The Walls and Waters

A Comparative Study of City Cultures in Modern China — Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong

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Introduction

This paper is a preliminary attempt to analyze and compare the cultural characteristics of three Chinese cities: Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. The central thesis of this paper is that there is a close relationship between environment and culture. The development and evolution of a city culture in these three places, as this paper attempts to show, depended very much on the interaction of two environments: the natural and the artificial. The latter refers to a man-made environment such as that which results from city planning, the construction of transportation and communications systems, buildings and other architectural structures, while the former refers to natural landscapes, geographical locations, vegetation and natural resources. This paper will be divided into two main parts. The first half will examine and analyze the cultural significance of a man-made environment, as represented by the walls of a city. The second half will analyze the natural environment, focusing on the impact of waterways and waterfronts in the evolution of a city's culture.

On the one hand, the history of a city's walls reveals the essential characteristics of the city; on the other, the reconstruction and demolition of walls had a great impact on the lifestyles and political and commercial cultures of these cities. Moreover, the debates and disputes over the demolition of these walls in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong also reflected the struggle between tradition and modernity, as well as

confrontation, cooperation and compromise between political and commercial elites in these places.

The "water" issue in the second half of the paper is actually more complex. The rivers, harbours, bays and coastal lines are natural geographical features, but waterways and waterfronts could be shaped by human effort, as in the case of canals, wharves and harbour facilities. I will examine both elements in the development of city culture, first to show how the natural environment, especially the waters surrounding the cities — rivers, bays and harbours — defines the characters of the three cities, and then how the "changing waters" impacted on the development of city culture.

The Walls and City Culture

The city wall was a prominent feature in old Chinese cities. To the Chinese, the walls had practical value as well as symbolic meanings. The lifestyles and livelihoods of the people in the city were in many ways moulded by the design, structure and functionality of these walls. Thus, changes in a city's culture were intimately connected to the history of these walls — their design and construction in the early period, their subsequent renovation and reconstruction, and eventually their demolition in the twentieth century. From the history of the walls we can see how the cultural characteristics of a city changed, and how the competition among local elites affected the political and economic development of a city. During the last two centuries when Chinese cities underwent rapid industrialization, modernization and commercialization, the functional value of the walls were debated, and finally the walls were torn down.

The controversies centring around the preservation or demolition of the walls reflected the cultural tensions between tradition and modernity, and between a land-based political orientation and an open-mindedness towards maritime trade. In the end, the walls in the three cities were all victims to modernization, industrialization, urban renewal and rapid economic expansion. For purposes of comparison, so as to

achieve a better understanding of the relationship between walls and cultural development, I will include the city walls of Beijing in this part of the paper, but only concentrate on Shanghai and Hong Kong when we examine the element of water.

Beijing: The Walls Stood Tall

Beijing was a city of prominent and visible walls. The walls were of different heights and sizes, and were constructed of stone and mud. There were walls aplenty: those of the "Forbidden City" (*Zijincheng* 紫禁城) or "Palace City," those of the "Imperial City" (*huangcheng* 皇城), of the "Inner City" (*neicheng* 內城), the "Outer City" (*waicheng* 外城), and the walls around the sacred temples, noblemen's houses and imperial gardens — and of course, sections of the "Great Wall" (*Changcheng* 長城) in the outskirts of the city. The walls were constructed prior to the twentieth century, and were meant for various purposes: to protect the imperial palaces and the royal families, to guard the capital from outside attacks by rebels and invaders, and to keep intruders from the sacred grounds of the "Temple of Heaven" (*Tiantan* 天壇) and other holy places. In other words, one of the most important reasons for the construction of the walls in Beijing was for the protection and defence of the city and the noble people and sacred altars therein.

The old city walls were built more than two thousand years ago in the ancient city of Jizhou (薊州) and Yanjing (燕京). Subsequently, more walls were built when a new dynasty was established. Over the last six hundred years, Beijing has been the capital of China and, because of that, more buildings and more walls were constructed in and around the city.

Beijing was, and still is, a city of prominent walls.

History of the Walls

Beijing had already been a city of many walls for centuries. First, there were the walls of the old city of Jicheng (薊城), later changed to the city of Youzhou (幽州) and then to the city of Yanjing. The ancient city of Jicheng was established, according

to Chinese legends, some two thousand and four hundred years ago during the reign of the Sage-king Shun (舜) (Siren, 1924:13). The walls were renovated by the small northern state of Yan (燕) when the city was made its capital during the Warring States (戰國) period (475-221 BC). A new walled city was constructed in the south around 70 AD in the Eastern Han (東漢) and it was named Youzhou in the period of the Three Kingdoms (三國, 220-280 AD) (Siren, 1924:13-14). Subsequently, the city was made the capital of the Khitan Liao (契丹, 遼) and Jurchen Jin (女真, 金) dynasties (907-1125 AD and 1115-1234 AD, respectively), and came to be known as Yanjing. The city walls of Yanjing formed the shape of a square, with thirty-six *li* (里) on each side. The height of the city wall was three *zhang* (丈) and the width at the base was about one and half *zhang*. The Liao added an inner wall for better protection and defence. The Jin also expanded and renovated sections of the wall (using mud bricks) to make it the "Central Capital" (*Zhongdu* 中都) of the state. According to one source, the circumference of the city wall of the Central Capital was about fifty-four *li* (Siren, 1924:16). The city was conquered by Mongols under Genghis Khan (成吉思汗) in the beginning of the thirteenth century; later the Yuan (元) ruler, Kublai Khan (忽必烈), likewise adopted the city as his Central Capital in 1267 AD. In 1272, its name was officially changed to "Great Capital" (*Dadu* 大都). From then, until the end of the Qing (清) dynasty (1616-1911 AD), Beijing was the capital of China for about six hundred years (Meyer, 1976:28-29). Most of the city walls constructed by Kublai Khan were preserved into the Ming (明) dynasty (1368-1644 AD). This old walled city was called the Inner City when a new wall was constructed in the early fifteenth century to include a vast piece of territory outside the main gate of the old walled city to form the Outer City.

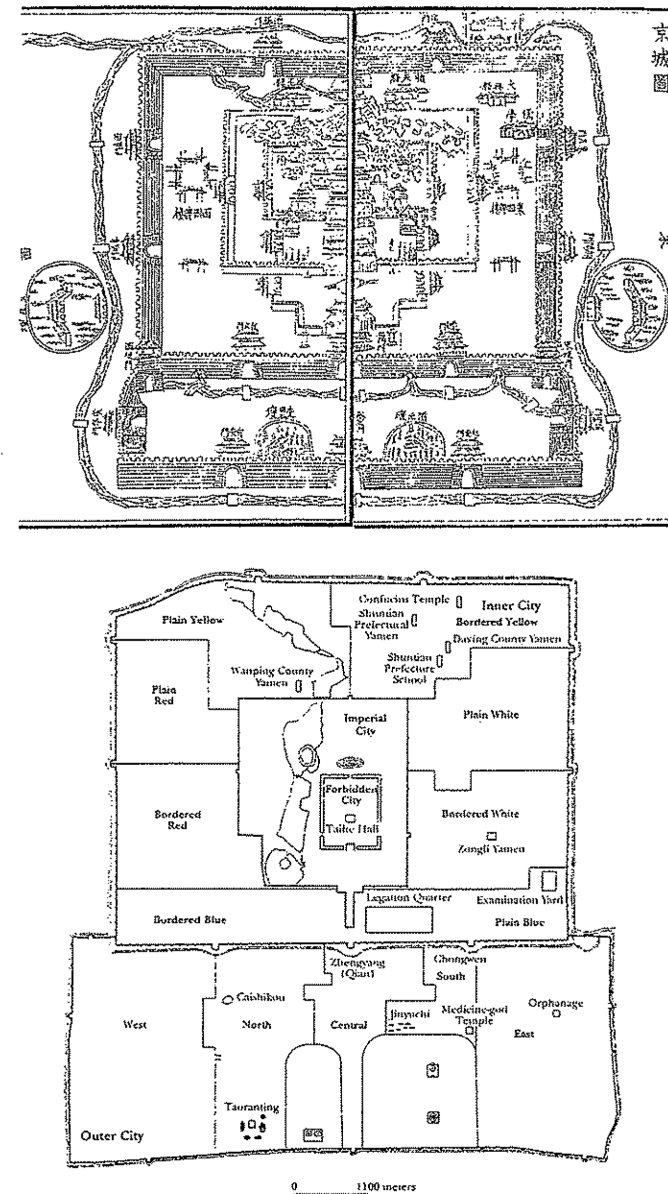
The walls of the Outer City represented the outermost layer of Beijing's city walls. Sections of the walls were demolished in the mid-twentieth century but certain parts have been maintained in the present day. Besides the walls of the Outer City, there were more walls in Beijing: First, there were those of the Inner City, which were built in the Yuan dynasty when the Mongol ruler made the city the capital of his vast empire. Then, within the walls of the Outer City and the Inner City there were more walls: To begin with, there were the walls of the Imperial City, within which the government offices, imperial palaces, houses and courts of the nobility were located. In addition, there were the walls of the Forbidden City. These cities were all surrounded by walls which protected the palaces and people within, and prevented intrusion by common people. The walls of the Imperial City and the Forbidden City were decorated with elaborate gates, guard towers, and other architectural structures and sculptures for a variety of purposes including *fengshui* (geomancy 風水). In fact, the design and construction of the entire capital was in line with astrological and *fengshui* prescriptions, with the Forbidden City at the centre (Chen, 1996:38). Designed by Liu Bingzhong (劉秉忠), an expert architect familiar with the layout and characteristics of ancient Chinese capitals such as Chang'an (長安) and Luoyang (洛陽), the new capital of the Mongol empire embraced all essential elements of Chinese *fengshui* that justified its political significance and locational centrality. The construction work was completed in 1283, a few years after Kublai Khan elevated the city from the status of "central capital" to that of "great capital." It became a great city in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with a population of about half a million, consisting of Mongols, Jurchens, Tibetans, Chinese and dozens of racial groups from Central and Northern Asia. It was ransacked during the rebellion of the 1360s. After the fall of the Mongol dynasty, the Ming Emperor Yongle (永樂) decided to rebuild the city as his "Northern Capital" (Beijing 北京) although the official capital of the Ming dynasty was located in Nanjing (南京). The rebuilding of Beijing proved to be a major construction project that lasted more than a decade-and-a-half. More palaces and temples were built within the city, and sections of the city wall were renovated throughout the early Qing dynasty, but the layout and main structures remained unchanged. In the early twentieth century, advocates of modern city planning and city reconstruction called for the demolition of the old walls to pave way for new

buildings and infrastructure. The new government of the People's Republic generally sided with these city reformers, and as a result, most of the city walls were torn down for road expansion and for new construction projects in the 1950s, despite the objections of a few scholars and professional architects such as Liang Sicheng (梁思成) and Hou Renzhi (侯仁之).[1] However, certain sections of the walls have been preserved, together with most of the imperial palaces and sacred temples.

The Walls and Development of Imperial Beijing

The walls of Beijing in more ways than one shaped and defined the culture of the city. As mentioned earlier, the most common function of the walls was for protection. The city walls of Beijing protected the royal family, government officials and the people living in the imperial capital. Since these people were important, the walls were high and sturdily built, usually with stones and hard bricks. They were thick, double-layered and surrounded by moats that helped in defence. If invaders or rebels broke through the walls of the Outer City, there were more walls to protect the Inner City and more walls to protect the Imperial City and the Forbidden City. The concentricity of the walls of the imperial capital was not only to better protect the royal family, but also revealed the growing status and importance of the people from outer to inner, and from periphery to centre. The walls of Beijing, in other words, not only protected the people within from attacks from without, it also divided the people living within. The walls of each city were lines of demarcation, preventing people from mingling freely. The Qing dynasty maintained the basic design and structure of the city, making only minor changes, primarily adding more palaces and other buildings throughout the first hundred years. However, one important policy of segregation was initiated by the early Manchu government using the walls of the Inner City (hence also called Tartar City) as boundaries (see Figure 1). The Han Chinese were not permitted to reside in areas within the Inner City, including that of the Imperial City and Forbidden City. They were forced to move outside of the walls of the Inner City into a newly

Figure 1 The Walled City of Beijing, circa 1684



Source: Adapted from Naquin (2000:356, 428).

developed area within the walls of the Outer City (Chen, 1996:48). In other words, the walls of the Inner City served the purpose of segregation in addition to that of protection.

The walls stood tall and each possessed its own gates and guard towers. The gates were given names such as "Martial Gate" (*Shenwumen* 神武門), "Gate of Ultimate Peace" (*Taihemen* 太和門), "Gate of Heavenly Peace" (*Tiananmen* 天安門) and "Noon Gate" (*Wumen* 午門) and so on. The towers and the high walls were imposing and sometimes quite threatening. The gates with names written in huge characters at the top looking down at passers-by were constantly guarded by soldiers. On top of the wall there were watch-towers and archery stands. This instilled a sense of fear and awe in ordinary people. Their movements were restricted and their documents and identities regularly checked, constantly reminding the residents of Beijing of their ethnic and class identities. This led to a general acceptance of hierarchy and a high level of status consciousness. Words such as "No entry" or "No trespassing" were written virtually all over the walls. In such a place, ideas of equality and liberalism could find little ground in which to take root.

However, the residents of Beijing were proud of their status as inhabitants of the centre of the "Middle Kingdom" literally living under the feet of the "Son of Heaven." The walls of Beijing were not only a physical boundary separating "inner" and "outer," but a cultural boundary denoting centre and periphery. The sense of the capital's centrality in the nation as well as in the universe gave rise to a widespread feeling of superiority and cultural vigour in Beijing's inhabitants, especially the scholar-officials. This cultural pride and sense of leadership remain quite apparent among the elite of contemporary Beijing, despite the demolition of most the old city walls.

Shanghai: The Walls were Crumbling Down

Shanghai was not a capital or a mega-city five centuries ago, when Beijing had already established its prominence. Shanghai was a commercial town and trading centre before its walls were

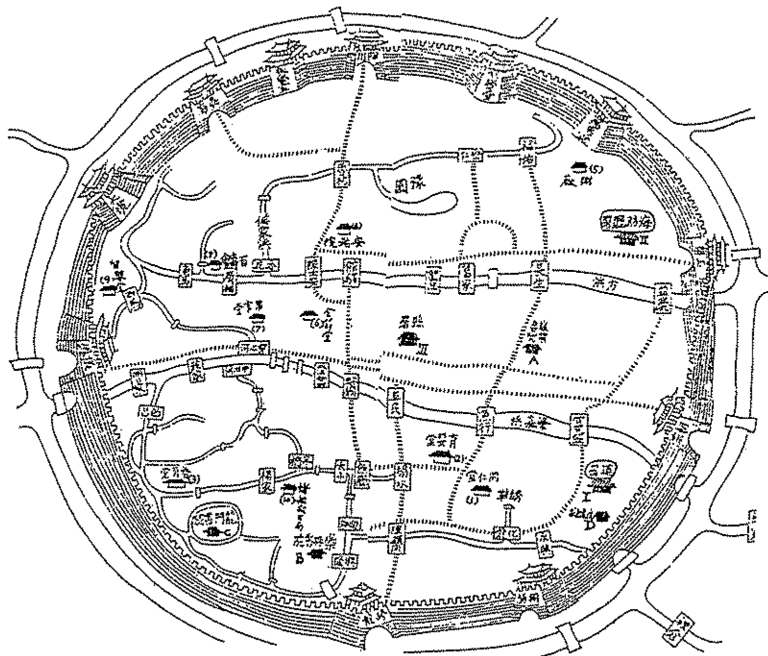
erected in the Ming dynasty. The city walls were built primarily for defense against the frequent raids and harassment of sea pirates. The walls, however, were built with mud bricks and were not as sturdy and permanent as Beijing's walls. In addition, Shanghai's walls were relatively low and, in the nineteenth century, the enclosed area was limited to what was known as the "Chinese City" (*xiancheng* 縣城) or "Southern City" (*nanshi* 南市). The walled portion, therefore, constituted only a small section of the new city of Shanghai in the modern period, beginning with the opening of the city to foreign trade in 1843. The walled city was only one of the tri-cities in Shanghai, the other two being the International Settlements and the French Concession (see Figures 2 and 3). The erection and demolition of the walls of the Chinese City in Shanghai tell a fascinating story of cultural adjustment and power struggle among the local elite.

History of the Walls

Shanghai's city walls were built in the seventeenth century, during the Ming dynasty. Before that, Shanghai was a small market-town located in an open plain adjacent to the Huangpu (黄浦) River. Its increasing significance as a regional trade centre led the Yuan government to designate it the seat of a district government office (*xian yamen* 縣衙門) in 1292. A Yuan map shows a sprawling town, without walls, "but having important county offices, a Yuan naval garrison and the headquarters for the grain tribute" (Johnson, 1993:155). The city walls were not built until the Jiajing (嘉靖) period (1522-1566 AD) of the Ming dynasty. During the mid-fifteenth century, the Yangzi (*Changjiang* 長江) delta was repeatedly invaded by Japanese pirates and the threat led to a communal decision to build a wall to better defend the city.

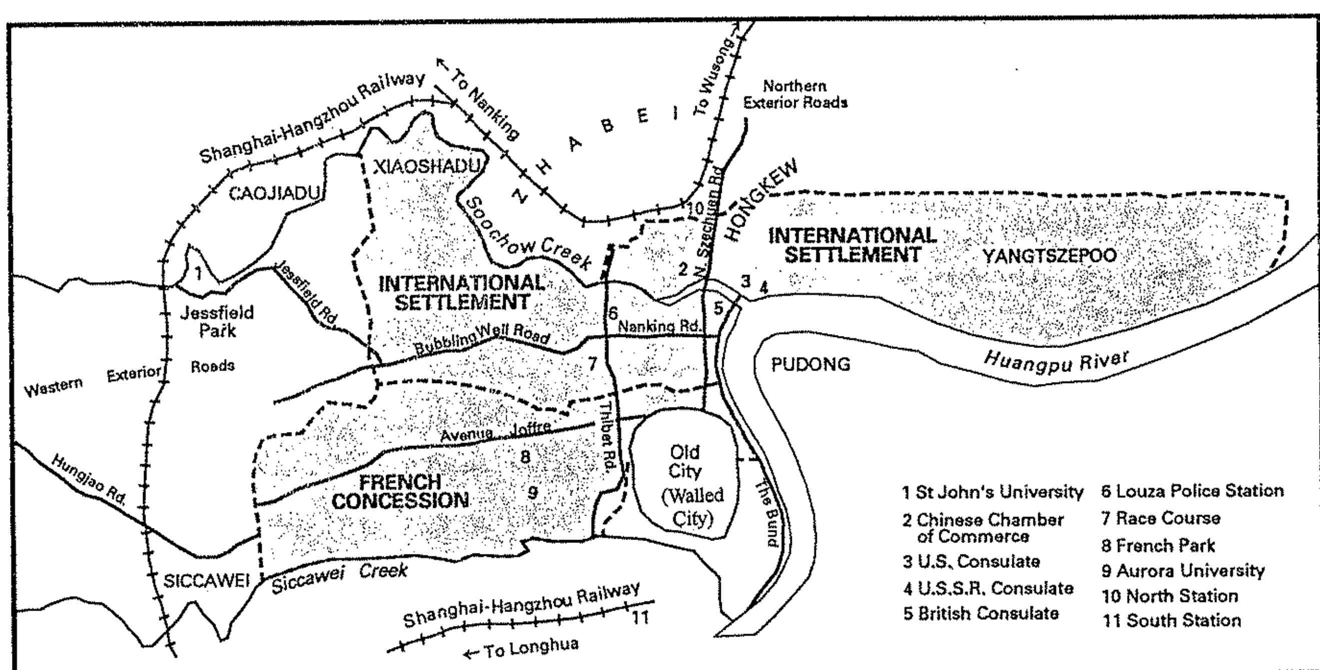
The city wall had a circumference of nine *li* with a height of two *zhang* and four Chinese feet. There were seven gates, three of which were connected to the waters of the Huangpu River running by the city. In 1598, another five feet of bricks were added to the height of the old wall to improve defence, and one more gate was constructed for water traffic (Zheng, 1999:5).

Figure 2 The Walled City of Shanghai, circa 1872



Source: *The Shanghai Gazetteer* (Tongzhi, 1872) from Leung (1990:140).

Figure 3 City Map of Shanghai, circa 1900



Source: Clifford (1991:xviii).

All government offices were located within the walled Chinese City, from the intendant's (*daoshu* 道署) to the magistrate's (*xianya* 縣衙). The walls were interpolated with watch-towers, and the gates were also regularly guarded by soldiers. The city wall of Shanghai, like any other walled city in China, was supposedly built to provide security for government offices and their occupants, whether from local rebels or foreign invaders. However, in Shanghai the walls performed a reverse function in the 1850s, when a rebel group called the "Small Sword Society" (*Xiaodaohui* 小刀會) took over the walled city and drove the Qing officials outside. The rebels took refuge in the foreign settlements. With the assistance of foreigners, the Qing government eventually recaptured the walled city and re-established peace and order in Shanghai. During the fighting, several sections of the city wall were destroyed by modern firepower and explosives. Because of these new gaps and holes, more gates were subsequently installed between the walled city and the settlements. As a result, transportation and communications improved, and people were able to move more freely between the walled city and other two "cities" in Shanghai. Further economic development of the International Settlements and the French Concession attracted more immigrants from the Chinese City as well as from other parts of the country. Even though Qing officials maintained that the Chinese City was the administrative headquarters and power centre of Shanghai, more and more Chinese established their business outside the walled city in the post-Taiping era. An increasing number of Chinese officials also preferred to work and live inside the settlements, especially after retirement. For example, Shao Youlian (邵友濂) and Nie Jigui (聶緝槼) both served as Circuit Intendant of Su-Song-Tai (*Susongtai dao* 蘇松太道, or Shanghai *daotai* 上海道台 as the office was generally known). As such, each was Shanghai's highest-ranking official, and both stayed on in Shanghai after their retirement from office. Many ex-officials in Shanghai became entrepreneurs or industrialists in the twin settlements. These well-connected elites saw the diminishing role of the walls that separated their old

power hub and their new business ventures and social activities. At the turn of the century, many of them joined with the new local elite, made up of commercial leaders, in calling for demolition of the walls, in what became known as the "Demolish City Walls Movement" (*Chaicheng(qiang) Yundong* 拆城(牆)運動) (Zheng, 1999:6-8).

The walls were officially torn down in January 1912, after the collapse of the Qing dynasty. The intendant's office and the eastern and southern sections of the wall were the first to be demolished. The principal reason for this move, as cited by local advocates, was "for the convenience of transportation" (Zheng, 1999:7). The western and northern sections were also torn down and the moats were filled and transformed into new roads or "roads for horse-carriages" (*malu* 馬路), which when completed in 1914 became the first of the city's ring roads, with the names of *Fahua Minguo Lu* (法華民國路) and *Zhonghua Lu* (中華路).

The Walls and Development of Modern Shanghai

The story of the walled city of Shanghai and the decline of its significance in the modern period represents a clash of two cultures, East and West, and a transition from traditional political culture to the new politics, dominated by elite from new economic and cultural backgrounds. Within the walls of the old city, the traditional power structure with the government offices as the centre remained strong until the Taiping (太平天國) era (1851-1864 AD). After the mid-nineteenth century, however, new sources of wealth and power came not from within the walls, but from without — from the open seas, i.e., foreign trade and westernized ideas and programmes. Even the Chinese government moved outside the walled city when it decided to participate in modernization and open new economic and industrial ventures such as the China Merchant Steamship Company, the Telegraph Bureau and the Kiangnan Arsenal. Even the Shanghai intendant, the official ruler of Shanghai, had established a branch office, the *Yangwu Ju* (洋務局) in the settlements for dealing with foreigners and related matters such as modernization projects (Yao, 1989). These reform-minded

officials and modernization advocates needed to function in an open space within which transportation and communications were more convenient, and supply-demand market forces were readily at work. The walls of the Chinese City thus became a controlled space not conducive to new political experiments, new educational programmes or new business ventures. The walled city represented not only traditional bureaucratic power, it was also a place where traditional education (*shuyuan* 書院) and the local gentry were concentrated. To a certain extent, the walled city, with its Suzhou-style (蘇州) landscaped gardens such as *Yuyuan* (豫園) and *Chenghuang* Temple (城隍廟) was also an area of cultural preservation. The cityscape within the walled city and that of the foreign settlements were strikingly different. Traditional Chinese housing and architecture were the norm within the walled city. The means of transportation were also traditional: single-wheeled carts, ox-drawn carriages, sedan chairs and so on. The streets and alleys were narrow and muddy. By contrast, the streets and roads in the settlements were wider and well-paved, with high buildings along the two sides, usually in European style. Some streets near the Bund (*waitan* 外灘) such as Nanking Road (*Nanjing Lu* 南京路) were lined with well-crafted stone structures: cathedrals, churches, club houses and banks. There were horse-drawn carriages, rickshaws or *jinricksha*, and in the early twentieth century, trams and imported motor cars. The striking difference left a deep impression on the minds of visitors from the Chinese City and from other parts of the country. Many felt that "they were in a foreign country" (Chen, 1873:4b; Xiong, 1999:96-97). During the final years of the nineteenth century, more and more of the local elite in Shanghai, including those who lived within the walled city, were interested in the new culture, new fashions and new lifestyles of the neighbouring areas beyond the walls. The drive to be an integral part of the new economy and new culture of the larger city of Shanghai as defined by the characteristics of the settlements was, in my opinion, the principal motivating force behind the drive to breach the walls and tear them down. In fact, once the walls were demolished, the area within the Chinese

City adjacent to the foreign settlements, for example the "East Gate" (*Dongmen* 東門) district, transformed itself rapidly into a busy area with paved roads with horse-drawn carriages, and lined with electric light-posts, westernized shops and buildings (Tang, 1996). The Shanghai people of the new century had chosen an open environment without walls for modernization and development. Thus, the walls that had previously been regarded as inhibiting traffic and communications between the walled city and the foreign settlements were now considered obstacles to modernization. A few reformers of the 1890s suggested that the demolition of the walls would be beneficial to societies both inside and outside the walls. The suggestion was considered by authorities to be too radical in the late nineteenth century, but the "demolition" movement picked up momentum in the opening years of the twentieth century and was finally translated into action in 1912. With the walls removed, the result was better economic and cultural integration between the old city and the settlements. But to some Chinese who clung to tradition and the radicals who called for "total westernization," although the walls were gone, the boundary remained.

Hong Kong: The Walls Went Underground

For centuries, Hong Kong had no palaces, no great architectural structures and no walls. Before the Opium War, it was a small fishing town and there was no official government offices in the area. There were a few forts and walled villages built primarily for defence purposes, in the same fashion as those in South China. One noted example is the walled city of Tung Chung (東涌) on Lantau Island near present-day Hong Kong International Airport. The walls were built in 1832 by He Junlong (何駿龍), a captain of Xiangshan County (香山縣), as a fort to protect residents against Zhang Baozai's (張保仔) pirate band. The residents of this walled city, which enclosed an area of 225 feet by 265 feet, were primarily military personnel and families of the garrison. An outpost of the Xiangshan local government, this small, walled city never became a regional political or commercial centre (Lui, 1990:24-28).

After its cessation from China to Britain in 1842, Hong Kong became a colony and port of free trade. From this modest beginning, it developed rapidly over the course of one hundred years from a fishing town into a metropolis and commercial city of international fame in the mid-twentieth century. On the surface, Hong Kong was, and is, a city without any walls. In reality, however, in addition to the walls of Tung Chung fort, there was another small walled city in Hong Kong — or, rather, in Kowloon — an area known as the "Kowloon Walled City" (*Jiulong Zhaicheng* 九龍寨城). This walled city was built a century ago, and the walled area stood as a symbol of preservation and contradiction in the course of modernization and colonization. Many of the activities within the walled city had been conducted underground, literally as well as figuratively, before the walls were demolished. In the 1980s, the Hong Kong government finally cleared out the area and resettled its inhabitants.

History of the Walls

When the British took over Hong Kong Island in 1842, the Chinese government ordered the construction of a wall on the Kowloon Peninsula for the military defence of the coast. The wall, completed in 1847, consisted of four gates and six watch-towers, and had numerous cannon installed along the parapet (Pullinger, 1989:18-19). Before the construction of the wall, an old fort built in the seventeenth century to defend the coast against pirates had stood on the same site. After 1843, the fort and, subsequently, the walled city was placed under the jurisdiction of the assistant magistrate of Xin'an (新安) County (Sinn, 1987:30-31). How large was the walled city? According to the report of a Hong Kong historian, "it formed a rough parallelogram measuring 700 feet by 400 feet, enclosing an area of 6.5 acres. It (the wall) was built of granite ashlar facing, 15 feet in width at the top, and averaged 13 feet in height. There were six watch towers and four gateways, with doors of wood lined with iron sheeting" (Sinn, 1987:31).[2] After the Beijing Convention, the British acquired more territories from China, but the

Kowloon Walled City, as the area surrounded by the wall was called, remained under Chinese control and military garrison (see Figure 4). At a later date, the wall was extended up the hill, rising to about 150 feet above the plain where the walled city was originally located.[3] A controversy developed in 1898 when the British further acquired the New Territories, north of Kowloon, from China in a 99-year lease. The original agreement stated that "It is... agreed that within the city of Kowloon the Chinese officials now stationed there shall continue to exercise jurisdiction except so far as may be inconsistent with the military requirements for the defense of Hong Kong" (Pullinger, 1989:13). The clause was vague and soon it led to argument between British and Chinese officials concerning the power of jurisdiction within those walls. The British in Hong Kong, in December 1899, stated in an Order in Council, that "the exercise of jurisdiction by the Chinese officials in the City of Kowloon having been found to be inconsistent with the military requirements for the defense of Hong Kong, it is expedient that... the Chinese officials within the City of Kowloon should cease to exercise jurisdiction therein, and that the said City of Kowloon should become part and parcel of Her Majesty's Colony of Hong Kong" (Pullinger, 1989:13).

However, the Chinese government never recognized this unilateral act and continued to claim sovereignty over the walled city (Lui, 1990:31-32). The walls remained there for decades to come, and the British never followed up with their claim of jurisdiction in the next half century or so. Thus, the walled city became a land of lawlessness and a city of darkness run by triads. Without maintenance, the walls became dilapidated and sections were demolished in the early twentieth century. But in the 1920s and 1930s, they were still clearly visible, as photos from that period reveal. It was the Japanese air raids and bombardment that finally brought down most, if not all, of the old city walls. And after the war, the area was taken over by squatters and refugees who flooded Hong Kong from the Chinese mainland in an attempt to escape the civil war. The

Figure 4 The Kowloon Walled City, 1900

Source: Lui (1990:101).

walls were gone, but the area remained a controversial territory over which the British colonial government found it difficult, if not impossible, to exert its authority. The police and ordinary citizens of Hong Kong were reluctant to go into the area. Thugs and gangs ruled the city and, in order to avoid outright embarrassment to the police, they operated their criminal activities literally in an underground city of alleys and tunnels infested with insects, rats and diseases.

The Walls and Development of Colonial Hong Kong

The impact of the Kowloon Walled City on the development of a city culture in Hong Kong has, by any standard, been insignificant. The original purpose for constructing those walls in the mid-1840s was for coastal defence of the peninsula and surveillance of the British on Hong Kong Island. The expansion of British colonial rule in the second half of the nineteenth century into the Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories through the 1860 Treaty and 1898 Lease respectively rendered the original purpose of the wall useless. The walls, in the post-1860 period and especially in the twentieth century, had more symbolic meaning than practical function in the British colony of Hong Kong. In the first place, the walled area had no official government offices and therefore was not directly under Qing governmental control. Secondly, the enclosed area was small and isolated. There were only a few hundred residents within the walled city and many of them had to venture out into the neighbouring areas of Kowloon or the New Territories, which were under British rule. But the fact that the Chinese government never recognized the British claim of jurisdiction over the walled city meant that this area was *officially* under Chinese imperial jurisdiction and sovereignty. Thus, the walled city has long been considered an islet of China in a British colonial sea. Since the Hong Kong government was reluctant to occupy the area, and the Qing government and subsequent governments in China never sent in troops or dispatched officials into the area to reclaim its sovereignty, the walled city was left largely to itself, leaving control in the hands of drug lords and triad gangs. After the walls were destroyed, the area remained a lawless slum crowded with poor squatters, refugees from the mainland, drug addicts, prostitutes, thugs and gangsters. For a long time, ordinary citizens of Hong Kong kept away from the area. A visitor to the old walled city before its demolition in the 1960s commented, "[It's] a dismal and forbidding place which lies just west of Kai Tak Airport in Kowloon. For generations it had been the hideout of robbers and

murderers.... [It] is not part of the crown colony, but an eight-acre patch of stateless ground.... Britain and China wrangled inconclusively over it while the dingy little enclave-within-an-enclave went its own way, harbouring killers and thugs who fled into its narrow alleys to escape the police of both countries. Until 1960 it was worth your life to venture into those alleys" (Gleason, 1967:98).

In other words, the Kowloon Walled City no longer protected the Chinese elite, nor the common people. It was not a place even for the police, or a place regulated by laws and rituals. In post-war Hong Kong, it had become a symbol of the contrary — lawlessness, protection for criminals and thugs, and cancerous to community development. The walled city's negative image and all the symbolic meanings associated with it had lasted for many years in the mind of the Hong Kong public until the 1970s and 1980s, when the Hong Kong government made decisive steps to clear up the city and resettle its residents. After that, the walls were gone, but in many parts of modern Hong Kong the old city walls are still there. Only these walls, which create boundaries and signify power and hierarchy in society, are invisible.

The Waters and Cultural Space

For centuries in China, there was a close connection between the location and distribution of waterways such as rivers and canals and local market networks. However, in the modern period, accessibility to the sea and the accommodation of ocean ships had become increasingly important for a city's growth and economic development. The "waters" — waterways and waterfronts — constituted an important part of the city's natural environment, but much effort had been expended to change the natural environment by building canals and dikes, and decorating ponds and lakes with pagodas and pavilions. The goal was to facilitate commercial development or, sometimes, to please the eye. In other words, the "waters" represent not only a

natural environment but, in many cases, also man-made environments. The other "water" element that was important for city growth, the supply of drinking water, will not be discussed here.

Decorated Waters in Beijing

The *fengshui* elements were extremely important in the design and construction of Beijing, the imperial city. Its palaces, city walls, towers and streets were all aligned with *fengshui*. But the water element in *fengshui* did not refer to the water levels of the bay or to the location of rivers and harbours. The cosmic *fengshui* factor will not be examined in this paper. The "waters" discussed here are those associated with the physical environment: rivers, lakes, harbours, canals and so on. In essence, Beijing was, and still is, a continental city and "imperial" capital, a point emphasized by Naquin (2000:12) in her new study of Beijing. Unlike Shanghai and Hong Kong, it is not a port city nor was it built for commercial convenience. In that sense, waterfronts and waterways played relatively insignificant roles in the development of the city, especially in the realms of business and commerce. The waters of Beijing in histories discussing the construction of the city, are always presented as part of the man-made environment, and functioned like the walls of the city: they were for protection, for prestige and sometimes for pleasure. The waters were "constructed" in the forms of moats, canals, ponds and lakes, and were designed for the above functions, rather than intended to provide transport or to facilitate commerce. The moats around the city walls were considered part of the walled city, adding to the city's defence capability on the one hand and instilling a sense of seclusion and isolation on the other. The most important waterway linking the north to the south, the Grand Canal, stopped at Tongzhou (通州) and Tianjin (天津), so that tributary missions and goods had to be transported by land to the capital under troop escort (see Figure 5). Of course, there are several rivers and streams in the Beijing area, but none of them attained anything like the cultural or commercial prominence of the

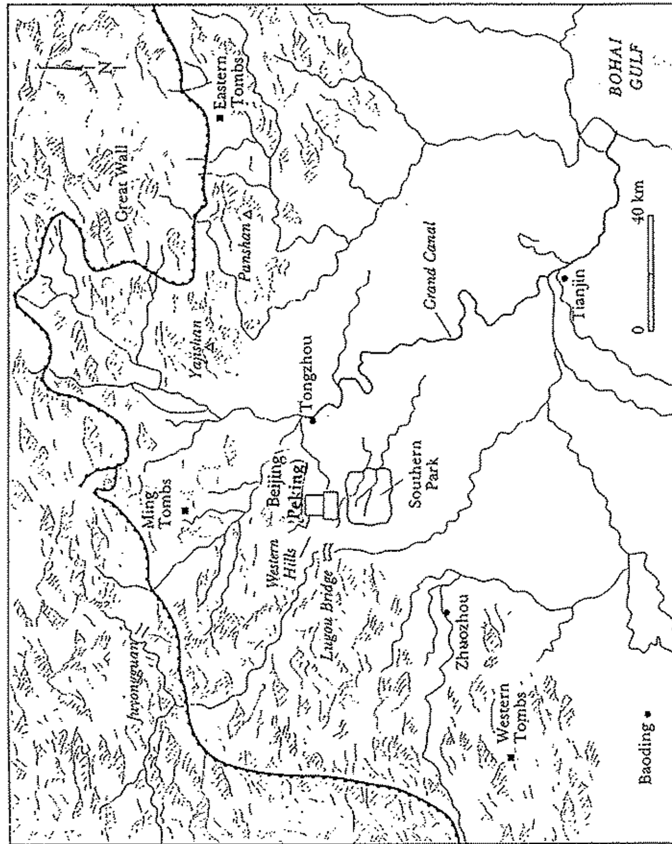


Figure 5 The Waterways of Beijing

Source: Naquin (2000:12).

Yellow River (*Huanghe* 黃河), the Yangzi River, or the Pearl River (*Zhujiang* 珠江). Beijing was not lacking in lakes and ponds, but most of them became "decorated waters" for the pleasure of princes and the nobility. The "North Sea" (*Bei Hai* 北海), "Central and Southern Sea" (*Zhongnan Hai* 中南海) in the Forbidden City and Kunming (昆明) Lake in "Summer Palace" (*Yihe Yuan* 頤和園).

In the case of Shanghai and Hong Kong, however, the rivers, harbours and bays have been important elements affecting the development of economic and community life. In the period before the opening of Shanghai to foreign trade, the riverways and canals were vital to local commerce — fishermen, boatmen, merchants and peddlers operated on both sides of the canals and rivers. Also, canal irrigation was extremely important to cotton cultivation, the principal cash crop of the entire Jiangnan (江南) or Yangzi delta. In Shanghai, the Suzhou River, the Wusong (吳淞) River and the Huangpu River were principal waterways upon which regional transport and daily local commutes depended. Because of the natural environment of well-connected waterways, Shanghai had become a regional trading centre in the Yangzi delta as early as the Song (宋, 960-1279 AD) and Yuan dynasties. The Grand Canal, a man-made waterway, was also important to Shanghai's development as a centre for the collection of tribute grain and transportation of salt and other commodities to the north. Because of the regular nature of the tributary operations, the Canal boosted economic growth and social development in the cities along the Canal between Shanghai and the imperial capital of Beijing, notably Tianjin, Jinan (濟南) and Yangzhou (揚州). A tribute grain mission usually comprised dozens of boats and hundreds of soldiers and labourers, and in certain sections of the Canal, hundreds and thousands of boat pullers. Naturally, other boats and commodities were also allowed to travel via the Canal, and much of the business of the above cities was connected with this waterway. The transportation of tribute grain and salt was an important political assignment involving much communicating back and forth between central provincial officials. Thus, local

officials and gentry-elites looked upon the Grand Canal and its functions more in political than economic terms. But beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, tribute grain began to be transported through another route — via the sea (*haiyun* 海運), first by Chinese junks and later by steamships, thus leading to the economic decline of the inland Canal cities. The exception was Tianjin, which had access to the sea via the river leading to Tanggu (塘沽) Bay and the Bohai Gulf (渤海灣). In sum, in Shanghai the waterways — rivers and canals — represented an integration of the natural and the man-made environments. Together, they shaped the economic and political culture of the city for a long time. But in Hong Kong, there was no complicated network of riverways and canals. What was prominent were the deep water harbours and bays and the open sea, an important factor in commercial development during the age of the steamship. Let us first turn to Shanghai's waters.

Shanghai's Functional Waterways and Waterfronts

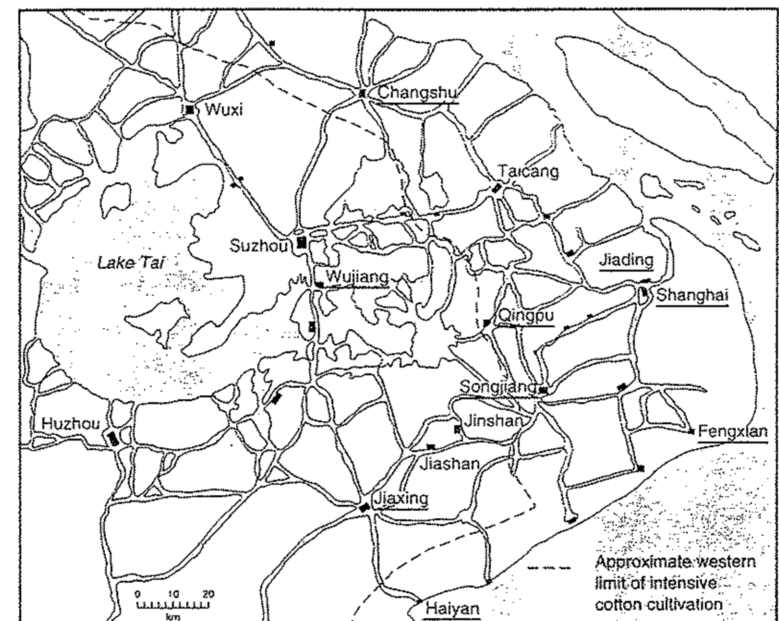
Shanghai's economic progress since the Song-Yuan period, as aptly pointed out by Elvin (1996:101), had been closely connected with the intricate network of waterways that covered the city and its vicinity. The waterways supplied irrigation water for a high-yield agriculture (cotton and silk) and served as the means of communication for a flourishing water-borne commerce. He said, "Carts and even wheelbarrows hardly existed, and for any journey beyond an easy walk the universal form of transport was the boat" (Elvin, 1996:102). Shanghai merchants who "went to other places in search of a sale" were called "water-borne traders" (*shuike* 水客) (Elvin, 1996:109-10).

The Shanghai rivers not only provided transport and business for the local residents, they also connected the city with other market-towns and cities in the larger Jiangnan area — cities in the south like Jiaxing (嘉興), Songjiang (松江), Huzhou (湖州) and Hangzhou (杭州) in Zhejiang (浙江) province; northern cities such as Nanjing, Changshu (常熟), Taicang (太倉) and Jiading (嘉定); and cities in the west of Shanghai like

Qingpu (青浦), Wujiang (吳江), Suzhou and Wuxi (無錫). The mulberry and cotton farmers depended on irrigation water from the canals and rivers, the silk weaving industry and other local handicraft industries depended on water transport; and other local people made their living by fishing, peddling on boats and through businesses related to leisure rides. The waterways were clearly a significant part of the local economy and of city life in Shanghai (see Figures 6 and 7).

The most important change in nineteenth-century Shanghai, however, took place on the waterfront, and not on the networks of rivers. The rapid development along one section of the Huangpu River near the Wusong River that leads to the coast and open sea, the Bund, as this waterfront was called by

Figure 6 The Waterways around Shanghai, circa 1600



Source: Elvin (1996:108).

Figure 7 Shanghai Waterways, circa 1600

Source: Adapted from Elvin (1996:103).

Westerners, is the most remarkable story of modern Shanghai. This section of the Huangpu waterfront was transformed by the arrival of the new ships from the West, the steamships. Long before the advent of the steamship age, Chinese junks of different sizes and shapes had been plying the Wusong River and Huangpu River, and linking the city to inner ones along the Yangzi River and to other coastal cities of China. In other words, the sea route was not new. But the oceanic ships were unlike the traditional Chinese junks. Many of them were huge and heavy (over one or two thousand tons), they were driven by steam engines, and they were fast and sturdy. But most importantly, they came from distant countries such as Britain and the United States and carried new cargoes and commodities such as

machinery, textiles, glass and other industrial goods. The Bund and its adjacent "foreign settlement" soon became a new western city standing along the old Chinese walled city on the south. Along the waterfront, western banks, go-downs, cathedrals and other buildings were constructed, with wharves, piers and "jetties" stretching out into the Huangpu River. The new settlement and its structures signalled a new age of sea transport and increased commercial relations with the western world. The new businesses brought on by the steamship age and the rapid growth of the import-export trade are familiar stories well documented in Kwang-ching Liu's *Anglo-American Steamship Rivalry in China, 1862-1874*, Linda Cooke Johnson's *Shanghai: From Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074-1858*, and other books on Shanghai. Suffice it to say, the Bund was a symbol of this new commercial development and increased maritime trade.

The activities on the Bund, however, were not confined to commerce and business. The waters, to the amazement of many Chinese, meant much more than navigation and transport, or even leisurely boat rides. The Huangpu River represented a changing culture. Water sports of all kinds such as rowing, yachting, swimming and skiing became part of social life in this section of Shanghai, although before the turn of the century, most participants were foreigners. For example, the Shanghai Rowing Club was established in 1860 by foreigners living in the International Settlement.[4] The Club had its own club house, harbour and boat shelter, occupying over one thousand square metres of land near the mouth of the Suzhou River where it joined the Huangpu River. The Club also had a swimming pool, game room and bar — symbols of western culture in the eyes of the local Chinese. The first rowing contest was held in 1863, and the annual contest became a regular event celebrated by Westerners and Chinese alike (Xiong et al., 1997:200, 376). The American team won the "Holland Cup" in a rowing contest in 1866, but the British won it in the following year. It was reported that the 1906 event had attracted tens of thousands of spectators and alarmed the Municipal Council because of the crowds and traffic congestion it caused.

The Centrality of the Harbour in Hong Kong

Shanghai in the nineteenth century was undergoing a transition from river port to international sea port. Many of the traditional lifestyles and economic functions of the waterways remained. The rapid transformation occurred only in certain sections of the Huangpu River, notably the Bund, which showed clearly the impact of foreign trade and maritime culture. But Shanghai was still primarily a river port just like Canton (*Guangzhou* 廣州), although in the late nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, sea port characteristics had gradually become more prominent in Shanghai. On the other hand, Canton never became an international city in the twentieth century. Once the only port in China designated for foreign trade, the city never welcomed foreigners and western culture with the openness of Shanghai. With the exception of the *hong* (行) merchants and the compradors who made great profits from external trade, most officials and commoners in Canton were not particularly enthusiastic about foreign intruders and their culture. In fact, most people were hostile towards Westerners, and this attitude was reflected in a series of anti-foreign riots such as the *Sanyuanli* (三元里) incident and the city-entry dispute (Wakeman, 1966). British Hong Kong, as a new city by the sea after the Opium War, did not have the traditional baggage of riverine culture as had Shanghai and Canton. The local rivers had almost no bearing on the economic and cultural development of the city. From the beginning of its cession to the British in 1842, the development of the island city had been based primarily on maritime trade. The most significant factor affecting trade development, in the age of the steamship, was a deep-water harbour and good port facilities. In this regard, Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour (維多利亞港) was ideal for anchoring big ships of heavy tonnage. The Harbour, located between the Kowloon Peninsula and the north side of Hong Kong Island, could be entered from both its eastern and western ends, and better sheltered from strong monsoon winds than was Lintin (零汀) harbour on the south side of the Island.[5] Moreover,

with its policy of free trade, the British colonial government also contributed to the rapid growth of the city of Victoria (now the areas of Central 中環, Sheung Wan 上環, and Sai Wan 西環). Based on their experience in India and British Southeast Asia, especially in Penang and Singapore, the British knew very well the importance of foreign trade and of ports. Along the bund in the city of Victoria, office buildings of various agency houses, banks, warehouses and godowns were constructed, and on the waters of Victoria Harbour there were steamships, lighters, cargo boats, Chinese junks and various other types of sailing vessels, all for trading purposes. Unlike the ports of Canton and Shanghai where interaction between sea and river regularly occurred, amounting to what can be described as the meeting of two economies and cultures (riverine and oceanic) or the "fusion of two horizons" (to borrow J. Gadamar's phrase), Hong Kong's city development in the nineteenth century clearly shows the dominance of maritime commercial culture — the characteristics of an entrepot port. The western business houses were built along the bund, now Des Voeux Road Central (德輔道中), and many of the early retail business firms such as Lane Crawford (founded in 1850) were related to the shipping business (Kwok, 1983). Most of the Chinese inhabiting this part of the island were also largely engaged in business activities. They were shoppers, hawkers, artisans and craftsmen, many of whom depended on products or customers from the trading ships. The most prominent Chinese business group was known as the "Southern and Northern Firms" (Nam Pak Hong 南北行) who conducted business with other Chinese ports in the north and with Southeast Asian countries. The first group of Southern and Northern Firms was the Yuen Fat Hong (源發行) established by Ko Man-wah at 10 Nam Pak Hong Street (now Bonham Strand West 文咸西街) in the early 1850s. Then came Kin Tye Lung (乾泰隆) in 1851, and in 1868, the Nam Pak Hong Association consisting of more than a dozen firms was established by Fung Ping-shan and other leaders on Bonham Strand West (Fung, 1983:12-13). In other words, both Chinese and Western businessmen who were active in early Hong Kong, particularly

in the Central and Western District, were involved with maritime trade and shipping. It is no exaggeration to say that the dominant "waters" in Hong Kong was the sea or the ocean.

In the early history of Hong Kong, the open seas had commonly been equated with pirate activities such as Zhang Baozai's. Some places in Hong Kong like Stanley (赤柱) were associated with fisheries and not foreign trade. Victoria Harbour, however, projected a new and different image of a busy commercial mart frequented by steamers from all nations: the British P & O liners, the Russells & Co. ships from New York, the iron-clad ships of Butterfield & Swire, and later ships of the China Merchant Steam Navigation Co. (*Zhaoshang Ju* 招商局). *The Hong Kong Guide, 1893* said, "The commerce of the Colony has progressed.... The shipping frequenting the harbour has not been inaptly termed the 'life blood of the Colony.' In the year 1847, the number of ships which arrived in Hong Kong was 694, of 229,465 tons: and of these only 163 imported and 193 exported merchandise into and from the Colony" (p. 44). The *Guide* also showed the increased number of vessels sailing into and out of the harbour in the second half of the nineteenth century (see Table 1).

Decades later, in the early twentieth century, Hong Kong had become one of the busiest international trading ports. In 1907, the vessels registered as having entered and cleared in Hong Kong amounted to 507,634 with a total tonnage of 36,028,310. These ships for foreign trade were listed in Table 2.

According to Tsai's (1993:35) calculation, "During the year 1907 everyday an average of 1,390 large and small vessels of 98,707 tons entered and cleared the Hong Kong port, discounting large numbers of lighters, cargo boats, passenger boats, water boats, and fishing crafts of all kinds. This record exceeded that of any port in the world at the time."

In addition to international trade, the steamship also represented technological change and modernization which, in Chinese eyes was also associated with western culture. Steamships were built and maintained in a shipyard which, in the West, was a symbol of advanced technology and modern

Table 1 Number of Vessels, 1861-1891

Year	Number of vessels cleared	Number of vessels entered
1861	1,259	1,286
1871	34,550	28,635
1881	27,553	27,051
1891	27,157	26,953

Source: Shepherd (1982:45).

Table 2 Number of Vessels for Foreign Trade, 1907

	Number of vessels	Tonnage
British ocean-going ships	3,756	7,216,169
Foreign ocean-going ships	4,621	7,720,875
British river steamers	6,828	4,630,364
Foreign river steamers	1,310	743,992
Steamship under 60 tons	1,581	70,021
Junks	29,564	2,651,470
Total	47,660	23,032,891

Source: Tsai (1993:34).

enterprise, like the dockyards of Liverpool in mid-nineteenth-century Britain. In post-Taiping China during the period of Self-strengthening from the 1860s to the 1890s, the Jiangnan Shipyard (*Jiangnan Zaochuan Ju* 江南造船局) in Shanghai and the Foochow Dockyard (*Mawei Zaochuan Chang* 馬尾造船廠) in Fuzhou (福州) were also looked upon as symbols of modernity and advanced technology. The steamship and modern dockyard were found together in modern port cities such as Hong Kong. Also around the docks were related industries such as machine shops, appliance and hardware stores, engine repairing shops, and

eateries and lodging places for the large number of coolies involved in carrying and in loading and unloading cargo to or from the steamers. A hierarchical seaside community consisting of house merchants and Chinese compradors at the top and dock labourers and coolies at the bottom, emerged with the development and expansion of the wharves, offices and warehouses on the bund and the improvement of port facilities. Everything was directly or indirectly related to shipping and the sea. Thus, Victoria Harbour and its waters played a central role in the development of the city of Hong Kong.

Notes

1. For a brief account of the demolition of the old city wall in Beijing, see Hou ([1988] 1991).
2. There is also a description of the walls and gates in Lui (1990:29-33).
3. For a description of the wall up the hill, see Schofield (1969:155-56). For a recent study of the history of the walled city, see Gao (2001).
4. In Xiong et al. (1997:200), the Club was established in 1864.
5. Shepherd (1982:15) says, "The anchorage of Lintin, is so much exposed... during the southerly monsoon as to render it unsafe for the shipping in the tempestuous weather which sweeps over these seas during the summer months... it was considered desirable to remove the anchorage to the safe and commodious basin or harbour of Hong Kong."

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