

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CHGO/43  
Shanghai Episodes

27 Lugard Road,  
The Peak,  
Hong Kong.

January 12, 1965.

Mr. R.H. Nolte,  
Institute of Current World Affairs,  
366 Madison Avenue,  
New York 17, N.Y.,  
U.S.A..

Dear Mr. Nolte,

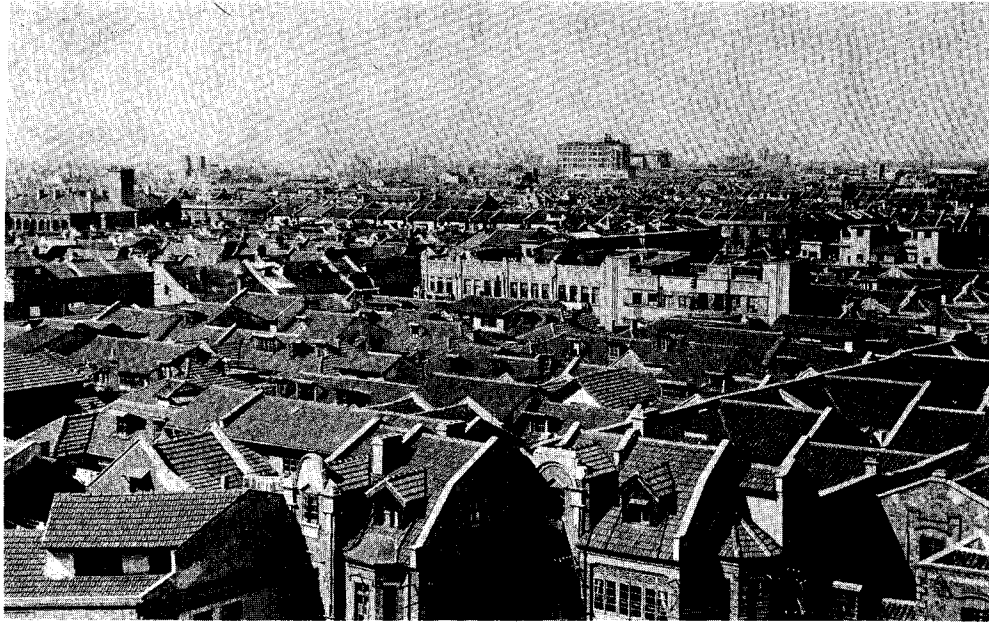
Shanghai must be the most "un-Chinese" city in China.  
Going there after Canton, Peking, Nanking, and Soochow, one is

immediately struck by the differences. The architectural style of the buildings is overwhelmingly Nineteenth Century European, and hardly less striking is the different appearance of the people -- particularly the women. Everywhere else they wore the baggiest of pants and jackets and their hair was either cut short and straight or plaited. In Shanghai the slacks were definitely cut that much tighter, the jackets were more colorful, and several women had "permed" hair. At an acrobatic show I watched, the announcer actually wore a long cheongsam with thigh-high slits -- it seemed positively naughty.

Shanghai was the center of Chinese capitalism and it still has many capitalist features. For example in this Communist country a Chinese capitalist millionaire was pointed out to me walking down the steps of our hotel. "Would you like to meet him?" I was asked. "Not particularly," I replied. "But how is it that he is still a millionaire?" It seems that when the Communists arrived and



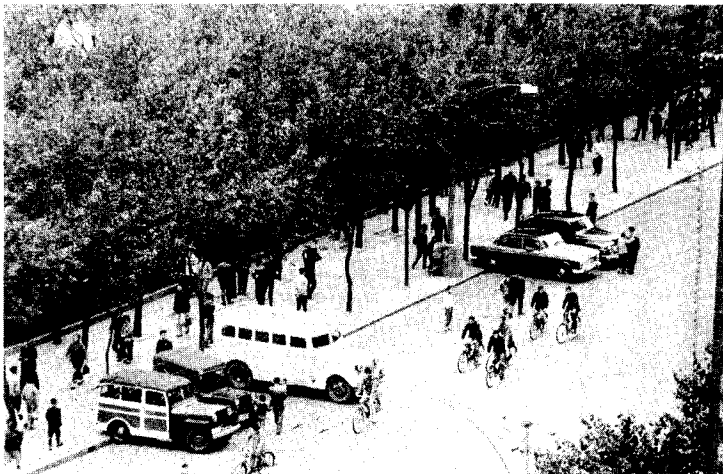
Nanking Road, Shanghai



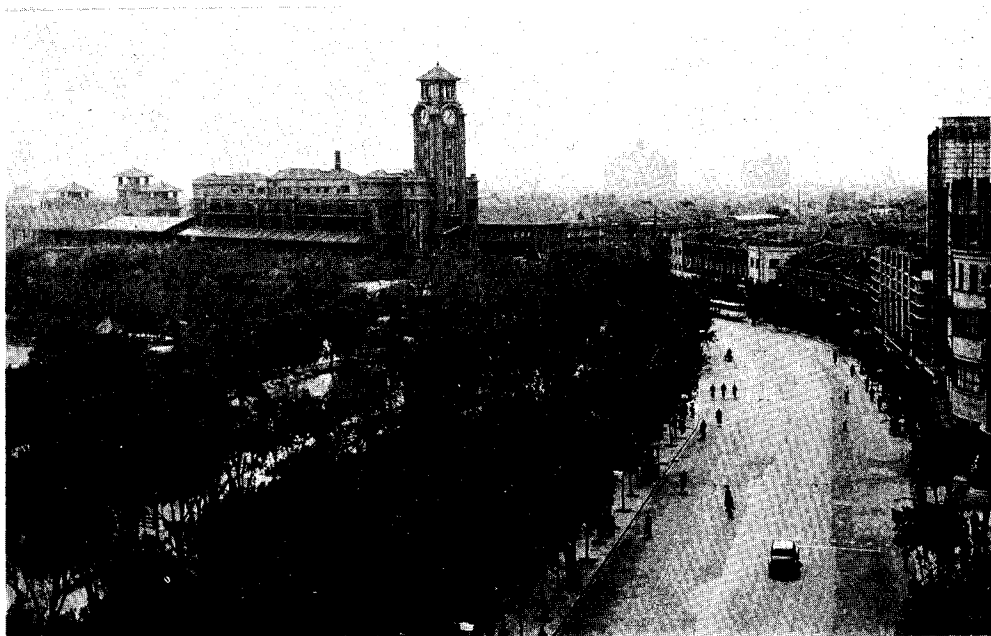
Shanghai: View from hotel window

took over the factories they valued the capital in each factory and pay 5% interest per annum on this capital sum to those capitalist owners who supported the Communists.

I stayed at the Overseas Chinese' Hotel on Nanking Road overlooking what used to be the race course, now a "peoples' park". During my week's stay, there were only five Westerners in the hotel: an Australian lady who used to own an art gallery in Sydney; a young Australian lawyer; a Swiss architect; a Canadian dress manufacturer; and myself. For the last three days I was on my own. The hotel was full with overseas Chinese but Westerners had a special restaurant on the top floor where we could eat either Chinese or European food. Occasionally the Australian lawyer and I would upset the system by eating in the Overseas Chinese' restaurant, but since a special staff of cooks and waitresses were on duty in the Western restaurant there was a sort of moral obligation to give them some work to do. The food in this hotel was quite excellent, both Chinese and European, in fact the European food was better than in most Western restaurants in Hong Kong, and the staff infinitely more polite. At the end of my stay I said I would like to thank the chef for his excellent work. He was brought out of the kitchen, an old man with white chef's uniform, who humbly begged me to give my criticisms. What stories I'm sure he could tell about the "bad old days".



Nanking Road, opposite the Overseas Chinese' Hotel.

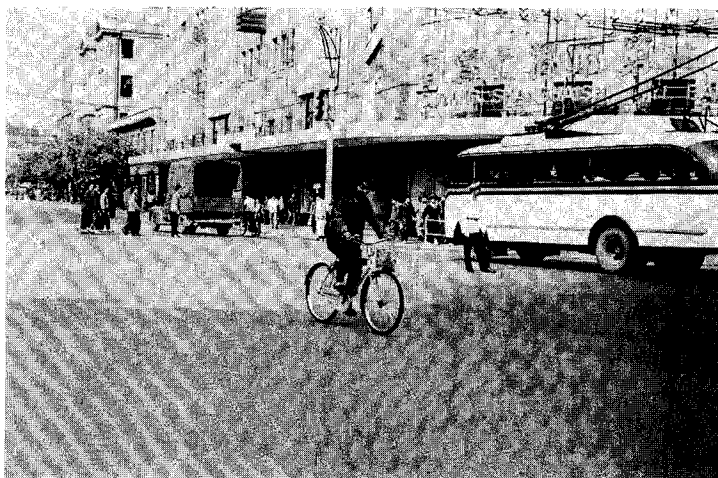


Nanking Road. Old race course and grandstand  
(now a park and library)

Although our days and evenings were separately organized by the China International Travel Service, the Australian lawyer and I used to go out again on our own after our evening's official entertainment. On the Sunday we strolled down Nanking Road to the famous Bund, the waterfront along the Whampoa River, and there at 11 o'clock at night we found every seat occupied by embracing couples. Neither of us had seen anything like this in any other Chinese city. In fact all other cities were quite dead by 9 p.m.. It quite restored our faith in human nature! We were even more pleasantly surprised when at this late hour we found a little restaurant open in a side street. We went in and bought beer and some of the delicious Dean Shin, Chinese savouries. This became a nightly haunt of ours for a late beer and snack and we became quite friendly with the waiters. We were always a source of wonder and amusement to other diners as the number of foreigners, even in Shanghai, is still very few.

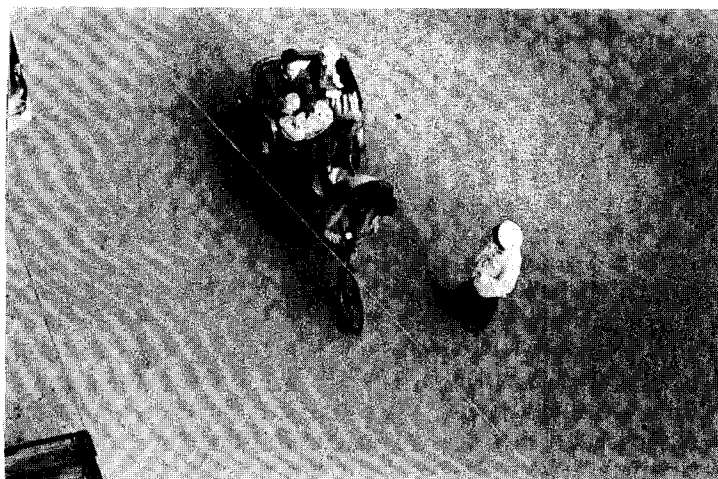
The State owned antique shop in Shanghai has some magnificent pieces of Chinoiserie which make the goods in the Hong Kong antique shops look like junk. The Government buys from the people and since many of the once wealthy Shanghai residents sell their antiques piece by piece, the shop has a steady turnover of goods. Antiques older than 140 years cannot be exported, and experts from the museum inspect each article to decide which can be sold to foreigners and which must stay in the country. I particularly wanted to buy a scroll and vase for friends in England but had insufficient cash with me. I decided to telephone Brenda in Hong Kong and get her to send some more money.

SHANGHAI



The Nanking Road

A white-coated policeman  
watches a pedicab go by  
the Overseas Chinese'  
Hotel



A corner of old Shanghai

We had an excellent 'phone connection and I asked her to transfer the money to the Bank of China in Hong Kong for them to cable it to their Shanghai branch. (I was notified that it had arrived five hours after she paid it in.) I also broke the news that I was staying in China an extra two weeks. The reaction to this was congratulations in tones of green. Also regret that I would not be around to escort her to a discotheque to be given by some friends who work in the U.S. Consulate. I told her the Australian lawyer would be in Hong Kong by the time of the party and said I would arrange for him to go with her. It must have been the first time in the past fifteen years that anyone arranged a date to such a function over the telephone from Shanghai!

One afternoon I was taken to see a new workers' housing estate. It had been completed two months previously and the old slums were being pulled down nearby. I was met by the chairwoman of the street committee and taken first to view the slums. "This is what it was like in the old days," she said. "We are leaving two to remind the children of how bad things were. ... Now come and have a look at the new housing. Choose any apartment," she said as she led me straight into one -- without bothering to knock. I followed her in and was introduced to the lady of the house. She was a worker in a textile factory and had eight children. The apartment had three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a toilet, and was much more spacious than the rehousing estates I have visited in Hong Kong. I asked her to tell me about the family budget. She gave the following figures:

Monthly income:	Wife - worker in textile factory ...	¥86 (U.S.\$36)
	Husband - construction worker ...	¥66
	Eldest son, already working ...	¥20
		<u>¥172 (U.S.\$72)</u>

Monthly expenditures for the family. Although she was very familiar with family income she was less sure of expenditures, and it was not clear where the balance between total income and total expenditure actually went.

Rent for apartment (includes maintenance)	...	¥10 to ¥14
100 kilos rice	... ..	¥30
Coal	... ..	¥ 5
Electricity	... ..	¥ 1
Water, .20 per person	... ..	¥ 2
Gas	... ..	¥ 2.20
Vegetables and meat	... ..	¥23
Clothes, 30 meters/year	... ..	¥ 4
Savings	... ..	¥ 9
		<u>¥89.20</u>

She said that before Liberation her husband was out of a job but now he was working as a construction worker. She worked an eight hour day in the textile factory and at the moment was working a night shift.

I asked about the work of the street committee, and was told it organizes such things as sanitation, classes for teaching

people to read and write, and political discussions. Its members also collect the money for electricity, etc.. The chairwoman said, "Things have improved so much that we really feel grateful to Chairman Mao. Last week on October 1st, another old lady and myself danced in the street and broke into spontaneous song, singing such songs as "Socialism is good," "We must listen to the Party," and "Unity is a great force".

This was clearly a pre-arranged visit and no opportunity was lost to pump me with politics. I decided to pull their legs a little.

"How long is it since Liberation?" I asked.

"Fifteen years," came the prompt reply.

"And how long have you been in this new apartment?"

"Two months."

"So for fifteen years after Liberation you still had to live in those old slums we have just seen. Weren't there times during those fifteen years when you felt a little dissatisfied and wondered why it was that the Government was not providing you with new housing?"

"No," answered the Street Committee Chairwoman. "Soon after Liberation the Government installed electric lights for us, then after a year or so we got running water, and then they paved the street. So we knew the Government was looking after us. But we never dreamed that we would ever be provided with housing such as this."

I then said, "Now that you do have this -- dream on some more. What do you want in the future. You are saving money, what would you really like to have .. a car, television set, or what?"

But I couldn't catch her out, she replied, "I would like all the Chinese people to have it as good as we have got."

"But suppose all the Chinese people were as well off as you, what then?"

"Then I would like all the people in the world to have it as good as us."

On this triumphant note she led the way into another apartment, again without knocking. A sixty-year old woman welcomed me and told her story. There were eight in this family: her daughter, who worked in a textile factory and earned ¥94 a month (this is very high): her son-in-law who works in a confectioners and earns ¥65; herself, retired on a pension of ¥46 a month; and five children. The furniture in this apartment was better than in the previous one but I noticed that they both possessed wardrobes. I commented on this and the old lady said that the old slums were





The chairwoman of the street committee (left) and the young tenant pose in front of a new housing estate in Shanghai

too small to have wardrobes, but now they were very popular. It seems that wardrobes have become the new status symbol in this housing estate. The old lady went on to make her political speech about the tough conditions before Liberation, "But," she said, pointing to a portrait of Chairman Mao, "thanks to Chairman Mao and the Party, things have improved a great deal."

The Chairwoman then suggested that it was time to go, and led the way back towards the car. I said I would like to see one more apartment and suggested one at random. The chairwoman said there wasn't really time, but I said I was in no hurry. So, somewhat reluctantly, she knocked on the door. A young woman with a baby came to the door, it was explained who I was and we were invited in. Also in the apartment were two other young women and they had obviously been chatting over a cup of tea. The young woman told me there were five in this family: her husband, mother-in-law, younger brother, herself, and the baby. She stayed at home to look after the baby and the total income for the family was ¥130 a month -- considerably less than either of the other two families. She was 24 years old and had married when she was 22. The family was saving some money but the mother-in-law kept all the savings. I

asked what she was saving for, and was absolutely delighted when she replied, "New clothes!"

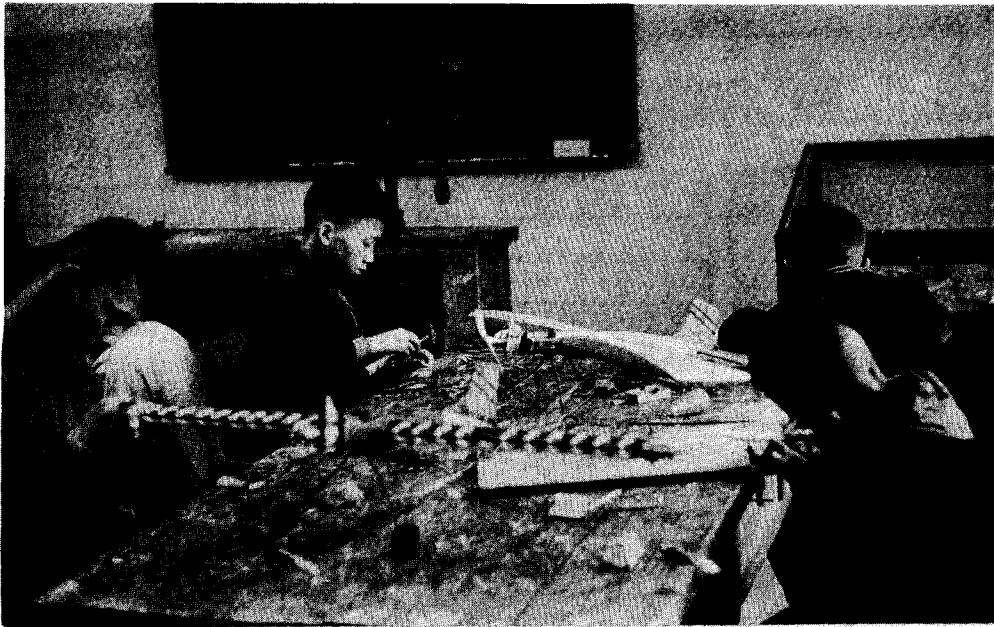
The Chinese have made very real accomplishments in many things, but for most Westerners an appreciation of these achievements is marred by the constant propaganda which goes with them. The seven million square meters of new housing in Shanghai, with one million people resettled, is a notable achievement.

Toward the end of my stay in Shanghai I began to sleep badly. In trying to cram as much as possible into every day I became over-tired, with the result that one morning I didn't feel particularly hungry and ordered a light breakfast. The waitress immediately became worried and 'phoned for my interpreter who came rushing up to my room. I said I was quite well, just a little

tired. He said I must see a doctor. I said there was no need. He insisted. Finally I agreed so that I might get some sleeping pills. However, it turned out that the hotel doctor was not on duty and it was necessary for me to go to a hospital. At first I was appalled at this development but then realized that it might be quite interesting to see what happens to a sick "foreign guest", and so off we went to the Shanghai Number One Free Hospital. We went into a consulting room especially reserved for foreign guests. Very soon a Chinese woman doctor in slacks, white coat and cap, came in and sat down at the desk. She asked a lot of questions, made copious notes, and then gave me one of the most thorough medical examinations I have had in a long time. She took my blood pressure, laid me on a bed and thumped and prodded until in the end I began to worry that she had found something wrong. However she said I was just over-tired, and prescribed four different kinds of medicine -- for which I had to pay the equivalent of U.S. 90¢. The inspection was free.

The Tsong Ning Children's Palace which I visited one Sunday afternoon is one of eleven similar institutions scattered throughout Shanghai. They provide a variety of extra-curricular activities for school children -- several of which are illustrated in the accompanying photographs. The standard of the various group activities was high. But, like almost everything else in China today, the motivation behind the good work is largely political. That this was the case was made abundantly clear by the head of the palace in his introductory speech.

The children's palaces are run jointly by the district governments and the district Communist Youth League, and their purpose is to supplement the education given in schools, to help



Model aeroplane class at the Children's Palace, Shanghai



Children's Cultural Palace, Shanghai

Traditional Chinese dances and instruments



students develop "morally, intellectually, and physically". Intellectual development is catered for by the various group activities, and moral -- or political -- education is hammered home by means of lectures, exhibitions, theatrical shows with contemporary (i.e. political) themes, and visits to communes, factories, and military establishments.

This particular palace was the converted mansion of Juh Jing-wei who, I was told, was a Chinese traitor who had helped the Japanese. The palace is open from 4.15 to 6.15 p.m. on weekdays, and from 8.30 to 10.30 a.m. and 2.30 to 5 p.m. on Sundays. It has a full time staff of 20, and another 24 volunteers who help in their spare time. An average of from 500 to 800 children make use of the facilities of the palace each year.

I have many other recollections of incidents and scenes in Shanghai: a visit to the home of relatives of a Hong Kong friend (without an interpreter); operas; acrobatic shows; and a highly political performance in a children's theatre. Old Shanghai, and new Shanghai. Parks. The tallest flagpole I have ever seen -- with the Union Jack flying from the masthead. Chinese shadow boxing in the early morning in the Peoples' Park opposite the hotel. Skipping with the children near the Nanking Road. Schools; universities; museums; a commune. And one final episode which took place while I was waiting for the train to leave for Hangchow. One of the room boys from the hotel came rushing down the platform seconds before the train drew out and thrust a Hong Kong 50¢ piece (about U.S. 8¢) into my hand. I had inadvertently left it in my room and he had chased about two miles across Shanghai to get to me before the train left. It somehow seemed a fitting finale to my stay in "new Shanghai". It could only have happened in China!

Yours sincerely,

*C.H.G. Oldham*

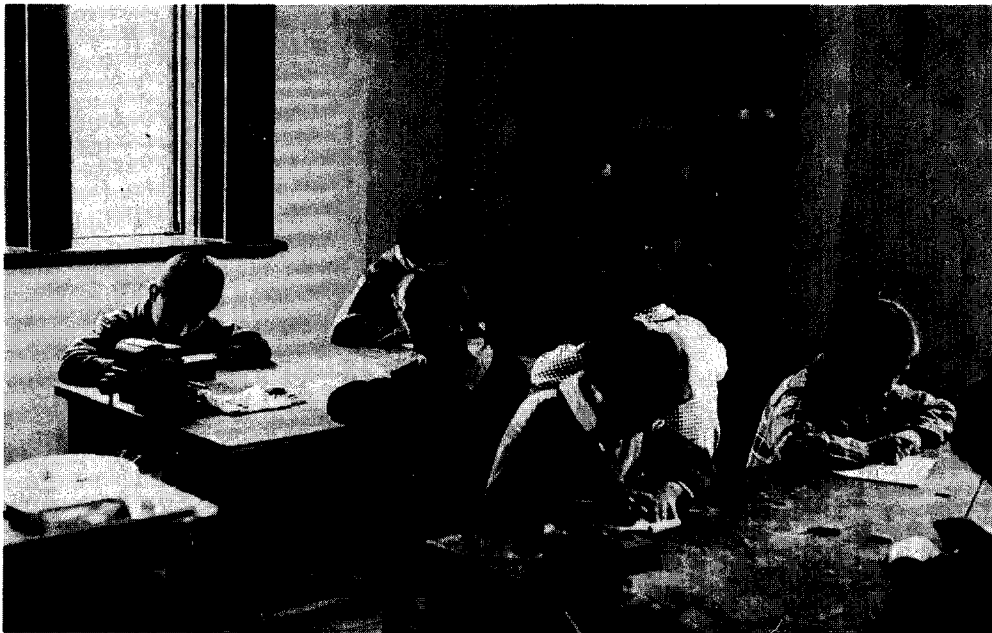
C.H.G. Oldham.



A "shadow boxer"  
in a Shanghai park

Received in New York January 15, 1965.

Children's Cultural Palace



A morse-code class in progress. The sound came  
from a tape-recorder



The ballet class poses  
after giving a most delightful performance