

The Influence of Multiculturalism on the Construction of Shanghai's City Image in the 1920s

Takumi Kamiya^{1,a,*}

¹International School of Beijing, Shunyi District, Beijing, China
a. takumi.kamiya@student.isb.bj.edu.cn

*corresponding author

Abstract: As a cosmopolitan city in China, Shanghai has a rich cultural heritage and historical sites. As one of the first ports of commerce to be opened, Shanghai took advantage of its unique geographical, economic, and cultural advantages to attract a large number of immigrants, giving rise to the city's diverse culture. In this paper, it discusses about the diverse culture of 1920s Shanghai and its influences to a variety of aspects on the city image of Shanghai. The paper focuses on the time period of the 1920s, a time period that is after the Opium War, and Shanghai is greatly industrialized. The multiculturalism of Shanghai is mainly analyzed in two aspects, culture and economy. The analysis concludes that multiculturalism, which started with the diverse cultures of the different peoples of Shanghai, causes some major influences and development to the city. This is further connected to modern-day Shanghai, and the influences are seen on the city's image of Shanghai from multiculturalism and its effects in the 1920s.

Keywords: Shanghai, Multiculturalism, Culture, Internationalization, China

1. Introduction

1920s Shanghai was a particular time since it had much time to develop from the foreign influences after events, such as the Opium War and the Second Opium War. It was also before the Second World War and the Japanese invasion starting in the late 1930s. Before the Opium War (1840), the trade between the western nations and China was highly imbalanced, as China had no demand for foreign goods [1]. The British Empire attempted to sell opium to China in hopes of rebalancing their economy, causing the Opium wars. Unfortunately, the Chinese has lost the Opium War and were forced to sign unfair treaties. The treaties that were signed after the loss of the first Opium War was known as the Nanking treaty of 1842 [2]. The results of the wars in the 19th century opened China's doors to foreign nations, Hongkong ceded to Britain, paid large amounts of fortune, and allowed foreign trade. Shanghai was one of the three international trading ports opened to foreigners [3]. The increase in commerce meant Shanghai had more economic opportunities and more westernization. Shanghai's economic advantages attracted many different people, foreign traders, Shanghai locals, Chinese citizens to immigrate to Shanghai, all looking for economic opportunities. Thus, the different cultures formed Shanghai's multiculturalism.

In such a social context, Shanghai in the 1920s had many city images for a large variety of people: the international trade port for westerners, a city of work opportunities for Chinese immigrants, and a place to survive for the foreign refugees. These diverse people from different backgrounds and

cultures formed substantial multiculturalism and influenced the city image of “the Paris of the East”. In this thesis, the author will try to understand how cultures and economics within Shanghai that have formed its multiculturalism and city image, then analyze its influences.

2. Cultural Reasons for Shanghai’s City Image

Four different cultures during the 1920s were significantly defined by social class and nationality. These four divergent groups are the foreign traders, the refugees, the local elite class, and the Chinese immigrants (laborers). The foreign traders were composed mainly of British, French, and Japanese people. The refugees were mainly from Russia, arriving between the late 1920s and early 1930s to escape the war. The local elite class was Shanghainese people high in the social hierarchy and had their social circle. The Chinese immigrants looking for job opportunities in the developing city of Shanghai were predominantly Subei people influx into the city before the 1920s [4]. These four cultures changed Shanghai’s culture, thus greatly influencing its city image. And the cultural influences behind this could be analyzed through ideology and religion, sociality, and influences on attire tradition, and identify the influences on city image from these aspects.

2.1. Introduction of Ideology

The westerners primarily influenced ideology in Shanghai during the time period. As a result of multiculturalism, Shanghai had capitalism and imperialism represented in its city image. Imperialism can be identified from the two wars and the international concessions under foreign jurisdiction [2]. Since the Nanking treaty of 1842, Shanghai was divided into many areas and concessions that were under French, Chinese, and Anglo-American jurisdiction [5]. Later in the late 1920s, imperialism was further demonstrated by the Japanese Empire, which invaded Shanghai. The international concessions followed the policy of Laissez-faire capitalism, which was suggested as one of the most successful uses of capitalism. All citizens, foreigners, and Chinese locals had rights and freedom practiced. It also encouraged free trade, which made it the international commerce center.

2.2. Introduction of Religion

Religions in the city were Taoism, Christianity, and Catholicism. Catholicism and Christianity were brought to Shanghai by foreign traders and refugees, while the local Chinese people, as well as immigrants, were into Taoism. Christian and Catholic churches opened during the 20th century, such as Youag John Allen memorial church, constructed in 1923, and the Shanghai community church, originally funded by immigrants from many countries, constructed in 1925. These churches opened up communities by religion, and the churches provided a social space for foreigners and the Chinese people [6]. Therefore, Shanghai’s diversity shown multiple beliefs of ideology and religion, emphasizes its multicultural city image [7].

2.3. New Social Hierarchy

The social hierarchy of Shanghai was clear from the four divided groups. The local Shanghainese people (the elite class) were strongly prejudiced against the Chinese immigrants, specifically the Subei people [8]. The comparison the conditions of the laborers to the elite class, demonstrating the substantial economic gap between the different classes. The laborers worked in harsh environments and on physical jobs that did not require much knowledge, which was needed in industrializing Shanghai but caused prejudice from the elite class [8]. Comparatively, the foreign traders with a large fortune were relatively supportive of the immigrants. For example, Russian traders supported the Russian people with food and shelter. However, the refugees still lived in conditions almost

equivalent to the laborers and the lower class. Though the laborers had some minor support for the refugees and did not exclude them. The elite class socialized under the influences of westerners, drinking wine, dancing, and listening to classical music [9]. The Figure 1 shows a group of foreigners with the elite class, which shows the cross-culturing aspect of Shanghai's culture. Japanese, Caucasian, and locals are in a fancy ballroom with foreign interior design [9]. On the streets, there are social areas like salons and restaurants that serve foreigners. On the store's glass window, it writes Russian, demonstrating multiculturalism.



Figure 1: Foreigners in Shanghai.

2.4. Variation of Attire Styles and Changed Tradition

Attire was also significantly influenced by the different cultures. One of the most famous revolutions in fashion is the rise of Qipao clothing. The Qipao clothing had not appeared before this time and was different from the old-fashioned and traditional clothing. Moreover, Qipao had received favorable response from the Shanghai local elite class females. The Qipao symbolizes the mix of cultures in Shanghai as it combines traditional Chinese elements with western elements. The Shanghainese females also wore shorts and had wavy hair to go along with the Qipao. Unlike the former clothing, the Qipao is less complex and fashionable, while elements like embroidery represent the local fashion. In comparison, people wearing western clothing, often a pinched hat, suit, or cane, can also be found [2].

In addition to the change in clothes, there was also a change in tradition. The young generation at that time are no longer following the old Chinese traditions. Western Influences has made their lives very different from before and other Chinese cities. A clear instance of Western alterations in Shanghai for the younger generation is their understand of time. Chinese traditions often follow the lunar calendar, self explanatorily, following the cycle of the moon. While western traditions follow the Gregorian calendar, that follows the cycle of the sun. The younger generation follows the combination of the two calendars because of the multiculturalism existing in Shanghai. In their homes and families, they still obey the lunar calendar and mainly tracks time through this way to follow the original and traditional ways their elders are fonder of. However, in the condition for their works which has been changed and revolutionized by the foreign influences, they follow the Gregorian calendar. Over the decade, many aspects of the people in Shanghai demonstrated their change in traditions through the increasing diversity in the city.

3. Economic Reasons for Shanghai's City Image

As Shanghai recovered from the opium wars that happened a few decades before the 1920s, industrialization was at its peak [2]. The Shanghai economy imported and exported most of China's goods since it is one of the few international ports opened with the treaty. Even before the Opium Wars, foreign nationals had a high demand for the exotic goods of China, such as tea. The opium wars forced China into balanced trade with the nation, and China began importing foreign goods. Tens of thousands of foreign traders from Europe or Japan gathered in Shanghai for trade opportunities. With the internationalization of Shanghai, it gradually became the most outstanding economic center of China, and the city was a place of fortune [3]. The city's image of an economic center attracts more people to Shanghai and is one of the factors that brought multiculturalism to the city.

The Subei people that came to Shanghai in the late 19th century composed much of the lower-class labor workers, which contributed to the industrialization of Shanghai. These lower-class labor workers moved to Shanghai for a better job opportunity. They worked for low pays and did mainly physical jobs that didn't require any academic background or prior experience in the subject. With the large scale of labor from these people, Shanghai created its basis for its strong economy and commerce center [10].

Shanghai being one of the first ports that opened for foreign nations attracted numerous and countless traders that were in demand of Shanghai and China's goods, such as tea and other Chinese goods that are valuable to the foreign countries. Many of these traders stayed in Shanghai in international concessions and it ultimately what had led Shanghai to become the international and economically successful city on the basis of the labor workers. They have also promoted the industrialization of all Shanghai for the foreign influences of technology [10].

The middle class and elite class emerged from these trades with the foreigners, and they were mainly Shanghainese people. These people, unlike the working class, enjoyed the benefits of the urban society and earned most from the industrialization and the progressive improvements of Shanghai, enjoying benefits such as night clubs, music, high education, and luxurious lifestyle.

The collaboration of these people made Shanghai a suitable place with advantages for economic development such as strong and complete workforce, well cooperative producers, and the international community [10]. Through the decades of development on economics and commerce, 1920s Shanghai has become the economic giant in China's trade market. The significant increase shows how Shanghai has been progressively attracting more traders internationally and have a higher demand for Chinese goods.

4. The Influences on Modern-Day Shanghai

Modern-day Shanghai was still drastically influenced by multiculturalism in the early 20th century, and its influences can still be seen in many aspects of the city's image. Shanghai is culturally diverse since many immigrants are from different cities and internationally. These people are attracted by the economic opportunities and bring their culture. Ideologically and religiously, Shanghai mainly focuses on the Christian religion, influenced by foreigners, and the churches built in the 1920s remain today. In their attire, people follow the international fashion trend, and Shanghai is also now known as the fashion center of China. The infrastructure also shows multiculturalism, as modern-day Shanghai combines the different styles from different regions. Many old buildings from the international concessions remain untouched, preserved by the government. New buildings also emerged and showed the significant development of Shanghai. Economically, Shanghai's city image remains as the international economic center and still a city with many opportunities [8].

However, due to Shanghai's international developments and favoritism towards foreign culture, religion, attire, and infrastructure, the Chinese people often refer to Shanghai as a city that betrays the country of its cultures and admires and favors foreign cultures. People often argue that Shanghai does not demonstrate the same patriotism for their nation that the other areas of China show and often frown upon Shanghai based on their understanding of Shanghai's city image.

5. Conclusion

From these impactful influences from foreign countries, such as ideology and religious beliefs, changes in socialization, and attire, Shanghai had drastically changed through cross-cultural interactions and multiculturalism. Due to the diversity of cultures, Shanghai has an extremely unique and diverse city image for different people. For the laborers, Shanghai remains a place with job opportunities, often believing Shanghai was the place for a better life. Foreigners, especially the later refugees from World War II, had known Shanghai for its great internationalization and their varieties of foreign communities, making Shanghai their place of refuge and immigration. Foreign countries like Japan attempted to invade Shanghai because of its industrialization and internationalism from cross-cultural interactions.

Shanghai's multiculturalism led to the rise of the new Shanghai and its developments in industrialization and commercialization. These potent effects from the different cultures and their cross-culture interactions were never seen before. It alternated the image of the cultural aspects in the eyes of various people who eventually made Shanghai the "Pearl of the Orient" and the "Paris of the East." The great influences on Shanghai's distinct city image, such as Shanghai's impactful and diverse culture, Shanghai's complex combination of ideology and religious beliefs, its westernized attire and traditions, and the unique and symbolic infrastructure of the multicultural city, symbolizing its internationalization and multiculturalism. The effects of the 1920s on modern day Shanghai is significant as the former trade port is still one of the most diverse and modernized cities, and one of the leading economic and commerce centers of China. The changes and impacts of the different people of Shanghai, the foreigners, Chinese immigrants, Shanghainese locals, and the refugees, had led to the multiculturalism within Shanghai, leading the city to its success later.

References

- [1] Honig, E. (1989). "The Politics of Prejudice: Subei People in Republican-Era Shanghai." *Modern China* 15, no. 3, 243–74.
- [2] Lovell, J. (2015). *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams, and the Making of Modern China*. United States: ABRAMS, Incorporated (Ignition).
- [3] Sheridan, M. (2021). *The Gate to China: A New History of the People's Republic and Hong Kong*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- [4] Xu, F. (2021). *Silencing Shanghai: Language and Identity in Urban China*. United States: Lexington Books.
- [5] 1920s Map of Shanghai. Photograph. Newman Tours. 2019. Accessed August 26, 2022. <https://newmantours.com/1920s-map-shanghai>.
- [6] Shanghai Community Church. Photograph. Virtual Shanghai. Accessed August 25, 2022. <https://www.virtualshanghai.net/Photos/Images?pn=21>.
- [7] Lin, J. (2017). *Shanghai Faithful: Betrayal and Forgiveness in a Chinese Christian Family*. United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- [8] Workers for The Shanghai Electric Construction Co. Ltd. on Nanjing Road laying streetcar trolley rails. Photograph. ChinaSMACK. September 2, 2013. Accessed August 25, 2022. <https://www.chinasmack.com/photos-of-shanghai-during-the-first-half-of-the-20th-century>.
- [9] Field, A. D., Farrer, J. (2015). *Shanghai Nightscapes: A Nocturnal Biography of a Global City*. United States: University of Chicago Press.
- [10] Yeh, Wen-Hsin. "Shanghai Modernity: Commerce and Culture in a Republican City." *The China Quarterly* 150 (1997): 375–94. doi:10.1017/S0305741000052528.