

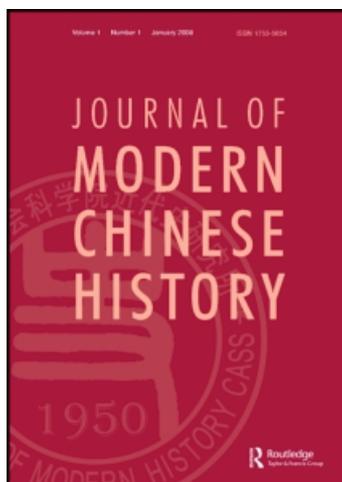
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ARTICLE

The Shanghai Bund in myth and history: an essay through textual and visual sources

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The Bund ranks first in any introduction to Shanghai in contemporary guides as a “must see” place where one can go to discover the wonders of Shanghai and its now sanitized and non-controversial past. Current accounts usually point to the bizarre architectural heritage that the municipal government has lately chosen to turn into a tourist attraction for domestic and foreign consumption alike. The present paper intends to unveil a much more complex and multi-layered history. It relies on a large body of materials, especially visual sources, to document the transformation of an undistinguished space – a riverfront – into a central place of political, social and architectural juxtaposition. This exploration will start from the earliest visual records of the city, made by Chinese or Western residents and travelers and move into the late 1940s. This paper weaves different threads to highlight the various layers of discourse that “made the Bund” while at the same time blending textual and visual sources to illustrate its changing nature over time, from a commercial entrepot to a cityscape devoted to finance and leisure.

Keywords: urban; visual; architecture; Shanghai; representation

While Shanghai evokes mixed images of glamour, exoticism, a Sino–Western hybrid, the Bund has almost become its metonym *par excellence*. The Bund ranks first in any introduction to the city in contemporary guides as a “must see” place where one can go to discover the wonders of Shanghai and its now sanitized and non-controversial past. Current accounts usually point to the bizarre architectural heritage that the municipal government has lately chosen to turn into a tourist attraction for domestic and foreign consumption alike. Although the Bund fell into relative obscurity after 1949, it returned to life with brightly illuminated façades in the late 1980s and, more recently, with expensive and chic coffee-terraces on top of its “old” buildings.

The present paper aims to tell a different story and to unveil a much more complex and multi-layered history. It relies on a large body of materials, especially visual sources, to document the transformation of an undistinguished space – a riverfront – into a central place of political, social and architectural juxtaposition. This exploration will start from the earliest visual records of the city made by Chinese or Western residents and travelers and move into the late 1940s. While brief references will be made to the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period, this essay focuses on the late Qing and Republican periods. In terms

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of geographical coverage, the focus is on the Bund as an icon, specifically the section of the riverfront that extended southward from Soochow Creek (Suzhouhe) to the border with the French Concession.¹ Nevertheless, I shall also occasionally enlarge the scope to include the riverfront of the French section and that of the Chinese walled city.

Previous studies of the Bund have generally focused on its architectural composition and transformation. Jon Huebner's paper offered one of the first systematic descriptions of the last wave of high-rise buildings erected along the Bund in the International Settlement. While Huebner illuminates the nature and significance of these landmarks around which Westerners construed a collective memory, he does not explore the various ramifications of the Bund as a specific space.² Jeremy Taylor's take on the Bund starts from an opposite posture. It examines the Bund as a crucial element of the treaty-port system, a "spatial form that emerged not only in Shanghai, but in many other ports open to foreign trade throughout Mainland China, Taiwan and Japan."³ Taylor also highlights the major functions – commercial, military, and recreational – of the Shanghai Bund along with other similar areas within their various settings. In his otherwise useful approach, however, Taylor tends to read too much into the actual function and symbolic meaning of the Bund. That the shaping of these "bunds" was tied to the Western presence is undeniable. But to claim they had no precedent in the laying out of waterfronts in Chinese cities is certainly open to debate.

In the case of Canton, the "Thirteen Factories" formed a row of buildings that, beyond their façades, matched local building practices and style well before Westerners used their gunboats to open up other treaty ports.⁴ Moreover, the formal resemblance between the "bunds" built in various places did not translate into the same pattern of power relations and social intercourse. A "bund" could simply be a Western-style waterfront with a large degree of regulatory power in Chinese hands.⁵ The Shanghai Bund was a unique example in that this "spatial form" was backed up by a full set of strong and largely autonomous Western dominated institutions (Shanghai Municipal Council, Mixed Court, Volunteer Corps, and Maritime Customs). This paper will weave different threads to highlight the various layers of discourse that "made the Bund" while at the same time blending textual and visual sources to illustrate the changing nature of the Bund over time.

A note on sources and method

The present study is based in large part on visual materials, both paintings and photographs. It is only through such sources that one can hope to reconstruct the century-long transformation of this famous sector of the city, especially when it comes to a study of architectural change. For paintings, I have made intensive use of an issue of *Arts of Asia*

¹By convention, throughout this text, I shall use the original names for places in English for the pre-1949 period. I refer to these places in post-1950 Shanghai by their Chinese names in *pinyin* transliteration. Whenever necessary, I add the current Chinese name in brackets.

²Jon W. Huebner, "Architecture and History in Shanghai's Central District," *Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2 (1988), 109–222.

³Jeremy E. Taylor, "The Bund: Littoral Space of Empire in the Treaty Ports of East Asia," *Social History*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2002), 126.

⁴Jonathan A. Farris, "Thirteen Factories of Canton: An Architecture of Sino–Western Collaboration and Confrontation," *Buildings and Landscapes*, no. 14 (2007), 67–83.

⁵Chen Yu, "The Making of a Bund in China: The British Concession in Xiamen (1852–1930)," *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering*, no. 38 (2008), 31–38.

devoted to the Bund, with its series of six nineteenth-century views of the Bund.⁶ Photographs, however, I had to identify and glean from a variety of sources, mostly books published before 1949.

Paintings may be considered a questionable source for the historian, at least when taken as an “actual” source in viewing objects from the past. My approach, however, has been to test the limits of these (superficially) imaginary renderings of the Bund. Of course, there is no reason to question the intent of the painters, most of them anonymous artists, to give a fairly accurate view of the riverfront. Yet, as for drawings and paintings by military painters, there is a significant margin for imagination, beautification, and other involuntary or voluntary distortions. Arguably, the stakes in landscape representations are much less salient than when it comes to producing a visual report on a battle or other heroic moments. There is less risk of a major deformation.⁷ The artists, however, could have simplified the view, or skipped an ugly building or “improved” it with a more decent appearance. While I had access only to the reproductions published in *Arts of Asia*, the quality was high enough, especially after digitizing, to allow for close-up examination of individual buildings.

Photographs, as compared to paintings, provide a more reliable view of reality. In my case, I was dealing with panoramic views of the Bund that left no room for “framing” the picture. What is in the photograph was there. The issue was to find as many images as possible that covered the entire Bund through its pre-1949 history. In the same way that the riverfront had attracted the eye of painters, photographers also endeavored to provide panoramic views of the Bund. They were initially limited in their attempt by the technology of the time, which did not allow wide-angle shots. Creativity and skill, however, made up for this deficiency as the Bund was often photographed section by section. Eventually, the photographer reconstituted a panoramic view in the darkroom. These views were taken from the other side of the river, sometimes from a tower, with varying degrees of clarity. A major limitation in terms of quality was that many of the photographs had been obtained from books. Digital tools and software, however, helped improve the images.⁸

In using these visual materials, I had to address several issues. First was the necessity of collecting a representative sampling of pictures large enough to be able to see both the transformation of the Bund over time, and to allow the possibility of comparative views. I tried to build a series that would cover as narrow a time interval as possible. Table 1 shows that the temporal coverage is quite dense, even if large gaps still exist. Yet all the major transformations took place during periods that preceded these views by just a few years.

⁶Eric Politzer, “The Changing Face of the Shanghai Bund, Circa 1849–1879,” *Arts of Asia*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2005), 64–81.

⁷See Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu, “Du dessin de presse à la photographie (1878–1914): histoire d’une mutation technique et culturelle,” *Revue d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, vol. 39 (January–March 1992), 6–28.

⁸Sources of the photographs: Ch-B Maybon and Jean Fredet, *Histoire de la Concession française de Changhai* [Bund in 1873 & 1876–1878] (Paris: Plon, 1929); Politzer, “The Changing Face of the Shanghai Bund” [Bund in 1876]; Arnold Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Other Treaty Ports of China: Their History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources* [Bund in 1907–1908] (Lloyds Greater Britain Publishing Company, 1908); Shimazu Chōjirō, *Shanghai annai* [Bund in 1893 & circa 1913] (Shanghai: Kinpūsha, 1918); *Shanghai Kyoryūmindan sanjūgoshūnen kinenshi* [Bund in 1894 & 1937–1938] (Shanghai: Shanghai Kyoryūmindan, 1942); Kobori Rintarō, *Natsukashi no Shanghai: shashinshū* [Bund in 1916–1918] (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1984); Virtual Shanghai, “General View of the Bund and Huangpu River from Pudong” [Bund in 1898–1901].

Table 1. Time frame of the Bund views.

Paintings	Photographs
circa 1849–1850	
circa 1854	
circa 1857	
circa 1862	
circa 1867–1868	
circa 1879	1873 and 1876–1878
	1893 and 1894
	1898–1900
	1907–1908
	1913
	1916–1918
	1937–1938

While I may have missed a few buildings, I believe almost all the major structures that were erected along the Bund are included. A second issue was the dating of the paintings and the photographs. For the former, I relied on the dates provided by Eric Politzer in his *Arts of Asia* paper, although I made a careful study of their content to assess their credibility.⁹ Photographs, in contrast to paintings, rarely came with an indication of the exact year they were taken. Usually there was a crude indication based on the date of publication (such as “A current view of”). By going back and forth between the images and the records, from the date of construction/destruction of the buildings and other items displayed in the photographs, I was able to narrow down the time frame of several pictures.¹⁰ Unfortunately, at this stage, I am unable to pin most of them down to a single year.¹¹

Time frame of the Bund views

The third source I mobilized for this study is comprised of maps. They were useful in several ways. First, because maps sometimes display specific buildings, I was able to ascertain the existence of buildings at a certain point in time, even if the accuracy of commercial maps is sometimes questionable. Second, maps provided the exact location of the buildings represented in the images. The general views of the Bund I used – both paintings and photographs – hardly showed any details about the space between the buildings, even when there was an

⁹Eric Politzer’s work is based on the use of visual (paintings), cartographic (the 1925 version of the 1855 map of the British Settlement and a cadastral map of 1864–1866) and textual (especially newspapers and *Hong Lists*) records. He produced a very careful and well-documented study of the buildings of the Bund during the 1849–1879 period. His approach was very similar to mine, but in my case, apart from extending the period of investigation into the twentieth century, the use of GIS-based maps allowed me to reconstitute the cadastral lots and location of buildings through time. Politzer, “The Changing Face of the Shanghai Bund,” 80

¹⁰On the buildings of the Bund and their dating, a most useful tool is Peter Hibbard, *The Bund Shanghai: China Faces West* (Hong Kong: Odyssey, 2007).

¹¹There were three photographs that came with estimated periods or no indication at all: one from Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions* (no indication, book published in 1908); Shimazu, *Shanghai annai* (“present view” of the Bund, book published in 1918); *Natsukashi no Shanghai* (no date given). The “internal critique” of these documents led to the following dating: respectively 1907–1909; 1910–1912; 1914. For a discussion of the dating method, see individual photographs in the *Virtual Shanghai* image database.

empty yard. The streets are either not represented or hidden from view both in paintings and photographs. Perspective also introduced a distortion in assessing which building was where, or simply to make sure a building was indeed on the Bund (and not in the background). To overcome this problem, I reconstituted the cadastral lots on maps and traced their transformation over time.¹²

The textual records were also an essential part, both helpful but also misleading. They are frequently not accurate, being documents produced well after the period they study.¹³ Another problem in the written records is that buildings are usually referred to by the name of their occupant rather than by the structure itself. Conversely, some companies remained on the same spot, but rebuilt their premises two or three times. Finally, some companies moved their offices to different locations on the Bund. In other words, one might be led to believe there is a new building where there is only a change of owner or tenant. To avoid assuming a new building where there was only a new tenant, I had to trace the occupancy of the buildings. The second case – reconstruction of the premises – was of course easier to solve through the visual record, while the “intra-Bund” moves were indeed limited.

By going back and forth between the maps, the images and the textual records on individual buildings, I built a small database that identified almost every building on the Bund and provided a timeline of its transformation. I then matched the transformation of the buildings over time with the visual sources. There remained a few gaps of minor buildings which I was not able to identify.¹⁴

The Bund through words and works

The conventional explanation for the use of the term “Bund” is a Hindi word [*band*] meaning “embankment.” It was part of the general phenomenon of using foreign words in the pidgin that served as a *lingua franca* among merchants in the various ports from India to China.¹⁵ Some authors argue this was part of a general process of appropriating words

¹²Sources of the major maps: “Ground Plan of the Foreign Settlement at Shanghai – North of the Yang Kang Pang Canal,” from a survey by Mr FB Youel RN, 1855; “Plan of the English Settlement at Shanghai” (Shanghai: Shanghai Municipal Council, 1864–1866); “Street Plan of the English, French and American Settlement” (London: published for the North China Herald and North China Daily New Offices, Shanghai, circa 1870); “Plan de la concession française à Shanghai” (Shanghai: Imprimerie de Erhard, 1882); “Cadastral Plan of the (So-called) English Settlement Shanghai” (Shanghai: Shanghai Municipal Council, 1890); “Street Plan of the British and French Settlements” (Shanghai, 1900); “Saishin Shanhai chizu” [The New Map of Shanghai City] (Shanghai: Shōsuido Shōten, 1908); “Street Plan of the Foreign Settlement (Central District) & French Settlement at Shanghai,” in *The Chronicle and Directory for China, Corea, Japan, the Philippines, Indo-China, Straits Settlements, Siam, Borneo, Malay states, etc.* (Hong Kong: “Daily Press” Office, 1895 & 1926); “Saishin Shanhai chizu” [The New Map of Shanghai City] (Osaka: Mainichi shinbunsha, 1932); *Shanghai shi hanghao lutu lu* [Shanghai Street Directory], 2 vols. (Shanghai: The Free Trading Co. Ltd., 1939–1940).

¹³A case in point is the 1857 picture of the Bund and its labeling by Morse in his 1910 book. The captions have been taken for granted and reproduced in various publications. For a full discussion of Morse’s captions, see Politzer, “The Changing Face of the Shanghai Bund,” 76–77.

¹⁴For 1987, I used *Shanghai shi shangyong dituce* [Shanghai Business Atlas], 7 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai fanyi chubanshe, 1987).

¹⁵The term came to be used by civil engineers in Shanghai – “bundling” – to designate the action of placing sloping stone pavement against an earth bank with a foundation of fascine work and a stone wall at the toe of the sloping pavement. H. von Heidenstam, *The Improvement of the Huang Pu River (Shanghai, China) for Ocean Navigation* (Brussels: Permanent International Association of Congresses of Navigation, Office of the Secretary General, 1920), 16.

from various colonized countries as British imperialism made its progress to the East and to “mark” newly conquered spaces with a symbolic meaning.¹⁶ How the word “Bund” came into usage in Shanghai has not been documented. It appears to have been used quite early, although its adoption as the official name of the riverfront in Shanghai came at a fairly late date.

Apart from hand-made rough schematic drawings, the earliest extant map of the English Settlement dates from 1855. While all the streets of the settlement bore proper names, the riverfront was still nameless.¹⁷ On later maps, as on the 1864–1866 cadastral map,¹⁸ the 1870 map of the English, French and American settlements¹⁹ or the 1890 “Cadastral plan of the (so-called) English settlement”²⁰ the road was designated as “Bund or Yangtsze Road,” reflecting an ambiguity between common usage (Bund) and the official designation established in 1865.²¹ Ten years later, however, the riverfront was clearly labeled the “Bund.”²² As we do not have maps for the interval, we cannot ascertain when the name became official. Until we find other textual evidence, we can only assume the Bund became the official name of the riverfront some time around 1900. While there is no doubt that the word was in use much earlier and was most probably part of the common language, the absence of designation also points to a change of perception regarding the riverfront when it came to be associated with a more glamorous image that emerged at a later stage.

The other major designation of the Bund is of course its name in Chinese. It has not changed since the nineteenth century, and probably earlier, when the term *waitan* simply designated the “outside bank” of the Huangpu River.²³ Before Westerners were allowed to settle in Shanghai on a small strip of land north of the walled city, the riverbank had been in use for many centuries. Of course, only the section that followed the riverfront along the city wall was actually used as a mooring and transshipment area. The reason for the distinction between an “outside” bank and an “inner” bank is one of geography in relation with the walled city. The upper stream of any river was called *li* (internal, inside); the lower stream was called *wai*.²⁴ The local Chinese therefore distinguished between the “inside bank” (*neitan*), south of an imaginary line set at Lujiabang Creek and the “external bank” (*waitan*) north of that line.²⁵ While the southern section hosted warehouses, wharves, and mooring areas, the northern section had very little relevance as it had no specific function besides a “rope walk” as we shall see below. The “active” part of the riverfront was named *shiliupu*

¹⁶Taylor, “The Bund,” 129. The argument is debatable. One can also read this linguistic process of appropriating foreign words as a form of spontaneous hybridization and a practical way of working out a common language. The term “bund,” at least in Chinese, never had an impact on the native language.

¹⁷“Ground Plan of the Foreign Settlement at Shanghai – North of the Yang Kang Pang Canal.”

¹⁸“Plan of the English Settlement at Shanghai.”

¹⁹“Street Plan of the English, French and American Settlement” (London: published for the North China Herald and North China Daily New Offices, Shanghai, circa 1870).

²⁰“Cadastral Plan of the (So-called) English Settlement, Shanghai.”

²¹In 1865, the SMC adopted the first general scheme that established the names of all roads in the settlement, with all North–South streets named after Chinese provinces and East–West streets named after Chinese cities. The road along the Huangpu was named “Yangtsze Road.” Yuan Xieming, “Gongbuju yu Shanghai luzheng” [The Shanghai Municipal Council and Road Policy], *Shanghai yanjiu luncong*, no. 2 (1989), 176; Hibbard, *The Bund Shanghai*, 27–33.

²²“Street Plan of the British and French Settlements,” Shanghai, 1900.

²³I chose to translate *tan* as “bank.” The actual meaning is closer to “beach,” which it actually was until the Bund was turned into an embankment by placing wooden posts along the bank. Up to then, at low ebb, the river withdrew and left a 30-meter wide open mud bank.

²⁴Xue Liyong, *Waitan de lishi he jianzhu* [History and Construction of the Bund] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2002), 2.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 3.

after the administrative system that divided the walled city and its suburbs into various districts (*pu*).²⁶

In the French Concession, the word “Bund” never made it into the local official or informal language. Pidgin notwithstanding, the French stuck to the conventional designation of “quai” (wharf) to name their section of the riverfront. That section was initially very limited, as it stretched from Yangjingbang Creek, which separated the two settlements, to its terminus with adjoining Chinese-administered territory along the creek that bordered the *Tianhougong* (Temple of the Queen of Heaven). The riverfront was simply named after the river, *Quai du Whampoo* (Whampoo Wharf). In 1861, the French obtained an extension of the settlement that included the area south of the initial border down to the canal that flowed out of the Eastern Gate (*Dongmen*). This was precisely the section of the Chinese Bund called “*Shiliupu*.” To give it more grandeur in French eyes, the riverfront was christened “*Quai de France*.” Eventually, the name “*Quai du Whampoo*” was dropped and the entire section was officially called *Quai de France*. This was part of a general movement in the early years of the twentieth century that saw the French municipality getting rid of most references to Chinese place names for street designations and replacing them with those of local or national luminaries, or with names that highlighted French accomplishments overseas.²⁷

Before the opening of the harbor to foreign trade, the riverbank had no special equipment or infrastructure for junks or sampans. Although there was an active domestic and international trade going through Shanghai, ships simply used the riverbank as it was, except around the Eastern gate (*Dongmen*) where a sort of embankment had been built. Depending on the time of the day, low tide or high ebb, the river left open a strip of sand (*tan*). The name in Chinese took its origin from this. The only specific feature was a pathway traced by boat pullers along the riverbank. It was called *xiandao*, or the “Rope path (or walk)” and constituted the only way along the river. When Westerners came to Shanghai, the area along the river north of the Walled City was just that rope path.²⁸ In the English Settlement, the Land Regulations approved by Chinese authorities prohibited foreigners from building right along the river. This was meant precisely to protect the “rope walk” from encroachment and allow the passage of the pullers.²⁹ Yet even before the Regulations were signed, foreign residents – actually foreign *hongs* – had started to consolidate and enlarge the original “rope walk” to twice its official width.³⁰ Obviously technological progress would soon make the use of ropes to pull boats irrelevant, but the rule remained in force. As a result, the riverfront remained free from construction and eventually was transformed into a major 1500-meter long thoroughfare.³¹

By the late 1840s, all the British settlement offered to the viewer was no more than a few roads that crept into the newly built-up area behind the “Bund.” The early settlement was bordered by four waterways, with two main rivers, the Huangpu and Soochow Creek in the

²⁶Xue Liyong, *Shanghai tan diming zhanggu* [Stories about the Place Names of the Shanghai Bund] (Shanghai: Tongji daxue chubanshe, 1994), 238–40.

²⁷On the history of street names in the French Concession, see the study by J.H. Haan, *The Sino-Western Miscellany, Being Historical Notes about Foreign Life in China* (no publisher given, 1993).

²⁸Ke Zhaoyin and Zhuang Zhenxiang, eds., *Shanghai tan yeshi* [An Unofficial History of the Shanghai Bund] (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1993), 8; Xue Liyong, *Waitan de lishi he jianzhu*, 2.

²⁹“Shanghai tudi zhangcheng” [Shanghai Land Regulations], in *Shanghai gonglu shi* [A History of Shanghai Streets], ed. Li Shihua (Shanghai: Renmin jiaotong chubanshe, 1989), 201.

³⁰Wu Jiang, *Shanghai bai nian jianzhu shi, 1840–1949* [The History of Shanghai Architecture, 1840–1949] (Shanghai: Tongji daxue chubanshe, 1997), 47.

³¹Wang Shaozhou, *Shanghai jindai chengshi jianzhu* [Shanghai Modern City Construction] (Nanjing: Jiangsu kexue jishu chubanshe, 1989), 17.

East and North respectively, and Defense Creek and the Yangjingbang in the West and South respectively. By any measure, it was no more than a small flake of foreign presence amidst a landscape dominated by rice fields and waterways, next to a sturdy but massive Chinese walled city. Roads actually ranked high on the agenda for the new settlers. The first proto-municipal organization established for the management of the new land was designed to take care of “roads and jetties.”³² Little was done in terms of actual planning before 1854, although the establishment of lots after November 1843 called for the proper delimitation of space between the lots. As early as 1846 the first mud roads were ploughed through the flat land: Barrier Road, Park Lane, Rope Walk Road, and the Bund itself.³³ Along the river, the major endeavor was the construction of jetties. As the Chinese had previously done, foreign ships initially simply moored close to jetties from and to which the various goods were carried by small-boat: “Early Shanghai knew nothing of wharves alongside which vessels could load and unload. All this was done from and into native boats in the stream, the cargo coming and going from jetties jutting out from the Bund.”³⁴

For about two decades, the Bund was largely left in its original state, even if private initiative had started to transform it with the addition of jetties. Over time the path along the river was widened and covered with a mix of ashes and refuse. In an 1849–1850 painting, the riverbank remains pretty much in its “natural” state, even if jetties can be seen protruding from the bank.³⁵ In 1861, pavement was laid along the Bund as part of a general plan to improve the condition of roads.³⁶ It did not prove satisfactory, however, and one year later, the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) decided to build an embankment.³⁷ Consolidation was achieved by planting wooden posts all along the riverfront, as an 1862 painting and a photograph of the Customs House show.³⁸ This had the effect of delineating land from water more sharply and laid the groundwork for further consolidation. One visual source, however, tends to throw this chronology into question. For, in an 1854 painting, the Bund appears to be carefully lined with wooden posts already.³⁹ I initially questioned the dating of the picture, but its content makes it clear that the pilings date prior to both an 1857 painting (on which the wooden posts are not visible) and an 1862 painting (on which the wooden posts are in evidence). The textual record will have to be revisited to solve this enigma.

³²The “Committee on roads and jetties” was later renamed “Municipal Council” after the signing of the Land regulations between the British Consulate and the Shanghai Daotai in 1854. Initially there was a plan to have all foreign areas – British, American, and French – to come under a single municipal organization called “Executive Committee” (*gongbuju* in Chinese). Yet the plan for a single administration failed when the French decided to preserve their autonomy. The “Executive Committee” was renamed “Municipal Council” (Shanghai Municipal Council), though the Chinese name remained unchanged. In the French Concession, the process was very similar with a “Comité des routes” initially taking care of the first layout of roads. Maybon and Fredet, *Histoire de la Concession française*, 264–65.

³³*Shanghai gonglu shi*, 1989, 27.

³⁴Samuel Couling and George Lanning, *The History of Shanghai* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1921), 389.

³⁵*Arts of Asia*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2005), 68–69.

³⁶Yuan Xieming, “Gongbuju yu Shanghai luzheng,” 175.

³⁷Ke Zhaoyin and Zhuang Zhenxiang, eds., *Shanghai tan yeshi*, 8.

³⁸*Arts of Asia*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2005), 72–73; “Customs House,” photograph, undated, 2003.R22 Box 35, Getty Research Institute. In its early stage, the Bund probably looked like the Bund at Jiujiang for which J. Thomson left a good photographic record. J. Thomson, *Illustrations of China and its People. A Series of Two Hundred Photographs, with Letterpress Descriptive of the Places and People Represented*, vol. 3 (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low, and Searle, 1874).

³⁹*Arts of Asia*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2005), 68–69.

In an 1867–1868 painting, the northern part of the Bund is already bounded by a more solid embankment made of stone.⁴⁰ This reinforcement was done in order to stabilize the land at the mouth of Soochow Creek. As land stabilized, the area was further widened and turned into a public garden.⁴¹ The work of filling the area to create the garden started in 1866 and was completed in August 1868.⁴² It is visible in later paintings and photographs of the 1870s. By “bundling” the river at the limit at the water level of low tide, under the protection of the filled-in public garden, the SMC actually reclaimed a very large area outside the original line of the Bund by filling in the space under the jetties.⁴³ Later, the enhancement of the Bund also benefited from new technologies. Public lighting came on the heels of the establishment of the first gas company in 1865. The Bund was among the first streets to benefit from the new service. Electricity followed not much later, in 1882 and again the Bund, along with Nanking Road, were the first to be graced with new electric lamps. Having been built almost entirely on barren land, the appearance of the early streets remained quite elementary. In 1865, trees were planted along the major arteries, starting with the Bund.⁴⁴ From the visual sources, however, it seems that the trees took some time before catching the eyes of artists. Their presence became obvious only in mid-1870s photographs or late-1870s paintings.

In the French Concession, work to build a proper embankment started in 1855 on the initial section of the riverfront. The Small Sword Rebellion had left much of the area in ruins. After removing the rubble and debris, French sailors traced a rough path along the river. A road was constructed in 1856 by a group of 200 Christian refugees who were employed as coolies.⁴⁵ Little progress was made, however, due to the lack of human presence in the French Concession.⁴⁶ Yet what constituted the French section of the riverbank soon became too small to accommodate all the requests for land, warehouses and jetties. In 1860, due to the pressure of private companies for more space along the river, the French consul initiated a new round of negotiations to obtain a stretch of land that ran southward to the Small East gate. Eventually, the extension was granted in 1861, which gave the French Bund an extra 650 meters.⁴⁷ Yet, while more jetties were being constructed, the riverfront remained in a pitiful state. The French consul, Brenier de Montmorand, described it in 1864 as the following:

A badly drained and hardly leveled ground, often cut by large cracks after heavy rain. It narrowed between the low tide mark, a large strip of sand from which the summer sun caused unhealthy exhalations, with a few non-aligned and unassuming houses. In daytime, it looked deserted and dreary; at night it was hardly lighted by a few badly kept gas lamps.⁴⁸

⁴⁰Ibid., 79–80.

⁴¹The area where the public garden stands was originally called the “Consular Flats.” It was formed by the accumulation of mud and silt from the river around the wreck of a small vessel that had sunk near the site. Rev. C.E. Darwent, *Shanghai. A Handbook for Travellers and Residents* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1904), 3.

⁴²Darwent, *Shanghai. A Handbook*, 3.

⁴³The photographic record documents the gradual process that turned the Bund from a small road into a wide area encompassing a road, a space covered with grass and trees, and jetties and pontoons. The earlier 30-meter long jetties were progressively turned into pathways on the newly reclaimed land. See Hibbard, *The Bund Shanghai*, 37–45.

⁴⁴Yuan Xieming, “Gongbuju yu Shanghai luzheng,” 175–76 and 179.

⁴⁵Maybon and Fredet, *Histoire de la Concession française*, 163–64; “Fa zujie waitan de di yi tiao malu” [The First Road on the Bund of the French Concession], in *Shanghai yanjiu ziliao* [Research Materials on Shanghai] (1936; repr., Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1984), 345.

⁴⁶Maybon and Fredet, *Histoire de la Concession française*, 61.

⁴⁷Ibid., 239 and 244.

⁴⁸Ibid., 287–88.

One of the major impediments to the remodeling of the riverfront was clearly the lack of financial resources by the French Municipal Council. The priority was given to dredging and cleaning the creeks and moat along the wall and to removing the trash that had accumulated.⁴⁹ The Messageries Impériales Company built its own wharf by 1863, but serious talks about improving the riverfront did not start until the following year.⁵⁰ The French Municipal Council hired a British engineer, Freeman, to build a proper embankment along the northern section (*Quai du Whampoo*) of the riverfront. Work started in October 1864, but soon after, in January 1865, a part of the new Bund collapsed, causing a dispute between the French authorities and the British engineer, which provided an opportunity for sarcastic comments in the *North China Herald*.⁵¹ Eventually, that section was completed in 1867 with the cost borne mostly by a special tax on the lots along the newly built 30-meter wide Bund, which included several floating jetties.⁵² The southern section was initially simply drained thanks to a new canal and paved, while a new gate (*Porte Montauban – Xin beimen*) was opened in the wall to facilitate communication with the walled city.⁵³

The Chinese section of the Bund was the responsibility of local authorities, but little work was done here until the late nineteenth century. From the various records we have, it seems the anchorage was left much to its original layout, with boats mooring in front of the city walls and the loading and unloading of the larger junks performed by small craft. Due to its central role as a transshipment harbor between North and South China, and one of the major outlets for the Jiangnan area, a whole district had developed outside of the walled city since at least Ming times, as one painting shows.⁵⁴ By the mid-eighteenth century, there were 27 small streets that ran through the area.⁵⁵ Shanghai received a very high number of boats and ships of all sizes. On an average year, about 1200–1300 large ships (80–240 tons) and 2500–2600 smaller crafts (of less than 80 tons) which handled a total freight of about 280,000 tons, cleared the port.⁵⁶ In 1849, a British visitor noted that “the suburb on this side of the river is very extensive and densely populated.”⁵⁷

As part of the modernization efforts of late Qing reformers, an arsenal and shipyard, the Jiangnan Arsenal, was established south of the walled city. To facilitate traffic, a first effort was made to improve the road along the Huangpu.⁵⁸ Work on the Chinese Bund started in 1896 and was completed one year later. The road was nine meters wide and had a full length of 2412 meters.⁵⁹ This improvement came with the establishment of the first proto-municipal organs in 1895. As with the “Committee on Roads and Jetties” in the British Settlement, the new organ, the South City Roadwork Board (*Nanshi malu gongchengju*) was

⁴⁹Ibid., 270.

⁵⁰“Fa zujiej waitan de diyige matou” [The First Wharf on the Bund of the French Concession], in *Shanghai yanjiu ziliao*, 357.

⁵¹Maybon and Fredet, *Histoire de la Concession française*, 288–89; Haan, *The Sino–Western Miscellany*, 90.

⁵²Maybon and Fredet, *Histoire de la Concession française*, 289, 295.

⁵³Ibid., 238. See picture “New North Gate (Porte Montauban),” China collection, Box 35, Getty Research Institute.

⁵⁴See reproduction in Sun Ping, ed., *Shanghai chengshi guihua zhi* [Gazetteer of Shanghai Urban Planning] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1999), 56.

⁵⁵*Shanghai gonglu shi*, 14.

⁵⁶Zhang Zhongmin, “Qing qianqi Shanghai gang fazhan yanbian xintan,” *Zhongguo jingjishi yanjiu* [Researches in Chinese Economic History], no. 3 (1981), 91.

⁵⁷Henry Charles Sirr, *China and the Chinese: Their Religion, Character, Customs and Manufactures: The Evils Arising from the Opium Trade with a Glance at our Religious, Moral, Political, and Commercial Intercourse with the Country* (London: W.S. Orr, 1849), 210.

⁵⁸Wu Jiang, *Shanghai bai nian jianzhu shi, 1840–1949*, 53.

⁵⁹Wang Shaozhou, *Shanghai jindai chengshi jianzhu*, 491; *All about Shanghai*, 61.

concerned with the construction and maintenance of roads.⁶⁰ After its renovation, the road came under strict supervision including new regulations about taxes, hygiene, traffic, and shop signs.⁶¹ Throughout the late Imperial and Republican periods, it remained a bustling commercial area and a densely populated quarter. It was, however, an architecturally undistinguished riverfront, lined with dockyards, warehouses, hospitals, and various shipping, timber and rice offices through the 1930s.⁶²

Architectural transformation and change of function (1849–1949)

The status of Shanghai as one of the principal entrepôts between Europe and China was mirrored by the architectural transformation of its waterfront. From its initial period as a meager outpost of mercantile enterprise, the Bund quickly became the main stage for showcasing the city's growing stature as a nexus of trade and finance. By tracing the growth of its physical form we can gain some insight as to how the power holders in Shanghai saw themselves and wanted to be seen by the outside world. The Bund in the International Settlement went through three successive waves of renewal. Of course, the erection of new buildings did not take place simultaneously with these periods of transformation. Yet in most locations, buildings were torn down and reconstructed two to three times. The highly visible transformation of the Bund skyline, however, entailed much more than a physical renovation. It also reflected a deeper change in the economic and social function of the Bund (Figure 1).

From the 1850s to the early 1870s, the Bund was lined with one-story and two-story buildings. While they may have looked impressive to the newcomer, as Wang Tao recalled, the buildings distinguished themselves more by their style than by their actual height. Chinese temples or guildhalls in the walled city were far more imposing. Many buildings were simple one-level warehouses. The first generation of buildings was made up of construction that often combined both offices and living quarters. As some companies were able to acquire large tracks of riverfront, like Dent & Co. or Russel & Co., they established large compounds made up of several buildings. Later, these compounds were parceled out and gave way to new individual structures.

The second wave of construction was spread over a few decades starting from the 1880s to around WWI. There was a double transformation. On the one hand many original lots were subdivided, opening up space for entirely new buildings. On the other hand, many existing edifices underwent their first transformation from their original "compradoric" style – a generic Southeast Asian style – to an equally pompous though more massive appearance. The third and last wave of construction – the one that gave the Shanghai Bund its present allure – took place over a single decade between 1920 and 1929, although a few more additions were made in the 1930s. Table 2 lists all the buildings that sprang from ground during these two fateful decades. This spate of construction is a direct reflection of the formidable growth and push for modernization that engulfed the city before the second Sino–Japanese war.

⁶⁰See Mark Elvin, "The Administration of Shanghai, 1905–1914," in *The Chinese City between Two Worlds*, ed. Mark Elvin and William G. Skinner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 239–62; Jack Gray, ed., "The Gentry Democracy in Shanghai, 1905–1914," in *Modern China's Search for a Political Form* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 41–65.

⁶¹Yuan Xieming, "Gongbuju yu Shanghai luzheng," 201.

⁶²*All about Shanghai*, 59 and 61.

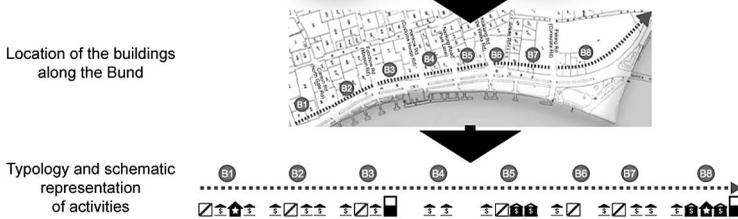


Figure 1. Map and cross-section of the Bund. See also Figure 2.

The third wave of construction on the Bund (1920–1937)⁶³

This momentous change is significant because it happened in a unique setting. Whether by formal administrative bodies or in the subtler expression of power embodied by powerful

⁶³Based on Wu Jiang, *Shanghai bai nian jianzhu shi, 1840–1949*, 113.

Table 2. The third wave of construction on the Bund (1920–1937).

Building	Date of construction
Yangtze Insurance Company	1916–1918
Glen Line	1920–1922
Jardine, Matheson & Co.	1920–1922
Nisshin Kisen Kaisha Steamship Company	1921
Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation	1921–1923
Union Insurance Co.	1922
Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China	1922–1923
North China Daily News	1922–1924
Yokohama Specie Bank	1923–1924
Bank of Taiwan	1924–1926
Customs House	1925–1927
Sassoon House	1926–1929
Broadway Mansions (across Soochow Creek)	1930–1934
Bank of China	1936–1937
Messageries Maritimes (French Bund)	1937

trading firms, the Bund's architectural growth in many ways mirrored the relationship between the European colonial powers and the Chinese treaty ports. Such environments, especially one as prominent as the Shanghai Bund, were thus the results of imperial processes that, through a visual medium, produced a sense of empire.⁶⁴

The early days: a trading port

In the early years, buildings were almost exclusively commercial in nature. Numerous European trading firms from Britain, Norway, and Portugal, among other nations, established commercial compounds, called *hong*, that varied in size proportionate to the scope of a particular firm's operations.⁶⁵ The *hong* served both a residential and commercial purpose. The building's back rooms or upper floors were reserved for accommodations, while the ground floor or a covered veranda provided office space. The number of people in each *hong* could range from two to three partners, five to ten European clerks, and up to 50 Chinese staff.⁶⁶ The merchandise warehouses, or "go-downs," were also in the back lot of each compound, around which employees resided in accommodations arranged hierarchically according to seniority and nationality. Kitchens and stables also stood within the compound. Such *hong* often covered acres and often included a garden.⁶⁷ While the actual layout may have been more varied and even jumbled up, the key thing is that these buildings combined utility with display, and display was uppermost on the waterfront.

Charles Dyce, a 30-year resident of Shanghai, lamented in his memoirs that "the community was almost entirely commercial."⁶⁸ Figure 2 (1849–50) confirms this view as, except for the British Consulate and the Chinese Imperial Customs House, the Bund was dotted with commercial premises (*hong* and warehouses). By the late 1860s, however, greater diversification had occurred, even if the commercial *hong* still dominated the

⁶⁴Mark Crinson, *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 4.

⁶⁵Murphey, *Shanghai*, 69.

⁶⁶Charles M. Dyce, *Personal Reminiscences of Thirty Years' Residence in the Model Settlement of Shanghai* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1906), 36.

⁶⁷Denison, *Building Shanghai*, 47–48 and Dyce, *Personal Reminiscences of Thirty Years*, 35.

⁶⁸Dyce, *Personal Reminiscences of Thirty Years*, 32.

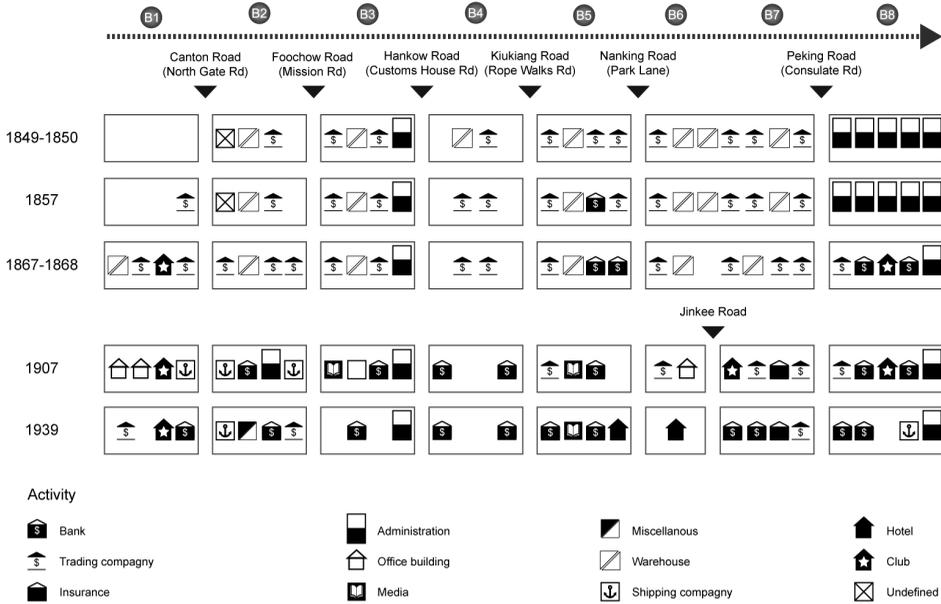


Figure 2. Schematic map of buildings on the Bund (1849–1939).

riverfront (see 1867–68). The new features included a few banks, the Masonic hall, opened in 1867, and the Shanghai Club, a primarily British social institution established in 1862.⁶⁹ Maybon’s 1873 photograph of the Bund reveals a well-developed settlement with almost a dozen ships anchored in the river, but it still had the appearance of a quiet harbor with few major structures on the riverfront. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the spacious *hongs* and other legacies of Shanghai’s early years began to give way to more modern construction and a wider range of activities.

Consolidation and growth: Shanghai’s second wave

As the pressure on available space increased, a volatile real-estate market and the demand for housing within the International Settlement provided the background for a second wave of architectural development on the Bund.⁷⁰ In a 1908 panorama, the scene is completely different. Steam has replaced sail, the buildings are taller, and factories crowd along Soochow Creek and the stretches of the Huangpu north of the Garden Bridge. Likewise, a change in architecture is apparent as a larger variety of buildings jostle for space on the Bund. Limited to six stories in height, the Bund’s large buildings stood on wooden pilings driven into the silt. Beginning with the new Shanghai Club building, finished in 1910, major buildings used a floating concrete flat in order to overcome the weight restrictions of the area’s alluvial soils.⁷¹

While the Bund’s buildings were not immediately transformed into skyscrapers, a significant development during this period was the greater diversification of the Bund’s commercial tenants (Figure 2, 1907). Although there had been a banking presence from its

⁶⁹Denison, *Building Shanghai*, 68.

⁷⁰Ibid., 76.

⁷¹Murphey, *Shanghai*, 31.

earliest days in the form of the Oriental Bank and, from 1865, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC), nonetheless after the turn of the twentieth century financial institutions became the largest single type of venture on the Bund. This growth coincided with the construction of many new bank buildings (seven establishments altogether). The HSBC for example moved into larger premises and the first Chinese-run bank – the Imperial Bank of China – built an impressive structure on the south Bund in 1897. As the Bund became more financial, the loading and unloading of ships moved away from it both upstream and downstream. Trading companies were replaced by the large international shipping companies that brought both goods and people from Europe, America and Japan.⁷² In addition, the old and unique Central Hotel gave way to the modern Palace Hotel, another significant development linked to tourism. Finally, the German Club Concordia joined the Shanghai Club on the Bund. By and large, the Bund had taken on a new appearance and function, with buildings geared toward finance and leisure.

The billion-dollar skyline: the apex of the Bund

If we were to take the amount of building on the Bund as a barometer of economic success, then as Shanghai entered the 1920s, business appeared to be booming. By the middle of the 1930s, Shanghai's Bund had reached the apex of its development. Called the "billion-dollar skyline," the Bund was the proud representative of a city which had turned into a major regional industrial, financial, and mercantile powerhouse.⁷³ While the second wave of growth during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had filled out the Bund's empty spaces to make a continuous built-up streetscape, the final period of architectural development was of an order and magnitude even larger than its predecessor. Technological improvements, such as the safety elevator, steel frames, and reinforced concrete, combined with the increasing demand for office space on Shanghai's premier business street to create the grand new buildings that still grace the city's riverfront.⁷⁴

Shanghai's final wave of building definitely reflected the continuing transformation of its function in the city (Figure 2, 1939). Financial institutions remained the largest group of buildings with 11 establishments along the Bund. Playing a similar function in business, one could now see insurance companies gaining ground on the Bund, while shipping seriously receded. One major addition was the Sassoon House/Cathay Hotel. Two major hotels now flanked the entrance to Nanking Road, the major commercial artery. Of the original trading companies, only Jardine, Matheson & Co. remained, while at the opposite end of the Bund, the Asiatic Petroleum Company and the William Muntz Company figured as the new "trading companies."

Obviously the Bund had acquired enormous prestige as the place where any really serious company had to establish its headquarters. As a result, by the 1930s the transfiguration of the riverfront was spectacular, with the complete abandonment of the original function of shipping and storing goods traveling between China and Europe. Large cargos made way for ocean liners carrying tourists and would-be settlers. The prominent presence of banks emphasized the new status of Shanghai as Asia's major financial center. Still an industrial center as well in its backyard districts, Shanghai shone with a riverfront dedicated

⁷²In terms of volume of goods and people transported, the most active shipping companies were those engaged in the coastal and river trades. Yet they did not figure among the tenants or owners of buildings on the Bund.

⁷³See the following paper: "Shanghai's New Billion-dollar Skyline," *The Far Eastern Review* (June 1927), 254–55.

⁷⁴Huebner, "Architecture on the Shanghai Bund," 213.

to the services – banks, insurance companies, newspapers, clubs, hotels – all of which catered to the needs of its enterprising population.

Western and Chinese visions of the Bund

The history of Shanghai has been told many times as a “success story” supposedly due entirely to Western presence. Without the least hesitation, a 1934 guide of Shanghai boldly stated that “less than a century ago, Shanghai was little more than an anchorage for junks, with a few villages scattered along the low, muddy banks of the river.”⁷⁵ As we shall see in this section, the “anchorage” and its history is fully part of the mythical reconstruction of an imaginary Western view of Shanghai.⁷⁶ In the same guide, the Bund came first as the “natural starting point for our tour” of the city, and it proudly made note of:

The muddy tow-path of fifty years ago which has magically become one of the most striking and beautiful civic entrances in the world, faced from the West by an impressive rampart of modern buildings and bounded on the East by the Huangpu river.⁷⁷

Of course, by the 1930s, the Bund had developed into a complex and sophisticated area where work easily overlapped with leisure. “The handsome boulevard is flanked by a park space which extends to the rivers-edge with its unobtrusive landing stages, where tenders bring passengers from great ocean liners.”⁷⁸

These self-aggrandizing views of Shanghai by Western travelers or residents, celebrating the Bund as a symbol of their success, are part of a myth to which even some Chinese have subscribed. Cathy Yeh argues that for displaced literati in search of a new identity, Shanghai offered itself as a “playground,” as a place of “exoticism,” something that threw them off balance even if, in many ways, the physical surroundings of the early settlement were hardly different from any other Chinese city (except for the neat grid of streets and the major buildings on the Bund, all other construction bore the signature of Chinese traditional architecture).⁷⁹ Nevertheless, if Shanghai came to be represented in a way that magnified this aspect and symbolized Chinese modernity, the way in which Westerners and Chinese perceived and described the city, especially the Bund, differs widely. Whereas the Bund figures prominently in all Western renditions of Shanghai, Chinese writers were far less sensitive to its assumed grandeur and glamour. The Western bias, however, was a late development. Early Western travelers to Shanghai were impressed by the Chinese Bund – obviously the only developed place before Westerners settled in Shanghai – and failed to harbor the prejudices of those who followed their tracks some years later.

The first visitors to Shanghai, Lindsay and Gutzlaff, reached the city in 1832. While they spent most of their time trying to obtain the right to trade in Shanghai, they did not fail to note

⁷⁵*All about Shanghai*, 1934, 1

⁷⁶For earlier examination and deconstruction of the “fishing village” and related myths, see Kerrie L. MacPherson, *A Wilderness of Marshes. The Origins of Public Health in Shanghai, 1843–1893* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Robert A. Bickers, *Britain in China: Community Culture and Colonialism, 1900–1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Linda C. Johnson, *Shanghai: From Market Town to Treaty Port* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

⁷⁷*All about Shanghai*, 44.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 44–45.

⁷⁹Catherine Vance Yeh, “The Life-Style of Four Wenren in Late Qing Shanghai,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 57, no. 2 (1997), 426–28; Catherine Yeh, “Guides to Paradise: Entertainment in the Formation of Shanghai’s Identity,” in *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850–1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 304–40.

the brisk trade that was already taking place in the harbor. Lindsay reported quite favorably on the local facilities:

Commodious wharfs and large warehouses occupy the banks of the river, which is deep enough to allow junks to come and unload alongside of them; in the middle it has from six to eight fathoms, and is nearly half a mile in breadth.⁸⁰

Captain Monfort, traveling through Shanghai in the early 1850s, was impressed by the hustle and bustle in the city and its harbor: “there is nothing more active and animated than the aspect of the harbor and the wharves of the city.”⁸¹ With the rise of the English Bund, these fairly positive descriptions of the city and its original Chinese Bund along the walled city, would slowly give way to derogatory comments or simply complete omission.

When one reads through the travel accounts by early travelers to Shanghai, however, it becomes obvious that the Bund was not yet on their mental map. While a few words of praise are usually said about the British/International Settlement, it is about the buildings, the streets, and the modern appearance of the place: “Shanghai [...] is laid like a city at home. It extends along the harbor for the distance of three miles and has a breadth of one mile.”⁸² We learn that the streets are macadamized, drained with brick sewers and illuminated by “an abundance of public lamps.”⁸³ The early-1860s visitor then turns his eyes to the houses (although we do not know if it is a general comment or a description of the houses on the Bund): “The residences of the merchants are large and elegantly finished, and admirably constructed for comfort. The rooms are high and airy, with windows opening to the surface of the floor upon a wide piazza.”⁸⁴ The Bund itself is not mentioned as a noteworthy place.

By 1867, a major travel guide on China and Japan made one of the first mentions of the riverfront as the “far-famed Bund.”⁸⁵ The author gives credit to the original tow-path and its preservation and successive widening for giving Shanghai a “noble quay along the entire length of its river-front.” A newly arrived German banker expressed the same view: “The beautiful city lay before us. With its lovely quay and high regal palaces, the city made a magnificent impression. This was, however, actually only the English settlement.”⁸⁶ The duplication of similar embankments in other Western settlements is said “to have made the Bund a prominent feature of European progress throughout China.” In 1867, however, the riverfront was still lined only with wooden pillars due to “the high cost of granite in this alluvial region.” At low ebb, a wide mud-bank of about 30 meters extended from the timber facing the roadway. The tidal movement explains why long sloppy jetties, as can be seen on nineteenth-century paintings, were built to secure an approach at all stages of the tide.⁸⁷ By contrast, the French Bund paled compared to its British neighbor. It was lined with “buildings of very inferior description.” The French municipality, however, was credited with success in building a permanent embankment with stone. The guide emphasized the “commodious wharves” erected by the China Steam Navigation Company and the French

⁸⁰*Report of Proceedings on a Voyage to the Northern Ports of China, in the Ship Lord Hamherst* (London: B. Fellowes, 1833), 173.

⁸¹George Bell, *Voyage en Chine du capitaine Montfort avec un appendice historique sur les derniers événements* (Paris: Victor Lecou, 1854), 265.

⁸²William L.G. Smith, *Observations on China and the Chinese* (New York: Carleton, 1863), 122.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 122

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 123.

⁸⁵N.B. Dennys, ed., *The Treaty ports of China and Japan* (London: Trubner and Co., 1867), 355.

⁸⁶Hermann Wallich, *Aus meinem Leben, in: Zwei Generationen im deutschen Bankwesen, 1833–1914* (1929; repr., Frankfurt: am Main, 1978), 85–97.

⁸⁷Dennys, *The Treaty Ports of China and Japan*, 376.

Messageries Impériales. The Chinese section had already fallen into oblivion: “Beyond this point stretch the crowded tiers of the Chinese shipping.”⁸⁸

Close to the turn of the century, the riverfront was taking shape both physically and, above all, in people’s minds. The SMC seems to have decided to preserve the Bund from turning into a major harbor area. In fact, while jetties and iron pontoons were constructed, actual wharves never developed along the bank. No ships or large vessels were allowed at the Bund. They could only moor at a distance and rely on cargo boats for loading and unloading.⁸⁹ In 1897, as he approached Shanghai from the river, a British traveler recollected his experience:

In front of the Bund, we look with wonder upon the splendid business houses, that seem like palaces [. . .] A walk along the Bund tends to increase the admiration we felt as it seemed to move by us for inspection, when we looked at it from the poop of the steamer. The first thought that strikes one is the magnificence with which everything has been planned.⁹⁰

This commentary echoes that given by Wang Tao upon arriving in Shanghai in 1848. But the contemporary British traveler continues his description:

The Bund is wide and spacious, and kept in splendid order by the members of the Municipal Council. . . On one side is a broad pathway lined with trees that throw a pleasant shade upon the ground and keep off fiery rays of the sun. . . On the other side are the business houses, which are also residences, and which have been built. . . with such artistic beauty and disregard of expense.⁹¹

From these descriptions, one can sense that the Bund was beginning to have a separate identity from the river and from the city itself.⁹² It existed by itself and stood as the most concrete evidence of Western modernity and achievement in Shanghai. With the characteristic enthusiasm of the time, the same author stated that:

There is a profound consciousness in many of them [Englishmen] that England’s mission is to elevate the world. This idea exalts commerce, and drives out the meaner motives in connection with it, by surrounding it with beautiful houses, and exquisite gardens, and lines of charming trees.⁹³

Some newcomers were even surprised to discover there were Chinese in Shanghai, even on the Bund. In 1899, on her first trip to Shanghai, a woman traveler wrote:

⁸⁸Ibid., 383. The walled city is covered in one paragraph that basically dissuades the traveler from visiting, “except as an exemplification of the extreme of native filth and squalor,” a regular trope in nineteenth-century travel accounts. See Jeffrey N. Dupée, *British Travel Writers in China – Writing Home to a British Public, 1890–1914* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2004), chapter 5.

⁸⁹William R. Kahler, *My Holidays in China* (Shanghai: unpublished, 1895), 7.

⁹⁰John Macgowan, *Pictures of Southern China* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1897), 10–11.

⁹¹Ibid., 13.

⁹²Taylor’s interpretation of the Bund as a space *per se* fails to take into account the historical process of construction of the image/myth of the Bund. The terms did not create the space. The space came to be created out of necessity in different urban settings that Taylor does not discuss. The extent to which the term Bund came to acquire a specific meaning must have varied according to the cities, but above all it was a “myth-creation” process that took place over several decades. It was also a process that took place within the Western world with a limited impact on local society. Taylor, “The Bund.”

⁹³Macgowan, *Pictures of Southern China*, 12.

I was not prepared for the Chinese element being so much *en evidence* in the foreign settlement. It is not only that clerks and compradors dressed in rich silk on which the characters for happiness and longevity and the symbols of luck are in numbers on the Bund, and that all the servile classes, as may be expected, are Chinese, but that Chinese shops of high standing. . . are taking their places in fine streets which run back from the Bund.

Obviously, the first contact with the Shanghai Bund was an eye-opening experience which shattered – albeit partially – the biased view of the traveler. Her description also gives us a sense of the brisk activity along the Bund: “Single and two-horse carriages and buggies, open and closed, with coachmen and grooms. . . dash along the drive. There are *jinrickshas* in hundreds, with Chinese runners, and Shanghai wheelbarrows innumerable. . .” All that, however, was due to “an honest and thoroughly efficient British local administration.”⁹⁴

This line of discourse was usually continued and magnified in the following decades. In the first Western guide of Shanghai in 1904, the Bund comes first on the list of “Routes with chief objects of interest.” It is described as “one of the most interesting, famous, and handsome thoroughfares in the world,” with the Shanghai Municipal Council identified as the valiant designer and protector of public interest which “fought against all attempts of the shipping interest to construct wharves for shipping” thus insuring its continuation as “the great lung and promenade of Shanghai.”⁹⁵ It is presented as an area for leisure, even if the author also points to the active traffic that takes place on the Bund.⁹⁶ The Bund is also a place that extols the apparent cosmopolitan nature of Shanghai. There is movement, there are people from all over the world all strolling along the same street.

As waves of travelers and residents moved into Shanghai, the Bund became the main focal point, the place that gave Shanghai its identity, while the original city – the city once surrounded by a wall and canals – fell into oblivion. That part was unconsciously erased from history. Myth overpowered history. The Bund had come out of nothing:

The splendid Bund, bounded on one side by sightly bank and club, steamboat and insurance buildings, and on the other by the Whangpoo River, is the city’s pride and glory. It is hard to realize that this wide, white road, humming with life and swept by costly automobiles, was once nothing but a well trodden tow-path bordering a marsh.⁹⁷

As seen before, it is true there once was only a towpath, but it connected to a harbor which had been bustling for centuries along the walled city. Foreign trade and the development of “foreign Shanghai” metaphorically took off when it connected to the tremendous on-going trade that was taking place a few miles to the south.

The image of the Bund as a place for leisure and architectural appreciation was taking root. In his 1920 edition, Darwent had completely rewritten his introduction to the showcase window of Shanghai:

The newcomer will observe a most striking difference between the river-front of the International Settlement and that of the French Settlement. That of the French Settlement has been captured by commerce; steamers line it, cargo and coolies litter it; it is not pleasant to

⁹⁴Isabella L. Bird, *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond: An Account of Journeys in China, Chiefly in the Province of Sze Chuan and among the Man-Tze of the Somo Territory* (London: J. Murray, 1899), 18–19.

⁹⁵Darwent, *Shanghai. A Handbook*, 1.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁷Mary Ninde Gamewell, *The Gateway to China: Pictures of Shanghai* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916), 42.

promenade. That of the International Settlement is a splendid open space – save for a few launches and cargo-boats moored off it. Its pleasant grassy lawn and walks, with an unobstructed view across the open water, across which the cool breezes from the sea are wafted and borne in the heat of summer, make it of untold value to the amenity, the health and beauty of our river-front.⁹⁸

The tone is almost lyrical. The British Bund was no longer a place for trade and shipping, except for “a few launches and cargo boats” that seem to be there through sufferance. With stronger words than in the first edition of his guide, Darwent attributed this success to “the men of a past generation who fought and won the battle for this freedom of the Bund foreshore from all-devouring commerce.”⁹⁹ In Darwent’s eyes the genesis of the Bund manifested epic significance.

By the 1920s, the image of the Bund as the beating heart of the city, where powerful firms competed fiercely to build their headquarters, was well established. The competition, in fact, generated a movement for higher and more massive buildings. The shift of attention from the “promenade” to the line of buildings started after WWI. In the 1916 edition of the *Travelers’ Handbook for China*, the Bund is praised as “shaded and inviting,” although it also points to the “proud buildings for the city’s principal banks and business houses.” Yet no single building is mentioned. In the later editions – 1921, 1925, 1933 – the guide dutifully listed all the “notable buildings,” updating its business profile along with the transformation of the Bund.¹⁰⁰ By the beginning of the decade, the technology was available to erect high and heavy structures on Shanghai’s soft and water-filled soil. The 1921 edition of the guide predicted that “it is possible that in a few years time the entire Bund frontage will be filled with six-story buildings.”¹⁰¹ Reality went well beyond this projection. By 1930 an impressive row of buildings took over the entire Bund, creating what a hotel guide called the “billion-dollar skyline.”¹⁰²

Neither the French nor the Chinese sections of the Bund were ever able to receive but a very slight, and often derogatory, comment in the writings of British travelers. The French section partly redeemed itself through its installations. In 1899, the *Quai du Whampoo* is praised for its “fine wharves at which the big Yangtze steamers load and discharge their cargoes and. . . beyond which stretch, far as the eye can reach, the crowded tiers of Chinese shipping.”¹⁰³ The southern section of the riverfront retained its image as a place devoted to shipping and storage, even after improvements were made. Except for a few major buildings, like the French consulate or the 1920 rebuilt headquarters of the Messageries Maritimes, one must admit that the French Bund failed to attract major construction. Further to the south, the Chinese Bund was most often overlooked. In 1916, an American resident offered an unusually romantic view: “The characteristic feature of the Chinese Bund is its boat population. For more than half a mile little boats called sampans. . . line the shore and extend well into the river.”¹⁰⁴ There were indeed differences between the various sections of the

⁹⁸Darwent, *Shanghai*, 1.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Carl Crow, *The Travelers’ Handbook for China* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1916), 86; Crow, *The Travelers’ Handbook*, 5th ed. (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1933), 145–46; Crow, *The Travelers’ Handbook*, 3rd ed. (Shanghai: Dood, Mead & Co., 1921), 106; Crow, *The Travelers’ Handbook*, 4th ed. (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1925), 139–40.

¹⁰¹Crow, *The Travelers’ Handbook for China*, 3rd ed., 107.

¹⁰²California Directory Association, comp., *Tourist Guide to Shanghai–North China* (Shanghai: unpublished, 1930), 15, compliments of Hong Kong & Shanghai Hotels Ltd.

¹⁰³Bird, *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond*, 23.

¹⁰⁴Gamewell, *The Gateway to China*, 43.

Bund, but as one can see from the visual record, a wide range of activities took place along the riverfront. The presentation of the “English” Bund as a place for rest and leisurely walks fails to reflect the actual diversity of the place and its actual role as a bustling workplace.

Compared to Western enthusiasm for the Bund, Chinese records fail to convey a similar sense of fervor. The Bund almost never appears as a central reference point of the city. Even if it struck the eyes of early travelers – such as Wang Tao in 1848 as we shall see below – and while it probably impressed scores of Chinese visitors, Chinese city guides glossed over the Bund.

In 1848, on his first visit to the city, Wang Tao seems to have been impressed by the row of buildings along the Bund that he viewed from the river:

As soon as we got up the Huangpu [River], it was all at once a different world. Looking out from the boat laid an expanse of mist and water with a forest of masts and sails. All along the bank of the river were the houses of foreigners, tall buildings whose roofs seemed to reach to the clouds, with elaborate gates and ornate flags.¹⁰⁵

There are two problems with this description of Shanghai in 1848. The first is that the date that this prose description was written, while unclear, was about three decades after Wang actually took his trip to Shanghai. While he may have kept a diary, his 1891 publication, first serialized in a newspaper, is the only evidence we have.¹⁰⁶ In other words, his memory may have been tainted by his more current view of the Bund. The second issue is that visual evidence from contemporary paintings does not fully support the view presented by Wang Tao. Paintings are of course imaginary re-creations of reality. Yet these paintings were produced by local artists, both Chinese and Westerners, who cared less about the latest trends in painting than in describing what they actually saw.

In this study, I have matched all the paintings with actual photographs and established that these paintings were fairly accurate on all accounts: location of buildings, distribution, general appearances, and so on. If we rely on the first painting known to date from 1849–1850, about the time when Wang Tao arrived in Shanghai, there was hardly anything that would have impressed a young man fresh from Suzhou, a city of close to one million people at the time.¹⁰⁷ There were less than a dozen buildings scattered along the riverbank, from the British consulate to the Russell & Co. compound. None of them could be confused with the potential six-story buildings of a later era. Actually, the building of the Chinese Imperial Customs appears as the tallest structure on the riverfront.¹⁰⁸ The only major difference was certainly style, but quite opposite to the elegant Chinese Customs structure, Western buildings were sturdy and square, though their colonnades and balconies gave them

¹⁰⁵Wang Tao, *Man you sui lu* [Idle Travel Notes] (Shanghai: Zhu yi tang, 1877), in *Man you sui lu tu ji* [A Pictorial Record of Idle Travel Notes], ed. Wang Jiaju (Jinan: Shandong huabao chubanshe, 2004), 23.

¹⁰⁶Wang Jiaju, introduction to *Man you sui lu*, by Wang Tao, 6. The only known diary by Wang Tao does not include anything about his arrival in Shanghai. Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji* [Wang Tao Diary] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987).

¹⁰⁷There is some disagreement on the size of the population of Suzhou, with F.W. Mote supporting a high figure of one million in the 1850s, while W.G. Skinner offers a more conservative estimate of 700,000. William G. Skinner, ed., “Introduction: Urban Development in Imperial China,” in *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), 29.

¹⁰⁸Jeffrey Wasserstrom argues that the twice-rebuilt Maritime Customs became one of the two tallest buildings in Shanghai and the tallest one on the Bund. Its clock – and chime – set the time for the whole city, which also contributed to turn the Customs House into an iconic urban landmark. Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “A Big Ben with Chinese Characteristics: The Customs House as Urban Icon in Old and New Shanghai,” *Urban History*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2006), 65–84.

an airy aspect. The unusual façades may have engendered an element of surprise, especially the columns that certainly gave the impression of “reaching to the clouds.” Wang Tao also noticed the flags that hung in front of many buildings, either the company flag or the flag of whichever country the company represented.¹⁰⁹ As to the “forest of sails and masts,” it is unlikely there was such a concentration of vessels in front of the British settlement. All paintings tend to show a more sparsely concentrated mooring. And aside from the visual record, we know from other records that if any such forest was to be found in 1848, it was along the Chinese section of the riverfront, along the walled city. This is where for centuries thousands of ships had been mooring every year.¹¹⁰

The testimony of Wang Tao has remained the unchallenged view of early-treaty-port Shanghai in Western and Chinese literature.¹¹¹ This image is taken for granted and has been repeated up to this day without critical distance.¹¹² Quite interestingly, it is not unlike the mythical and romanticized view of the later Bund we have inherited from the 1920s–1930s. What this disjuncture between the recollections of Wang Tao and the visual sources suggests, apart from the issue of a distorted memory, is that the confrontation of textual records, from which historians have elaborated their interpretations both of the appearance of mid-nineteenth century Shanghai and the reaction of a young Chinese literati to this scene, calls for a second and more critical reading of these textual records. While the paintings by themselves would be a questionable source, their systematic study through time and comparison with early photographic records actually provides a solid basis for a “visual reconstruction” of the early Bund and an alternative tool through which to reassess textual records.

The first image of the Bund Wang Tao recalls actually does not seem to have made a lasting impression on him. At least, it failed to attract him for a visit or casual stroll. In the diary he kept at various times between 1858 and 1860, Wang Tao often mentions the various places he went with his friends or by himself. However, the Bund is mentioned only once, after he had taken a trip to Hongkou, across Soochow Creek.¹¹³ In other words, apart from the initial mention in his recollections, the Bund never became a point of reference in his mental geography of the city. In point of fact, his whereabouts were centered more clearly on the walled city. A contemporary of Wang Tao, the city guide compiler Ge Yuanxu, was equally insensitive to the Bund. In the first Chinese city guide that he produced, he made no mention of the Bund, or of any part of the riverfront, although he introduced the reader to shipping and shipping routes from Shanghai. Quite evidently, the Bund failed to strike a chord in the mind of the author.¹¹⁴ In fact, one needs to point out that in Chinese textual sources, the “Bund” failed to become the icon that figured so prominently in Western writing about the city.

A close examination of Chinese city guides published through the Republican period confirms the lack of interest in the Bund. This may be due to their pragmatic approach since

¹⁰⁹In the early period of settlement, trade companies often also served in a consular capacity for a given country. Jardine, Matheson & Co. displayed the Danish flag; Dent & Co. carried the Portuguese flag; A. Heard & Co. represented Russia. In 1867, Great Britain, France, Spain, Prussia and the United States were the only powers represented by official consuls. Dennys, *The Treaty Ports of China and Japan*, 380.

¹¹⁰Zhang Zhongmin, “Qing qianqi Shanghai gang fazhan yanbian xintan,” 91.

¹¹¹Yuan Xieming, “Gongbuju yu Shanghai luzheng,” 170.

¹¹²H. McAleavy, *Wang T'ao (1828–1890): The Life and Writings of a Displaced Person* (London: The China Society, 1953), 4; Catherine Vance Yeh, “The Life-Style of Four Wenren in Late Qing Shanghai,” 423–24.

¹¹³Wang Tao, *Wang Tao riji*, 117.

¹¹⁴Ge Yuanxu, *Hu you za ji* [Miscellaneous Notes on Visiting Shanghai] (1876; repr., Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989).

Chinese city guides usually described Shanghai very systematically in every aspect. These guides were conceived less to assist foreign tourists, as in the Darwent or *All about Shanghai* guides with their “tours” of the various sections of the city, than to introduce the reader to the various practical resources which Shanghai offered. The city is defined geographically, but it has no center to start from. It is divided into various themes (government, industry, and leisure) rather than by districts or areas. Even the photographic record in these guides fails to offer a glimpse of the Bund. It appears almost furtively in one guide through a picture of the Public Garden or of the WWI Memorial. There is no way to say whether this was a conscious choice or simply the result of their editorial structures, but obviously the Bund was not an element of civic pride in Chinese guides.¹¹⁵ As we shall see below, this may explain why the post-1949 guides also remained silent about the main promenade of the city. The only full presentation of the Bund for tourists that I have found is a special issue of the *Lüxing zazhi* (China Traveler) of January 1930. In an article devoted to the Bund, the author introduced the reader to its magnificence, but in poetic language. No superlative here. No mention of Westerners either. This was “China modern.”¹¹⁶

Although the *waitan* (Bund) was absent from city guides, it eventually came to be associated with Shanghai as a synonym for the city’s name. The *waitan* epitomized Shanghai, not necessarily physically, but rather for its lifestyle, attractions and dangers. A 1942 guide, *Da shanghai*, devotes two short sections to “tan.” One section “Huangpu tan” presents the Bund as the “point of origin” of the International Settlement, but immediately proceeds to describe it as the “Wall Street” of the city, with a high concentration of banks from all over the world. No other aspect of the Bund is mentioned, save for the impressive architecture of these financial establishments. The other sections of the riverfront are glossed over. In another section the author explains to the traveler the meaning of “Shanghai tan” as a metaphor for the city as a whole, a place of pleasure for the rich, a fine example of a modern city of the twentieth century, but also full of traps and disillusionment.¹¹⁷ In fact, this vision is certainly the one that prevailed, at least through other media. In movies, in particular, the Bund often appears in the “opening credits,” along with views of modern buildings and department stores.¹¹⁸ Quite clearly, the visual record left a very different imprint about the Bund in people’s minds than did the written sources. There is a striking difference, however, between the Western and Chinese visions of the Bund in the

¹¹⁵This discussion is based on the examination of the following guides: *Shanghai zhinan* [Guide to Shanghai: A Chinese Directory of the Port] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1909); see also subsequent editions from 1919, 1920, 1923, 1925, 1926 and 1930; Zhonghua tushu jicheng gongsi bianjisuo, ed., *Shanghai youlan zhinan* [A Comprehensive Guide of Shanghai] (Shanghai: Zhonghua tushu jicheng gongsi, 1923); Lin Zhen, *Shanghai zhinan* [Guide of Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1930); *Shanghai shenmi zhinan* [Secret Guide of Shanghai], 2 vols. (Shanghai: Datong tushushe, no date given); Xu Wancheng, Huang Jingwan, *Shanghai zhinan* [Guide of Shanghai] (Shanghai: Guoguang shudian, no date given); Shen Bojing, *Shanghai shi zhinan* [Guide of the Shanghai Municipality] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1933); Liu Peiqian, ed., *Da Shanghai zhinan* [Guide of Greater Shanghai] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936); Leng Xingwu, *Zuixin Shanghai zhinan* [New Guide of Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua yanjiushe, 1946); Wang Changnian, ed., *Da Shanghai zhinan* [Guide of Greater Shanghai] (Shanghai: Dongnan wenhua fuwushe, 1947).

¹¹⁶Sun Enlin, “Pubin cangsang lu” [A Record of the Vicissitudes of River Bank], in *Lüxing zazhi* [China Traveler], vol. 4, no. 1 (1930), 67–73.

¹¹⁷Ji Longsheng, *Da Shanghai* [Greater Shanghai] (Taipei: Nanfang zazhishe, 1942), 11–12, 22–23. The guide presents only a few other major streets in the International Settlement (Nanking, Peking, Foochow, and Fukien Roads).

¹¹⁸See for instance *Shen nü* [Goddess], 1934; *Malu tianshi* [Street Angel], 1937 or *Sanmao liu lang ji* [San Mao], 1949.

twentieth century. While the former wrote about it as an ode to their accomplishments in Shanghai, the latter used it to convey a sense of urban modernity.

Epilogue: the Bund in the post-revolutionary period

The glamorous Bund – a glamour that overshadowed a more complex reality as seen before – started to shatter after the takeover by Communist armies in May 1949. The Bund fell into oblivion in revolutionary Shanghai. Even if Chinese travelers coming to the city would certainly make the walk to the Bund and have their picture taken, such opportunities became rare with the enforcement of a rigid system of control over the movement of the population. Apart from cadres and some technicians, few people were allowed to travel. Trade no longer brought the flow of merchants that had made Shanghai famous. Foreign visitors were limited to technicians from the socialist bloc and only very rarely did occasional delegations from Western countries set foot in China. Tourism, both domestic and international, just dried up.

The city was required to turn itself from a place where “consumption” dominated – and corrupted its people – to a “productive” socialist urban entity. The Bund ceased to be a marker of Chinese urban modernity. On the contrary, it came to be seen as a legacy of Western colonialism. The buildings were simply taken over by the new authorities. Quite symbolically, the new municipal government and the Party Committee elected to locate their headquarters in the building of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. Yet there was no destruction by the new authorities, as little capital was made available for infrastructures under the new regime. The little funding available went to the renovation of slum quarters and the building of workers’ villages.¹¹⁹ Many of the features that make a place a city disappeared from Shanghai. One can find a reflection of that in the virtual disappearance of city guides compared to the several yearly publications to be found before 1949. I was able to trace only two such guides, one for 1957 and the other for 1980 when Shanghai started to regain some clout on the national scene.¹²⁰ In fact, the 1957 guide amounts to no more than nine pages listing the bus lines and a few places of interest (theaters, cinemas, and sport halls).

The progressive reopening of the city to travelers, however, took a cautious path within the constraining shell of the officially defined “socialist city.” A 1980 guide provides a further illustration of this perspective. The guide seemed to target the “serious” traveler, one that came to Shanghai not to enjoy its cityscape or the pleasures a city usually offers, but the relevant places for doing proper business in a socialist nation. The guide was illustrated with advertisements for industrial hardware and technical gear that an individual would hardly find useful. The geography of tourist attractions laid out in the guide offered only a very small sample of historical landmarks of genuine Chinese origin (namely Yu Yuan Garden and Longhua Pagoda) and non-controversial recreational areas (public parks and the zoo).¹²¹ The Bund, even under its Chinese name, simply did not exist. Nowhere throughout the text was there any reference to the riverfront or to any buildings thereon. The term *waitan* (Bund) crept in almost inadvertently in the very last pages of the guide in a schematic map of the major commercial arteries: Nanjing donglu did start from the “*waitan*.”¹²² A 1987 traffic

¹¹⁹Shanghai shehui kexueyuan jingji yanjiusuo [Institute of Economics, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences], ed., *Shanghai penghuqu de bianqian* [The Transformation of Shanghai Slums] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1965).

¹²⁰*Shanghai zhinan 1957* [Guide to Shanghai, 1957] (Shanghai: no publisher given, 1957); *Shanghai zhinan* [Guide to Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu chubanshe, 1980).

¹²¹*Shanghai zhinan*, 167–84.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 188.

guide equally failed to mention the Bund among its various entries. The term *waitan* appeared only in relation with *Zhongshan Dongyi Lu* (East Zhongshan Road, Section one).¹²³

Little was done to maintain or enhance the buildings along the Bund or even to the Bund itself. After the takeover of the city, the municipal government mostly reorganized the wharves and jetties, removing some of them to the south, tearing down scattered buildings to make way for green space.¹²⁴ By the mid-1980s, however, the Institute of Urban Planning came up with a new scheme for the Bund, with the proposal to heighten the riverfront to prevent possible damage from the millennium flood.¹²⁵ The dyke that runs along the Huangpu was elevated from 5.8 to 6.9 meters and the Bund was turned into a 10-lane highway. The planned renovation of the Bund was completed in September 1992. Other additions were rather cosmetic, like the erection of a statue in the middle of the Bund garden to commemorate the heroes of the revolution in Shanghai and one in honor of the first mayor of Shanghai, Chen Yi, in front of Nanjing Lu.

The municipal Bureau of Urban Planning started to work on a scheme to preserve the buildings on the Bund by 1984. Basically, it defined the stretch to be protected, from the Suzhou River (Soochow Creek) to Yan'an Donglu (Edward VII Avenue), and from the riverfront to Henan Lu. Two years later, 17 buildings were listed as landmarks to be protected. It took another five years for a general scheme to be adopted for the same area, slightly extended to the northern bank of the Suzhou River. Altogether, a total of 40 buildings came under the protective scheme of the Bureau of Urban Planning.¹²⁶ Finally, in 1993–1995, the Institute of Urban Planning designed a plan for the development of the Bund in three sections: the Bund Finance and Trade area (*Waitan jinrong maoyi qu*), the Southern Bund (*Nan waitan qu*) and the Northern Bund (*Bei waitan qu*). These sections corresponded to the “original” Bund and the French Bund respectively. The third section comprised the area known as “Consular Row” before 1949.¹²⁷

In the 1990s and 2000s, as in the 1930s, the focus remains firmly centered on the “British Bund.” While its buildings are a legacy from Shanghai’s colonial past – something that was definitely erased during the first three decades of the Communist regime – they are now being viewed in a different perspective by the city’s leaders. The city has invested in a sumptuous illumination scheme to highlight the buildings on the Bund and to emphasize Shanghai’s glamour. The buildings have been voided of their historical content or substance. The colonial past has been pushed back into the fold of history and only the thin surface of its heritage, reinterpreted for both domestic and international consumption, is being promoted. The Bund has become a “heritage” in a quasi UNESCO fashion, a set of historical monuments worth preserving for their own sake, not necessarily for what they represent historically but worth preserving for what they convey in the current search of Shanghai for a robust new identity, a renewed identity as the city reconnects with the world in the context of the post-Deng reforms. In Shanghai, this re-evaluation was nurtured by a reconstruction of the collective memory of the colonial past.¹²⁸ The Bund buildings were, *mutatis mutandis*,

¹²³ *Shanghai shi diming jiaotong zhinan* [Guide of Place Names and Communications in the Shanghai Municipality] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1987), 45

¹²⁴ Sun Ping, ed., *Shanghai chengshi guihua zhi*, 468.

¹²⁵ Johnson, *Shanghai*, 27. On the expansion of the Shanghai area, see the series of maps in Zhou Zhenhe, *Shanghai lishi ditu ji* [Historical Atlas of Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1999), 15–21.

¹²⁶ Sun Ping, ed., *Shanghai chengshi guihua zhi*, 405–7.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 469.

¹²⁸ On “Shanghai nostalgia,” see Zhang Xudong, “Shanghai Nostalgia: Postrevolutionary Allegories in Wang Anyi’s Literary Production in the 1990s,” *Positions: East Asian Cultures Critique*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2000), 349–87.

the material blocks that gave reality to a reinvented and sanitized past. This reinterpreted past – actually a de-historicized past – fit both the ambitions of local leaders and the expectations of the local population to put Shanghai into the forefront of Chinese modernity. Memory, and China’s economic resurgence, has redefined how the Bund should be viewed and seen.

This study of the Bund was an attempt to explore various ways in which the image of the Bund – one could certainly say the “myth” of the Bund – was created in the minds of Westerners through their writings (travel accounts, city guides, and more), at the same time as they were transforming the physical appearance of the riverfront. As we observed, the Chinese failed to subscribe to this line of self-promotion. While the Bund was ever present in everyday life for most Chinese in the city, it remained an area that reflected and embodied the Western presence. The “myth” of the Bund as a genteel area also needs to be revised. It was in fact a complex location that mixed work and leisure, even if leisure eventually became the dominant theme attached to the Bund. Yet, by using a wide array of visual sources, I have established that the tremendous physical transformation of the riverfront reflected various stages in the function of the Bund within the city, from a place devoted to loading, unloading, storing and shipping goods to one massively geared toward financial services and secondarily leisure. Visual sources provide a solid counterpoint for the deconstruction of the various forms of discourse on the Bund and its actual transformation, especially the pervasive contemporary “myth” of the Bund.

Glossary

Bei waitan qu 北外滩区

Chen Yi 陈毅

Daotai 道台

Dongmen 东门

Ge Yuanxu 葛元煦

Gongbujü 工部局

Henan lu 河南路

Hongkou 虹口

Huangpu 黄浦

Jiangnan 江南

Jiujiang 九江

li 里

Longhua 龙华

Lujiabang 陆家浜

Nan waitan qu 南外滩区

Nanshi malu gongchengju 南市马路工程局

neitan 内滩

pu 铺

Shiliupu 十六铺

Suzhouhe 苏州河

Tianhougong 天后宫

Waitan jinrong maoyi qu 外滩金融贸易区

waitan 外滩

wai 外

Wang Tao 王韬

xiandao 纤道

Xin beimen 新北门

Yangjingbang 洋泾浜
 Yan'an donglu 延安东路
 Yu Yuan 豫园
 Zhongshan dongyi lu 中山东一路

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