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Does Might Make Right?

An Exploration of Policing in the Shanghai French Concession

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Asian Studies

Senior Thesis

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I. Introduction

I would like to start my thesis by giving a short anecdote on how I ended up choosing this subject: France and China both hold a special place in my heart; I am a student of Chinese heritage, but who is interested not only in Asian History, but also in French History. As such, after coming to Vassar, I finally had a chance to explore both my passions, which is why I became an Asian Studies and French major, and the reason I ended up choosing this topic. I wanted to combine my two interests, and so it seemed that the best way to do so was to examine French colonialism in Asia. Originally, I only had Shanghai in mind since that was my grandmother's ancestral home. It was also coincidentally the home to the French Concession, which is notable to Chinese people for being one of the main hubs of foreign influence and the birthplace of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Moreover, I was intrigued by the politics of colonialism since I had never really thought about the complications arising from differing modes of colonial government on the colonized people. However, this did not constitute enough material for a formal analysis because although I wanted to analyze the colonial structures of the aforementioned city, I did not have something else to compare it to. Then at the suggestion of professors in the Asian Studies department, I added an examination of French Indochina to my original plan. This completed plan would then materialize as this thesis. Hopefully, this formal exploration will help bridge the gap between two separate worlds, but also point out the discontinuities borne from historical impositions, both voluntary and involuntary.

French imperialism has always appeared one step behind that of other European powers such as Great Britain or the Netherlands, but it has nonetheless made a considerable impact on Asian history. Ranging from the northern ends of China to the southern tip of the Indochinese

peninsula, France's worldly impact is not be underestimated. For my thesis, I am thus investigating the extent of this often-unilateral relationship, and the means by which the French established and maintained colonial control in Asia, particularly in Shanghai and the area that is modern day Vietnam.

These two locations were arguably the two most important French colonial possessions in Asia, and accordingly have an extended historical relationship with Paris. However, it was not until the 19th century that the French really began pursuing an aggressive expansionist policy in Asia. Consequently, when the French installed themselves in these locales, they assumed responsibility for the indigenous residents who henceforth became French colonial subjects. What then interests me about this forced relationship is the resulting dynamic between the colonizers and the colonized, and the way in which this dynamic is mirrored in the colonizer's mode of governance. As such, to find this connection, I have chosen one aspect of society through which we would be able to understand the functioning of the government: social unrest, or more accurately, the way in which governments dealt with social unrest. Therefore, I intend to analyze the relationship between the colonial government and its subjects through the lens of societal management by the state in these respective areas.

It is also interesting to note, however, that in the history of French Colonization, the French Concession of Shanghai, often seems to be neglected by scholars compared to other French possessions at the turn of the 20th century. As I was doing research, I observed that although a sizeable amount of research has been done on the concession, it pales in comparison to the scholarship on French Indochina. While I cannot speak for the French scholarship done on this subject, some reasons that I believe account for this discrepancy in English language resources include: the United States having had a much larger historical stake in Vietnam than in

China during the 20th century; or, the simultaneous presence of the International Settlement in Shanghai, which was created from the outset by an English speaking country. Nevertheless, I found scholarly literature pertinent to the governance and policing of the French Concession during social unrest, which then became my field of study as mentioned earlier. From what I read, the dominant narrative portrayed the French Concession government as idle and corrupt, having succumbed to the influence of criminal elements, which will be elaborated on further in my thesis. In response to this prevailing narrative, I am arguing the opposite: even though the Concession government and its police force sometimes haphazardly dealt with strikes, they still acted effectively in most instances to stymie the societal chaos brought on by social unrest. As such, the goal of this research is twofold: first, to make contributions in an already under-researched field; and two, to hopefully offer an alternative view of governance that will shed light on new insights.

Lastly, this thesis will be split into the five following chapters: historical background, aiming to provide context for the analysis; literature review, in which I discuss the various sources that I used for the analysis; methodology, which outlines the way in which the analysis will be structured; analysis, a comparative study of the methods of governance in Shanghai and Vietnam by the French colonial government; and finally a conclusion to summarize the findings of this study.

II. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

For my research, I am prioritizing a qualitative analysis over a quantitative one because the resources that I have collected lean towards a more historical, rather than political science bias. In doing so, I have split the subsequent two chapters into two main categories: the creation of a temporal historiography, and a more question driven analysis of one section from this historiography. In order to do both, it is necessary to examine both primary and secondary resources, though in different capacities depending on the category.

Since my inquiries are based first and foremost on a defined historiography, the first task at hand is to use the sources mentioned in previous chapter to construct a historical narrative that will serve as the backdrop for my analysis. However, there are many different types of historiographical approaches that could be taken such as geographical, cultural, or social to name a few. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be assembling a temporal historiography with the goal of creating a chronological account for the French concession's governance, spanning from its conception in the mid 19th century to its retrocession after the Second World War.

Thus, in chronological order, we start the historiography with Johnson and Bergère, who both examine the concession government beginning with its naissance in 1849. Both take a rather holistic approach to the explaining the government's formation. And, even though this holistic approach may seem vague and overly generalized, I believe it actually corresponds to the relatively rudimentary system of governance during this initial stage of development. Following the works of these two authors are Wakeman Jr., Martin, and Bergère once again focusing on the concession government at the peak of its activity. Information extrapolated from the writings' of Wakeman Jr. and Martin are unique in that both authors do not directly examine government activity. Rather,

they look at crime within the concession, the government's reaction to said crimes, and the greater societal implications of this relationship. Consequently, if we deconstruct these analyses, we are able to extract information with governance as the central subject instead of crime.

Finally, Henriot and Bergère provide information on the decline of the concession until its demise to complete the chronology. Unlike the previous secondary sources, these two authors focus mainly on the methods of governance during the final stages of the concession. As a result, because their subject matter is directly related to governance, their research is also directly applicable to the final section of the chronologic historiography.

Afterwards, I will be using primary sources as a way of adding nuances to certain parts of the chronology. The secondary sources mentioned above serve mostly to create a framework with general facts so that a context and continuity can be clearly established; the primary sources will become a way to illustrate more deliberately and concretely key points or moments from the secondary source. All of this will allow me to take an in-depth look at the second section of my historiography, a period covering 1911 through 1937, in the analysis chapter.

III. Historiography and Literature Review

The French Concession in Shanghai could be seen as an anomaly among colonial cities given the overall political organization of Shanghai as a whole, and the concessionary government's penchant for pragmatic tactics to maintain stability in its territory. Even the concession's official establishment in 1847 was quite unorthodox, having been initially created by vice-consul Charles de Montigny without the approval or support of French authorities from continental Europe.¹ A daring man, this consular appointee was so intent on spreading France's imperial mission into China that he refused to live in the International Settlement after arriving in Shanghai due to it being under British rule, preferring instead to singlehandedly negotiate with local Chinese authorities for land that would become the French Concession.² This is only the first of many changes that the concession underwent during its existence. Consequently, it is necessary to first examine viewpoints of preceding scholars in order to better understand how the concession evolved and thus its position within the colonial narrative.

To this end, this chapter will be organized according to a chronological historiography. And, since the rate of government evolution is not equal across all cross-sections of the historiography. The three sections, which I have distinguished below, best represent the uneven distribution of government progression throughout almost a century's worth of time; the first sub-period has the largest span of time since there is not much governmental development during this time, which means that it is not as necessary to divide it in order to better analyze. Then, because the period between 1911 and 1946 is where most of development occurs, I decided that splitting it

¹ John F. Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1954), 80.

² Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism*, 81-82.

in two would allow for a more thorough analysis by being able to focus on smaller segments rather than a large chunk of time.

This chapter will thus have three main sections: *Proto-concession and Its Beginnings*, which will deal mainly with the forebearers of the French concession up to its formal establishment near the turn of the 19th century; *Ascent and Apogee*, which will elaborate on literature concerning the concession government's growth and zenith; and finally, *Final Breaths*, looking at the final acts of the government before it retrocedes the concession back to the Chinese.

Additionally, I would like to put additional emphasis on the characters appearing in the late 1920s to the early 1930s, as they will be the focal point of my analysis in the next section. These characters include: the government of the French Concession, who I will sometimes be referring to using the term "central government" or "municipal government"; the Concession police force; Du Yue Sheng (Tu Yueh-Sing, Tu Yueh-Sen, Tu Yueh-seng, 杜月笙 1888-1951), notorious gangster who would come to prominence during this period for his involvement in politics; the Green Gang (Ching Hung Paung), which was the gang lead by Du Yuesheng; and the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang GMD), the archrival of the CCP and China's ruling political party at the time that was headed by Jiang Jianshi, who would later go on to establish Taiwan. The actions of these actors, especially the first three, will come to define the sociopolitical development of the concession during the aforementioned time period.

Proto-concession and Its Beginnings (1849-1911)

To begin each section, I would first like to explain the potentially strange and arbitrary time interval assigned to it because these intervals, which shorten with each subsequent section, are seemingly inconsistent. This first section will cover literature pertaining to the first 50 years of

the concession ranging from its conception to the Xinhai Revolution since the concession had not yet reached a point developmentally that necessitated a robust government. As such these fifty years of political history would seemingly be equivalent to the twenty years and ten years of political history for the following sections in this chapter.

Linda Cooke Johnson, in her book *Shanghai: From Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074-1858*, sheds light on the development of the French concession in the late 1840s thanks to the help of lasting Catholic influence and a scrappy first consul-general, Charles de Montigny.³ Instead of taking a more opinionated view of the installation of foreign powers in China, Johnson opts for a neutral tone, relating her research as a way to explain rather than argue a certain point. And, not only does she delve solely into the progenitors of the concession, but she also details some conflicts involving the concession, giving the government more character and providing greater context to the motives for why the concession was created.

Like Johnson, Marie-Claire Bergère examines the genesis of the French concession in the beginning chapters in her book. However, one thing to note in *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity* is that she goes beyond this single chronological period and covers the holistic development of Shanghai over almost two centuries.⁴ As such, much of her analysis will be relevant to all three sections of this chapter. I will thus be referring back to her work whenever applicable in the following sections to stay consistent and not omit any critical information throughout the chapter.

Returning to main idea of this section, Bergère similar to Johnson explores the historical context in which the concessions were initially developed by France and Great Britain. Both look

³ Linda C. Johnson, *Shanghai: from Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074-1858*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

⁴ Marie Claire Bergère, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity*, Translated by Janet Lloyd. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

at the birth of the concession from a neutral standpoint, detailing its development from the moment it was established until the creation of the General Inspectorate of Maritime Customs, which could be considered the first major political development concerning the French concession. From this moment on until Xinhai Revolution, there is little mention about political changes in either book, despite their being more mention about important demographic changes, suggesting that the concession went through minimal political development during this period.

Ascent and Apogee (1911-1937)

This section focuses on the literature pertaining to the concession during the height of its development in the early 20th century. Like the previous section, there is not much literature that deals directly with the beginning of this second chronological period; the focus is mainly the concession in the 1920s going forward. However, the government undertakes various enterprises and embroils itself in conflict in this fifteen-year time span, making this the most dynamic phase of the three sections.

From Brian G. Martin's Book, *The Shanghai Green Gang: Politics and Organized Crime, 1919-1937*, it is possible to extrapolate information about the government's method of governance through the lens of how it dealt with crime during this period.⁵ Even though Martin focuses first and foremost on crime rather than governance in his book, nonetheless what he recounts shows that the two are intrinsically linked in the case of the French concession government. There are two chapters in particular that are of particular importance: "The French Connection," and "The Pact with the Devil."

⁵ Brian G. Martin, *The Shanghai Green Gang: Politics and Organized Crime, 1919-1937*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

In the first chapter, Martin examines the how crime developed and flourished in the French Concession during the 1920s. In doing so, he identifies the ways through which the concession government develops an almost symbiotic relationship with crime syndicates, which begins to alter the functioning of the government. Furthermore, his analysis helps to identify major actors in the government during these dubious exchanges such as the chief of the concession police force, Etienne Fiori, and Green Gang Leader, Du Yuesheng.

In his excerpt from an earlier piece titled “Du Yuesheng, the French Concession, and Social Networks” in the anthology *At the Crossroads of Empires*, Martin once again emphasizes the importance of Du Yuesheng in the functioning of the concession government, both in the capacity as a comprador, but also as a quasi-politician himself.⁶ Additionally, he posits that this role of being a middleman between the concession government and the local Chinese people played a significant part in his fall from grace as a powerful political figure living in concession.

Going back to his book, Martin then investigates the growth of the Green Gang and their dealings with the concession government from the late 20s up until the beginning of World War II in the chapter titled “Pact with the Devil.” His analysis here mainly concern’s the maturation and eventual dissipation of the relationship between Du and the concession government; Du’s ambitious conduct could only be tolerated to a certain level before the Paris decided that it was necessary to disassociate the concession government from him once and for all.

This same observation is echoed by Bergère in the middle chapters of her book, also noting that although Du Yuesheng had a promising start as a gang boss in the French concession, the harsher stance of mainland France against corruption in the concession prevented him from fully

⁶ Brian G. Martin, “Du Yuesheng, the French Concession, and Social Networks in Shanghai,” in *At the Crossroads of Empires*, ed. Nara Dillon, Jean C. Oi (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 65-83.

dominating and usurping power from the colonial government. She, also like Martin in “The French Connection,” concludes that Du, through a mix of bribery and political cunningness, managed to oust most of his political enemies, which earned him a place in the concession government living in concession.

Lastly, Frederick Wake Jr. in his book *Policing Shanghai: 1927-1938*, reinforces the aforementioned histories provided by Martin and Bergère in providing a similar narrative that emphasizes the fall of Du Yuesheng due to tightening control exerted by Paris on the concession government.⁷ He also aptly describes the concession government’s overall attitude towards crime perpetrated by Chinese people by quoting a Frenchman saying, “let the ‘natives’ go to degradation and demoralization; their fate is no concern of the French nation.”⁸ Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this apathetic attitude was strongly mirrored by the conduct of the concession government.

Final Breaths (1937-1946)

The final section focuses on literature relevant to the end phase of the French concession beginning with the first signs Japanese aggression in China to the end of World War II. As such, this interval is shortest one mentioned. Nonetheless, it has equal value to those of the previous two sections since we can observe how the concession government attempted to mitigate the fallout from the political upheaval due to a major international crisis.

Christine Cornet, in her article titled “The Bumpy End of the French Concession and French Influence in Shanghai, 1937-1946” from the book *In the Shadows of the Rising Sun*, has for its topic the concession government’s final scramble to deal with Japanese occupation of

⁷ Frederic Wakeman Jr, *Policing Shanghai: 1927-1938*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 14.

⁸ Wakeman Jr, *Policing Shanghai*, 14.

Shanghai.⁹ She notes the complex political interplay between the concession government, the Japanese puppet government in Nanjing, and the Jiang Jieshi's rebellion government located in Chongqing, and studies the political stakes in the retrocession of the French concession after the war; a political shift in this situation is constrained by the legitimacy of the relevant political actors, which translates into functional setbacks when trying to disentangle property and personnel exchanges.

Once again, Bergère strengthens this observation, noting the difficulty with which the French concession government tried to negotiate its way through World War II in order to keep Japanese imperialism at bay. Yet unlike Cornet, Bergère lacks a thoroughness in her analysis in giving a briefer overview rather than focusing specifically on this subject. Though, thoroughness aside, Bergère's account at the very least provides a method by which we can verify the accuracy of Cornet's own analysis.

⁹ Christine Cornet, "The Bumpy End of the French Concession and French Influence in Shanghai, 1937-1946" in *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai under Japanese Occupation*, ed. Christian Henriot., Wen-hsin Yeh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 257-276.

IV. Analysis

Overview:

Historians specializing on this period generally agree that a mutual partnership between the concession government and gang bosses, specifically Du Yuesheng, a leader of the Green Gang, helped the former manage crime and other societal turbulences within the concession. Born to a poor family in a small village, Du joined the Green Gang in his youth and worked his way up the ladder until he became the head gangster.¹⁰ Under his leadership, the gang gained more notoriety for its involvement in such as the opium trade and gambling houses.¹¹ Referring back to Brian G. Martin's book, *The Shanghai Green Gang: Politics and Organized Crime, 1919-1937*, he argues that Du Yuesheng and his criminal connections had a strong influence over the concession government because he acted as an indigenous intermediary between the wholly French government and the concession's disproportionately large Chinese population. Marie-Claire Bergère makes a similar argument in her respective book, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity*, viewing Du Yuesheng having a symbiotic relationship with the municipal council, even if he was generally kept on a tight leash to prevent his influence from spreading over the concession authorities. This perspective that emphasizes a slightly more tenuous relationship is further developed by Fredrick Wake Jr. in his own work *Policing Shanghai: 1927-1938*, which sees Du as an important, albeit controversial and ultimately disposable tool for the Concession government to quell societal turmoil using unofficial methods. Thus, existing literature marks the

¹⁰ Brian G. Martin, "'The Pact with the Devil': The Relationship between the Green Gang and the French Concession Authorities, 1925-1935," in *Shanghai Sojourners*, ed. Frederic Wakeman, Jr., Wen-hsin Yeh (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California: Center for Chinese Studies, 1992), 275.

¹¹ Brian G. Martin, "'The Pact with the Devil': The Relationship between the Green Gang and the French Concession Authorities, 1925-1935," 288-289.

presence of unlawful actors in the realm of policing as being commonplace and accepted at the time.

Despite the prevailing view that criminal elements of the French Concession, especially in regard to gang bosses, had been co-opted by the concession government to combat crime and social unrest, I argue that the government acted mostly independently in these affairs, with Du Yuesheng taking on a secondary role. In order to reach this conclusion, I parsed through almost 100 news articles that dated between the 1910s and the 1940s. Furthermore, I chose these two dates for the start and end dates because they coincided with the moments of time that were right before and right after the period when Du Yuesheng was most active in the concession; in extending the temporal scope of my search, I hope to be able to conduct a more holistic analysis.

Additionally, these newspaper articles came from a variety of publishers including: *The North China Herald* and *Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, *Peking Gazette*, *South China Morning Post*, *China Press*, *New York Times*, *Shanghai Times*, and *The China Critic*. I then decided to focus on investigating cases of social unrest between the 1920s and 1930s, which was a major theme brought up in the secondary sources where policing manifested itself most evidently.

Consequently, the results of this inquiry indicate a contrary conclusion to that of the aforementioned historians: although existing literature points out that the central government and police force were mostly incompetent, having also been compromised by Du Yuesheng, I argue that not only was Du not as influential as previously noted, but that the government and police force functioned relatively competently, even if their roles and objectives were in state of flux during different episodes of social unrest. All of this will be furthered expanded upon in the following sections of this chapter based on the previously established two themes.

Social Unrest

In this section, “social unrest” will be defined as a movement that is intended to legally creates societal disturbances so that the agitators’ needs are met. Most commonly, this takes the form of strikes. In any given society, the way that the government responds can greatly inform us on the functionality of the government. According to secondary sources such as Martin and Wakeman Jr., there seemed to have been a profound influence exerted by non-governmental actors who were co-opted by the government in Shanghai; the government solicited help from gangsters in order to maintain control during turbulent times, such as when strikes occurred. However, as my research will show, this interplay might have been exaggerated since the government always seems to be the primary actor when any societal unrest happens. So, I am arguing that the lack of coverage given to non-governmental forces in local newspapers indicates that at the very least, the central government, to varying degrees of success, acted much more independently from criminal forces than described by the dominant literature. This section will be thus split into the following sub-sections according to theme and chronology: 1928 Tramway Strike, 1930 Tramway Strike, and 1931 Garbage Strike.

1928 Tramway Strike

In December of 1928, a strike unfolded that would prove detrimental to the inhabitants of the French Concession. Starting in early December, the principal strikers were workers from the French Concession Tramway Company (FCTC).¹² At first, it started with only tramway operators. They demanded higher wages and reduced working hours.¹³ However, despite initially agreeing

¹² “French Utilities New Strike: A Thousand Employees Out,” *North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette* (Shanghai, China), Dec. 22, 1928.

¹³ “Traffic Tie Up: Shanghai Tram and Bus Employees Strike,” *South China Morning Post* (Shanghai, China), Dec. 4, 1928.

to these terms, their upper management ended up choosing to renege on their promises.¹⁴ As a result, the strikers resumed their agitations during the later weeks of that same December, joined by fellow workers from adjacent departments that controlled the concession's utilities. It was not until a joint effort between the Guomindang and the BSA that the strikes subsided.¹⁵

Despite the assertions in existing literature that Du played an impactful role in the policing of the concession during this period, coverage from news sources suggests policing played a minimal role in this strike. Overall, of the four articles, only one article explicitly mentions the usage of municipal police to deal with protestors. However, two interesting observations can be made from this: first, there were no mention of any ties to criminal elements on the part of the police. Secondly, the protestors in question were not directly linked to the main tramway workers. Rather, they were students that were suspected of being connected to the CCP. Conversely, it seems that the main actors were the tramway company itself, the local Guomindang branch, offering services as a mediator, and foreign workers who came in to replace the striking local Chinese workers. As such, it appears that the police did not have enough of a tangible impact in these strikes for it to be instrumentalized by Du.

Articles from the *North China Herald* yielded somewhat similar results: government intervention was fairly sparse, and the main actors remained the same as in the first wave of strikes. Even when reporting about the reactions the strike, which naturally would concern the government since the strike disrupted public utilities, there was little mention of a governmental response. There was one response in an article titled "French Utilities New Strike" from December 22nd, which urged upper management to take action:

¹⁴ "French Utilities New Strike: A Thousand Employees Out," Dec. 22, 1928.

¹⁵ Martin, *The Shanghai Green Gang*, 124.

Your employees have gone on strike as a result of their demand for an increase of pay having rejected. We would like to draw your attention the inconvenience cause to thousands of people who make use of the tramway service daily. For the sake of communications in this Concession, we request you to make concession as to bring the [s]trike to an end.’¹⁶

Taking the form of a quote from the Chinese Ratepayers Association, it assumed a tone of indignation, though not for the strikers, but for the citizens affected by the disruptions. While this could be taken as a more sympathetic sentiment, if we take into account the fact that none of the strikers were French tells us that perhaps there was more bias against the Chinese workers in that statement than it let on.

Lastly, Du Yuesheng, the head of the Green Gang, and the Green Gang itself were interestingly mentioned in only two articles published December 29th, albeit in a negative light.¹⁷ One reports that “through the mediation Tu Yueh-sen and the Shanghai District Kumointang[,] the strikers resumed work on December on the understanding that the agreement would be signed on December 15. However, the capitalists failed to do so and... discharged a number of workers.”¹⁸ The other explains that “originally the strike of public utilities... had been aimed to destroy the influence of th[e] notorious [Ching Hung] Paung.”¹⁹ Both sources in tandem suggest that during the first wave of strikes, the workers ended up settling at the behest of Du, not knowing that the FCTC would nonetheless ignore the agreement drafted between the workers and management. Perhaps, it was this betrayal that turned the workers against Du, who belonged to this Paung, which

¹⁶ “French Utilities New Strike: A Thousand Employees Out,” Dec. 22, 1928.

¹⁷ “French Tramway Strike: By Men’s Leaders Favouring Continuance of Struggle: Manifesto Issued by Other Unions,” *North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette* (Shanghai, China), Dec. 29, 1928.

¹⁸ French Tramway Strike: By Men’s Leaders Favouring Continuance of Struggle: Manifesto Issued by Other Unions,” *North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, Dec. 29, 1928.

¹⁹ “A Secret Society of Shanghai: Power of ‘Blue and Red Party’ in French Concession,” *North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette* (Shanghai, China), Dec. 22, 1928.

refers to the Green Gang. As such, the North Herald goes on to elaborate that one reason for the striking other than material grievances was to undo the influence of the Green Gang in the concession. Thus, the strikers' responses put into the question whether or not the Du would have even wanted to act as middleman between the government and strikers, as both parties put him into a precarious position.

1930 Tramway Strike

The tramway strike of 1930 in many ways mirrored the events of the 1928 tramway strike: the primary constituents of the strike were workers from different departments of the French Concession Tramway and Lighting company, and the primary responders were the Shanghai branch of the Guomindang, and more importantly, the French Concession government.²⁰ However, unlike the strike of two years ago, the scale of the 1930 strike was much larger, with over 700 workers on strike, disrupting all major utilities in the concession such as electricity and public transportation. Moreover, the striking was much more violent than in the past, with mere refusals to work escalating into full-blown violent attacks against workers who opted not to strike.²¹ This would last over a month with negotiations between the GMD, concession government, FCTC's upper management, and the strikes themselves. It was not until a final compromise entailing financial compensation for the strikers made between them and the concession government that the tramway strikes finally subsided.²²

²⁰ "French Utiliites Strike," *North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 15, 1930.

²¹ "Shanghai Tram Riot," *South China Morning Post* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 28, 1930.

²² "Street Car Men Get Wages for Strike Period: Tram And Bus Services Are Now Running On Normal Schedule," *The China Press* (Shanghai, China), Aug. 16, 1930.

Even though Du Yuesheng still played a tangible part in the mediation efforts with the strikers, he was nonetheless rarely mentioned in the news articles covering this strike, which seem to further reinforce the idea that he was not the principal actor representing the concession government in this conflict. The August 5th article had this to say about Du, “Meanwhile, Mr. Li Shih-tseng has been busy investigating the situation and is reported to have had a conference with Mr. Tu Yueh-sing, a French Concession councilor, and representative of the strikers.”²³ The August 16th article echoed a similar guiding role in saying that “the payment of the wages during the period of the strike to the workers... was completed...the workers’ union received \$20,000 from the company through Tu Yueh-sung, Chinese councilor of the French municipality.”²⁴ From these two reports, we can thus conclude that it is impossible to say that Du had little to no influence and that the only actors attempting to keep order in the concession were the police; it is clear that the Du still played a somewhat important role in being a sort of intermediary between the central authorities and strikers as Green had noted prior.

However, it is then worth noting that he was not even treated as the primary responder to the strikers in the only articles that mention him: while the previous article treats him as a primary actor towards the strikers, the August 5th article only describes him as a tertiary actor vis-à-vis the Guomindang. This distancing from his prominent initial persona is only magnified by the fact that Du is never again mentioned in any other article other than in the aforementioned two. As such, it would be an overstatement to consider him as the puppet master of the concession police because he is neither referred to as such, nor does he even appear comprehensively enough in these periodicals for such an assertion to be made in the first place.

²³ “New Move Made In Tram Strike: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Orders Negotiations,” *North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette* (Shanghai, China), Aug. 5, 1930.

²⁴ “Street Car Men Get Wages for Strike Period: Tram And Bus Services Are Now Running On Normal Schedule,” Aug. 16, 1930.

Then, in analyzing the role of the concession police during this time of turmoil, we can observe that they played a much greater part in keeping injurious aspects of social unrest to a minimum. Their participation can be summarized into three main points: a prompt response to violence, an increase in their numbers, and the undertaking of specialized operations. Although the protests initially started peacefully, it eventually started to escalate, with the strikers committing both coordinated and uncoordinated acts of violence towards other workers who did not side with them. In response to this, the police mobilized quick quickly. Days after the first acts of violent protests, an article from the 15 of July reports that at an event celebrating Bastille Day, “[a] procession... was led by a police by a police party who had in handcuffs with them four Chinese who had scattered pamphlets on the route of the procession...French police, armed and carrying batons, were [also] conspicuous and mingling among the crowd.”²⁵ Although the morality of the police might be suspect, their actions for establish a precedence, a zero-tolerance policy towards violence. It is evident that the police intentionally wanted visibility to deter future acts of brutality, and perhaps pragmatically chose to take advantage of a national holiday to reinforce security measures.

Besides rapidly mobilizing, the police force also increased the number of its agents on duty to bolster general security, while also tackling premeditated attacks on certain victims. Most notably, an article from July 28th observes that “all police guards on the boundary have been tripled”²⁶ after the police learned of a plan to assault guards protecting the concession boundaries. Some other examples of this reinforcement are noted in a July 29th article, mentioning that “patrols

²⁵ “French Utiiliites Strike,” Jul. 15, 1930.

²⁶ “Shanghai Tram Riot: A Fight in French Concession,” *South China Morning Post* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 15, 1930.

of French and native police, in motor-cars continue, making incessant rounds of the concession,”²⁷ and in a report from August 10th, that “as a result of strike-duty in *Frenchtown*, 14 plain clothes officers and assistants were involved in a traffic accident.”²⁸ Although both testimonies have an unfortunate tone, they nonetheless demonstrate an effort on the part of the police to maintain order and security within the concession using community-oriented measures.

Furthermore, this effort continued in the form of proactive responses to personal requests, as evidenced in a July 22nd report. The day before, a certain sect of strikers had planned to attack a union of non-striking workers. However, thanks to a leak, the Police acted quickly and “were in waiting when shortly before 8 a.m. some 200 strikers appeared... [the police] advanced on the mob... and in a matter of a minute or so had made 25 arrests... three shots were fired into the air by the police, and the crowd promptly dispersed.”²⁹ Then on August 4th, a similar event unfolded with the strikers attempting to target a non-compliant workers home. They went to the wrong address, however, and:

“within a short time, a squad of Chinese and foreign detectives arrived on the scene. A foreign detective approached the car and asked the men for their names and business, but one of them produced a pistol and fired point-blank at the detective. The bullet went over the detective’s shoulder. An exchange of shots followed. Two of the men were arrested, but the other four escaped. One was recognized as a prominent labor agitator.”³⁰

²⁷ “French Concession Trouble: Strikers Attempting to Force Chinese Official Mediation,” *North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 29, 1930.

²⁸ “Street Car Tie Up In French Town Shows No Change,” *North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 15, 1930.

²⁹ “Tramway Men Abducted: French Company Strikers Try Intimidation,” *North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 22, 1930.

³⁰ “New Move Made In Tram Strike: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Orders Negotiations,” Aug. 5, 1930.

There is thus little doubt that the police acted in a swift manner that ensured the safety of their caller. And even though they did not apprehend all suspects in each of the situations, they still achieved their primary goal of protecting the innocent's life and bringing to justice those that they could apprehend.

Despite all these positives, we still have to keep in mind the colonial aspect of this type of law enforcement; the police, who represented French colonizing interests, were maintaining peace at the detriment of workers, who were mostly Chinese. Fortunately for the strikers, the concession police's actions in Shanghai were not nearly as ruthless as the methods employed by the police in France's other major colony, Vietnam, which will be explored in the last chapter. So not only did the police respond effectively to community level threats, but they also act efficiently to resolve conflicts on a personal level. This level of coverage and subsequent evidence of societal participation in contrast to the infrequent mention of Du thus lends more credence to the police's legitimacy and effectiveness as an actor working independently from the crime lord.

Inversely, despite the central concession government becoming increasingly important as the strikes progressed, unlike the police force, it never effected tangible resolutions to the issue. To start, the police being an extension of the central government, and the fact that the strikes frequently called upon government intervention makes the latter worth analyzing as a major actor too. The *China Press* announces in a July 29th article that "negotiations between the French consul-general and delegates from the municipality of greater Shanghai were conducted... though the prospect of an early settlement seems in sight...the parties... [have] arrived at nothing definite to date."³¹ While this seems to give a positive first impression of the government, in hindsight it would not facilitate an outcome conducive to ending the strikes. Instead, this meeting would be

³¹ "Few Street Cars, Police Guarded, Run in F'town: French Consul-General Conducts Negotiations with Chinese," *North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 29, 1930.

the first of many conferences between French officials and GMD officials, which would take place all throughout late July and early August: a following meeting was then declared in an August 5th article, with “the Ministry of Foreign Affairs propos[ing] to instruct the municipality of Greater Shanghai to open negotiations with the French Consul at Shanghai, and if nothing is achieved the Ministry will then communicate with M. Wilden, the French Minister.”³² The need for this second meeting evidently indicates that the first round of negotiations was not effective, and that the central concession government had to potentially expend more resources to continue mediation.

This deadlock would continue, as a few days later, on August 7th, the *China Press* notes that “representatives from the strikers...asked [the manager] whether he would agree to direct negotiations between them. This was refused as conferences on the affair are being held between the French and Kuomintang officials.”³³ Ironically, by finally intervening indirectly through the GMD rather than having the strikers and company directly negotiate, the concession government missed an effective opportunity for a quick mediation. And even towards the final days of the strike, it was reported on August 9th that “despite the agreement which has been reached by the Chinese authorities and the French Consul-General in connection with the tramway strike in the concession, it appears evident that the workers have no intention of submitting to these terms.”³⁴ It was not until municipal council directly compromised with the financial demands of the strikers that the strike ended. As such, the concession government blundered in its attempts to resolve the strike, deferring final action to third parties, which ended up contributing to the continued insubordination of the strikers.

³² “New Move Made In Tram Strike: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Orders Negotiations,” Aug. 5, 1930.

³³ “French Tramways Manager Refuses Direct Meeting: Local Kuomintang man Resigns From Post; New Head Elected,” *The China Press* (Shanghai, China) Aug. 7, 1930.

³⁴ “French Tramway Strikers Reject Official Terms: Concession Street Car Tie Up Is Likely To Continue,” *The China Press* (Shanghai, China) Aug. 9, 1930.

1931 Garbage Strike

The Garbage workers strike, although less intense than the two previous major strikes, was still an important that further illustrated the dominant role that the central government played in mediating strike. In early July of 1931, due to supposed unfair treatment and unsatisfactory wages, garbage workers employed by the French municipal council declared a mass strike.³⁵ There were also claims that there was some undue influence from a third-party, namely the CCP, which helped trigger the strikes.³⁶ Subsequently, the number of workers going on strike in solidarity increased to over 2000 within a few days, which included other types of government workers inspired by the initial protests of the garbage coolies.³⁷ They concluded that no work would be resumed unless the garbage workers obtained the wage increase that were asking for. What then intensified the stakes even more was the serious sanitary problems as result of the garbage disposal service halting for almost week. Finally, after almost a week of striking the concession municipal council agreed to increase the wages of the workers by 11%, which effectively ended the strike.³⁸

Interestingly, Du was also not explicitly mentioned in any of the articles except for in one from late in the strike, which seems to contrast with the existing literature asserting that he was major player that manipulated the government to his own ends. The *China Press* reported on July 8th that “Mr. Doo Yah-sen, chairman of the Chinese Ratepayers Association... yesterday requested that the striking workers send representatives to talk...with him so that...he will be able to negotiate

³⁵ “Garbage Men Of Concession Go On Strike: Better Working Hours and Conditions Demanded,” *The China Press* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 3 1931.

³⁶ “2,000 Employees Of French Council Walk Out On Strike: Heavy Guards of Frenchtown Police Thrown Around Tram and Omnibus Depots To Prevent Display Of Violence: Workers Demanding Higher Wages,” Jul. 5, 1931.

³⁷ “2,000 Employees Of French Council Walk Out On Strike: Heavy Guards of Frenchtown Police Thrown Around Tram and Omnibus Depots To Prevent Display Of Violence: Workers Demanding Higher Wages,” *The China Press* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 5, 1931.

³⁸ “Shanghai Strike: Garbage Coolies to Get 11 Per Cent More,” *The South China Morning Post* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 11, 1930.

with the French Municipal Council.”³⁹ Again, it is impossible to deny that Du Yuesheng had zero affiliation with the concession government as illustrated by this excerpt. However, there were no prior articles that give context or establish his place within the timeline of mediation. Moreover, there were no articles published afterwards that detailed the consequences of this interaction, or more importantly, whether or not this invitation had any influence on the eventual settlement reached between the strikers and the municipal government. So, even though Du did play a role in helping to mediate, it is actually not immediately clear whether or not the role was substantial and as representative of the central government as Green claimed.

Conversely, while the police also played a more minor role compared to the previous two strikes, they were still acted prudently in face of the mounting unrest. At the start of the strikes, the *China Press* once again reported that “French police are standing by and exerting every vigilance in the control of law and order... Detachments of the French police were at once called out to cope with the situation. Heavy guards were placed at the tram and omnibus depots.”⁴⁰ Perhaps by this time, the concession was already so used to having this level of social unrest that the police already knew what had to be done in order to put into place pre-emptive security measures. Either way, the police’s quick reaction and organized effort to maintain order on the eve of this strike demonstrates their effectiveness in responding to the disturbances created by the strike. Consequently, the police, by acting swiftly and preventatively in face of a potential crisis given preceding incidents, fulfilled their basic duty of working to protect innocent bystanders.

In contrast to both Du and the police force, the municipal council played a more active role as both the object of the strike and the party to eventually resolve it, having taken action

³⁹ “Frenchtown Free of Garbage: Strike Demands May Hike Rates,” *The China Press* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 8, 1930.

⁴⁰ “2,000 Employees Of French Council Walk Out On Strike: Heavy Guards of Frenchtown Police Thrown Around Tram and Omnibus Depots To Prevent Display Of Violence: Workers Demanding Higher Wages,” Jul. 5, 1931.

immediately after the strike began rather than delaying a response like in previous strikes. As mentioned earlier, it was the garbage workers employed by the municipal council that went on strike against the latter as result of perceived unfair treatment on behalf of the upper management.

Yet, despite the unfavorable working conditions created by the council, I would argue that they also reacted and worked quickly to solve the ensuing strike. The *China Press* noted in an article from July 8th that “striking garbage collectors and street sweepers of the French Concession last night had practically erased traces of a six-day accumulation of refuse from the streets...to fulfill a promise made at a meeting Monday afternoon to keep the Concession area in a...sanitary condition pending the outcome of negotiations for settlement.”⁴¹ While one can highlight the benevolence of the garbage workers in choosing to continue to work through the pending period of the agreement, the fact that the central authorities reacted so quickly is equally as notable; the workers were respecting the terms from a meeting that took place on July 6th, only a few days after the first reports of the strike. Simultaneously, it should be noted that “the efforts of the French to get the strikers back to work were joined by the Chinese Rate Payers Association,”⁴² according to another *China Press* article from July 6th. While this might seem to contradict the argument that Du had less influence than secondary sources indicate since this association was essentially run by Du, I would argue back that the actor that initiated the negotiations in the first place was the central government itself. And ultimately, the one to make the final decision to end the strike would also be the same actor. Therefore, while Du and the police force played a more facilitative role to help ease the immediate consequences of the strikes, the deciding actor was the municipal government, which responded quickly and judiciously to the strikers to demands.

⁴¹ “Frenchtown Free of Garbage: Strike Demands May Hike Rates,” Jul. 8, 1930.

⁴² “Garbage Piles Up In Concession As Walkout Continues: Exhortations Fail To Bring 2,500 Chinese Employees of French Municipal Council Back to Work; Disinfectants To Be Sprayed In Streets,” *The China Press* (Shanghai, China), Jul. 8, 1930.

V. Conclusion

By examining three major strikes during the period of Du Yuesheng's rise to notoriety, it becomes clear that the government actually was not as inept as secondary sources claim it to be despite some initial setbacks. In 1928 Tramway Strike, there was very little mention that the Concession government was infiltrated by Du, indicating there was a greater agency on the part of the municipal council. However, even in having more agency, neither the government nor the police force did much to quell the societal furor stemming from the strike.

This sluggish attitude would change during 1930 Tramway Strike as the concession police had a much larger role in keeping order despite disruptions caused by the striking workers. The government also attempted to effect positive change by helping to negotiate a settlement between workers and the Tramway Company, even if its efforts ultimately did not expedite the mediation process. Du's role remained mostly the same as before, however, having continued to play an auxiliary role when compared to the concession government and police.

Then during the 1931 Garbage Strike, the government and police switched roles compared to the previous strike: while both were active in mediation efforts, it was the municipal council that took the lead in finding a settlement with the strikers. Yet, the scarce mentions of Du suggest that even though he was part of the strike negotiations, his influence over the government's decision making would have been fairly minimal.

These conclusions will hopefully expand the breadth of literature available on the topic of governance in the French Concession and provide a challenge to the dominant narrative. Returning to Brian G. Martin's book, *The Shanghai Green Gang: Politics and Organized Crime, 1919-1937*, as a point of reference, Du's influence in and over the concession government seems to be overstated. While Du was certainly a character that was present on behalf of the government in

many cases of social unrest, his actions, or really lack thereof, attest to a significant rift between these two actors. Instead, the primary actors who dealt with societal instability in the concession were the municipal council and police force, both of whom became increasingly active as evidenced above. So, while there was an undeniable connection between the government and Du, it appears to mostly be circumstantial, rarely effecting any sort of significant change on either party's side.

French Colonialism in Asia: A Case-Study

However, something that cannot be overlooked about the French policing in Shanghai is its colonial aspect given the extra-territorial nature of the French Concession itself. To illustrate this point, I will also be comparing these two strikes to rubber strikes in Vietnam during French occupation. I chose French Indochina as the point of comparison because it arguably most closely resembles the French Concession in terms of politics, both being French colonies in Asia during the same time period. Yet, in many other ways, Indochina serves as a perfect foil to the French Concession, especially in terms of policing policy as will be analyzed below.

I would then argue that although the concession police did show signs of using their judicial power to affirm the status quo, the desire to maintain colonial supremacy over Chinese citizens was secondary to the societal stakes of social unrest. To begin with, the very existence of a police force in an extraterritorial zone could be seen as an exertion of colonial power over native people who had existed in that area first. The French Concession police force as no exception to that given the fact that by the 1920s and 1930s, the Chinese population far outnumbered the French population. And yet, the police seemingly had a disproportionate amount of power to both represent the minority, but also conversely punish the majority. Thus, the intervention of the police

on behalf of the minority of French people living in the concession to stymie the effects of protests by native Chinese people gives the impression of continually affirming a colonial hierarchy.

However, one must also take into account how they intervened, and what that might inform us about their intent to purposefully uphold a seemingly repressive status quo. In the previously analyzed strikes, rarely did the police act pre-emptively in such a way to prevent the protestors from even protesting in the first place; the police's initiatives were reactions, violence that had already occurred as a result of the protest. And when the police did act pre-emptively, it was never as a response to the initial strike itself to prevent the workers from striking, but rather as a method of containing violence that was a consequence of the strikes' escalating intensity, such as coordinated violence during the 1928 tramway strikes. Additionally, the services that were incapacitated by the strikes, garbage collecting in 1931 for example, were vital ones that had a direct impact on the functioning on the concession due to their addressing the basic life necessities. As such, these strikes needed to be immediately dealt, or else the whole concession would grind to halt without any usable public infrastructure. Therefore, even if the further subjugation of Chinese workers might have yielded the police, and by extension the administration, less opposition, this would have only mattered if there was a relatively stable colonial structure to begin with. However, these strikes threatening the very fabric of the concession's actual existence, and the government only targeting violence rather than suppressing strikes altogether, suggest that the police did not subscribe to a colonial policy near as much as their political position would lead us to believe.

In contrast, the rubber strikes in French occupied Vietnam during the 1930s exemplify a French colonial government that implemented a wholly colonialist policy, using the police as a tool to suppress of any form dissidence. These strikes arose for a myriad of reasons: from a

sociopolitical perspective, the rise of an anti-colonialist sentiment, in large part thanks to the indoctrination of Vietnamese communists agitating for independence; economically, the maltreatment of workers by large corporations; and politically, continual persecution by the government in the name of public safety.⁴³

From these three main reasons, we can also draw many parallels with the situation in Shanghai that would help explain the comparison: similar to the Vietnamese strikes, the French Concession strikes contained communist influences that were also used to politicize and sometimes demonize the issue, even if the relationship was not one hundred percent direct. Moreover, during the rubber strikes, there were three main actors: the striking coolies, upper management of Michelin owned plant, and the colonial government, just as there were striking laborers, Du Yuesheng, and the concession authorities in Shanghai. Interestingly, Du Yuesheng and the Michelin brothers, the owners of the Michelin plant, happened to play a similar role in their respective conflicts as a sort of wild card that was inextricably linked to the both the forces of law and rebellion, yet sided with neither unless there was something to be gained. Finally, it is evident that economically, workers from both countries had similar grievances. So, in many ways, this case-study is an example of what the French Concession police and government could have been had they taken a more repressive and iron-fisted approach to governing.

That being said, an example of this more authoritarian strategy was when “fourteen Vietnamese identified as ringleaders of the February strikes were convicted, not on the basis of witness testimony, by *Sûreté* political intelligence reports... Their sentences, ranging from six months to five year’s imprisonment.”⁴⁴ These convictions took place after the first wave of protests

⁴³ Thomas Martin, “Rubber, coolies, and communists: Policing disorder in French Vietnam,” in *Violence and colonial order: police, workers and protest in the European colonial empires, 1918-1940* (England: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 141-149.

⁴⁴ Martin, “Rubber, coolies, and communists: Policing disorder in French Vietnam,” 154.

from Michelin's Phu-Riêng rubber plantation, and the first thing to note is the presumption of innocence in this trial; the government unilaterally decided that these protestors were guilty of a crime. Furthermore, what they were accused of was not even violence, but the mere act of protesting, exemplifying the brutal methods of the French police in Vietnam.

These oppressive tactics only intensified over the course of the year, as “on [May 5,] police shootings killed sixteen Vietnamese and wounded fifteen more during operations conducted in Thanh-Chuong, also in Nghệ An. Annam's Governor Aristide Le Fol and his police chief in Hue... congratulated themselves that ‘forceful’ police crowd control during May Day protests stopped the government's opponents in their tracks.”⁴⁵ The flagrant disregard for basic democratic liberties by a country that prides itself on being a bastion of progressiveness is ironic in this regard. In this excerpt, the repressive tactics of the colonial police are on full display, having escalated over only a few months. The condescending tone used by the governor and police chief then serves to reinforce the idea that there is a hierarchy that separates the French and the Vietnamese, that there is a moral right and wrong; so, what the colonial government is doing is in the right, even if it is at the cost of the lives of other people. Consequently, the French colonial government of Vietnam was a much more definitive example of using a colonial policy to exact absolute obedience from their colonial subjects, in contrast to the concession government, whose primary goal was to maintain the welfare of the concession in and of itself.

Final Remarks

Contrary to what existing literature has described, Du Yuesheng did not have a direct, managerial role within the French Concession police and government. Instead, Du played a

⁴⁵ Martin, “Rubber, coolies, and communists: Policing disorder in French Vietnam,” 157.

facilitating role while the government and police acted mostly independently, even if both did not always successfully achieve their goals. Additionally, while the central concession authorities inevitably fell into a colonial categorization, they were not actually nearly as devoted to this process as their actions would suggest, especially when compared to somewhat similar instances of social unrest in French Indochina.

In conjunction with my topic, another topic that might warrant further research would be the development and growth of the communism in concession, and how this would have played a role in the everyday lives of the concession's inhabitants. As mentioned previously, the new sources have often reported that there had been communist elements linked to the strikes and other types of social unrest, but the relationship is never completely clear. To be sure, there were definitely communist agitators who incited some sort of action, however, the main query would be to what extent did communist agitators have a role in the evolution of crime in the concession.

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