

'INVISIBLE DEATHS, SILENT DEATHS': 'BODIES WITHOUT MASTERS' IN REPUBLICAN SHANGHAI

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Foreword

The issue of death looms large in Shanghai and Chinese cities in the modern era. In the rich body of historiography produced in the last two decades, however, this topic is almost non-existent. While works in urban history have brought an increasingly sharp focus on life in a whole spate of cities, on specific categories of the population (workers, merchants, students, prostitutes, etc.) or on cultural processes, death is hardly mentioned. In fact, given the numerical importance of deaths in Chinese cities and their striking visibility through funerals and the movement of coffins on the streets, it is surprising that no attention was paid to death in studies devoted to popular or street culture.¹ Even in books devoted to hygiene and public health, death is simply alluded to, or sometimes not at all, in relation to sanitary conditions, epidemics, or public health policies.²

As an object of scholarly focus, death in China has been the privileged domain of anthropology.³ The only serious attempt at addressing the issue of death in modern Chinese society is the volume edited by James Watson and Evelyn Rawsky in 1985, *Death rituals in late imperial and modern China*.⁴ For an understanding of death in modern China, we are left mostly with the classic works of de Groot and Doolittle on 19th century Fujian.⁵ The absence of studies of death as a social phenomenon with its standard sets of rituals and various forms of organization stands in sharp contrast with the large body of work done in European history.⁶

In studying the issue of death in Shanghai, my interest lies in the forms and expressions of death in a major urban setting and how the Chinese popular practices and beliefs associated to death evolved over time, from the late imperial period to post-1949. In the present paper, I examine a very specific aspect of death, namely the issue of exposed corpses and abandoned coffins, all the "bodies without masters" with no one to take care of or responsibility for.⁷ In Republican Shanghai, poor people without relatives, or whose relatives could not support them, died or were dumped in the street, on the pavement, in squares, on market places, in back alleys, virtually anywhere. Taking care of the poor and destitute, alive or dead, became a major feature of the work of the benevolent societies that emerged by the end of the Ming.⁸ These voluntary associations engaged in a variety of relief work.⁹ In Shanghai, some associations eventually concentrated on establishing charity cemeteries where poor people and unclaimed bodies could be buried after a proper ceremony.¹⁰

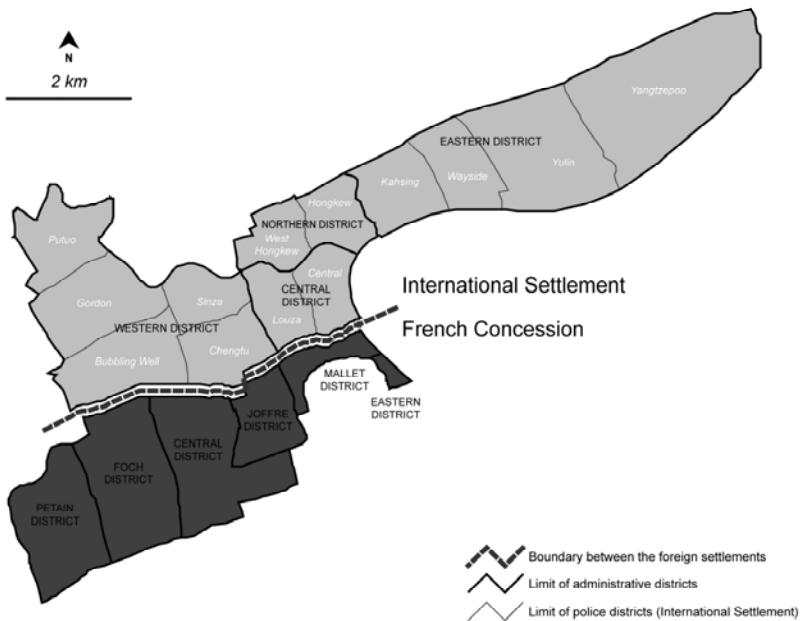
'Silent' deaths, 'invisible' bodies

The present study has its roots in my research on wartime Shanghai. Yet the issue of 'invisible deaths' had a long history in the city. Exposed corpses were one of the most gruesome aspects of urban life at least until the early 1950s. The data on which this paper is based come mainly from the archives of the two foreign settlements in Shanghai.¹¹ It does not cover the areas under Chinese administration. This is not a deliberate choice. It reflects the state of archival documentation. The 'administration of death' does not seem to have ranked high in the concern of the Chinese municipalities, while the archives from the charities involved in collecting exposed corpses remain largely untraced.

This imbalance in data reflects the unusual political geography of the city until W.W.II. Shanghai was made up of three separate entities—International Settlement, French Concession, and Chinese Municipality that each administered its territory autonomously and with almost no coordination or exchange of information. It was three cities in one. To make things worse, there was no proper municipal administration in the Chinese administered-districts until the turn of the century, but a modern municipal government came into being only in 1927.¹² Each 'municipality' organized its territory in various and different subunits (districts, police wards, etc.) that served as the base units for data collection (see map 1). There was no form of population registration, except for a census every five years conducted separately by each administration with differ-

Map 1

Police districts in the International Settlement and the French Concession



ent criteria. Without a proper count of the living, studying death raises a solid challenge.

At all times, indigent people or their offspring died in the street of cities. These were deaths that left no trace and made no noise. These were deaths that went unreported, except perhaps in the records of charity organizations; corpses picked up and disposed of as soon as they were spotted; bodies poorly wrapped in bamboo matting urban residents would rather 'not see'. These were socially shameful deaths, by Chinese standards, deaths better forgotten as if the individual had never existed. This does not belittle the action of the charity organizations involved in this work with the explicit intent to give these abandoned corpses their share of a decent ceremony and burial. The 'invisibility' of these exposed corpses and coffins was less a physical reality, especially when their number rose into the thousands per year, than a 'social invisibility', a phenomenon that came to be part of daily life, something so present and so pressing that eventually the eye just glossed over it while the mind simply erased them. But even when figures grew exponentially after 1937, there was hardly any discussion of it. It came to be taken for granted as an inevitable curse of urban life that indigents died in the street.

Throughout the republican period and into the early years of the PRC, exposed corpses were collected *daily* in the streets. These people passed away, a huge proportion of them children, and remained where they had died or were abandoned, in the street. Shanghai was like a gigantic funnel that swallowed up lives by the hundreds or thousands, even in times of peace.¹³ With the outbreak of hostilities as in 1931–1932 or in August 1937, death became more prevalent with thousands of indigent people dying in the street, almost at every corner. In the context of war and occupation, the issue of exposed corpses changed drastically. Despite the existence of well-established organizations and practices, death came in the form of exceptional and new challenges for the population and the authorities.

Despite the high incidence of exposed corpses and abandoned coffins in the city, the press, Chinese or foreign, actually rarely addressed the problem and when it did, it was either to report briefly on the activities of the Pushan shanzhuang (Shanghai Public Benevolent Cemetery, hereafter SPBC) or Tongren fuyuantang (hereafter TRFYT), or because of extreme circumstances as during the war when exposed corpses caused some 'annoyance'.¹⁴ Quite strikingly, all our press cases come from the 1930s. In 1934, the *China Press* reported "25,753 bodies found in the city in 1933," but the bulk of the article reported on the activity of the SPBC and its cooperation with the local authorities. Four years later, "Society makes grim report" provided an account of the situation in 1936 in words like "grisly account", "grim inventory", but no discussion of the problem itself. Even the staggering figure of 1938 failed to cause any particular alarm: "60,000 free burials are handled here during 1938." It was presented plain and simple, with a call for donations to the SPBC.¹⁵ The other English-language newspapers carried similar headlines with the same content, with one of them finding it "astonishing that the SPBC dealt with more than 60,000 unclaimed human bodies last year."¹⁶ Most of the time, however, the annual report by the SPBC was not worth more than a short paragraph.¹⁷

The presence of dead children in the street was rationalized, at least in public

discourse, as something due to “the age old Chinese customs of not burying their dead children—the corpses of children up to the age of ten are invariably wrapped in rags, tied round with matting [. . .] and thrown by the roadside. This unsanitary and regrettable custom is attributed to a superstition that if decent burials are given, the spirits of the dead children would return to take away with them their companions in this world.”¹⁸ This explanation, however, goes against various beliefs and realities. On the one hand, a high number of children were found encoffined, which tends to show that parents cared, even if they lacked the means to organize a proper burial.¹⁹ On the other hand, for adults at least, proper funeral and interment were important precisely to pacify the spirit of the deceased and make sure it would not come back to haunt the living. Obviously, even if there was a recognized practice of burying children very simply in the countryside or even of dropping the corpses of infant children in cities, the major point of high mortality was simply missed or overlooked.²⁰ That so many bodies found their way onto the pavement had less to do with a “regrettable custom” than to the stark reality of an exceptionally high infant mortality.

Another reason for the lack of discussion may have been the class-based view through which this phenomenon was reported. In September 1942, a year of high mortality rates for all age groups in the population, the *Shanghai Times* interviewed Stone Loh, the director of the SPBC. Apart from predicting serious death rates in the upcoming cold months, Loh made the case that “only the children died of starvation.” He contended that the death rate of adults was comparatively small and that “almost all of these beggars are addicted to drugs . . . when they have no money to buy the drug, they die. The high mortality of children could be reduced if the authorities could maintain a hospital for babies.”²¹ This line of argument by the head of the SPBC is quite striking. There may have been a strategy in pointing to the tragic case of children from poor families to attract donors and help raise money for the SPBC. Adults were easily and conveniently presented as sorry cases hardly worth the trouble they gave. Presenting them as drug users—an image that made its impact on the Shanghai residents—can also be read as a way to give oneself good conscience and whitewash the problem.²² Of course, it goes against all evidence and even common sense that the use of drugs could explain why poor people ended up dead in the street and why there were such dramatic changes in times of economic crisis or warfare.

In examining this issue and its impact, one has to distinguish between two kinds of ‘bodies without masters’. For people with limited resources, a quick and cheap way of handling the deceased was to deposit the coffin on a piece of vacant land, hardly buried, often simply above the ground. It was a temporary expedient pending better days or ulterior removal and proper burial. It was the most affordable solution for those who could not cover the cost of a coffin repository or the assistance of a guild coffin repository. A well-entrenched Chinese custom was to keep the coffin of the dead until a proper time and place had been found, either in the city, or most often in the original native place. Usually, this was done within weeks or months, but sometimes coffins were kept for years before being shipped back home.²³ For the poor people, renting a space in a coffin repository was a luxury while their houses were too small to accommodate the cumbersome presence of a coffin. The second and more common practice was

to wrap the dead body in a crude bamboo matt and to leave it in the open air. While vacant land was also used, most bodies were found in the street, in more or less public spaces.²⁴

It is probably impossible to take a full measure of the number of exposed corpses in Shanghai. To start with, the 19th century is largely elusive, as no record has been found. Moreover, even when there are records, they are incomplete and/or cover different areas within the city. While two major organizations took care of most of the work of collecting bodies, a few smaller associations also come up in the records. There is also the issue of sorting out the corpses actually picked in the street from those received from hospitals, charity homes, or refugee camps. Generally, these were separate categories, but of course in times of acute crisis such a distinction became blurred. Finally, anything beyond the close limits of the urban area went unrecorded. Most of our data was generated by the involvement of the municipal authorities in the International Settlement (after 1928) and the French Concession (after 1937). Although the Chinese municipality started to give grants during the war with Japan, I was not able to trace any documentary evidence for this area.

For a crude assessment of the phenomenon, I shall start from the records of the main organization, SPBC.²⁵ Established in 1913, the SPBC went into full operation in 1915 and remained active well into the early 1950s. For more than 35 years, it devoted itself almost exclusively to collecting and burying exposed corpses in Shanghai.²⁶ I was fortunate to find a four-page pamphlet published on the occasion of a fund-raising campaign in late 1947. The document contained a table with the annual count of bodies gathered throughout the history of the association up to June 1947.²⁷ Since the figures may have been exaggerated for publicity purposes, I double-checked them with similar data retrieved from various sources, in particular archival documents. The published figures were consistent with those of internal reports. Table 1 presents these figures with additions for the late 1940s and early 1950s.

There is little doubt that the number of exposed bodies followed an ever-ascending curve, with massive increases in times of crisis. The records of the early years probably do not reflect the extent of the phenomenon. By 1917, however, they may convey a sense of the actual number of exposed corpses in the city, although the surge from 2,720 in 1918 to 5,642 the following year cannot be explained by any special circumstances. By 1921, a plateau was reached that lasted for half a decade, followed by a prodigious increase that, except for a slump in 1927, pushed the figure to a new level until 1929. The next decade saw another jump, though with jigsaw oscillations. In the French Concession a report by the TRFYT shows that by 1929 the association was collecting almost 4,000 bodies per year. If we add the SPBC to the TRFYT figures, the number of exposed corpses and abandoned coffins recovered in the late 1920s and mid-1930s amounted to 30,000–40,000 per year.

In both settlements, however, serious disruptions in daily life had far reaching consequences. The 1930–1932 period was particularly unforgiving. These were years of crisis in the surrounding countryside, especially during the Yangzi flood of 1931 that forced tens of thousands of peasants to seek refuge in Shanghai, but above all there was also war in the midst of the city during the winter of 1931–

Table 1
 Number of exposed corpses and abandoned coffins collected by the SPBC in
 Shanghai (1915–1951)

| Year | Adult bodies and coffins | Children bodies and coffins | Total | Adult bodies and coffins (%) | Children bodies and coffins (%) |
|-------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1915 | | 259 | 259 | * | * |
| 1916 | | 758 | 758 | * | * |
| 1917 | 62 | 2012 | 2074 | 3.0% | 97.0% |
| 1918 | 51 | 2669 | 2720 | 1.9% | 98.1% |
| 1919 | 91 | 5551 | 5642 | 1.6% | 98.4% |
| 1920 | 152 | 6405 | 6557 | 2.3% | 97.7% |
| 1921 | 243 | 11660 | 11903 | 2.0% | 98.0% |
| 1922 | 503 | 12352 | 12855 | 3.9% | 96.1% |
| 1923 | 644 | 11751 | 12395 | 5.2% | 94.8% |
| 1924 | 625 | 11950 | 12575 | 5.0% | 95.0% |
| 1925 | 528 | 20307 | 20835 | 2.5% | 97.5% |
| 1926 | 620 | 24423 | 25043 | 2.5% | 97.5% |
| 1927 | 609 | 15847 | 16456 | 3.7% | 96.3% |
| 1928 | 438 | 23201 | 23639 | 1.9% | 98.1% |
| 1929 | 627 | 26926 | 27553 | 2.3% | 97.7% |
| 1930 | 1312 | 35064 | 36376 | 3.6% | 96.4% |
| 1931 | 1003 | 33978 | 34981 | 2.9% | 97.1% |
| 1932 | 3088 | 33616 | 36704 | 8.4% | 91.6% |
| 1933 | 1413 | 24410 | 25823 | 5.5% | 94.5% |
| 1934 | 1292 | 35685 | 36977 | 3.5% | 96.5% |
| 1935 | 1360 | 29337 | 30697 | 4.4% | 95.6% |
| 1936 | 1993 | 38352 | 40345 | 4.9% | 95.1% |
| 1937 | 7452 | 42229 | 49681 | 15.0% | 85.0% |
| 1938 | 14989 | 45075 | 60064 | 25.0% | 75.0% |
| 1939 | 8365 | 32711 | 41076 | 20.4% | 79.6% |
| 1940 | 8720 | 20720 | 29440 | 29.6% | 70.4% |
| 1941 | 8708 | 26425 | 35133 | 24.8% | 75.2% |
| 1942 | 12265 | 18805 | 31070 | 39.5% | 60.5% |
| 1943 | 3598 | 13262 | 16860 | 21.3% | 78.7% |
| 1944 | 2595 | 15305 | 17900 | 14.5% | 85.5% |
| 1945 | 2926 | 10752 | 13678 | 21.4% | 78.6% |
| 1946 | 1702 | 14436 | 16138 | 10.5% | 89.5% |
| 1947 | 558 | 13638 | 14196 | 3.9% | 96.1% |
| Total SPBC | 88532 | 659871 | 748403 | 11.8% | 88.2% |
| 1948 | 147 | 2364 | 2511 | | |
| 1948* | 588 | 9456 | 10044 | | |
| 1949 | | | 43140 | | |
| 1950–1951 | | | 44661 | | |
| Grand total | 89267 | 671691 | 848759 | | |

* 1948: partial estimate

Source: "Pushan shanzhuang jianshi," *Pushan shanzhuang boyin mukan tekan*, Q1-12-1502; Shanghai shili gongmu huozang ji lushi tuzang huozang renshu, Report, undated (prob. 1948), Q400-1-3928; Report on vital statistics (Shengming tongji zong baogao, July 1950–June 1951) (1); B242-1-255-1, SMA

Table 2
Number of exposed corpses and abandoned coffins collected by the TRFYT in the French Concession (1929–1938)

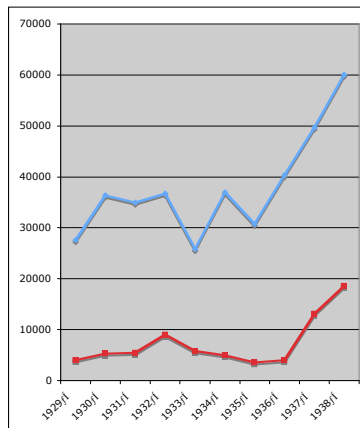
| Year | Adults | Children | Total | Adults | Children |
|--------------|--------|----------|-------|--------|----------|
| 1929 | 394 | 3601 | 3995 | 10% | 90% |
| 1930 | 668 | 4613 | 5281 | 13% | 87% |
| 1931 | 728 | 4715 | 5443 | 13% | 87% |
| 1932 | 1350 | 7649 | 8999 | 15% | 85% |
| 1933 | 445 | 5371 | 5816 | 8% | 92% |
| 1934 | 452 | 4483 | 4935 | 9% | 91% |
| 1935 | 596 | 2960 | 3556 | 17% | 83% |
| 1936 | 691 | 3313 | 4004 | 17% | 83% |
| 1937 | 2443 | 10642 | 13085 | 19% | 81% |
| 1938 | 3494 | 15090 | 18584 | 19% | 81% |
| <i>Total</i> | 11261 | 62437 | 73698 | 15% | 85% |

Source: “Tongren fuyuantang shenqing buzhu, mianfei chezhao ji qingdu yongju, yaoshui,” SMA U38-5-1641

1932. With the first and short-lived Sino-Japanese confrontation, the number of exposed corpses simply doubled in the French Concession. Thereafter, there was hardly any return to the previous level, especially in the International Settlement. This respite was short, however, as there was a dramatic upsurge after 1937.

The outbreak of Sino-Japanese hostilities in 1937 in the city had enduring consequences far beyond the immediate effects of fighting. The first major consequence was a massive displacement of people who left their home with few re-

Figure 1
Exposed corpses collected by the SPBC and Tongren fuyuantang (1929–1938)



sources. In a matter of weeks, one million people were turned into refugees. Warfare in the neighboring countryside also brought successive waves of peasants in search of a temporary shelter. While large numbers were evacuated back to their native place—around 300,000—most stayed behind, hoping to get back to their jobs and housing. Unfortunately, bombing, shelling and fires turned the northern and eastern districts into ashes.²⁸ In other words, residents-turned-refugees had to survive much longer than expected in the foreign settlements. Death took an exacting toll on the poor and destitute, especially children. While 1937 saw a new surge, mostly in the second half of the year, 1938 set an infamous record with more than 60,000 deaths/corpses—165 on every single day on average—left by the road side. There was a significant decrease over 1939 and 1940, although no breakthrough below the 30,000 baseline. The harsh conditions of the winter of 1941–1942 pushed again the figures for both years upward.

There is a certain discrepancy between the trend shown in the figures of the SPBC for Shanghai as a whole and those in the International Settlement. From 1928 to 1937, the number of exposed corpses was relatively stable in the International Settlement, whereas there was an almost continuous increase in the city as a whole. This tends to indicate that the phenomenon was spread all over the city, with sharper movements in the Chinese-administered districts. In the French Concession, the ratio of exposed corpses during the 1930s stood at 14 per thousand while in the International Settlement the figure leveled at 11–12 per thousand. In 1932, however, the figure in the French Concession jumped to 22 per thousand. After 1937, the two lines for the International Settlement and Shanghai as a whole were strictly parallel, reflecting in fact the distribution of the displaced population that had sought refuge in the foreign settlements. Throughout the war, the phenomenon of exposed bodies and abandoned coffins became markedly a problem centered in the International Settlement, escalating from one half to close to 70% of the total between 1937 and 1943.²⁹

In the latter years of the war, the number of exposed corpses fell back below the level of the 1920s, except in 1942. This may have resulted from the policy of forced departure of the population by the authorities and the enforcement of the *baojia* system.³⁰ At any rate, the movement upward resumed in 1947, even if the data are incomplete. This was a period that also saw great economic instability, warfare in the countryside and a massive influx of displaced population. By June 1947 the SPBC had collected more than 14,000 bodies and there is every reason to believe the remaining half of the year brought in as many bodies. In the first quarter of 1948, more than 2,500 exposed corpses and abandoned coffins (or about 10,000 for one year) were found. The latter part of the civil war must have brought extreme difficulties, between hyperinflation and streams of displaced population. The figures for 1949 and the early years of the communist regime in Shanghai show a tragic return to figures above 40,000.

There is probably no way to make an accurate assessment of the number of exposed corpses and abandoned coffins found in the city. Our series are incomplete and inconsistent. Different sources provide different and contradictory figures. Most of the time, the discrepancy is limited, but during the war one can be certain that many bodies went unaccounted for. Altogether, for a single organization—SPBC—the total number of collected corpses and coffins between 1915 and 1951 comes to an astounding figure of 848,759. For a shorter

period of ten years, the TRFYT gathered close to 74,000 bodies. Even with a cautious rule of thumb, an aggregate of all statistics from all organizations would easily push the number to one million for the 35-year period under study here. This was the number of bodies left behind, wretched in both life and death, most of them premature fatalities of an unforgiving economic system and devastating wars.

Who were the “bodies without masters”?

Is there any way to learn more about these invisible and silent deaths? As one may expect, they were found with nothing, and the associations that collected the bodies concerned themselves only with removing and burying them. Only very minimal data were recorded about the exposed corpses and coffins discovered in the street. In most records, the dead were anonymous figures with no name, no age, no profession, and sometimes no sex (for children). One can probably make an educated guess that the vast majority belonged to the poorest sectors of population like unskilled manual workers and coolies. In a 1939 report, the PHD quoted from the SPBC that unclaimed adult bodies were those of beggars (33%), refugees (42%), and residents (25%).³¹ Since refugees were for the most part former residents from the war-torn areas in the city, with some of them falling into the ranks of “beggars”, it is not an exaggeration to think that a majority of the unclaimed bodies were those of Shanghai residents.

Our statistical series actually start with the involvement of the Shanghai Municipal Council, which required daily, monthly, and annual reports in exchange for its subsidy. Unfortunately, these reports provide only very rough data, namely sex, age category (adult/child), coffin/matting, police district. There is no indication about the precise location where the bodies were found, nor is there any breakdown by age groups. For the French Concession, I was fortunate to find the daily reports on exposed corpses found by the police. Whereas in the International Settlement only the corpses of adults were examined by the police before their removal by the SPBC, the French police, at least in wartime, made a record of any body that came to its attention. The policemen dutifully noted the exact address and the age of the victims. They indicated the age in months for infants, in years for children and decades for adults (20, 30, 40, etc.). This series covers only 1938, though it offers a solid sample of 2,020 individuals.

It is readily apparent in Table 1 that infants and children vastly outnumbered adults. They were the primary victims of poverty, malnutrition and disease. The high figure for children, many of them newborn or infants, is not surprising. They were the less well prepared to survive in a context of poor housing, lack of food and adverse weather conditions. Over 35 years, they represent on average 88.2% of the exposed corpses and coffins collected by the SPBC, but in most years before 1937 the figure was above 96%. The TRFYT data in Table 2 also support the trend of a large number of children. In times of crisis, like in 1932 or more clearly after 1937, the number of adults tended to increase substantially to one fifth or one quarter of the victims. Citywide, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the share of adults increased tremendously from 15% in 1937 to almost 40% in 1942. Immediately after the war, the decrease was substantial, but the mortality rate among adults remained high (10.5%). The overall trend however

was a return to a disproportionate share of children. Unfortunately, the post-1949 statistics did not distinguish between adults and children.

There was an overwhelming majority of males among adult exposed corpses. In the International Settlement, the share of adult males between 1928 and 1943 remained almost constantly close to or above 90%. There were exceptional years, in relation with war (1932 and 1933; 1938–1939), with a larger proportion of female bodies. In the French Concession, the population of exposed corpses in 1938 included 2,020 individuals, with 446 adult males (89%) and 54 adult females (11%). As in the International Settlement, adult female bodies ended up much more rarely in the street than men. Since there is no reason to consider that natural resistance or better nutrition would have spared the lives of women, and even considering that there were more men than women among the poor or refugee population, the only rational explanation for the low number of female corpses is one of economics. The surviving spouse was more able to pay for or organize the burial of the deceased when the former was a man, with more physical strength and income, than it was for a woman depending on the husband for a living.

A breakdown by age group among adults in the French subset does not modify the general picture. The major line of divide was between teenagers/adults and children, but even more so among children below the age of 5 years. Infants and the 1–5-year age group represented respectively 31.1% and 42.4% of the total number of exposed bodies. Among infants, if we are to trust the assessed age recorded by policemen, the 1–6 month-old group fared worse, which may be related to weaning or supplementing breastfeeding with artificial food.³² Definitely, young children below the age of five were far more exposed to premature death. They had not yet built immunity and resistance against various infectious diseases, while they must have lived in poor housing and lacked proper nutrition.

If we examine more closely the data on infants and children, especially the ratio between females and males, there is a general balance between the two. Except for the 1–6 months old (62%/38%), the ratio is close to 50/50. The large share of 1–6 month-old babies obviously biases the total and points to a higher morality rate for baby girls. Of course, this raises the issue of infanticide, or at least of the preference/neglect for boys and girls. We do not really have data to put these figures in perspective, for lack of data on registered births. If we assume that the natural rate was 1:1, girls appear less numerous in the few fragmentary census tables we have, which may indicate a lower survival rate and support the interpretation of 'active' or 'passive' infanticide. Past the age of one year, however, males are more numerous, and increasingly so with the years. There is a good chance that, as most studies of mortality in pre-modern and modern cities show, poor nutrition, unhealthy environment and lack of medical care took an even toll on the life of infants and young children.

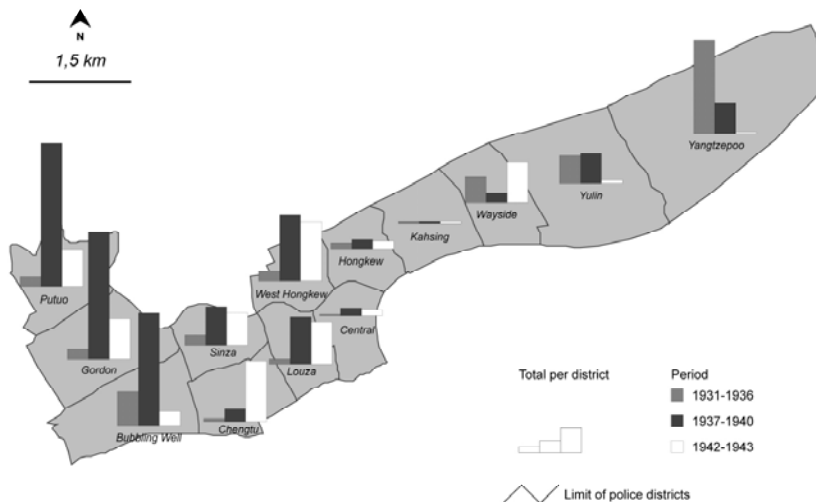
Almost without exception, adults were found dead without any cover or coffin. Figures vary for certain years in the International Settlement, but there is no distinguishable pattern. Children were generally found in coffins or wrapped in matting (about one third before the war, then it increased to 60%–80%). Obviously, economic difficulties made it increasingly difficult for poor families to even afford a small and simple coffin and bodies were just tossed away. This issue is

not indifferent for the degree of visibility of exposed corpses and the reaction of local residents. Depending on whether the body was encased or not, whether it was a child or an adult, the sensitivity of residents could be strongly affected. The distribution of exposed bodies in Shanghai amply supports the view that it was a phenomenon that any resident, except in the wealthier areas, was bound to come across.

Exposed corpses and abandoned coffins created a particular geography of death in the city. Through mapping it is possible to reconstitute this geography, even if a visual representation cannot actually recreate the original phenomenon. These are aggregated data projected onto a space, but they do convey a sense of the widespread nature of the phenomenon. The distribution of exposed bodies in the urban space is a fundamental issue for an understanding of how this phenomenon might have been perceived by Shanghai residents. In the International Settlement, data were aggregated by police district. These data reveal a moving geography (See Map 2) through time as population density and access to certain areas changed.³³ Before 1937, the larger numbers of bodies were collected in all four administrative districts, with a concentration in specific police wards: Louza in the Central district; Yangtsepoo, followed by Wayside, Yulin, and Kahsing in the Eastern district; Hongkew or West Hongkew alternatively in the Northern district; Bubbling Well in the Western district. Except for Louza, these were areas with a higher concentration of factories and workshops (Northern and Eastern districts). They were home to a large population of workers. They were also the place where recent immigrants (peddlers, coolies) found a shelter, most often in slum-like housing. The Western district was much less urbanized with a lot of vacant land around its factories and warehouses. Louza stands out mostly as a place where adult bodies were found, whereas child corpses

Map 2

The distribution of exposed corpses in the International Settlement
(cumulated figures by police district)

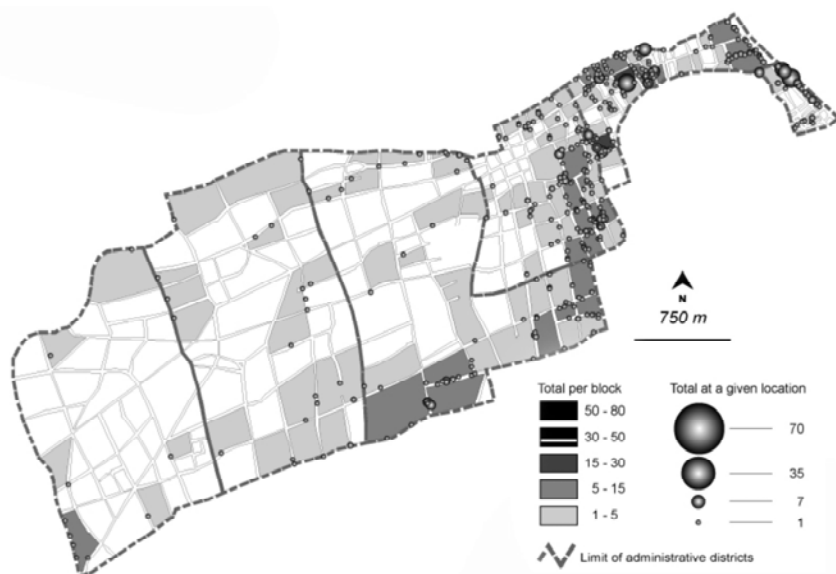


explain the high number in the Western and Eastern police districts. This was especially true of Yangtsepo, the most remote area in the Eastern district, where 33%–42% of children bodies were found. People chose to get rid of their dead children in these more desolated areas.

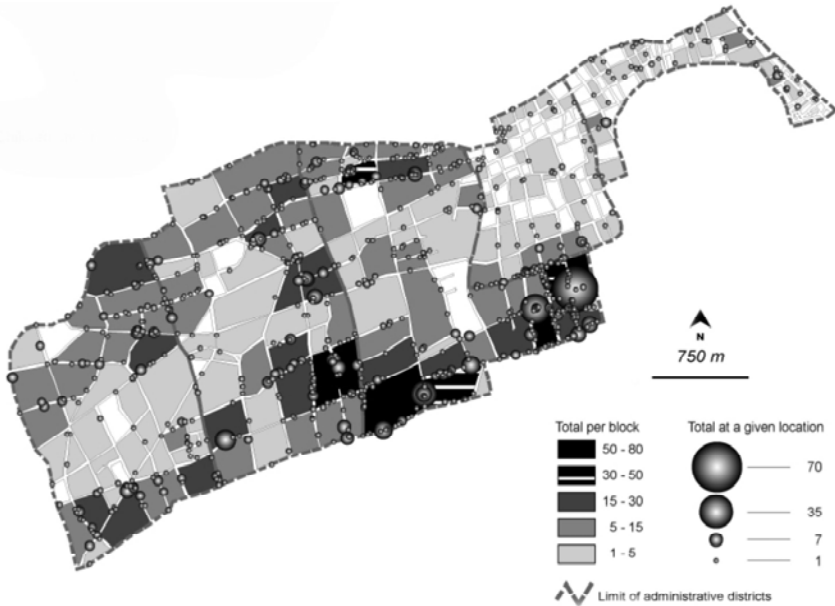
The war drastically altered this geography. The Eastern and Northern districts almost disappeared from the map in 1937 as these areas were emptied of their population as a result of fighting and remained inaccessible through most of 1938. As a consequence, the western-most districts received a much larger share, but the largest number was collected in the Central district with 64% of all bodies. In 1939, Western Hongkew, home to several refugee camps, reappeared on the map of exposed bodies, along with higher numbers in the western-most districts and in Louza. Sinza and Chengtu, in the Central district, also figured more prominently in a geography that hardly changed in the following years. What this quick survey shows is that a much higher share of exposed corpses were found in the most densely populated downtown districts during and after the Sino-Japanese war. What had been a diffused phenomenon with concentrations of bodies at the periphery turned into an unwelcome and unsightly presence almost at people's doorstep.

The detailed record of the French police in 1938 makes it possible to 'see' more precisely where the exposed bodies were found (See Maps 3–4). As in the neighboring settlement every district was affected, except for the small East district: by order of importance, Central (31%), Joffre and Foch (almost at par with 19%), Pétain (14%), Mallet (13%) and East (2%). The figures are not re-

Map 3
The distribution of exposed corpses in the French Concession
Adults above 15 years



Map 4
The distribution of exposed corpses in the French Concession
Children under 5 years



lated to the size of the districts, or to their population. Central probably owed its substantial share to its shape as it encompassed the largest section along the Zikawei Creek on its southern border, a convenient place to dump corpses. Police records confirm that in wartime the phenomenon was spread all over the place, with bodies found on the pavement, on market places, but mostly in the numerous *lilong* (alleys) that ran through the residential blocks. These were the most crowded housing areas, hidden from the main streets, where people lived, worked, and socialized. At night, they offered an ideal place to drop a dead child unnoticed.

A major difference can be observed between children and adults. Whereas children of both sexes were found throughout the concession, adults were concentrated in the two most central districts, East, Mallet, and part of Central. Babies and children were “dumped” in every corner, but adults most probably just died where they happened to be, and the central districts were those where they tried to eke a living (as in Louza in the International Settlement). Both maps introduce a certain distortion as all bodies collected over a period of several months are represented here.³⁴ Still, I believe that they offer a genuine visualization of ‘silent’ deaths in the French Concession. They highlight quite clearly that even in one of the most developed areas of the city, amidst plentiful resources and even wealth, a significant number of people was left to die or abandoned in open air.

“To prove I’m not forgot”³⁵

The problem of exposed corpses raised a significant challenge in a city where the municipal authorities refrained from getting involved in the ‘management of death’ beyond cemetery regulations. As with other matters of public concern in Chinese cities, the task was taken up by private charities. These organizations provided free paupers’ burials. They distributed coffins and maintained burial grounds for the poor of the city. The collection of exposed bodies became also part of their attributions. In Republican Shanghai, two major associations were involved in the actual removal of dead bodies and abandoned coffins from the streets: the Shanghai Public Benevolent Cemetery (SPBC) and Tongren fuyuantang (TRFYT). The TRFYT had a long history in the city since the 19th century, while the SPBC was established only in 1913.³⁶ Although the TRFYT was already involved in collecting abandoned corpses and coffins, a group of Ningbo merchants led by Wang Yiting, a famous Shanghai philanthropist felt the urge to establish an additional organization entirely devoted to the same task.³⁷

The TRFYT and SPBC performed a social service that was not unique to Shanghai. In Chinese towns and cities, and even in a village, if an unknown person happened to die suddenly, the local community was responsible for providing a coffin and burial.³⁸ All dead had a right, however simple, to a decent burial. The belief that the soul of an unburied corpse would haunt the neighborhood or house where it was found was a strong motivation for taking care of exposed bodies.³⁹ The number of such cases in large urban centers explains why some organizations devoted their energy to collect and bury exposed corpses after a simple ceremony. Even the hastily cremated remains of the people found in the war zone in late 1937 were entrusted to the SPBC “for burial in accordance with such rites as they seem advisable in order that no religious susceptibilities will be offended.”⁴⁰ The two associations dealt with the burial of exposed bodies as their main activity, but they actually provided a wider range of services. In particular, a major pursuit was the provision of free coffins to poor families to bury their dead properly. Between 1915 and 1947, the SPBC distributed 271,832 coffins.⁴¹

The division of labor between the two associations remains unclear. As early as 1864 the TRFYT had opened a branch in the French Concession, but it came to be recognized by the French authorities as the sole legitimate organization only after 1937. The SPBC was officially recognized in the International Settlement from 1928 onward.⁴² It is probably safe to assume that until 1913, the TRFYT was the only association that operated throughout Shanghai.⁴³ The sources mention other organizations in the archives, usually because they applied for a grant from the SMC, but they were small-scale latecomers that never played a significant role.⁴⁴ During wartime, the TRFYT and the SPBC became quasi-official undertakers for the poor and destitute.

Both organizations went to great lengths to guarantee a resting place to their unclaimed bodies.⁴⁵ The SPBC owned a large cemetery (Puyi gongmu) in Dachang, north of Shanghai, that it opened in 1925.⁴⁶ The TRFYT owned some 33 burial grounds in Pudong across the Huangpu River where it shipped the coffins in highly recognizable junks.⁴⁷ With the war, however, both organizations lost access to their cemeteries and had to acquire new land, mostly in the Hongqiao

area, west of Shanghai.⁴⁸ Because of the difficulties to access the burial ground in Hongqiao after the hostilities moved westward, it used temporary burial grounds within the International Settlement and in Nanshi.⁴⁹ As soon as the conflict moved away from Shanghai, the SPBC undertook to remove the tens of thousands of temporarily stored coffins to the Hongqiao cemetery.⁵⁰ As these places filled up, the two organizations had to obtain more land in the area. The SMC served as an intermediary between the SPBC and the Japanese military to obtain land and access rights in the Hongqiao area. Eventually, the SPBC owned 150 *mu* (55 acres) of land, next to the Hungjao Cemetery of the Shanghai Municipal Council.⁵¹

Although the need to remove the exposed bodies from the streets certainly helped the SPBC to obtain the support of the authorities, there were repeated closures or bans on burials in the Hongqiao area. The SPBC rented land further away from Shanghai in Qingpu, therefore incurring higher costs due to distance.⁵² After the war, the absentee owner of the land used by the SPBC to bury the coffins of identified or unclaimed coffins came back and claimed his land. The SPBC started to excavate the coffins, but the task exceeded its logistical capacities, which resulted in coffins lying in open air. An agreement with the owner eventually prevailed, by way of paying him a rent pending the removal of the coffins.⁵³ Struggle for more burial space was a continuous process not only because access to established burial grounds came to be closed, but because of the additional demands imposed by continuing military conflicts.⁵⁴ Despite the difficulties and costs, the two organizations never relented in guaranteeing a resting place to the bodies it had collected, even if it took moving them several times. No body should get lost.

Regulating unwanted corpses

For most of the history of the foreign settlements, the local authorities were not directly involved in the issue of abandoned corpses or coffins. In the late imperial and early republican period, down to the 1920s, the responsibility for the collection of abandoned corpses in the International Settlement was officially entrusted to the local headmen (*dibao*) who supervised land transactions in their respective areas.⁵⁵ The same applied in the other sections of Shanghai. The *dibao* was expected to attempt to identify the person, contact relatives, and file a report describing the state of the corpse as well as all the personal effects found on the body.⁵⁶ Since the Land regulations that governed the foreign settlements forbade the burial of any Chinese in the settlements, the removal of exposed corpses was a duty that also fell upon the *dibao*. Failure to take action might bring the *dibao* before the Mixed Court and get him fined.⁵⁷ On the whole, the job was done quite efficiently even if, occasionally, the SMC would lodge a protest about coffins left unattended close to the limits of the International Settlement.⁵⁸ Yet the task became more daunting with the sharp increase in abandoned bodies and coffins in the 1920s and protests became more frequent.

In 1922, the SPBC made its first move to obtain financial support from the SMC. In its letter of application for a grant in aid, it emphasized the service provided to the community. The SMC flatly refused to provide a subsidy arguing instead that the removal of dead bodies had been performed efficiently by

the *dibao* and that all such requests by similar societies had always been refused. Obviously, the SMC failed to see that the *dibao* were just intermediaries in the collection of bodies actually performed by the SPBC.⁵⁹ The SPBC temporarily gave up, but three years later it sent another letter to the SMC. This time, it also mentioned its role in preserving public health. The SMC again was unmoved, but above all still seemed totally ignorant of the actual situation. The memo prepared by its Inspectors of health stated that they had never heard of the SPBC, that their foremen said there was such an organization, that the inspectors were unable to “locate these people”.⁶⁰ One can make two observations: that the SPBC worked efficiently and diligently; that the number of dead bodies was still manageable, even if the SPBC felt it fair to apply for support from the SMC. Once again, the application was turned down.⁶¹ The association also failed with the French Concession.⁶²

By the mid-1920s, the *dibao* became increasingly reluctant to oversee the removal of the dead bodies and asked the SMC to be discharged of this duty. This was perhaps due to the increase in the number of bodies found in the streets of the International Settlement. In the late 1920s, it amounted to 4,000–6,000 per year. The new political context created by the conquest of the city by the Nationalist party may also have been used to put pressure on the SMC to contribute to the expenses.⁶³ While the SMC would have preferred to maintain the original scheme, in August 1928 it entrusted the task to the SPBC under the supervision of the Shanghai Municipal Police.⁶⁴ The French Concession rejected all SPBC applications arguing that it relied on the TRFYT to which it made small and occasional contributions.⁶⁵ The TRFYT had been performing its work without formal contacts with the French authorities. It came to the attention of the Bureau de l’Hygiène only in 1937 when it applied for a grant to face the increasing costs of collecting bodies in the French Concession.⁶⁶ Up to the beginning of the Sino-Japanese war, therefore, the involvement of the authorities was minimal. Exposed corpses and abandoned coffins were not a public issue, nor a public concern. The remarkable efficiency of the two charities that took care of removing the ‘unwanted dead’ certainly played a role in obliterating this phenomenon from the eye and conscience of Shanghai residents.

What had been handled reasonably well by private Chinese organizations in peacetime, however, required in wartime the forceful intervention of the foreign municipal institutions. In the early months of the war, abandoned bodies were processed *in situ*. The authorities only made sure that the bodies were removed as speedily as possible to places where they could be buried.⁶⁷ The end of the hostilities in December 1937 however failed to bring a remission. Coffin dumps were discovered all over the place. There was hardly any day without a letter or a complaint by residents or factories.⁶⁸ The SMC was soon overwhelmed by the number of people who died on its territory with no possibility to remove the bodies outside.⁶⁹ Various solutions were explored. In May 1938, the Shanghai Municipal Police proposed in a confidential document the dumping of bodies at sea.⁷⁰ Yet, the Commissioner of Public Health opposed the idea as both impracticable and unnecessary, arguing that approximately 30,000 coffins had been disposed of sanitarily by fire during the preceding four months. Furthermore, Jordan contended, “the Chinese population has as much right to their sentiments as any other section of the population.”⁷¹

By spring 1938, the authorities in both settlements had become seriously concerned with the issue of space and that of health. In particular, they started to worry about the removal of dead bodies, in coffins or abandoned in the streets, before the hot summer months. The SMC decided at this point to impose the cremation of abandoned bodies and coffins.⁷² Cremation for unclaimed bodies had been broached upon by the SMC before the war in its correspondence with the SPBC. It had suggested establishing a joint crematorium with the French and Chinese authorities to cremate the exposed corpses of children.⁷³ During the early months of conflict cremation had been enforced as an emergency measure to deal with the abandoned bodies resulting from fighting in the war-torn areas, but the practice was discontinued thereafter.⁷⁴ In May 1938, the French Concession also introduced the cremation of abandoned bodies when the site run by the TRFYT became too small to bury the coffins of indigent people.⁷⁵ The TRFYT protested against a measure carried out without its consent and threatened the French Concession with the suspension of the collection of abandoned bodies.⁷⁶ The authorities in both settlements prevailed against the reluctance and protests of the Chinese charities. With very few exceptions, all exposed corpses were cremated.⁷⁷ The measure was lifted on 1 January 1940 in the French Concession.⁷⁸ In the International Settlement, however, cremation was maintained until the end of the war.⁷⁹

By August 1938, the PHD cremated bodies at a rate of 5,000 per month.⁸⁰ In the first six months of 1939, the figure jumped to 20,531.⁸¹ The extent of the human tragedy that war brought to Shanghai can be measured with two simple figures. By May 1944, in the International Settlement the PHD had overseen the cremation of 182,225 bodies. If we add the cremation done by the French Concession, the total figure exceeds 200,000 human lives. These figures and these numbers show that there was almost no way for an ordinary Shanghai resident during these years to escape the view of dead children and adults lying in the streets or in alleyways. One can find occasional mentions of this phenomenon in memoirs by Westerners or in *Shanghai: a novel* by Yokomitsu Riichi.⁸² Although it never became a matter of public debate, I tend to believe that the forceful intervention of the authorities reflected both their concern for public health and the growing uneasiness of the population toward these unwelcome and intrusive deaths in the urban space.

The living and the dead: a changing perception

Over time the presence of exposed corpses in residential neighborhood seems to have become a more frequent cause of alarm among Shanghai residents. The issue of people's sensibility is one for which we have limited data. Aside from the press, one can rely only on the letters left in the archives. To what degree they are representative is hard to tell. Nevertheless their dating as well as the response of the authorities may support the idea of a growing concern starting in the early 1920s. In the International Settlement, the SMC was the natural target of people's anger or complaints, even if it was not directly involved in the collection of dead bodies. Under pressure from such protests, the Shanghai Municipal Council had to work out various schemes to address the collection of exposed corpses.

Residents usually complained about three main issues: smell, sight, and delay. Abandoned bodies might turn up—literally—at various intervals. On 28 February 1920, residents complained with the SMC about 500 coffins left within 300 yards of the boundary of the International Settlement. It appeared that the land was owned by the TRFYT and had become a dumping ground for coffins. When the *dibao* who lived in the vicinity considered that a sufficient number of coffins had accumulated, he arranged for their removal. The SMC asked the Chinese authorities to stop this practice.⁸³ Yet in 1926, the PHD wrote about the same location: “many of these coffins had been torn open by pariah dogs and portions of the remains strewn about the place. Many of the bodies were merely wrapped up in matting . . . in hot weather an unbearable stench emanates from the accumulated coffins.”⁸⁴ From the correspondence in the archives, it appears that the issue was never solved and foreign or Chinese residents made regular protests as late as 1935.⁸⁵ In July 1937 residents protested about ‘bad smells’ from unencoffined corpses in the collection station near the Racecourse.⁸⁶ The bombing of the Great World a month later brought a very large accumulation of bodies that the SPBC, according to neighbors and the SMC, was too slow to remove.⁸⁷

There were constant demands on both organizations by both the SMC and French Municipal Council for more expediency and yet to avoid anything offensive to Shanghai residents. This aspect came to dominate the correspondence between the authorities of the settlements and the Chinese charities. Both the SMC and the French Municipal Council tried to impose rules on the removal and transportation of exposed bodies. In particular, they insisted that the bodies should be fully covered when the carts went through the streets on their way to the collection station. But the rule was obviously difficult to enforce, especially in times when the available manpower was overwhelmed by the sheer number of bodies: “in spite of repeated protests both verbal and written regarding the ill-treatment of corpses, i.e. being conveyed along public roads in an exposed manner and thrown about in a careless way [. . .] yesterday . . . child corpses [were] thrown about off a truck onto the public roadway like rag dolls. Passers-by were holding their nose in anticipation of smell, the sight was disgusting.”⁸⁸

The Bureau de l'Hygiène in the French Concession was even more critical about the way the TRFYT treated the collected corpses. It repeatedly and bitterly complained about the lack of proper rules and complete neglect of basic hygienic standards by the TRFYT. While the TRFYT tried to abide by good standards, its coolies often failed to respect the rules. They would pick up bodies, sometimes completely naked, and transport them through the streets uncovered.⁸⁹ Local residents also protested against the operation of the TRFYT, denouncing an overflow of corpses on the premises, sometimes in the street itself.⁹⁰ The French authorities tried to pressure the TRFYT to improve its procedure. Its criticism targeted the lack of hygiene, the casual manner in which the bodies or coffins were dragged along, and the absence of cover on coffins. Worse, the low-quality coffins transported by truck through the city “let leak a blood-stained and pestilential fluid.” In June 1941, the French Concession even reduced its grant from \$5,000 to \$3,000 to sanction the TRFYT. Yet the TRFYT simply replied it was helping the authorities in dealing with unclaimed bodies and requested a reversal of the decision. Eventually, the French authorities imposed the presence of a Russian supervisor to control the management of bodies

and guarantee better standards. One year later, however, the director of Public Health expressed the same complaints.⁹¹

Even coffins became unsightly objects. During the hostilities, coffins that had been deposited on wasteland off Ichang Road were disinterred in May 1938 by a contractor who was building on part of the ground. His workers simply lined up the 200-odd coffins against the walls of the staff quarters of the Naigai Wata Kaisha cotton mill. The Japanese director of the mill wrote to the PHD to have the coffins removed.⁹² Yet, there were more gruesome cases. In December 1937, a Chinese resident living off Kiaochow road reported the presence of corpses of children on the ground. It was apparently a practice by thieves to go there at night and throw bodies out of the coffins to take the empty coffins away as firewood.⁹³ Of course such acts were punished when people got caught in the act, but this was hardly a deterrent in times of hardships.⁹⁴ Between December 1937 and August 1940, the SMC received 45 such letters of complaints about unattended coffins.⁹⁵ While this represents a small flow—probably many more complaints were lodged by phone—it is significant to see that residents were increasingly unhappy with what they perceived as a disturbing presence.

To take into account popular feelings, the SMC asked the SPBC to have its trucks covered by a tarpaulin “of sufficient size as to effectually conceal all of the coffins on the trucks.”⁹⁶ Whereas funerals were events that were acceptable for the public view, the dead bodies of the poor should be hidden and made as invisible as possible to the public. Their sheer number and the collective manner in which the bodies were gathered and transported certainly challenged the sensibility of residents and pride of the authorities. It is also true that there were far more people dying under these circumstances, at least during the war, than in normal conditions. The public was clearly becoming more sensitive to the issue of public display of coffins and bodies. In August 1948, the *Shen Bao* published a critical article about the condition of the Southern Wharf in Nanshi, used by the TRFYT, where accumulated coffins produced unpleasant odors and attracted swarms of insects.⁹⁷ With the development of civil war in the area, the situation could hardly improve. Eventually the TRFYT asked the permission to open a new burial ground outside of Nanshi after the army sealed the Huangpu River.⁹⁸

In fact, the authorities were never able to remedy the issue of faulty notification and removal of exposed corpses or coffins, especially during the war.⁹⁹ This work was performed with a limited staff and basic equipment.¹⁰⁰ To expedite the removal of exposed corpses, the coolies brought them first to the collection stations established in various places in the settlements. From there, the bodies were removed to the western areas either to be buried or, after 1938, to be cremated. After December 1941, however, new difficulties emerged. It became increasingly difficult to obtain gasoline for the trucks, while the number of bodies continued to increase. Another major concern was the cost of securing wood to make coffins.¹⁰¹ In December 1941, the SPBC decided to revert to handcarts—each could accommodate four large coffins—for transportation short distances.¹⁰² Eventually, the SPBC relied on just its six handcarts for transportation to Western Shanghai where burial and cremation took place.¹⁰³

In January 1942, the PHD admitted that despite all efforts, “faulty notification [was] still our real bugbear.”¹⁰⁴ There were clear cases of miscommunica-

tion among the three concerned departments (Public Works, Public Health, Police). To remedy this problem, the SMC tried to establish an inter-departmental scheme that by-passed the SPBC.¹⁰⁵ An initial daily collection by the Public Work Department would be started in the early morning as soon as the police had communicated the list of reported locations. If the police were to locate other corpses after 9:00 a.m., a supplementary collection would be undertaken.¹⁰⁶ By April 1942, however, no improvement had been made: "on the contrary, corpses are being left on the street or in the alleyway for two or three days at least while the SPBC who used to remove them within two days is denied such activities."¹⁰⁷ The coolies of the PWD disliked their new duty and made no effort for the prompt removal of corpses. In late 1943 the involvement of the PWD in body collection was discontinued and entrusted again to the SPBC.¹⁰⁸ In the French Concession, the authorities also entertained the idea of creating a municipal service for the removal of unclaimed bodies from the streets in February 1943, but the plan did not materialize.¹⁰⁹

After the end of the Sino-Japanese war, the issue of processing the unclaimed bodies in the city became the responsibility of the Chinese municipality. The archival record, however, is very sketchy and makes it difficult to follow the policy of the authorities on this issue in the post-war period. The municipal authorities, while sympathetic, cared foremost about public health and sought the transfer of all mortuary installations outside of the city center.¹¹⁰ The municipality also continued to provide financial support to the SPBC and TRFYT in 1946, but the instability of the political situation and the financial difficulties of the local government seem to have led to the suspension of its subsidy after 1947. At the end of the war, the SPBC had started to use the radio and other media to raise money from the public. The first campaign was launched in 1944 on a radio station (Wenhua diantai) based in the French Concession.¹¹¹ In December 1945, it launched its first two-day campaign with the approval of the municipal government. The operation was repeated every year thereafter to supplement the income from the properties of the SPBC in a time of hyperinflation.¹¹² We do not know whether these campaigns were successful, since the trail of official documentation vanishes after 1947.

From the 1930s onward, but more so after war broke out a different sensibility emerged both among the authorities and the public about death. Public health concerns dominated in official discourse, which led to more forceful intervention and monitoring by the authorities. After 1945, the Nationalist municipality tried to enforce policies of exclusion of all death-related operations from the city proper. Among the population there was also a growing rejection of the physical proximity with death that exposed corpses and abandoned coffins imposed by their sheer presence in the midst of the city. Yet official measures failed to tackle the fundamental problem of 'invisible deaths' that increasingly hurt the sensibilities of Shanghai residents.

Concluding remarks

In Republican-era Shanghai death did not strike evenly. Among the local residents, age, fortune, sex or ethnicity traced various paths on the demographic grid that ran across the local population. Throughout the late 19th century down

to the late 1930s, death took a heavy toll on the less fortunate, especially when climatic or economic conditions became more severe. Of course, periods of military conflict—accompanied by the complete disruption of normal social and economic order—represented a climax that created social havoc and left many literally “on the side of the street.” Yet, this was not exactly the case.

Shanghai’s experience is closer to that of third-world cities with the massive migration of poor people. Many, if not most of those who ended up in street of Shanghai had come to the city with few resources, no privileged contacts or networks on which to rely, ill health or few physical reserves. Of course, in wartime, the net caught a wider circle, but by and large I believe most “normal residents” had the resources to survive a major crisis. There is no doubt, also, that among the poorer groups of the population, children were those most exposed to premature death. The crude figures are simply shocking. Paradoxically, this phenomenon was so massive, so present in everyday life, and probably so unbearable that it became something people chose not to see or to care about, except when a dead body landed on their doorstep. Through a double process of social denial—being denied proper care and being denied proper burial—these invisible deaths were pushed out of collective memory.

Despite, or perhaps because of the massive increase in exposed corpses in the 1930s and during the war, an unconscious process of social “erasure” set in. This process obscured one of the biggest human tragedies in wartime Shanghai. People turned a blind eye toward a phenomenon that could be met at every street corner. The press failed to raise and discuss this issue beyond summary reports. Officials concerned themselves strictly with preventing these bodies from affecting the health of inhabitants. These deaths were the exact opposite of the “publicized” deaths embodied in funeral processions. These were “invisible” deaths, deaths that were relegated to obscurity and social denial. Yet, these ‘bodies’ were also those of human beings. Their lives may have been cut short—the vast majority were infants or children under five—but for the organizations that made it their task to collect them, they deserved a form of burial. The SPBC and the TRFYT provided an irreplaceable service to both the dead and the living in Shanghai. They could not address the root of a problem that was beyond their control, but their actions expressed a form of humanity toward the victims of misery.

After 1949, the two organizations came under the supervision of a joint committee on the management of charity organizations (Shanghai canfei yanglao gongzuo weiyuanhui).¹¹³ The new municipal government issued a set of regulations that basically followed those adopted by the previous Nationalist administration. These regulations, however, did not change reality. Unclaimed bodies continued to be picked up in the streets at least into 1952 when our sources become silent. By 1953, however, both the TRFYT and SPBC were still active in the city.¹¹⁴ The new authorities were overwhelmed by the extent of the problem of unclaimed bodies in the street. As part of their effort to get hold of the city and probably to figure out how to provide the population with adequate means of living, they endeavored to establish a system of population registration and vital statistics. Their genuine effort was undermined by the sheer number of unrecorded deaths. The Bureau of Public Health noted that it was trying to improve the reporting methods about the age and sex of street bodies, but it felt

powerless to know more about them. Unclaimed bodies, the author bitterly complained, affected the accuracy of the whole work of vital statistics.¹¹⁵ Whereas registered deaths in the whole city amounted to 64,834 individuals in 1951, the number of unclaimed bodies added a staggering 44,661 individuals (5,252 adults and 39,409 children).¹¹⁶

Yet in none of these internal reports did the communist cadres express either curiosity on the source of the phenomenon or a political condemnation of it. They seem to have been more concerned by the practicality of establishing a reliable statistical system. This does not mean a failure to address the issue. It is probable that the conjunction of various measures contributed to reducing the high mortality rate of infants and children and, eventually, eliminating the phenomenon of unclaimed bodies in the streets of Shanghai. Likewise, the mopping up of beggars, crippled, drug-addicts, and simply jobless refugees from the civil war period, and their forced removal to camps in the countryside, eliminated the issue of adults dying in the streets of Shanghai. The new government launched several campaigns of vaccination, at the same time as it was introducing small health offices down to the level of *lilong* (residential alleyways) with members of the Women's Federation organized to identify pregnant women, to post information on health on billboards, and to set up small clinics where medical examinations could be performed. Medical facilities were also created in the workplace, especially in factories. Finally, kindergartens were established at a rapid rate in the early years of the communist regime (from 196 to 363 in 1950–1951).¹¹⁷ These measures progressively brought all pregnant women into a system of medical surveillance and education.¹¹⁸

The phenomenon of 'invisible deaths' was finally eliminated from the everyday life experience of Shanghai residents, but by the same token its memory was also erased. As the press and all public organs, including the communist authorities, failed to bring up the issue for public discussion or condemnation, even in internal documents, the tragic fate of the poor became a forgotten casualty of history.

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ENDNOTES

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1. Wang Di, *Street culture in Chengdu: public space, urban commoners, and local politics, 1870–1930* (Stanford, 2003).

2. See Kerrie L. MacPherson, *A Wilderness of Marshes. The Origins of Public Health in Shanghai, 1843–1893* (Oxford, 1987); Anne-Frédérique Glaise, «L'évolution sanitaire et médicale de la Concession française de Shanghai entre 1850 et 1950» (doctoral disserta-

tion, Lumière-Lyon 2 University, 2005); Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic modernity. Meanings of health and disease in treaty-port China* (Berkeley, 2004).

3. For the contemporary period, see William R. Jankowiak, *Sex, death, and hierarchy in a Chinese city: an anthropological account* (New York, 1993); Chee Kiong Tong, *Chinese death rituals in Singapore* (New York, 2004).

4. Evelyn S. Rawski, James L. Watson, (eds.), *Death ritual in late imperial and modern China* (Berkeley, 1988).

5. J. J. M. de Groot, *The religious system of China: its ancient forms, evolution, history and present aspect, manners, custom and social institutions connected therewith* (Leyden, 1892–1910); Justus Doolittle, *Social life of the Chinese: with some account of their religious, governmental, educational, and business customs and opinions* (New York, 1867). These extraordinary studies, especially de Groot's, focus essentially on rituals associated to elite funerals and burials.

6. A few works have examined some aspects of death in Chinese cities. See Mechthild Leutner, *Geburt, Heirat und Tod in Peking: Volkskultur und Elitkultur von 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1989); Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853–1937* (Berkeley, 1995), 6–7, 90–92; 252–253; William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796–1889* (Stanford, 1984); *Hankow: conflict and community in a Chinese city, 1796–1895* (Stanford, 1989); Hiroyuki Hokari, “Kindai shanghai ni okeru itai shori mondai to shimei kosho—dokyō girudo to Chugoku no toshika” (The management of human remains in modern Shanghai and the Siming Gongsuo—Native-place guilds and China's urbanization), *Shigaku Zasshi* 103 (February 1994) 67–93; “Shinmatsu shanghai shime kōshō no “unkan nettawaku” no keisei: kindai chūgoku shakai ni okeru dōkyō ketsugo ni tsuite” [The formation of the “coffin sending network” of the Siming Gongsuo in late-Qing Shanghai: a study of native-place ties in modern China], *Shakai-Keizai Shigaku* (Socio-Economic History) (59, 6, 1994), 1–32.

7. The standard Chinese expression was *wuzhu shiti* for exposed corpses and *wuzhu guancai* for abandoned coffins.

8. On the rise of philanthropic associations, see Raymond D. Lum, “Philanthropy and Public Welfare in Late Imperial China” (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1985).

9. Angela Ki Che Leung, “To Chasten Society: The Development of Widow Homes in the Qing, 1773–1911,” *Late Imperial China* (14, 2, 1993), 1–32; “Organized Medicine in Ming-Qing China: State and Private Medical Institutions in the Lower Yangzi Region,” *Late Imperial China* (8, 1, 1987), 134–166.

10. Raymond Lum, “Philanthropy and Public Welfare,” 146–147

11. I would like to express special thanks to the Shanghai Municipal Archives for making the rich material available to me as much as I asked for during my most recent visits to Shanghai.

12. Christian Henriot, *Shanghai 1927–1937. Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization* (Berkeley, 1993).

13. This phenomenon actually is more comparable to the pre-modern French cities that drained population from the countryside to maintain their lifeline than to the European cities in the same period. Jean-Pierre Bardet, *Rouen aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: les mutations d'un espace social* (Paris, 1983); John Landers, *Death and the Metropolis: Studies in the Demographic History of London, 1670–1830*. (New York, 1993); Louis Chevalier, *Laboring classes and dangerous classes in Paris during the first half of the nineteenth century* (New York, 1973); Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: society and politics in the cholera years, 1830–1910* (Oxford, 1987).
14. “Is it there still?,” *North China Daily News*, 11 January 1939.
15. *The China Press*, 28 January 1934; 15 January 1937; 29 March 1939.
16. *Evening Post*, 29 March 1939.
17. *Shanghai Times*, 29 March 1939; 6 April 1940; 17 November 1942; *North China Daily News*, 6 October 1941; *Evening Post*, 14 September 1942.
18. Letter SPBC-SMC, 18 March 1926, File U1-16-2458, Shanghai Municipal Archives (hereafter SMA).
19. There were Chinese and foreign associations that provided a place where parents could ‘abandon’ their newborn or infants, as in Europe, but unlike Europe the practice of dropping dead children in the street was widespread. In European cities, some parents dropped their dead newborn in the Church cemetery with the hope it would receive a decent burial, but this was not very common. On ‘found children’, see Rachel Ginnis Fuchs, *Abandoned children: foundlings and child welfare in nineteenth-century France* (Albany, 1984); Volker Hunecke, *I trovatelli di Milano: bambini esposti e famiglie espositrici dal XVII al XIX secolo* (Milan, 1989).
20. de Groot, vol. 1, 240 & 329–330.
21. *Shanghai Times*, 13 September 1942.
22. The headline in the *Shanghai Times* was “Welfare body prepares to bury beggars.” The *Evening Post* wrote “virtually all [adults] had died of opium-poisoning . . . the deaths of children were attributed nearly in all cases to hunger”. *Shanghai Times*, 17 November 1942; *Evening Post*, 14 September 1942.
23. de Groot, vol. 1, 320. In the French Concession, residents had to obtain a permit from the authorities to be allowed to keep a coffin in a private dwelling for a limited period of time. In 1935, out of 1,057 permits, only 3% were kept in private dwellings. *Compte rendu de la gestion pour l'exercice 1935*, (Shanghai, 1936), 141.
24. De Groot makes the point that children, especially below the age of ten, were not given proper rituals and even burials. In cities, perhaps to deal with the issue of infant mortality, there were so-called “baby-towers” in which parents could deposit their dead child. Both de Groot and Milne mention the existence of such structures in southern cities. I have not found any record of a similar construction in Shanghai in the 19th century. Milne, who made it a point to visit charities and coffin repositories makes no mention of it, whereas he presents the work of collecting exposed corpses by the TRFYT in the mid-1850s. de Groot, vol. 3, 1388; William Charles Milne, *Life in China* (London, 1858), 44–45 and 68–69.

25. For a presentation of this organization and similar associations, see the section “To prove I’m not forgot.”

26. The SPBC also ran a small out-patient clinic (Baishizi pushan chanke) between 1920 and 1937, as well as a school for poor children (Pushan xiaoxue). Both were fully destroyed during the Sino-Japanese conflict in 1937. The school resumed operation in 1947, but the clinic was never reconstructed. *Shanghai Times*, 13 September 1942; *Pushan shanzhuang boyin mukuan tekan* (Special issue of the radiophonic fund-raising by the SPBC), 26 July 1947, 4.

27. “Pushan shanzhuang jianshi,” *Pushan shanzhuang boyin mukuan tekan*, 1.

28. On the issue of refugees in Shanghai, see Christian Henriot, “Shanghai and the experience of war: The fate of refugees”, *European Journal of East Asian Studies* (5, 2, 2006), 217–248; Jan Kiely, “For Whom the Bells Ring and the Drums Beat: Pure Land Buddhist Refugee Relief Activism in Wartime Shanghai, 1937–1945,” Conference in Honor of Frederic Wakeman, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley, May 6, 2006.

29. The total given for the French Concession and the Chinese municipality in 1928 comes to 23,533, although the grand total (33,042) is far above the 1928 figure in the SPBC record (23,639). There is an inconsistency that I cannot explain at this point. “Shanghai gonggong zujie gongbuju weishengchu guanyu pushan shanzhuang buzhu shiyi de wenjian”, File U1 16 2458, SMA.

30. After the takeover of the International Settlement in December 1941 in the context of economic embargo by the allied powers, the Japanese army sought to enforce a policy of repatriation to the countryside to relieve food supply in the city.

31. Letter, Chief health inspector, 3 April 1939, File U1-16-2530, SMA.

32. Jan Sundin, “Child mortality and causes of death in a Swedish city, 1750–1860,” *Historical Methods* (29, 3, 1996), 101.

33. This analysis is based on tables, charts and maps elaborated with the data collected in the following files: “The Shanghai Public Cemetery—Report of Unclaimed Corpses Collected and Buried” for 1931, 1935, 1936, 1937, File U1-16-2458; 1939, File U1-16-2461(2); 1940, 1942, 1943, File U1-16-2461(3), SMA.

34. The sample covers January–March and July–December 1938. “Cadavres trouvés au cours de la journée du (date),” File U38-5-1262, SMA.

35. I borrowed and reinterpreted this line from Sylvia M. Barnard’s book, *To prove I’m not forgot. Living and dying in a Victorian city* (Manchester, 1990). As for graves as memories of the dead in Victorian cities, the two charities involved in collecting “bodies without master” actually served the very purpose of leaving no one behind, providing rituals and a resting place to exposed bodies.

36. On the history of the TRFYT see “Préface pour le rapport de la gestion des affaires et des comptes du Bureau de Bienfaisance, Shanghai,” January 1933, File U38-5-1641, SMA; Letter of Qin Yan, administrator of the SPBC to French Municipal Council, 22 November 1938, U38-5-1641 Tongren fuyuantang shenqing buzhu, mianfei chezhao ji qingdu yongju, yaoshui, deng, SMA; Milne, *Life in China*, 68–69.

37. On the history of the SPBC, see File Q6-9-470, SMA. In 1913, the SPBC had its headquarters in Zhabei and a general office in the International Settlement after 1922. In 1914, it acquired its first burial ground (location unknown) and then proceeded to acquire a large tract in Dachang in 1918. From its original base in Zhabei, the SPBC expanded in the International Settlement (1922), Nanshi (1925) and Pudong (1926). Charter, undated [1929], File Q114-1-9, SMA.
38. de Groot, *Religious system of China*, vol. 1, 135–139.
39. de Groot, *Religious system of China*, vol. 3, 863–865.
40. *Municipal Gazette*, 11 March 1938.
41. *Pushan shanzhuang boyin mukuan tekan*, 26 July 1947, 1
42. Following the advent of the war, the TRFYT had moved its offices to the French Concession. Letter of Qin Yan, administrator of the SPBC to French Municipal Council, 22 November 1938, U38-5-1641 Tongren fuyuantang shenqing buzhu, mianfei chezhao ji qingdu yongju, yaoshui, deng, SMA.
43. The TRFYT owned a burial ground in Hongkou that the SMC tried to get rid of and transform into a public park. The TRFYT was able to stall any such attempt until the end of the war. The cemetery was turned into a refugee camps after 1937. See correspondence and maps, 1927–1940 File U1-14-6928, SMA.
44. Letter Li Yi Benevolent Society-SMC, 30 January 1929; Letter LYBS-SMC, 4 February 1929; Note PHD, 5 February 1929, File U1-16-2458, SMA; Letter, Health inspector, 4 April 1939, File U1-16-2530, SMA.
45. Letter, SMC-SPBC, 15 February 1938, U1-16-2530, SMA.
46. Letter SPBC-SMC, 24 March 1938, File U1-16-2457, SMA.
47. Each junk was identified by the large characters—Tongren fuyuan tang—painted in black on a white background and circled in red. Each had a different number. U38-5-1260-1, SMA.
48. The SPBC actually never fully recovered its Dachang cemetery. The large track of land was taken over for the construction of the Dachang military airport. *Pushan shanzhuang boyin mukuan tekan*, 26 July 1947, 1.
49. Letter PHD-SMC, 21 January 1938, File U1-16-2530, SMA.
50. Letter SPBC-SMC, 29 November 1937; 6 December 1937; Letter, Japanese Consul-SMC, 17 December 1937; Letter PHD-SMC, 30 December 1937, File U1-16-2530, SMA.
51. Report, Weishengju, undated [June 1947], File Q400-1-3932, SMA.
52. Report, SPBC, undated [July 1947], File Q6-9-470, SMA.
53. Report, Weishengju, undated [June 1947], File Q400-1-3932, SMA.
54. In late 1948, the SPBC applied for land to bury Nationalist soldiers killed in battle with communist troops. The municipal government denied access to Hongqiao, consid-

ered too full to receive more coffins. We lose track of the negotiations by May 1949, with no final decision yet made. Letter, SPBC-TBSZF, 9 September 1948, File Q109-1-790; correspondence, May 1949, File Q400-1-3929, SMA.

55. The territory under Chinese administration was divided in various districts (*bao*) and sections (*tu*). A *dibao* (land guarantor) was selected among the prominent landowners by the Shanghai city magistrate and appointed to function in the section in which his land was situated. He was responsible for the demarcation of boundaries of land in his section and collected the land tax on behalf of the government. His major role, however, was to authenticate all land transactions by putting his seal on land deeds, from which he derived a substantial revenue through a percentage-based commission.

56. Lum, Raymond, "Philanthropy and Public Welfare," 149.

57. Untitled memo (Sd.) R.Y. Yorke, A.C., June 1928, File U1-3-2399, SMA.

58. File U1-3-590 Coffin dumping: Kiaochow Rd 1920–25.

59. Letter, SPBC-SMC, 15 February 1922, File U1-3-1806; Letter SPBC-SMC, 6 April 1923, File U1-16-2458, SMA. The same letter was addressed to the French Concession and the Consular Body.

60. Memo, Health inspectors, 22 March 1926, File U1-16-2458, SMA.

61. Letter SMC-SPBC, 27 March 1926, File U1-16-2458, SMA.

62. *Compte rendu de la gestion pour l'exercice 1926* (Shanghai, 1927), 63–64.

63. Untitled memo (Sd.) R.Y. Yorke, A.C., June 1928, File U1-3-2399, SMA.

64. Letter, Secretary, SMC to Commissioner of Police, 29 August 1928, U1-16-2465, SMA; Office note (Shanghai Municipal Police), 7 August 1928; Letter SMC-SPBC, 24 September 1928; Memo, PHD, 15 January 1929, File U1-16-2458, SMA; Letter, Shanghai Municipal Police-SMC, 18 August 1928; Letter PHD-SMC, 21 August 1928, File U1-3-2399, SMA.

65. Shanghai Municipal Police report, 11 February 1931, File U1-3-2399, SMA. The SMC encouraged the SPBC to apply for public support, but as late as March 1937, the French Concession turned down their application on the same ground. Letter SMC-SPBC, 24 March 1937; Letter, SPBC-SMC, 5 May 1937, File U1-16-2458, SMA.

66. Donation by private parties represented around 10% of its total income in 1939 (\$233,142). The contribution of the settlements was based on an estimate of the number of corpses collected. Letter of the French deputy director of Public Health to Chief health inspector, 16 March 1938; Letter of SPBC to French Concession, 28 March 1938, U38-5-1641 Tongren fuyuantang shenqing buzhu, mianfei chezhao ji qingdu yongju, yaoshui, deng, SMA. The Bureau de l'Hygiène always suspected the TRFYT of exaggerating both figures and costs to obtain a larger grant from the municipality. U38-5-1641 Tongren fuyuantang shenqing buzhu, mianfei chezhao ji qingdu yongju, yaoshui, deng, SMA.

67. Letter, TRFYT to Consul general, undated [1938], U38-1-507 Service d'hygiène—Fonctionnement, SMA.

68. Letter, NWK Cotton Mil, 20 May 1938; Letter, PHD-Shanghai Municipal Police, 9 July 1938; Letter, China Chemical Works, 21 April 1938; Memo, health inspector, 26 May 1938; Letter, PHD-SMC, 13 June 1938, File U1-16-2532, SMA.
69. Note PHD-SMC, March 1938, File U1-16-2457, SMA.
70. Unsigned document, Divisional office "B", 21 May 38, U1-16-2532, SMA.
71. Letter, J.H. Jordan to Superintendent of police 27 May 1938, -16-2532, SMA.
72. *The Municipal Gazette*, 11 March 1938.
73. Letter SMC-SPBC, 24 March 1937; Letter SPBC-SMC, 5 May 1937, File U1-16-2458, SMA.
74. *The Municipal Gazette*, 11 March 1938; Letter, Secretary, 27 August 1937, U1-16-2449, SMA.
75. Letter, Directeur de la Police to Directeur de l'Hygiène, 9 May 1938, File U38-1-507 Service d'hygiène—Fonctionnement, SMA. The measure was prompted by a dispute about the removal of the coffins from the Ningbo temple on rue Vouillemont. The guild had accumulated 6,650 in its premises since the beginning of the hostilities, of which one half were coffins stored on behalf of the TRFYT.
76. Office note, Shanghai Municipal Police, 7 August 1928, File U1-16-2458, SMA; Letter, TRFYT to Consul general [May 1938], File U38-1-507 Service d'hygiène—Fonctionnement, SMA.
77. Note, Palud, Directeur de l'Hygiène, 7 June 1938, U38-1-507 Service d'hygiène—Fonctionnement, SMA.
78. Letter, Directeur de l'Hygiène, 23 December 1939; communication, Directeur administratif, 29 December 1939, File U38-5-158, SMA.
79. The idea of using cremation to deal with exposed corpses seems to have taken root in public opinion. In August 1944, a paper in the *Shen Bao* argued in favor of establishing a crematorium for poor people in order to deal with street bodies at a low cost "Gaige zanglian" (Suggestion to reform burials), *Shen Bao*, 8 August 1944.
80. Letter of J.H. Jordan to Secretary, SMC, 8 August 1938, U1-16-2534, SMA.
81. Memo, Acting chief inspector of health to J.H. Jordan, 11 September 1939, U1-16-2465, SMA.
82. There are several mentions of corpses or people bound to die in the street in the novel. One of the character, Yamaguchi, originally an architect, has even shifted to selling the bones of abandoned corpses. Yokomitsu Riichi, *Shanghai: a novel* (Ann Arbor, 2001), p. 49, 62, 110, 205, 208 and chap. 42.
83. Letter residents 28 Feb. 1920; Letter Chinese commissioner, 27 March 1920, 28 Feb. 1921; Letter Health officer, 11 Jan. 1921, 19 Nov. 1921, File U1-3-590, SMA.
84. Letter Commissioner of health 26 Feb. 1926, File U1-3-590, SMA.
85. Letter Health officer, 27 July 1922, 30 July 24, 10 March 1935.

86. Letter of residents, 9 July 1937; Report, health inspector, 13 July 1937, File U1-16-2457.
87. Letter by foreign residents, Race Course Apartments, 17 August 1937; Letter, PHD-SPBC, 17 August 1937, File U1-16-2457. On August 14, 1937 a Chinese military aircraft accidentally dropped two bombs near the refugee-filled Great World amusement center, in one of the most commercial intersection of Shanghai. Several hundreds people were killed instantly.
88. Letter, PHD-SPBC, 12 February 1938, File U1-16-2457, SMA.
89. Letter Secretariat of the French Municipal Council to TRFYT, 11 March 1938, File U38-5-1641 Tongren fuyuantang shenqing buzhu, mianfei chezhao ji qingdu yongju, yaoshui, deng; Decisions of the Municipal commission, 7 March 1938, File U38-1-507 (Service d'hygiène—Fonctionnement), SMA.
90. Letter, 'The residents of rue de Ningpo,' 21 August 1941, File U38-5-1638, SMA.
91. Letter, Palud, BPH-TRFYT, 27 February 1941 and 8 June 1941; Report, Palud, BPH-French Municipal Council, 20 May 1941 and 24 June 1941; Report, Palud, BPH-French Municipal Council, 3 September 1942, File U38-5-1638, SMA.
92. Letter, Mr. Kobayashi, Naigai Wata Kaisha, 18 May 1938, File U1-1463175 General—Cemeteries—Coffin Repositories, Burial Grounds & Funeral Parlours SMA.
93. Letter, Miss Ada Lum, 15 December 1937, File U1-16-2473 Complaints about corpses and coffins, SMA.
94. *Evening Post & Mercury*, 17 December 1937.
95. File U1-16-2473 'Complaints about corpses and coffins', SMA.
96. Letter SMC-SPBC, 27 March 1939, File U1-16-2457, SMA.
97. *Shen Bao*, 19 August 1948.
98. Letter TRFYT-Bureau of Public Health, 18 May 1949, File Q400-1-3995, SMA.
99. Memo, Commissioner of Public Health, 16 January 1942, File U1-16-2537 (State of emergency 1937/ Sanitation division), SMA.
100. In February 1938 the SPBC owned one motorcar, three motor trucks, three delivery tricycles, and three bicycles. To keep up with the workload, it had to purchase two new trucks. The TRFYT had two wheel-stretchers, two tricycles, and two trucks in late 1938. It maintained a staff of six coolies for the stretchers, the tricycles and the trucks, plus two drivers, and a team of eight coolies and one foreman in the Hongqiao cemetery. By 1942, the staff had hardly changed. It included three coolies to collect bodies in the street, and 18 coolies to take care of the coffining, transportation and burial of the unclaimed bodies. Letter SPBC-SMC, 25 February 1938, File U1-16-2457, SMA; Letter SPBC-SMC, 14 June 1938, File U1-16-2457; Letter of Chief health inspector to Y. Palud, Directeur de l'Hygiène publique et de l'Assistance, 6 December 1938, File U38-5-1641; Report, Chef inspecteur d'hygiène, 29 August 1942, File U38-5-1638, SMA.

101. In 1942, the cost of a large coffin was \$37.65, but by April 1943 the cost had jumped to \$88.35. The same increase applied to labor, transportation, and burying. Altogether the cost of burying an unclaimed body had increased from \$88.69 to \$205.30. Report, Crime and Special Branch, 23 April 1943, File U1-16-2458, SMA. The report by the Shanghai Municipal Police supported the application for an increase of the grant to the SPBC.
102. Letter Health inspector-PHD, 16 December 1941, File U1-16-2457, SMA.
103. Memo, Commissioner of Public Health, 16 January 1942, U1-16-2537 State of emergency 1937/ Sanitation division, SMA.
104. Memo, Commissioner of Public Health, 16 January 1942, U1-16-2537 State of emergency 1937/ Sanitation division, SMA.
105. Letter, Secretary of the transport control committee to Superintendent of Police, 16 January 1942, U1-16-2537, SMA.
106. Letter, Secretary of the Transport control committee to the Superintendent of Police, 2 March 1942, U1-16-2537, SMA. Because the activities of the PWD had greatly diminished due to the war, the SMC found it useful to entrust the PWD with the work of collecting corpses.
107. Letter, Chief health inspector to Superintendent of Police, 8 April 1942, U1-16-2537 State of emergency 1937/ Sanitation division, SMA.
108. Letter, Chief health inspector to Deputy Director of Public Health, 3 December 1943, U1-16-2537, SMA; Letter, Chief health inspector to Deputy Director of Public Health, 12 January 1944, U1-16-2537, SMA. A hand-written commentary on this document confirmed that the PWD collected only a portion of the exposed corpses.
109. Report, chef inspecteur d'hygiène, 13 February 1943, File U38-5-1638, SMA. In fact, while the collection of bodies was technically simple, in both settlements a systematic investigation by the police was mandatory in the case of adults for the sake of identification and uncovering possible criminal acts. All abandoned corpses were photographed before burial or cremation until December 1942. The need for such police investigation before removal partly explains the delays residents complained about. See files U38-5-1264-1, U38-5-1262-1, U38-5-1263-1, U38-5-1262-2, U38-5-1263-2, U38-5-1264-2; Daily register of the police photographer of the French police, June 1940–December 1942, File U38-2-2713, SMA. SMA.
110. Memo, Bureau of Public Health (Weishengju), undated; Memo, Bureau of Public Health (Weishengju), 19 December [1946], File Q400-1-3995, SMA.
111. Report, SPBC, undated [July 1947], File 6-9-470, SMA.
112. Letter SPBC-Shehuiju, 17 December 1945; Letter SPBC-Shehuiju, 21 July 1947, File Q6-9-117, SMA.
113. Minutes, Shanghai canfei yanglao gongzuo weiyuanhui (Shanghai work committee for crippled and old people), 10 Feb. 1951–20 June 1951, File Q115-22-40, SMA.

114. “Shanghai shi shimin shiti yidong chuli zanxing banfa” (Provisional regulation on the removal of corpses of residents of the Shanghai municipality), 21 December 1953, File S440-4-18, SMA.

115. “Shengming tongji zong baogao” (General report on vital statistics), July 1950–June 1951, 50–51, File B242-1-255, SMA.

116. “Shengming tongji zong baogao” (General report on vital statistics), July 1950–June 1951, 22, File B242-1-255, SMA.

117. “Shanghai shi renmin zhengfu weishengju tianbao huadong qu shanghai shi 1951 nian weisheng shiye chengguo baogaobiao” (Statistical report on the achievements in public health in 1951 submitted to the Municipal Government of Shanghai, East China Region, by the Bureau of Public Health), File B242-1-250, 14.

118. “Shanghai shi renmin zhengfu weishengju gongzuo baogao zongjie” (Synthesis of the work report of the Bureau of Public Health of the Shanghai People’s Municipal Government), 1951, File B242-1-248, SMA.

