For twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers around the world, “Shanghai” is a name with real power, denoting the quintessence of modernity in East Asia, whether conceived of as glamorous and exciting, as corrupt and impoverishing, or as a complex synthesis of the good, the bad, and the ugly. How did the name Shanghai acquire this power? How did adventurers, refugees, and businessmen and women from across China and around the world know that Shanghai was the place they wanted to go? How did they learn what to expect when they arrived and how to become “Shanghai people” (Szahaenin)? I suggest that the answers to these questions can be found in part in the products of the Shanghai culture industry: the guidebooks, newspapers, novels, illustration collections, and films that portrayed Shanghai as a uniquely prosperous, fascinating, and dangerous city. These printed texts and images were among the city’s most important industrial products from the second half of the nineteenth century into the first half of the twentieth; they made substantial profits for Shanghai publishers and film studios, advertised the city as a desirable destination wherever they were sold, and finally, conditioned the experiences of both visitors and residents through their specific visions of the city. It is this cultural production—in Chinese, Japanese, and a variety of European languages—that makes it possible for travelers from all over to arrive in the city with some variation of the words “So this is Shanghai!” on their lips, words that indicate not discovery but rather recognition.¹

For readers of Shanghai fiction in particular, this recognition goes beyond the easily visible—the Bund skyline, the crowded streets and alleys, and the extremes of wealth and poverty—to encompass the subtler aesthetic forms through which Shanghai cultural production and social practice are organized. Four of these forms, which may be referred to more precisely as narrative tropes, stand out: (1) simultaneity: different things happening at the same time; (2) interruption: breaks in continuity; (3) mediation: a position between two sides that defines those sides as internally coherent and mutually exclusive en-
ties; and (4) excess: the drive to expand without limit and consume without end. These forms give shape and meaning to the sensory and emotional overload—the bewildering array of sights, sounds, hopes, desires, and fears—that confronts individuals who come face-to-face with the city; they allow these individuals to impose a comprehensible and compelling order on that overload and convert a chaotic set of impressions into a coherent understanding of “what Shanghai is.” In so doing, these forms constitute a conceptual foundation on which Shanghai’s “social reality” is built, construct a frame through which the city can be perceived, and supply a template for the reader’s own experiences there.

This book investigates the literary and visual dimensions of these four narrative tropes, as well as their social and material effects, with particular attention to the master genre in which they take concrete form—installment fiction set in Shanghai from the 1890s to the 1930s (haishang xiaoshuo). In its narrative form (the way in which it tells its stories) and its mode of presentation (publication in regular installments), this serialized fiction provides both visitors and residents with a sense of what Shanghai is, and further, an imagination of how the city works and what it expects of individuals who find themselves there. This book aims to show how Shanghai fiction supplies not only the imagery that we now consider typical of the city, but more significantly, the very form through which the city could be experienced as a business and entertainment center, and imagined as the focal point of a mediasphere with national and transnational reach.

In addition, it will demonstrate the effects that the development of a Shanghai aesthetic—epitomized in installment fiction—has in the broader realm of twentieth-century Chinese cultural history, from the specific (inspiring the transformation of tabloid newspaper journalism at the beginning of the century) to the general (laying the temporal groundwork for the massive nostalgia industry that develops toward the century’s end). Finally, this book suggests ways the tropes of simultaneity, interruption, mediation, and excess, among others, set the terms on which Shanghai is even now returning to cultural preeminence and transnational significance.

Shanghai’s role as site and inspiration for transnational literary and cultural production is well known. Works as varied as Yokomitsu Riichi’s modernist installment fiction, Shanghai (1928–1929), von Sternberg’s film Shanghai Express (1932), and Malraux’s novel La condition humaine (1933) have for years been the subject of intense scholarly inquiry and debate. More recently, Shanghai modernist fiction in Chinese from the 1930s and ’40s has attracted a great deal
of attention, as have turn-of-the-century guidebooks to the courtesan quar-
ters. Shanghai fiction in Chinese from the 1890s through the 1920s, by con-
trast, has received significantly less attention, most of it focused on Haishang
hua liezhuan (Lives of Shanghai flowers), which began publication in install-
ments in 1892, and appeared in a volume edition in 1894.

But Lives of Shanghai Flowers was merely the starting point; installment
fiction set in Shanghai took off in the mid-1890s and quickly became popu-
lar with contemporary readers. By the 1910s, these novels were understood by
some authors to constitute a distinct type of long vernacular fiction: haishang
xiaoshuo (Shanghai novels), characterized by obsessive attention to the contem-
porary, precision and accuracy in details of place and time, and a tightly woven
and complex narrative structure that challenges conventional understandings
of plot and storyline. These novels established Shanghai as the standard for
urban sophistication against which other cities would be judged and inspired
imitations set in locations across China. Their influence is also clear in the bet-
ter-known “traveling fiction” of the early twentieth century; just as Edo serves
as the constant reference point that travelers in Shank’s Mare cannot avoid talk-
ing about no matter where they travel in Japan, knowledge of Shanghai and its
fiction is taken for granted in novels like Ershi nian mudu zhi guai xianzhuang
Strange happenings eyewitnessed over two decades, 1903–1910) and Jiuwei gui
(The nine-tailed turtle, 1906–1910). Even the hectic international peregrina-
tions of the various characters in the best-selling Niehai hua (Flower in a sea of
sin, 1903–1907, 1916) result in part from the author Zeng Pu’s sense that it was
necessary to go beyond the territory detailed so thoroughly in early Shanghai
fiction. As I argue in detail in the sixth chapter of this book, Shanghai novels
published in installments in the late Qing and Republican era provided a nec-
essary, though unacknowledged, grounding in form and content for the realist
writer Mao Dun (who referred to Lives of Shanghai Flowers as a masterpiece of
the “literary heritage”) as well as for 1930s modernists such as Liu Na’ou, Mu
Shiying, and Shi Zhecun.

Shanghai novels continued to fascinate readers throughout the twenti-
eth century, many of whom saw them almost as archaeological relics. In the
late 1950s Hsia Tsi-an found several volumes in a hardware store in Seattle’s
Chinatown:

They were wrapped up in paper, identified by titles written on with a brush,
and stacked horizontally on the shelves. I wonder for how many years they
had been left untouched—they were all covered with dust. The sight of these
books makes me feel as if Chinese history stopped right there. I bought
[Xiepu chao (The Huangpu tides), 1916–1921; Haishang fanhua meng
He began to read these novels, continued with *Lives of Shanghai Flowers*, and soon wrote to his brother that he had become interested in writing a study on “those Shanghai novels.”

Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing), who began her own writing career in the 1940s, read Shanghai fiction as a child and singled out *Lives of Shanghai Flowers* and *The Huangpu Tides* for special mention as two of her favorite eight works of Chinese fiction, past and present. In the late 1970s she published a Mandarin translation of *Lives of Shanghai Flowers*, also in installments, and subsequently began work on an English translation, a revised version of which recently appeared in print. Over the last two decades, late Qing and Republican-era Shanghai fiction has also served as inspiration for a wide variety of influential works, including Shanghai-centered short stories and essays by Wang Anyi, fiction set in Kuala Lumpur by the Malaysian Chinese writer Li Tianbao, and a cinematic experiment by the Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien (*Haishang hua*—Flowers of Shanghai, 1998).

This book begins with a question about the aesthetics of Shanghai installment fiction: how might the formal characteristics of Shanghai narrative give shape and coherence to Shanghai residents and visitors’ sensory and emotional experiences of the city? Questions of form, however, cannot be limited to a realm of “pure aesthetics” that is separated from the social and material. They demand to be considered in conjunction with economic development, technological change, and political contestation for their full significance to reveal itself. What follows in this introduction is an outline of the theoretical grounds on which this book is based: the reasons why I believe formal and material concerns to be inextricably interrelated in the study of Shanghai installment fiction, how I understand these concerns to be related, and what specific types of connections between the aesthetic and the social this book will emphasize.

First, we address the question of cultural production, or the constitutive dimension of literary texts and illustrations. How could Shanghai fiction work to “construct” the city instead of merely reflecting it? How might the effects it had on its audiences take on a broader social importance? Second, this introduction demonstrates the significant implications of reading Shanghai fiction as a genre in its social and intellectual context, rather than as a succession of unconnected works. Third, by appropriating and redefining the concept of the
“mediasphere,” this introduction provides a theoretical basis for expressing the relationship between the formal and material qualities of Shanghai installment fiction on the one hand, and Shanghai’s rapid rise to prominence as a national media center on the other. Finally, I locate this book in the broader context of Shanghai cultural history, explaining the differences in emphasis between my approach and existing paradigms in the field. The introduction concludes with a chronological account of the development of Shanghai fiction as a genre and an overview of the book as a whole.

**Cultural Production**

Until recently, scholars of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chinese literature have tended to isolate literary texts as a particular category and understand them in one of three related ways: as reflections (of historical reality or individual experience), as expressions (of individual thoughts and feelings or universal artistic truths), or as symptoms (of the dilemmas of westernization, the contradictions of modernization, or the semicolonial predicament). In each of these cases, the literary text functions as a discrete object that is secondary to or derivative of the originary matrix or historical process against which it is defined, providing a concrete example of the kind of distinction between social “base” and cultural “superstructure” that Raymond Williams criticizes for its failure to grasp the significance of culture as a “constitutive social process.”

Indeed, according to Liang Qichao, one of the most famous theorists of fiction writing in Chinese in the twentieth century, there is another way of understanding literary texts: as fundamentally generative, producing effects on their reading public and society as a whole that should not be underestimated.

Where did we Chinese people get the idea of holding scholars who took first place in the civil service examinations and prime ministers in high esteem? From fiction (xiaoshuo). Where did our ideal of the talented scholar and the beauty come from? From fiction. Where did our thoughts of Robin Hood types and brigands come from? From fiction... Has it ever been the case that these ideas were transmitted formally, like the master handing over the alms bowl to the disciple? And yet, from the butchers, cooks, peddlers, and messengers, old ladies, young girls, and boys, all the way up to those in the upper classes, those with talent and learning, every one holds at least one of these ideas dear... This is because there are over a hundred works of fiction that have poisoned them directly or indirectly; it’s that serious.
Liang argues that fiction has the power to transform its readers and their attitudes fundamentally; he goes on to explain that even those members of society who do not read fiction are infected by it indirectly because the attitudes it produces are contagious. Liang’s polemical assertions of the central significance of fiction are clearly a response to a specific set of historical circumstances and reveal an obsession with national reconstruction through literature that we may no longer share. But if we broaden the scope of these assertions to include other kinds of texts in addition to fiction, and allow that texts are not the sole agents of cultural production, but share the stage with many other factors, Liang’s claims begin to remind us not only of certain Marxist reconsiderations of the distinction between base and superstructure, but also of more recent theories of the rise of nationalism.

Though he is writing eight decades after Liang Qichao, Benedict Anderson is also concerned with the question of nation formation—how is it that a national consciousness can be brought into being in a certain group of people? Anderson’s answer, in part, is that the “imagined community” that is the nation depends on a new sense of simultaneity generated in the novel and the newspaper: “. . . these forms provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation.”14 The nation is not the only kind of “imagined community” possible. As Perry Link, Leo Lee, and Andrew Nathan first proposed more than two decades ago, and as numerous scholars have emphasized more recently, there is no aspect of cultural production in the late Qing and early Republican period that can compete with fiction and print journalism in forming communities of consumers, and it is no accident that profiles of the xiao shimin (“petty urbanite”) class—whether in Shanghai or elsewhere in China—return so often to their reading habits as a central defining characteristic.15 Literary address is clearly a powerful means of writing a variety of communities into existence.

How exactly does cultural practice constitute social reality? How is it that we can speak of literary texts as producing specific social effects? As a heuristic device, it may be helpful to provisionally articulate three aspects of Shanghai installment fiction having three different—though ultimately related—effects on the metropolis and the reading public as a whole: (1) the text as mere object (produced in a factory, providing a return on someone’s capital, paying someone else’s wages, and creating a market for the machinery required to produce it); (2) the text as advertisement for the city (encouraging visitors from elsewhere in China); and finally, (3) the text as a narrative force that through its aesthetic characteristics structures the reader’s experience of Shanghai as a city.
Shanghai’s development as an industrial and commercial center in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was due not only to international trade and the establishment of textile factories, but also in significant measure to the publishing and leisure industries. At the turn of the century, books and periodicals were among the most important industrial products that Shanghai had to offer—as had been the case in nineteenth-century New York—commanding an impressive share of foreign investment. Christopher Reed estimates that approximately three hundred publishers and bookstores appeared in the Henan Road / Fuzhou Road area alone in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; this publishing boom in turn created a new industrial niche, print machine shops, that would soon become one of the leading sectors of the Chinese domestic machine manufacturing industry, with a twenty-fold expansion between 1912 and 1932. Even before we begin to consider Shanghai novels as participants in a symbolic economy, we must admit that as mere objects—stacks of printed sheets stitched between bindings, assembled in publishing houses equipped with domestically manufactured printing presses, and sold in stores—the novels were already an important element in Shanghai’s economic development. I will pursue this discussion in detail in chapter 4.

Of course, people weren’t buying fiction just to stack on a table as ornament or display on a bookshelf as a way to seem cultured. Books of fiction were purchased or rented to be read; novels set in Shanghai functioned as attractive presentations of an urban life of leisure. Shanghai fiction taught its readers to desire an “experience” that those readers had no idea they were missing and made the point that this object of desire could be obtained in a specific place—the city of Shanghai. Like newspapers and guidebooks, novels could explain Shanghai customs and practices to the reader, and typically included the names of the major streets and small alleys, fancy restaurants and lively teahouses, theaters and public parks that constitute one aspect of the urban “grid of reference” discussed in chapter 2.

The third aspect of these novels consists in their ability to organize the presentation of this kind of information in accordance with a particular kind of narrative aesthetic: in explaining to their readers what Shanghai was like, installment fiction in fact conditioned the experience their readers would have of the city—not only readers from elsewhere, but even those readers who had lived in Shanghai for years. Installment fiction helped shape readers’ understanding of Shanghai by identifying certain phenomena as worthy of their attention, but also, and more significantly, by providing a concrete narrative logic and a specific aesthetic agenda according to which those phenomena could be put into a compelling and meaningful order.

As Gail Hershatter and Catherine Yeh have shown, turn-of-the-century
Shanghai newspapers and guidebooks did much to explain the city directly, addressing the reader in straightforward fashion.\textsuperscript{18} Fiction did this as well, but it could also present the city in more subtle and contagious ways. In novels set in Shanghai, the narrator does occasionally speak directly to the reader about what it means to be there, but the strongest sense of the “Shanghai experience” emerges from a deeper textual level through certain recurring figures. For example, the trope of simultaneity, active at multiple levels, locates the reader in a broad chronologically regulated order; and the sense of near simultaneity between core and periphery assures him or her that Shanghai is at the leading edge of historical change, as we will see in chapter 3. Similarly, the repeated interruption and subsequent continuation of the narrative teaches readers a new mode of consumption, transforming the drive to reach the end of the novel or acquire a certain luxury item into a permanent state of desire that can never be fully satisfied (chapter 4). Mediation creates a sense of multiple coherent narrative lines within a complicated text, and likewise introduces and reinforces the mutually exclusive sets of identities (northern/southern, Western/Chinese, past/future) that constitute one of the major products of the Shanghai culture industry (chapters 1 and 5).

As Liang Qichao suggests, it is the indirectness of presentation in fictional texts that makes them in the end more productive and effective than texts with less vivid stories to tell.\textsuperscript{19} If guidebooks and other reference works provide the “vocabulary” of the Shanghai experience for newcomers to the city, Shanghai fiction supplies the “grammar” of that experience both to visitors and to residents of the city: not only what a Shanghai person should know, but how he or she acts on that knowledge. It is through its narrative aesthetics—figures of simultaneity, interruption, mediation, and excess—that Shanghai fiction proposes a structure through which the reader’s experience of the city can become meaningful. The very pervasiveness of these four tropes in Shanghai discourse of all genres from the 1930s forward, and the extent to which they have become natural, even necessary choices for cultural producers who aim to evoke the city, hints at the crucial role that Shanghai fiction played in defining the city beginning in the 1890s.

Existing scholarship on Shanghai literature tends to emphasize the social and political origins of its distinctive features, detailing the significant effects of the colonial project, international trade, and rapid industrialization on the city’s cultural production. A great deal of productive research has been done by scholars who read literary texts primarily as a result of social processes. The aim of this book is not to deny the importance of economic development, technological change, and political struggle, but rather to take an alternative approach to Shanghai literary and cultural history by also emphasizing the
active role that literary texts themselves have in processes of cultural production. How is it that visitors to Shanghai are convinced even before arriving that the city is the most up-to-the-minute and fashionable in China? Why does anyone want to visit in the first place? How do visitors and residents alike learn to spend to excess in support of the leisure industry, in striking contrast with conventional ideals of balanced consumption that knows its limits? How do they know what is “Western” and what is “Chinese”? Why does a sense of “interrupted history” contribute to the appeal Shanghai has again today for both tourists and investors? This book begins from the proposition that a consideration of literary texts as active participants in social processes, not merely passive onlookers or by-products, will help to provide answers to these questions.

Audiences

Who was reading these novels? To what extent can we identify an audience through which novels set in Shanghai participated in the broader cultural production of the city? Shanghai novels, especially those written in Wu dialect, have been dismissed by some scholars as a relatively minor phenomenon, with a readership that was strictly limited, but this characterization does not survive a careful look at turn-of-the-century publishing figures. As we will see later in this introduction and in the first chapter, the early Shanghai novels *Lives of Shanghai Flowers* and *Dreams of Shanghai Splendor*, which began to appear in the 1890s, were quite popular into the early 1910s; they were reprinted in numbers that rivaled the most popular May Fourth fiction of the 1920s and inspired both sequels and imitations around China. Though publication figures for the volume editions of Shanghai novels of the 1910s and 1920s are harder to ascertain, those works appeared first as daily installments in Shanghai newspapers with national circulation, ensuring a large potential audience. It has been noted that Mao Dun’s *Ziye* (Midnight, 1933), his first novel set entirely in Shanghai, was surprisingly popular among readers who did not usually read fiction by May Fourth authors; clearly long-format representations of contemporary Shanghai were of more interest to early twentieth-century readers than many other topics chosen by May Fourth writers. This suggests that (1) the dismissive attitude shown by advocates of “new literature” (*xin wenxue*) toward “old-style” fiction of this period was rooted as much in their anxieties about the limited popularity of works they championed as it was in the actual publication figures for Shanghai narratives; and (2) the definition of “readership” that these critics were working with excluded a great number (perhaps the majority) of actual readers, whose educational experience differed from their own.
How many people could read the novels, newspapers, urban sketches, and guidebooks that were rolling off Shanghai printing presses? The literacy rate in late nineteenth-century Shanghai itself was relatively high: roughly 60 percent of adult men and between 10 and 30 percent of adult women were able to read fairly simple texts.21 (By way of comparison, mid-nineteenth-century England and Wales had literacy rates of just below 70 percent for men and just above 50 percent for women.)22 We can infer from a number of sources (including newspaper editorials, urban sketches, and collections of lithographic illustrations) that by the 1890s women at a certain level of Shanghai society—and at least some men at every level—could and did read newspapers, tanci (narratives that consisted of both prose and verse portions), and novels.23

Evelyn Rawski’s groundbreaking work on literacy in the Qing provides us with a point of departure for China as a whole: she concludes that basic literacy in the nineteenth century was between 30 and 45 percent for adult males and between 2 and 10 percent for adult females.24 Literacy in urban areas was much higher, with some estimates of adult male literacy in Daoguang era (1821–1850) Guangzhou at 80 to 90 percent.25 Books were not, on the whole, inexpensive, but circulating libraries made them available to those who could not otherwise have afforded them. One English observer in 1830s Guangzhou describes the libraries as follows:

The librarian, with an assortment of books in two boxes, suspended from a bamboo laid across his shoulder, and with a little rattle in his hand to advertise his friends of his approach, sets off on his circuit, going from street to street, and from door to door. In this way he passes his whole time, and gains his livelihood. He loans his books, usually for a very short time and for a very small compensation. . . . The books thus circulated are chiefly novels, and sometimes those of a very bad character. The system, however, is a good one, and worthy the attention of the friends of useful knowledge. The librarian, whom I met at the door of the hong this afternoon, loaning books to the servants and coolies of the factories, said that his whole stock amounted to more than 2000 volumes. He had with him, however, not more than 300 volumes; the others being in the hands of his numerous customers.26

Though it could hardly have been the case that every person defined as having basic literacy was a frequent reader, mid- to late nineteenth-century accounts of circulating libraries name servants, factory workers, and coolies as their clients, and conclude that novels and other fiction were the most popular among borrowers; one novel set in Shanghai in the early twentieth century even refers to a library that specialized in “new fiction” (xin xiaoshuo).27
Circulating libraries made fiction affordable to Qing-dynasty readers who otherwise might have gone without it by allowing them to rent instead of purchase. Installment publication served a similar purpose in a slightly different fashion for readers from the 1890s forward. As Perry Link has pointed out,

> When newspapers began serializing fiction, the device took on an economic logic for both readers and publishers. For readers, newspapers were—or at least seemed to be—a less expensive source of fiction than books and magazines... the total cost would not be different but the feeling of affordability would be present because each daily outlay seemed unimportantly small. And since there were, of course, many other good reasons for buying a newspaper, getting to read a novel could be viewed as a kind of bonus.²⁸

In addition, the risk of wasting one’s money on a novel that was uninteresting was significantly reduced. If the total cost of the novel was not much less when it was purchased in installments, one could be sure of spending the full price only on a narrative that was actually worth it; should the first installment or two prove uninspiring, there was no need to purchase the rest.

A basic prerequisite for cultural production is the effective distribution of the “means” of cultural production, whether texts, images, recorded sound, or film, to audiences who find them meaningful. The brief history of Shanghai fiction that follows later in this introduction provides more detail on the publication and distribution of Shanghai novels; chapter 1 discusses the question of readership for those novels that were written in Wu dialect. For now, I would like to suggest that it is likely that audiences for Shanghai fiction were broader and more diverse—in terms of geographical location, class, and gender—than is generally supposed.

**Genre / Genealogy**

What does it mean to read a group of texts as a genre? Recent theories of genre, rather than attempting to classify texts from disparate origins into a limited number of (logically deduced) universal categories, have tried instead to understand the appearance of specific generic traditions as historical processes. In the words of Hans Robert Jauss,

> Literary genres are to be understood not as genera (classes) in the logical senses, but rather as groups or historical families. As such, they cannot
be deduced or defined, but only historically determined, delimited, and described.}

In a related development, scholars have begun to emphasize the social dimensions of generic distinctions; Raymond Williams, among others, argues that genres should be seen as social constructions rather than as ideal types or sets of rules, and Fredric Jameson suggests that genres should be thought of more concretely as “literary institutions . . . social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact.”Instead of reifying an ahistorical definition of each genre, these theorists understand genres as sets of texts, readings, and rewritings that are open to growth and change.

In this book, the intention is to engage with this conception of genre and articulate a genealogy of the “historical family” that is Shanghai fiction from the 1890s through the 1930s, as well as its better-known “descendants” later in the twentieth century. This genealogy is not concerned with tracing a single dominant thread, nor in establishing a privileged moment of origin, but rather with showing the often-simultaneous progression of related texts over time; instead of focusing on issues of paternity and lineal transmission, it looks primarily at the relations between different members of several discontinuous generations of the textual family. Without postulating a grand metanarrative, this accounting will nonetheless reckon with the shifts, disruptions, and repetitions that authors of such metanarratives appropriate and reinterpret as evidence of the movement of History. Though it will identify concrete moments of dialectic reversal, my reading of these novels as a genre subscribes neither to a trope of continuous development nor to a dialectic governing the unfolding of the category as a whole; instead, it remains attentive to the contingency of the changes and disparities that allow us to differentiate one text from another. It is in this sense that I find Foucault’s discussion of “genealogy” useful: although this accounting of Shanghai fiction is both more circumscribed and more concrete than Nietzsche’s wide-ranging genealogy of morals, it shares that genealogy’s interest in recording “the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality . . . not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles,” as well as the related critique of searches for origin that presume “the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession.”

The basic criteria for membership in the historical family proposed here consist of the following: (1) publication in installments; and (2) narrative focus centered on the city of Shanghai. In addition to these criteria, the related aesthetic figures I have already identified—simultaneity, interruption, mediation,
excess—manifest themselves most concretely as problems to which these novels attempt to supply answers: how to manage a complex narrative structure with no single protagonist; how best to represent “nonstandard” speech in writing; how to make use of the distinctive features of the installment format; and how to bring a narrative that presents contemporary events to a satisfying conclusion, among others. Though different texts provide different—sometimes antithetical—answers to these questions, they all find them to be of real aesthetic significance.

There is already a genre in widespread scholarly use that includes several of the novels that I discuss in this book: *xiaxie xiaoshuo*—”depravity fiction,” “courtesan fiction,” or “novels about prostitutes”—originally formulated by Lu Xun in the early 1920s. Lu Xun suggested that this genre was best understood as a kind of “depraved” echo of *Honglou meng* (Dream of the red chamber) and organized the group of novels temporally through a change in attitudes towards the courtesan, from esteem and romanticization in early works like *Huayue hen* (Traces of the moon and flowers), to a “realistic” appraisal in *Lives of Shanghai Flowers*, to bitter condemnation and sensationalism in the early twentieth century. Several of the earlier novels I discuss are considered by most scholars to belong to the *xiaxie* genre; as such, they have been read primarily as accounts of relationships between courtesans and their clients. This generic classification has its strong points: if we read *xiaxie xiaoshuo* as a group, it becomes clear that the nineteenth century saw important developments in narrative form that established the conditions under which the first-person narratives so central to twentieth-century Chinese literature could appear.

The selection of this single aspect of textual content to characterize the genre, however, implies an approach to fiction that is grounded in questions of morality. Given the overdetermination of the courtesan/prostitute as a figure in twentieth-century Chinese discourse that cries out for liberation and modernization, subsumption of Shanghai fiction under this generic rubric risks oversimplifying the complicated dynamics of power between women and men in the novels and suggests to the later reader graphic descriptions of sensual interaction that do not in fact appear. Far from enacting voyeuristic sequences structured by the “male gaze,” novels set in Shanghai present a milieu in which display and public humiliation are—with only the rarest exceptions—weapons wielded by women against men to great effect. It is also worth noting that while the nineteenth-century European realist novel has far more than its share of courtesan types and outright prostitutes, scholars of those novels tend not to define them exclusively in terms of this aspect of their content. In proposing to read novels set in Shanghai as a genre, my aim is not to invalidate “courtesan
fiction” as a generic construct, but rather to supplement it by giving a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of the interaction between content, narrative form, and local social practice in fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

What do we get from reading these works of installment fiction as a genre? The full answer to this question can be found only in the specific readings to follow, but it is possible here to hint at two immediate results of this approach to the texts. First, as we will see in chapter 3, each of these novels allegorically represents the structure of the genre as a whole in its individual narrative structure; just as no one narrative strand within an individual novel makes sense in isolation, each novel on its own is only one part of a larger representational project. The multiplicity of the narrative lines within each text figures the relationship of the novels as they appear in installments in different parts of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mediasphere, reminding us that genre often must be read as a relation of simultaneity. The concept of genre allows a richer reading of texts and social practices in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Shanghai; in return, this reading calls our attention to a neglected dimension of the concept of genre.

Second, attention to the persistence of specific generic conventions, even as they are reproduced ironically, inverted, stretched, or reconceptualized, allows the reader to move beyond the dichotomy between “literary tradition” and “literary modernity” that invariably impoverishes the readings of texts in their specificity. Reading Shanghai fiction as a genre challenges paradigms that schematize the tensions and contradictions which constitute literature of this period as a confrontation between (Chinese) tradition and (Western) modernity.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Shanghai was often used by writers both Chinese and Western as a symbol of the complex cultural, political, and economic negotiations that have been referred to collectively as “modernization” or “westernization.” Given a Victorian-era understanding of the movement of history as progress to a higher and more technologically sophisticated stage of development, free of undesirable practices and beliefs of the past, Shanghai’s International Settlement, with its electric lights, running water, telephones, and “rationally” planned street system, filled out with buildings erected in the previous few decades, could well see itself as a “model community” more advanced than most cities in England, Western Europe, or the United States. The first movie showings in Shanghai, for example, took place less than a year after the invention of cinematic technology in France. From the standpoint of Chinese writers, Shanghai was the stage where interaction with foreigners not only took place, but was illuminated by floodlights that cast such
interaction elsewhere in China into relative darkness. From the point that this interaction was first seen as a teleological process aimed at the fundamental transformation of Chinese society and culture, Shanghai could only be identified as the locus of Chinese modernity.

Indeed, a preliminary inquiry into Shanghai texts and images from the 1860s forward leads us to many characteristics cited by scholars of Western modernity as typical of the modern experience: an atmosphere of detachment in which atomized (immigrant and in-migrant) subjects experience both freedom and bewildering rootlessness; an arena in which time itself seems to change its essential nature as human activity increases daily in speed and effect; a milieu in which the blank stare and the random stroll replace the oral/aural communion of yesteryear, in which even objects previously thought of as sacred repositories of wisdom (like books) or aura (works of art) are produced in factories and sold as mere commodities; and an urban environment in which the leisure industry is one of the foundations of the city’s economic structure. Shanghai fiction produces these “modern” effects over the course of its narrative even as it contests the same effects by subjecting them to implicit and explicit critique.

The majority of the narratives discussed in the early chapters of this book are generally considered to be “traditional” in form and content, whether they appeared in the 1890s or the 1920s. For this reason, reading them together with Mao Dun’s novel *Midnight* and short stories by modernist authors of the 1930s (as I do in chapter 6) works across the division between the “modern” and the “not-yet-modernized.” Grouping these apparently diverse texts together as a historical family disrupts the usual discourse of literary progress not only by juxtaposing “traditional” narratives with fiction whose “modernity” is above suspicion, but also by affiliating them specifically with Shanghai, generally understood as a locus of modernity. In addition, as we will see in chapter 7 and the epilogue, tracing Shanghai narrative’s lines of descent through the twentieth century provides a clear accounting of the necessary interconnections between modernity and nostalgia.

My interest is not, however, in a recuperative project or an expansion of the modern canon; instead, I would like to suggest that attention to a single genre in its specific historicity provides an alternative to excessive reliance on the concept of “literary modernity” precisely because it enables us to read earlier fiction together with later realist and modernist efforts *without* on the one hand assuming a fundamental break between modern and premodern, or on the other postulating a monolithic “Chinese tradition” that continues without change. The concreteness with which the genre can be delineated in its historical moment bridges the rhetorical gap between “the modern” and “what went
before,” and suggests the radical heterogeneity and variety concealed *within* these two reified categories. Thinking of genre as a kind of genealogy allows for close readings of multiple texts without forcing these readings to choose between serving as evidence for metanarratives of radical transformation or diagnoses of perpetual stagnation.

**Mediasphere**

The interrelatedness and simultaneity characteristic of Shanghai narratives asks us to read them as a genre, rather than each on its own. The aesthetic of regular interruption and consequent open-endedness joins with those characteristics to suggest that Shanghai fiction also traces the form of a much broader mode of textual and visual organization, the *mediasphere*. In this book, I make use of Régis Debray’s neologism because I find his insistence on extending attention from “the visible system of the medium to the invisible macrosystem that gives it meaning” to be invaluable in the study of literary texts.42 At the same time, I insist on particularizing the definition of the mediasphere and returning it to a more productive level of historical specificity. I understand the mediasphere to be a form of cultural production consisting of (1) a visual and textual field characterized by the drive to expand without limit; (2) the simultaneous and regular appearance of the wide range of cultural products that make up this field—fiction and nonfiction books, newspapers, magazines, illustrated collections, and eventually, recorded performances, film, and radio; and (3) frequent connections and references between these cultural products across boundaries between different texts, genres, and media.

Each of these aspects of the mediasphere appeared in isolation centuries before the rise of Shanghai as a cultural center. The drive toward unlimited expansion can be found in the aesthetics of oral storytelling and the written forms that claim to mimic it, as well as in the production and reproduction of morality books that have their own further propagation as an overriding message. Simultaneous or near-simultaneous textual production and consumption constituting a certain type of “imagined community” can be found in the triennial civil service examinations, with their attendant rituals and associated markets for up-to-date essay collections, and on a much more circumscribed level among the various small communities of readers of novels and *tanci* that were still in the process of composition. Longitudinal connections and references can be found in the many allusions so important in poetry and prose composition, as well as in the movement of figures, episodes, and characters back and forth between fiction and drama from the late Ming on. At the same
time, the interaction between fiction and drama and the overlaps between the fields of ink painting, poetry, and calligraphy suggest ways in which productive exchange occurs not only between different genres, but even between different media, laying the groundwork for a new array of cultural products distinguished in part by the qualities understood to be characteristic of the medium in which they appear.

Although precedents for each of these aspects of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Shanghai cultural production clearly existed, what is distinctive about the cultural production that is the focus of this book is the way in which these three aspects appear together in mutually reinforcing fashion—not simply as a new kind of industry or a national print market or a particular set of aesthetics or a mode of reading, but as all of these together—as a mediashere. The dominance of a single city, Shanghai, within this field of textual and visual production is also unprecedented. Scholarship on Ming and Qing print culture suggests that prior to 1900, there were several regional publishing centers that divided the national market. The rapid growth of the Shanghai publishing industry from the 1880s forward, by contrast, meant that by 1937 “an overwhelming 86 percent of all books published in China appeared under a Shanghai imprint.”

The importance of the mediashere centered on Shanghai can be seen not only in material terms (the share of books printed and rapid development of a local economy based in part on publishing), but also in Shanghai’s new status as a cultural center, and in the insistent discursive projection of Shanghai as the most significant meeting point between “the West” and “China.” Other treaty ports, such as Hankou and Tianjin, get proportionally far less attention for their “hybridity,” and the extent to which Western missionaries circulated through the countryside, making converts even in remote villages, is often overlooked. Shanghai becomes the focus of discourses of hybridity and interaction in part because its media had become so dominant at the national level. The paradoxical consequences of this include on the one hand, the willful disregard of certain aspects of the Western presence in the so-called “interior,” and on the other, due to the emphasis on the Western presence in Shanghai, a mirror neglect of Shanghai cultural production not understood to relate in some form to “the West.” Even as the concessions represented an attempt by local authorities to contain “foreign” influence in the nineteenth century by ceding it a defined space within the Shanghai area, so did “Shanghai” itself in the early twentieth-century imaginary represent a variety of discursive attempts to contain those “foreign influences” by allowing them more significance in our understanding of Shanghai than they deserve, and perhaps less significance elsewhere in China than is accurate.
Shanghai Paradigms

Shanghai, not a colony, not even a concession, but a fortuitous aggregate of self-governing English Merchants.47

In his casual equation of the city as a whole with a particular minority of its residents, this British officer exemplifies the discourse of Shanghai as a city created out of nothing by European settlers, a discourse that arose in the second half of the nineteenth century through the conscious efforts of “Shanghailanders,” English-speaking long-term residents of the city whose livelihoods were bound to the city itself and who could not easily relocate.48 Two aspects of this discourse are most striking: first, the dramatic reversal that it represents from earlier English- and Chinese-language assessments of the city’s development; and second, its quick spread and surprising persistence—though generally in weakened or altered form—more than a century later in the face of clear evidence contradicting its basic premises.

A wide variety of sources suggest the outlines of the historical archive that this Shanghailander rhetorical project aimed to erase. As early as the eighteenth century, trading concerns native to Ningbo began to relocate to Shanghai in the wake of its designation as the customs station charged with supervising all trade between the Yangtze River valley and the rest of the world; by 1814—three decades before Western merchants arrived—there was already a “Foreign Trade Street” (Yanhang jie) named for the offices of Chinese shipping companies that did regular business in markets as far away as Java, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf.49 The decline of the Grand Canal in the early nineteenth century meant that grain shipments previously sent through Suzhou and Yangzhou on their way to the capital were now often transshipped through Shanghai instead, giving the local economy another important boost.50 And indeed, early nineteenth-century European-language sources give us a picture of British envoys eager to establish Western trade through Shanghai precisely because they realized the extent of the domestic and foreign trade that already went through the city. One 1832 assessment refers to Shanghai as “the emporium of Nanking, and of the whole of Keangnan province; and as far as the native trade is concerned, perhaps the principal commercial city in the empire.” According to another estimate, trade through Shanghai in the 1830s may well have been comparable to the level of trade through London during the same period.51

Late nineteenth-century attempts to rewrite the narrative of Shanghai’s development and deny the city’s economic significance prior to the Opium War
were, however, quite successful. Even today, popular and scholarly texts tend to emphasize the role of European, American, and Japanese trade, direct investment, and military presence in stimulating Shanghai’s growth between 1842 and 1937. Too often, we forget that the majority of trade through Shanghai prior to 1920 was domestic, not foreign, that some of the “Western” firms in Shanghai were part or even majority Chinese-owned, and that the city’s rapid economic expansion over this hundred-year period owed a great deal as well to influxes of refugees from elsewhere in China and the associated surges in the value of Shanghai real estate.52

The Shanghailander rhetorical project—identification of the European presence as crucial to Shanghai’s very existence as a prosperous city—has in fact been carried over with relatively little scrutiny into recent critical theorizing on the topic of Chinese “colonial modernity.” We are told, for example, in an otherwise perceptive comparison of Shanghai and Hong Kong that Shanghai was “essentially created by Western colonialism”—an assessment with which Shanghailanders themselves would have eagerly concurred.53 In asserting explicitly or implicitly that colonialism is the central determining factor in the formation of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Shanghai society, scholars of “colonial modernity” likewise tend to attribute to diplomats, military personnel, expatriates, and settlers of European origin a degree of bureaucratic coordination that did not exist, a unity of interests that they did not have, and a level of cultural hegemony that they could not have achieved.54

It is true that the “colonial modernity” paradigm encourages a salutary reflexivity among today’s scholars, and attends to certain of the unpleasant relations of power that undergirded important aspects of what is now often nostalgically recalled as “Old Shanghai.” By calling into question optimistic narratives of Shanghai modernism and cosmopolitanism, it reminds us that Shanghai’s current return to global prominence also has its price.55 Yet as historians have recently begun to show, the colonial paradigm fails to address certain important complexities and contradictions, among them the prominent role of Chinese native-place organizations within the International Settlement and the French Concession;56 the frequent conflicts of interest between settlement authorities in Shanghai and the foreign offices in the settlers’ countries of origin;57 the contingent and changeable nature of the International Settlement from its initial designation merely as a legal area of residence to its later relative political and legal autonomy, not only from Chinese authority, but also from European powers;58 the power and wealth of trading families of Middle Eastern and South Asian origin;59 and the arrival of large numbers of stateless and exiled Europeans in the 1920s and ’30s.60

Clear parallels have been drawn between the Shanghai “concession” sys-
tem and early nineteenth-century Qing administration attempts to contain and control Central Asian merchant activity in Xinjiang, and similarities have also been noted between the powers and responsibilities claimed by the French Concession and International Settlement administrations on the one hand, and those that native-place organizations—charged with the supervision of sojourners from other regions of China—customarily enjoyed on the other. And as Pär Cassel has recently shown, even the famous Mixed Court, bulwark of the extraterritorial system in Shanghai, was modeled in large part on existing institutions originally designed to address Manchu-Han disputes under the Qing. The fact that this “revisionist” trend has called into question even such well-worn symbols as the infamous sign in the Public Garden on the Bund suggests that we have no choice but to acknowledge the limits of the colonial paradigm.

Indeed, what this historical scholarship suggests is precisely that binary distinctions between “China” and “the West” and between “colonial subject” and “colonizer”—so crucial both to the triumphalist narratives of modernization theory and to the critical responses to those narratives that focus on the colonial project and its results to the exclusion of all else—cannot be taken for granted, but themselves must be seen as motivated cultural products, historicized as the collective result of a variety of often contradictory self-definition projects. At the most abstract aesthetic level, as Shu-mei Shih has shown, even the Western modernism we think we know so well as an inspiration for 1920s and ’30s Shanghai culture builds off specifically Chinese elements (not to mention the wealth of inspiration that it takes from other Asian and African cultures)—it took a great deal of interpretive and pedagogical work in the early and mid-twentieth century to repress that essential hybridity and turn “modernism” into a recognizable symbol of a single, unitary “West.” The interactions between “Western” and “Chinese” music in early twentieth-century Shanghai—from marching bands to folk songs, opera to jazz—are if anything even more nuanced and complex.

Speaking more concretely about individuals and groups in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Shanghai, we find that many do not fall easily on either side of the binary distinctions that modernization theory and its critics find essential. Examples include the Baghdadi, South Asian, or Southeast Asian merchants whose businesses counted as “British” and who received the same extraterritorial benefits in Shanghai, even though they were rarely considered part of “British society”; Koreans, Taiwanese, and even some Fujianese who registered as Japanese colonial citizens; stateless Russian and Jewish refugees, who had neither the economic nor the political power of other Europeans, but who outnumbered all other non-Chinese residents in Shanghai by the early 1930s;
and bicultural or “biracial” individuals such as the children of local “mixed” marriages, or new arrivals like the author Liu Na’ou, the exact nature of whose heritage was unclear to many of his contemporaries.66

One of the aims of this book is to supplement existing paradigms of Shanghai cultural history. First, instead of beginning with the proposition that racial and cultural distinctions were invariably self-evident in late-Qing and Republican Shanghai, I investigate the extent to which distinctions between “China” and “the West,” among others, were created and elaborated in the local Shanghai context. Instead of understanding Shanghai’s “hybridity” as the natural result of two or more mutually exclusive cultural orders encountering each other, my aim is to demonstrate the importance of a concept of “hybridity” (za) as one of the crucial means for constructing local Shanghai interactions between individuals and groups as “encounters” between mutually exclusive others.

Second, this book balances attention to that aspect of Shanghai cultural production in which such distinctions were constantly foregrounded and inescapable with analysis of other aspects in which these distinctions become less relevant or operate in unexpected ways. It is precisely in the debate over the specifics of restricted access to the so-called Public Garden, for example, that it becomes clear what has been neglected in the study of Shanghai’s public culture. Contrary to popular belief, the British-established Public Garden was not the first public park in Shanghai—Leisure Garden (Yu yuan) opened to the public in the space adjacent to the Temple of the City God in 1760, decades before the arrival of the first British envoy to the city.67 Nor was the Public Garden of any interest to the majority of Shanghai cultural producers and consumers, despite its symbolic importance in the formation of Chinese nationalist rhetoric in the 1920s and ’30s.68 Chinese-owned parks such as Shen Garden (Shen yuan) and Zhang’s Garden (Zhang yuan) were larger, better-attended, and far more spectacular than the Public Garden throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, it would have been truly bizarre if Shanghai residents had wanted to forsake the superior landscaping, entertainment possibilities, and general fashionability of the Chinese-owned parks for the dubious pleasure of a few benches and the company of Shanghailanders and seagulls. While Shen Garden offered a grand building, billiard tables, and a Western restaurant, and Zhang’s Garden hosted visitors late into the night with firework displays, opera, and film screenings, the Public Garden closed each evening at dusk (fig. 1).69

The relative neglect of public parks like Zhang’s Garden, Shen Garden, and Leisure Garden symbolizes a broader problem in the study of Shanghai cul-
ture: to the extent that we focus exclusively on imperialist and semicolonial projects and the “native” responses to those projects, we allow a handful of Shanghai-landers (backed up, to be sure, in moments of crisis by displays of imperialist military force) to set our research agenda; we are likely to overlook a wealth of cultural production in the process. If, as Jeffrey Wasserstrom has suggested, there are many “Old Shanghais,” the role of the scholar of literature and culture should, like that of the historian, consist in part in comprehending the varieties of difference inherent in any “object of study.” This book aims not to dismiss or ignore the role of European technologies, ideologies, and financial and military capabilities as partial conditions of Shanghai cultural production, but rather to understand these aspects of Shanghai in a different perspective.

**Shanghai Fiction: A Brief History**

The first burst of Shanghai fiction appeared in the 1890s. In 1892 Han Bangqing published the first thirty chapters of *Haishang hua liezhuan* (Lives of Shanghai flowers) in his literary magazine *Haishang qishu* (Marvelous Shanghai writ-
ings); the full sixty-four chapter version appeared in eight volumes in 1894. Zou Tao’s *Haishang chentian ying* (Shadows of Shanghai’s dusty skies) followed close on the heels of *Lives of Shanghai Flowers*; it was published either in 1894 or 1896. By the turn of the century, there were four more novels set in Shanghai: *Haishang mingji si da jin’gang qishu* (The four great courtesans of Shanghai: A marvelous account, 1898, probably one of Wu Jianren’s earliest published works), *Huoshao Shanghai Hongmiao yanyi* (A narrative of the burning of Shanghai’s Red Temple), *Haitian hong xueji* (A Shanghai swan’s traces in the snow, published in installments in 1899 and possibly written by Li Boyuan), and *Haishang fengliu zhuan* (An account of Shanghai fashions, 1899). Several of these novels were later reprinted by other publishers under slightly altered titles.

Sun Yusheng’s popular installment fiction *Haishang fahua meng* (Dreams of Shanghai splendor), which appeared as a page-a-day newspaper supplement between 1898 and 1906, was the first blockbuster in the genre, selling almost as well as *Flower in a Sea of Sin* and *Yuli hun* (The jade pear spirit) would in the years to follow. The significance of this novel in cities across China can be seen in the wave of imitations that sprang up in the late Qing, including *Suzhou fahua meng* (Dreams of Suzhou splendor), *Beijing fahua meng* (Dreams of Beijing splendor), *Beijing xin fahua meng* (New dreams of Beijing splendor), *Nianzai fahua meng* (Twenty years’ dream of splendor), *Qizai fahua meng* (Seven years’ dream of splendor), and *Xin fahua meng* (New dreams of splendor). Ironically, even *Lives of Shanghai Flowers* was reprinted in the late Guangxu era under the title *Zuixin Haishang fahua meng* (Newest dreams of Shanghai splendor). During this same period, *Lives of Shanghai Flowers* itself inspired no fewer than three sequels, one of which was written by Chen Diexian, who was to become a central figure in literary and publishing circles of the early twentieth century.

The success of the specifically Shanghai novel encouraged the alteration of earlier novels—*Fengyue meng* (A dream of romance), a novel set in Yangzhou, was changed to refer to Shanghai instead, as we will see in chapter 1—and also inspired later authors. Most other novels with urban settings printed in this period included sections set in Shanghai, Wu Jianren’s *Strange Happenings Eyewitnessed over Twenty Years* and *Hen hai* (Sea of regret), Li Boyuan’s *Guanchang xianxing ji* (The bureaucrats), and Zeng Pu’s *Flower in a Sea of Sin*, as well as many lesser-known and fragmentary political satires appearing between 1905 and 1910, among them. The most famous of the “depravity novels,” *The Nine-tailed Turtle*, which began to appear in installments in 1906, travels to Beijing, Tianjin, Suzhou, and Guangzhou as well as Shanghai, but responds specifically to *Lives of Shanghai Flowers, A Shanghai Swan’s Traces*
in the Snow, and Dreams of Shanghai Splendor, as suggested earlier in this introduction. Urban novels of the first decade of the twentieth century that were city-specific but not set in Shanghai frequently acknowledged Shanghai as the premier metropolis and the Shanghai novel as their inspiration. Shanghai was not the first city to be written in the Chinese novel, but it was the first to be rewritten, as each author told its story anew, and differently; by the end of the Qing, it had become a fundamental point of reference for urban fiction across China.

Shanghai novels continued to appear into the Republican period, most notably Lu Shi’e’s Xin Shanghai (New Shanghai, 1909); Zhu Shouju’s Xiepu chao (The Huangpu tides, 1916–1921), a favorite of Eileen Chang’s; Hujiang fengyue zhuan (Romance on Hu River, 1921), annotated by Xu Zhenya and his brother; Bi Yihong and Bao Tianxiao’s Renjian diyu (Hell in this world, 1922–1924); and Xu Xiaotian’s Shanghai fengyue (Shanghai romance, 1929). From the late 1920s into the 1940s, authors of Shanghai fiction began to claim independence from earlier works in the genre and self-consciously ally themselves instead with theories of literary production and technique that they understood as foreign and different. Landmarks in this period include Mao Dun’s Ziye (Midnight), published in 1933, and the short stories of Liu Na’ou, Shi Zhecun, and Mu Shiying, discussed in detail in chapter 6, but many others appeared that are not so well known, such as Lou Shiyi’s Shanghai kuangxiang qu (Shanghai rhapsodies), Li Qingya’s Shanghai, and Xu Xu’s Feng xiaoxiao (The sound of the wind).

**Chapter Outline**

Existing scholarship on Shanghai tends to explain the city’s rise to prominence as the result of encounters between groups whose identities are fixed and mutually exclusive, between northerners and southerners, for example, or between Chinese people and Westerners. In the first chapter of this book, I take a different approach: instead of assuming the distinctions between these groups to be self-evident and invariant, I aim to show the extent to which these distinctions were themselves products of the Shanghai culture industry rather than its preconditions. Shanghai fiction makes extensive use of dialect writing, for example, but rarely includes specifically Shanghai vocabulary, expressions, or phonetic representations. Rather than constructing a single unified linguistic identity centered on Shanghai, these novels present a specific kind of stereotyped heterogeneity as characteristic of the city—Shanghai is the arena in which Suzhou dialect culture and the northern standard are defined against each other and in
which they must struggle for dominance. Similarly, Shanghai novels work together with many other texts in Chinese and European languages to emphasize the differences between “Western” concession spaces and the “Chinese” southern city, moving discursively to make the distinctions between the two much more clear-cut and consistent than they ever were in practice.

Shanghai fiction takes pains to include precise references to markers of space and time. These references are unprecedented both in their accuracy and in their coherence, due in part, no doubt, to the frequent contestation of such markers in a rapidly industrializing and expanding city. At the same time, however, this obsessive attention to coherent systems of reference forms the most basic condition without which the narrative complexity and multiplicity characteristic of Shanghai installment fiction would not be possible. Most significantly, this attention foregrounds referentiality itself as a key narrative strategy—the practice of making intertextual references to the specific names, places, and moments that pervade the burgeoning field of Shanghai texts and images (guidebooks, newspapers, illustrated magazines, photograph albums, maps, lists, as well as other works of fiction). Although such a strategy may appear to resemble the realism that would become so popular in the May Fourth era, its aims and effects are radically different. Where realist fiction is animated both by an emancipatory mission and an ideological commitment to a pre-discursive Real that the text should reflect, works that concern themselves instead with referentiality aim for intertextual consistency and reciprocity, setting Shanghai fiction up as the master genre which is tied to all of the key points of reference in an ever-expanding discursive fabric.

In the third chapter, I show how the tropes of simultaneity and interruption that characterize Shanghai fiction from the 1890s through the 1930s combine with this expanding textual and visual field to sketch the outlines of a national mediasphere centered on Shanghai. At the formal level, Shanghai fiction is unrivaled in the number and complexity of its simultaneously progressing narrative lines; these narratives themselves, serialized concurrently in newspapers, magazines, or independent installments, were also consumed in rough simultaneity across China. In this sense, Shanghai serial narratives not only reinvent the lineal tropes of genre that had dominated fiction criticism to that point, but also represent a uniquely privileged means for the imagination of a national community of readers along the lines detailed by Benedict Anderson. Such simultaneity would not have been possible, however, without frequent interruption—of one episode by another, one narrative line by another, one type of narrative by another, and even “everyday life” by narrative and vice-versa. I argue that this aesthetic of interruption, which began in installment fiction, soon spread to newspapers, magazines, and other cultural products of
the period. As the print culture analogue of cross-cutting and shot/reverse shot techniques in cinema, it established a new, more active mode of readership, and bound these readers ever more tightly to the mediasphere then under construction.

The best-known Shanghai novels had multiple extensions or sequels, appearing over a period of years; chapter 4 inquires into the sources and effects of the continuing hunger for more text that made these extensions and sequels profitable. Like night carriage-riding, another popular leisure pursuit in late Qing and early Republican Shanghai, the appeal of incessant novel reading lay in its transgression of aesthetic and moral restrictions and distinctions. The effects of this desire for more text are not insubstantial: First, the frequent sequels and extensions increasingly find their justification in an extensive rhetoric of rapid and unceasing social change, a rhetoric that eventually acquires a life of its own and comes to form one of the supports for the grand metanarrative of “Shanghai modernity.” Second, as a commodity designed for leisure consumption, lengthy installment fiction was central to the Shanghai publishing industry, a key engine of the city’s industrial development (as it had been in New York, Paris, and other cities). Finally, Shanghai narrative not only establishes the city as the ultimate tourist destination with its constant references to other urban leisure products and practices, but also—through the installment form itself—teaches the reader to conceive of consumption as an endless quest for more, rather than as a process that might reach a necessary limit, thereby helping to ensure that readers who do visit Shanghai will be reluctant to leave.

The fifth chapter emphasizes persons, or types of agency. What subjectivities are available in early twentieth-century Shanghai fiction? Who flourishes under the terms set in these narratives? First, quite evidently, brokers and middlemen. Close reading of Shanghai fiction shows not only that the broker is indispensable as a character in the plot, but also that he (occasionally she) is necessary to mediate among narrative lines themselves, bringing stories that otherwise would remain separate together. The brokers’ paradox is to enable interaction and exchange between identities that they themselves have helped to define as radically separate. This move figures not only the social practice of the broker as an individual moving through Shanghai society, but also the place of the city itself between two sides (“China” and “the West”) that it claims cannot communicate without its assistance. More generally, we see a concept of the Szahaenin (Shanghai person) take shape. With the exception of the foolish and the eccentric, newcomers to Shanghai are understood to quickly transform themselves into Szahaenin, a new kind of “native place” identity, which, through its very ease of acquisition, reconfigures the relationship between local
identity and larger economic and political forces. It is my contention that the
discourse of the Szahaenin as a unique identity—which continues to function
as a powerful social force in China to this day—depends in large part not only
on the characters and themes articulated in Shanghai installment fiction, but at
an even more fundamental level on the very skills that this fiction requires of
its readers and the aesthetic experiences it gives in return.

Chapter 6 investigates the ways in which the “Shanghai” produced in in-
stallment fiction from the 1890s to the 1930s serves as the irreducible ground
for both realist and modernist novels and short stories of the 1930s by writers
as diverse as Mao Dun, Liu Na’ou, and Shi Zhecun. Mao Dun makes use of
this ground in his use of narrative structure and city space in Midnight (1933)
and reflects on it critically in his analysis of the distinction between leisure and
“serious” business. Modernist fiction, despite its many innovative aspects, is
also conditioned from the start by formations of gender, language, and narra-
tive structure that are first articulated in the earlier novels. In their presentation
of the “modern girl,” the city as an arena of polyglot cosmopolitan interaction,
and the “stream of consciousness” as an expression of interior space, these short
stories of the late 1920s and early 1930s make extensive use of figures and im-
ages produced and refined in earlier decades. Finally, while Mao Dun and the
modernists develop novel approaches to ideological and psychological space
respectively, these spaces retain important genetic connections to the concrete
urban spaces produced in earlier texts.

The centrality of the nostalgic mode in post-1949 discourse on Shanghai
is unmistakable: the late Qing and early Republican periods have been par-
ticularly inspirational to later journalists, historians, novelists, and filmmak-
ERS. The seventh chapter discusses a variety of efforts to come to terms with
“old Shanghai,” including Eileen Chang’s Lives of Shanghai Flowers translation
projects and commentary (1970s–1980s) and Hou Hsiao-hsien’s fin-de-siècle
cinematic experiment, Flowers of Shanghai (1998). My aim in this chapter is to
detail first, the rhetoric and practice of recuperation common to many of these
nostalgic looks back—rather than recreate the past, they attempt to remake it,
supplementing its inadequacies; second, the transitivity of nostalgia (the way
in which we are nostalgic for precisely that moment in the past that was in turn
intensely preoccupied with an even earlier historical moment); and finally, the
extent to which nostalgic attachment to the past depends in part on an equally
powerful obsession with the contemporary moment. In this sense, chapter 7
establishes a nostalgic genealogy that reaches back to the very earliest moments
of Shanghai cultural production and continues from that point forward to sub-
tend its persistent fascination with the “new” and “contemporary.”

Nostalgia is never merely a one-way street from our time back to the past;
it is also a call forward, a kind of address to the future. The epilogue inquires into the current obsession with “old Shanghai” and its link to Shanghai’s rush to “regain” its former global prominence in the spheres of culture, trade, and finance. What role do the tropes and figures characteristic of Shanghai in the early twentieth century play in articulating the ideal of urban development toward which the city is working at the turn of the twenty-first century?