



Figure 10: Borrowing Space from the Creek: The "Lofts on the Water" in Zhaojiabang, c. 1950

SOURCE: Shanghai shahul kexueyuan, jingji yanjiusuo (The Institute of Economic Research, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences), *Shanghai penghuqu de bianqian* (Changes in the Squatter Areas of Shanghai) (Shanghai, 1962).

were right under the floor, which was merely made up of a few broken wooden boards with large cracks between them. It was a pestilential hell hole full of flies, mosquitoes, and other vermin. On rainy days the so-called "lofts on the water" became "lofts in the water" (*shuizhong gelou*).⁴⁷

If Yaoshuilong, which was formed in early 1920, was representative of the early slums in Shanghai, then Zhaojiabang, which was formed in the later 1940s, was representative of the later slums in the city; and Fangualong, which was formed in the 1930s, can be considered an example of the slums that were somewhere in between. In comparing these three major slums in Shanghai, we encounter the fact that the rude straw shack had become a "high class" form of dwelling. By 1949, most of Yaoshuilong's 4,000-odd dwellings were straw shacks; in Fangualong, straw shacks were considered good housing, for most

of its twenty thousand residents lived in "rolling earth dragons"; and in Zhaojiabang, not only were straw shacks rare, but two thousand families did not even have enough ground on which to set up a "rolling earth dragon." They had to build their houses upon the dead creek bed, facing the ever-present danger of flood.⁴⁸

In a word, during the period 1920-1950, housing conditions in each new squatter community in Shanghai were worse than in the communities that preceded it. Late in the period, even Zhaojiabang did not look so bad compared to the "living arrangements" that sprang up here and there in the city. For instance, in 1948, a slum near Luban Road was said to contain "the city's most miserable dwellings," the so-called *yiaopen* (literally, kiln-hut). These hovels were less than three feet high and had a floor area of less than 18 square feet. In such a hovel one could scarcely sit upright; there was barely room enough to permit three people to sleep together.⁴⁹ But there was worse still. In the dock areas along Huangpu River, one encountered straw lean-tos built against the walls of public toilets. These uninvited neighbors of public toilets sometimes simply slept inside lavatories. For example, Liu Zhikang, a dock walloper, had slept in a public toilet for four years, from ages twelve to sixteen.⁵⁰

SHANTYTOWN DWELLERS: ZHANG KOUZI'S STORY

The importance of Shanghai's shantytowns can be seen by the surprisingly large number of people who lived there. A survey sponsored by the Shanghai Municipal Government in 1936 indicated that in the Chinese district of Shanghai there were more than twenty thousand households, with a population of one hundred thousand that lived in squatter areas. According to another estimate, in 1948, the slums of Shanghai contained about sixty to seventy thousand households (over three hundred thousand people), which was about 10 percent of the total population of the city.⁵¹ These figures might be considered conservative since the slums were scattered over much of the city (see map), and as one can imagine, conditions in squatter communities were such that it was difficult to get an exact count of