日本上海史研究会主催シンポジウム

「中華人民共和国成立前後における都市社会・文化の変容
-空間と生活の再編」

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This paper explores the issue of death in wartime Shanghai, and more specifically the issue of storing coffins in a city crowded with hundreds of thousands of refugees. In studying the issue of death in the city, I shall make brief references to the pre-war period to contextualize how death was managed – which social practices had been established – and how these practices had to adapt the new conditions created by war.

In any society, death takes its toll in two major ways, through natural causes and through unnatural causes. The first case does not raise any particular issue. Within a given population, the death rate is fairly constant. The rituals and services related to post-mortem treatment (mourning, funeral, burial, etc.) follow a well-established path. Yet, in a given place, two factors may affect the number of deaths: an epidemic outbreak (e.g. cholera) or a sudden increase in population. Shanghai met with the two circumstances over time, sometimes with the two combined, but the first factor never took such proportions that it became unmanageable. On the other hand, after August 1937, the two foreign settlements in Shanghai experienced a huge increase of population. The second case include the “common” un-natural causes such as accidents (car crash, falling from a roof, etc.) or murders, but both are also fairly constant in a given population. The most exceptional unnatural cause of death is mass violence from rioting and repression, and of course war. While Shanghai has been the scene of various riots, few have reached such a scale as to affect the population numerically. In modern times, the first such event was probably the Small Sword Rebellion and the terrible repression that ensued that left hundreds or even thousands of casualties. On the whole, however, changes in the population were due more to the displacement of persons

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2 In this paper my focus is on the death of civilians only. Military deaths are not included here, first, because sources are not available at this time; second, because death on the battlefield took place outside of the city, even if parts of Shanghai were turned into a battleground for several weeks.
rather than to actual deaths.³

In fact, the two major instances of war in Shanghai in modern times took place in the winter of 1931-1932 and in the summer of 1937. The first conflict did not last long and was centered on two districts of Shanghai (Hongkou and Zhabei, and parts of Yangshupu). Many civilians were killed, as fighting began very briefly after a minor incident, before the population had a chance to seek refuge in the International Settlement. Nevertheless, the short duration of the conflict and the absence of bombing by air force limited the casualties. Furthermore, the foreign and Chinese authorities were not disorganized by the conflict. The situation returned to normal very quickly.⁴ In 1937, the conflict lasted for three months during which all kinds of heavy artillery and aerial bombings were resorted to by both sides. Both the northern and southern districts, and at times the western area, of Shanghai were affected. The extent of material damages was huge, while the loss of civilian lives went far beyond that of 1931-1932, though not necessarily as a result of fighting.

That people died in wartime Shanghai therefore was not in itself a special phenomenon. As in all urban centers, the concentration of population called for and had actually generated various modes to cope with death in numbers. The conditions of war, however, created circumstances that pushed the figure of deaths much further up. This was especially true in the foreign settlements where the Chinese population living in the Chinese-administered districts sought refuge. As a result, the number of registered and unregistered deaths in these areas surged throughout the wartime period. This increase challenged the funeral practices of the population as well as the role and policy of the local authorities. To examine the transformation of the management of death during wartime, I shall present which kinds of arrangement for burials were in place when the war broke out, with a focus on funerals and the movement of coffins


out of the city. In the second part of the paper, I shall study how the war made Shanghai, especially the foreign settlements, a refuge for coffins.