



Figure 6: The "Rolling Earth Dragon" (*gundilong*) in Fangualong, Shanghai
 SOURCE: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, jingji yanjiusuo (The Institute of Economic Research, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences), *Shanghai panghuqu de bianqian* (Changes in the Squatter Areas of Shanghai) (Shanghai, 1962).

14 years of effort exerted by the newcomers. After years of hard work, a family might be able to save up a bit of money and build a straw shack.²⁹ It was a happy moment when a "rolling earth dragon" was torn down and a straw shack was built in its place, because this change usually meant that the residents had finally obtained a relatively stable form of housing. Yet, judging from their outside appearance or from the quality of their interior, a straw shack was still very rude.

15 A straw shack usually consisted of a single room, about twelve feet wide by twenty-four feet long. But straw shacks less than ten feet square were also very common.³⁰ Bamboo was most commonly used for the main structure. The posts were bamboo; the walls were bamboo wattle plastered with mud. The roof consisted of a few bunches of straw. A piece of lumber salvaged from a wooden boat often served as the door, but sometimes the "door" was merely a straw curtain or a ragged piece of cloth. Straw shacks were built directly on the muddy ground, which served as the floor. Glass would have been considered the height of luxury. In fact, many straw shacks had no windows at all.³¹ A survey of housing conditions in Yaoshuilong in 1951 found that

among the 4,191 houses that were investigated, there were 1,020—about 25 percent of the total—without any windows.³² For the residents of these shacks, the usual solution to the need for a window was to knock a hole in the wall. This was usually easy to accomplish since the walls were very thin. However, the primitive structure of a straw shack, more often than not, did not allow such "construction work" because it might cause the already weak wall to collapse. So, many straw shacks did not even boast a hole for ventilation. Thus the straw shack was inevitably dark, damp, and stank of mildew. Even on clear days no light was admitted if the door was closed; during the rainy season, the interior was nearly as wet as the street outside.

Indeed, there was hardly any place within the slum that could be properly called a "street" (Figure 7). Yaoshuilong, like all other slums in the city, was a crowded place full of grounded boats, the "rolling earth dragons," and straw shacks. The houses, if they can be called that, were built without control, and since the slum became more and more crowded in the 1930s and 1940s, any space that could hold a straw shack was soon occupied. The remaining spaces served as lanes which were often so narrow as to barely allow two men to pass shoulder to shoulder. Moreover, many straw shacks were so decrepit that they had to be leaned against one another to avoid collapse. Thus walking through the slum was rather like negotiating an obstacle course. As one walked, one would have to bend down to pass under low eaves, and jump dozens of bumps and potholes. No matter what the weather, it was impossible to pass through a slum without muddling one's shoes.³³

Nevertheless, in terms of public service, lack of pavement was not the worst thing in Yaoshuilong. Worse was the fact that there were scarcely any public utilities available in the shantytown. Although the inhabitants of Yaoshuilong lived in close proximity to the luxurious and modern facilities of this great metropolis, they were separated from water and power services. Actually, no electric service was available in any of the slums in Shanghai. Just as in their home villages, kerosene lamps were still the only source of artificial light. Also, it was difficult for the slum residents to get access to running water.³⁴ Fire hydrants on the streets at the margin of any shantytowns were usually objects of contention. Thousands of people forced to share one