
Shanghai’s waterfront, circa 1930, where colonial structures mixed with traditional architecture.

DELIVER GREATER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The eighth collection in the China and the Modern World series, Records of Shanghai and the International Settlement, 1836–1955, provides a primary source collection vital to understanding and researching the social, political, and economic history of not just the British-dominated yet highly globalized International Settlement in Shanghai but the history of modern China. Comprised of nine series of British Foreign Office files from The National Archives in the United Kingdom that are directly related to the history of Shanghai and the International Settlement, plus a small number of files selected from the records of the British Ministry of Labour, Treasury, and War Office, this collection deciphers and illuminates the International Settlement as the seat of formative events that shaped the history of modern China as it transitioned from an imperial dynasty to a globally engaged republic.

ABOUT THE COLLECTION

This collection covers the century-long history of Shanghai and the Shanghai International Settlement from multiple political, commercial, military, cultural, and legal perspectives. It offers unprecedented insight into China’s most-developed “semicolonial” territory, which was governed by a Westerner-dominated Municipal Council; put in place modern infrastructural mainstays such as electricity and tramways; and saw cataclysmic events that pushed the country toward the eventual establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. The topics covered encompass politics, industry, trade, crime, cultural affairs, entertainment, and everyday life, and some of the included materials are exclusive to these files.

VALUE OF THE ARCHIVE

• The accounts illustrate a century of political and cultural life in a “semicolonial” and global city in what is now one of the world’s superpowers.

• These files provide a diverse set of valuable English-language archives for researching one of the most dynamic and globalized cities in modern Asia, making it accessible to a Western/Anglophone audience in an area of increasing academic curiosity.

• Given that the Shanghai Municipal Council, which governed the International Settlement, was populated mostly by Anglophone Westerners, and that the Settlement itself was integral to the political, economic, and cultural makeup of the city, researching it is valuable not only for students of Chinese history but also for those researching colonialism, imperialism, urban history, and global cities.

• The material has no overlap with any other searchable collection.

• The collection enhances the following Archives Unbound collections:

  • China: Records of the U.S. Department of State, 1940–1944
  • Chinese Maritime Customs Service: The Customs’ Gazette, 1869–1913
  • The Minutes of the Shanghai Municipal Council
  • Papers of American Missionaries to Asia: Jay C. and Lucile C. Oliver and YMCA China
  • Papers of British Consulates and Legation in China (1727–1951)
  • Papers of Old Shanghai: Business, Banking, and Insurance, 1874–1949
  • Papers of Old Shanghai: Miscellanies, 1853–1945
  • Papers of Old Shanghai: Press, Education, Healthcare, and Charity, 1863–1948
  • Papers of Old Shanghai: Social Shanghai, 1906–1912
  • Papers of Old Shanghai: Societies and Clubs, 1890–1942
  • The Papers of Sir Ernest Mason Satow
  • Policing the Shanghai International Settlement, 1894–1945
  • Political Relations and Conflict between Republican China and Imperial Japan, 1930–1939: Records of the U.S. State Department
  • Service Lists and Reports of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service and Whangpoo Conservancy Board
  • Shanghai International Settlement: Shanghai Municipal Council Reports, Minutes of Ratepayers Meetings, and Shanghai Volunteer Corps
  • Shanghai International Settlement: Urban Planning and Development, 1845–1948
  • Shanghai Municipal Council: The Municipal Gazette, 1908–1940

Handwritten letter from 1900 discussing the writer’s employment in Shanghai, mentioning a monthly salary of $200. FO 1092/40; Crown Copyright images reproduced courtesy of The National Archives, UK.
TOPICS COVERED

- Shanghai Municipal Council
- Shanghai Volunteers Corps
- Extraterritoriality and the Mixed Court
- Shanghai riots [1905]
- World War I in Asia
- May Thirtieth Movement [1925]
- Shanghai incident (January 28, 1932)
- Second Sino-Japanese War
- Opium traffic and ban
- Rise of nationalism and communism in China
- Construction of railways and tramways
- British expatriate community in Shanghai

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The Shanghai Mixed Court, which heard cases between 1864 and 1927 in the Shanghai International Settlement.
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