

33 The experience of the Zhang family was in many ways typical of the shanty squatters in Shanghai. For example, in 1926, a petition to the local authorities presented by thousands of slum residents in East Shanghai (Hudong) said that all of the petitioners were from villages in northern Jiangsu province. An investigation of Beipingmencun, a straw shack slum in the southwest of the city, indicated that 60 percent of the residents there had migrated to Shanghai directly from rural areas.⁶⁰

34 In terms of origin, immigrants from Subei (or Jiangbei, mainly those areas of Jiangsu province north of the Yangzi River) formed what we might call the stereotypical body of slum residents in Shanghai. As Honig observes, "So close was the association of Subei people with the slums that they were often referred to as 'Jiangbei shack settlements.'" "If there was an 'official' language in the slums, it was not the Shanghai dialect but the Subei dialect, which is still commonly spoken in the area where the former slums were located."⁶¹ Although due to lack of statistics it is impossible to tell the precise numbers of Subei people in Shanghai's shack settlements, it is unquestionable that Subei people comprised the overwhelming majority of the population.⁶²

35 The occupations of the Zhangs were also rather typical for slum residents. Adult males usually found work where muscle was the only qualification, such as rickshaw pullers, coolies, and dock workers. Adult females, if not fortunate enough to become factory workers, usually made their livelihood as street peddlers, carrying a bamboo basket with small items such as sesame cakes and fried dough sticks, the most common breakfast food of Shanghai's urbanites; green onions and ginger roots, the favorite spices in Chinese kitchens; or some other tiny items that they could afford to deal in with their petty capital. Some, like Kouzi's mother, were too poor to have any capital, thus they could only roam streets picking up trash to sell. Part of the trash they picked up, such as discarded vegetables, became food for their families. Quite a number of slum residents simply had no livelihood but begging.⁶⁴

36 A 1939 investigation reported that all of Yaoshuilong's residents were rickshaw pullers, coolies, small peddlers, or mill workers.⁶⁵ Mill workers were the least numerous occupational group, although this

slum, as I have mentioned, was adjacent to the major mill district of the city. The occupational composition of the residents of Yaoshuilong was confirmed in a survey made in the early 1950s on the same location, which showed that 40 percent of the residents were factory workers, while the remaining 60 percent were rickshaw pullers, pedicab drivers, or peddlers.⁶⁶ In fact, because of its close proximity to the Huxi industrial district, Yaoshuilong had the largest proportion of factory worker residents among the three major slums that I have compared; hence it was often called an "industrial slum." If factory workers were a less important group even among Yaoshuilong residents, then, it is safe to say that factory workers were far from being the major inhabitants of the city's shantytowns.

FACTORY EMPLOYMENT: A SHANTYTOWN DREAM

37 Modern industrial workers have been commonly viewed as the lower class or, to use a Marxist term, the most exploited class. But in Shanghai, the largest industrial city of China, any adult who could find and keep a stable factory job was definitely not on the lowest rung of the social ladder.

38 There were two notable surveys on the living standards of Shanghai industrial workers made during the Nationalist decade (1927-1937). One was jointly conducted by the Shanghai Bureau of Price Investigation (*Shanghai diaocha huojia ju*) and the Peking Institute of Social Investigation (*Beiping shehui diaocha suo*) in 1927-1928, with Tao Menghe as the program director.⁶⁷ The other was conducted by the Bureau of Social Affairs of the City Government of Greater Shanghai (*Shanghai shizhengfu shehuiju*) in 1929-1930, with Cai Zhenya as the program director.⁶⁸ Tao's survey investigated 230 cotton mill workers' families in Caojiadu, Huxi. Cai's survey was more diverse. It selected 305 working families of various occupations and districts in Shanghai, including the foreign settlements and the Chinese districts.

39 As far as housing patterns were concerned, the results of these two surveys showed that most industrial-working families in Shanghai were not living in straw shacks. In Tao's survey, 95.7 percent