

## Jiang Jieshi's Nationalism and Shanghai

Time goes fast, but Shanghai is growing faster

By Chung Dooeum, 2011

### **Shanghai today, the most popular Chinese City**

Shanghai has always been associated with an exotic place providing all the ingredients of the mysterious Orient, and for many westerners Shanghai gives them a kind of nostalgic feeling. Before the communist take-over in 1949 Shanghai was a very flourishing, popular and international city, but it declined rapidly once the communist controlled China. Events turned after the introduction of economic reforms by Deng Xiaoping Shanghai in the 1990s experienced an intense redevelopment, still ongoing today, which resulted in the return of foreign investment to the city. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in their ultimate decision to allow this, may have been instigated by bittersweet memories of the formerly Shanghai glory days when the Nationalist Party of Jiang Jieshi was in power.

Shanghai today is growing into one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Asia with increasingly modern infrastructure and services. It is China's second largest city (after Chongqing) with a population of over 17 million. Dynamic and innovative, Shanghai is helping to drive China's developing economy. It is the commercial and financial center of the PRC. For many young Chinese people it provides a wealth opportunities. As a city it is together with Beijing also a very popular tourist destination in China. Shanghai's port is the busiest container port in the world and aims to become an international shipping center in the near future. It is one of the main industrial centers of China, playing a key role in the heavy industry. For instance, China's largest steelmaker, Baosteel Group, and one of China's oldest shipbuilders, Jiangnan shipyard (the meaning of the two Chinese characters in Shanghai's name is "Upon-the-Sea") are both located in Shanghai. Furthermore, one of the three largest Chinese automotive corporations is based in the city.

### **The 1930s Shanghai of Jiang Jieshi**

Jiang Jieshi and his nationalist government had well prepared plans for Shanghai's development as an international city; they wanted to become Shanghai like New York. The development of the urban areas like Shanghai but also of other larger Chinese cities was probably in a reaction to the communist success in the

countryside. Important figures close to him, like Ziwen (T.V) Song, Xiángxī (H.H) Kong were for instance instrumental in executing the financial policy. However, without Jiang Jieshi's vision for Shanghai's development it probably never would have played the role that it did during the 1930s. Although, Jiang Jieshi and the city had experienced many setbacks in the efforts to modernize, but Jiang always succeeded in bouncing back, indeed, one could even say he was indomitable. Labour unrests that ultimately resulted into the purging of the communists in 1927, political intrigues, and fighting with the Japanese in 1932 and 1937. The CCP was founded in Shanghai, and many of the Chinese secret societies were located in Shanghai. Furthermore, the notorious criminal gang the Green Gang controlling the drugs trade flourished in Shanghai. Altogether the ultimate melting pot and for the nationalist government's efforts to modernize the city into a place like New York it was a daily challenge.

Therefore, although, Shanghai never had been the center of any Chinese government during the time of Jiang Jieshi's nationalist government it was nevertheless the place where many things happened, Well-known is Jiang's policy of "appeasement" in the 1930s, meaning first fight the communists in China and then deal with the Japanese problem. Because the Japanese were also strongly against communism and the CCP, Jiang thoughts behind this were that my enemies (CCP) enemy is my friend. In reality, Jiang's philosophy was about 30 percent military and seventy percent political.

When in 1937 Japanese attacked Shanghai most of the foreigners evacuated en masse. As other countries closed their doors to immigrants in the lead up to the Second World War, the city became a haven for Jews fleeing Nazi terror in Europe, and over 20,000 Jewish refugees found asylum in Shanghai

### **Shanghai and Foreign Concessions**

Shanghai was once a small fishing village on the borders of the Huangpu river, but Shanghai in its heyday became one of the world's most modern and sophisticated cities. The term 'Old' Shanghai comprises the time from about 1842 until 1940, when foreigners through the concessions enjoyed certain privileges in China.

Myths and legends are legion.

Stella Dong in her book "*Shanghai 1842-1949: The Rise and Fall of a Decadent City*" put it this way:

"In Shanghai's prime no city in the Orient, or the world for that matter, could compare with it. Shanghai was half Oriental, half Occidental; half land, half water; neither a colony nor wholly belonging to China."

When speaking about Shanghai during the 1930s most people have imaginations of a city with unbridled free trade, opium wars between gangs and covert colonization by French, British and Japanese. Due to its location at the mouth of the Yangzi river and natural harbour, the city became well-known by its more popular name as “Paris of the East”. The opium wars during the 19<sup>th</sup> century are a reference to the brute military force used by the British in order to safeguard their rights to increase the exports of Chinese goods to finance the imports of opium to Chinese addicts. Different from many cities in China who have a long and varied history, Shanghai's history is quite short. The British opened a concession in Shanghai after the first Opium War which touched off Shanghai's development. Shanghai was located at the coming together of the Huangpu river and Suzhou creek, and connected to the Yangzi river and the Grand Canal, this meant that the city provided access by water to all parts of China as well as to the rest of the world. The British had requested part of the land alongside the Huangpu river which was outside the Chinese part of Shanghai. France also acquired equally concession rights, which encouraged other foreign powers to extract comparable privileges from Chinese officials. For some time there existed an informal Settlement for Americans, but this later merged with the British settlement to form the International Settlement. However, the British dominated all aspects of the International Settlement. The Japanese had been interested in Shanghai since 1880 but it was not until after the Sino-Japanese war that they obtained the same rights and privileges in China as the other treaty powers. Banking and manufacturing were the respectable professions, but it was opium--controlled largely by foreigners but used largely by Chinese--that built modern Shanghai. The arrogance and excess of foreigners, who set up their own courts, lived lavishly and excluded the Chinese from governing bodies and private clubs, created the uneven balance of power and economics that actually helped pave the way for Communism.

### **Early days Shanghai**

When in the thirteen century the transportation by sea of tribute grain started Shanghai became important because the rice barges had to pass through the Huangpu to reach the sea. The Bund, later a major boulevard of the foreign community in Shanghai originally was a towpath made and used by the coolies who pulled the barges along the river. Shanghai began to develop into a kind of storage for coastal and maritime shipping while also being a market town for trade between the surrounding provinces. Textiles and trade were the major drivers of the economy in the early days of Shanghai, because silk and cotton provided very

marketable products. Before the opium war foreign trade was limited to Guangzhou and British traders had long time tried to expand their business beyond Guangzhou. When the British invaded the city in 1842 it was inhabited by 250,000 Chinese and it did not take long before the Chinese nationals were serving the foreigners, who were making Shanghai one of the world's wealthiest business centers. Jiang Jieshi never was happy with the way Shanghai had been developed by foreigners and strived to give the city back its Chinese identity.