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## CREATING URBAN OUTCASTS Shantytowns in Shanghai, 1920-1950

HANCHAO LU  
Georgia Institute of Technology

Modern Shanghai was often described by romantic sobriquets such as "the Paris of the East," "the bright pearl of the Orient," "the paradise for adventures," and so on.<sup>1</sup> The stylish architecture on the famous Bund shaped the skyline of the city and served as a proud symbol of this great metropolis. Stories about successful persons—like Silas Aaron Haroon (1847-1931), a British Jew who came to Shanghai with virtually nothing but his suitcase yet became the richest real estate entrepreneur in China;<sup>2</sup> or Du Yuesheng (1888-1951), a native Shanghai-ese who rose from being a humble fruit peddler to become the most powerful and politicized gang boss in the country<sup>3</sup>—contributed to Shanghai's reputation as a city of opportunity, and to its "get rich quick" tradition.<sup>4</sup> Sagas such as these, together with Shanghai's modern skyline, made the city a symbol of modernity and opportunity.

However, for each "rags to riches" success story, there were thousands upon thousands of untold stories of former peasants who had migrated to the city during the Republican era (1911-1949), when Shanghai was in its heyday, and for whom simply to survive meant success. The stylish European architecture along the Bund may have served too many times as a "cover picture" for the city, and perhaps contributed to the exaggerated notion that Shanghai was "thoroughly modern." Much less noted was another darker, and less romantic aspect of urban growth in modern Shanghai: numerous filthy straw-huts chaotically thrown together into dozens of shantytowns that

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