

sheltered hundreds of thousands of urban poor. It is proper to say that, in contrast to the Bund skyline, the shantytowns were another symbol of modern Shanghai, or, as Emily Honig has put it, "another of Shanghai's distinctive world."⁵ However, although Shanghai is arguably the most researched Chinese metropolis in the West,⁶ this aspect of the city has largely been neglected in the literature. So far there is no single work that deals with the subject in detail.

This article discusses Shanghai's squatter areas during the period 1920-1950, arguing that the extremely congested and poor living conditions of Shanghai's shack settlements and the high unemployment and underemployment rates there created a group of "urban outcasts." Among them, factory jobs became a highly coveted form of employment, and ordinary industrial workers, who are generally regarded as comprising the majority of slum residents in modern industrial cities, formed merely a minority.

Unlike the slums of twentieth-century America, which were clearly associated with the inner city,⁷ slums in Shanghai were all peripheral, often located along the boundary of the city's foreign settlements.⁸ The peripheral location of Shanghai's slums reveals what we might call the superfluous nature of the slums and their occupants. At least from the viewpoint of the majority of Shanghai urbanites who were more "decently" settled down in the city than were the slum dwellers, the latter were uninvited outsiders⁹ and the outskirts they occupied were a blight on the city. Likewise, the shantytown inhabitants felt that they were denied entrance to the life of the inner city.

To some extent, it is more accurate to describe those who lived in Shanghai's shantytowns as homeless people rather than as ghetto dwellers. While in America the term *ghetto* has become a popular and evocative expression of the residential segregation of ethnically defined migrants in inner-city slums,¹⁰ there was no such component in Chinese slums¹¹ and the shantytowns in Shanghai were not an inner city problem. Also, if judged from the aspect of living conditions, for Shanghai's shantytown squatters, any working-class tenement in New York City would have been housing fit for a king.

Although there is not complete agreement on the definition of "the homeless," most would agree that someone who is "on the street" or in a temporary emergency shelter is homeless.¹² By these criteria, the

shantytown occupants were a Chinese version of the homeless. The Shanghai police forces, which were composed of four different foreign and Chinese authorities,¹³ pursued an injunction against the "loafer" population to keep the city "clean."¹⁴ To the authorities, only beggars were regarded as the "street people" in Shanghai. In the early 1930s when the city had a population of over three million, there were barely 3,000 street beggars in Shanghai.¹⁵ At the same time, the city generally lacked public emergency shelters. But there was no lack of homeless people. They were just driven out of the inner-city streets to squat on the immediate outskirts of the urban areas. The shanty shacks there could barely be called houses. As Peroff points out, "In less developed countries, sizable segments of the population live in permanent conditions that are much less adequate than the living conditions provided in the emergency shelters of the United States."¹⁶ Shanghai's shantytowns were, in that sense, the home of the homeless.

But there is always a risk of being judged as drawing a forced analogy when one tries to find a Western counterpart for a Chinese social phenomenon. In twentieth-century America, unemployment was the primary cause of vagrancy, tramping, or deviance—the conventionally recognized types of homelessness.¹⁷ In China, however, unemployed people huddled up in shantytowns. The great emphasis in traditional Chinese culture on family and a settled home might be one of the factors that reduced the number of people who were truly "hanging out on the street." More important, however, are the causes behind the scene. Unlike homelessness in America, which has been mainly a social problem associated with America's ethnic heritage, the shanty squatters in Chinese cities, or the Chinese version of the homeless, reflect something quite different: the gulf that separates rural from urban China.

Moving from a rural community to urban society, especially to a large metropolis like Shanghai, was (and still is) most widely considered by the general public in China as a form of upward social mobility.¹⁸ To go to Shanghai was something quite like immigrants entering the United States to pursue their "American dream." Although hundreds of thousands of the "Shanghai dreamers" ended up by squatting in shack slums and living in shelters that can barely be called homes,¹⁹ the allure of the city never faded. The majority of the