

Old Shanghai Clubs & Associations

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A directory of the rich life of foreigners in
Shanghai from the 1840s to the 1950s

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National Associations and Clubs

American

During the early years of their presence in Shanghai, Americans were accepted as equal members of most British social clubs, so, aside from small sailors' clubs, they felt no need to create their own clubs or associations. American Masons were members of the British lodges until 1864, when a group of Americans gathered in the house of Dr H.V. Boone and created the Ancient Landmark Lodge. Americans also joined almost all British sports and recreation clubs. However, as they did not play cricket, they established the Shanghai Amateur Baseball Club in 1865, another of the first American organizations. The July 1880 opening of the Columbia Country Club was a social milestone celebrated by the 230 Americans living in the International Settlement. The American Women's Literary Society (later the American Women's Club) was established as the first American women's social institution in Shanghai in 1889.

In the early 20th century, the declaration of an "open door policy" led to an increased American presence and the creation of new American institutions. A new American Masonic lodge, Sinim Lodge (established in 1904), marked an awakening of interest in American Masonry. Soon after, other American lodges were established, though they all still remained under the shadow and influence of the older English lodges for a few decades. The Shanghai American Amateur Athletic Association, established in the early 1900s, became a very popular American sports institution. The American Association of Shanghai was established with the aim to represent and consolidate the various interests of the American community in Shanghai for greater unity and efficiency. The Missouri News Colony Group, headed

by Thomas Millard, became an important unofficial social circle of American journalists from the University of Missouri. Several other American university associations were founded, such as Dr John Fryer's University of California Association, the American Returned Student Association and, most importantly, the American University Club in 1902. By that time, Grace Gale's House had already become the most important American leisure establishment, famous not only for having American prostitutes, but also for its excellent library and one of the city's best foreign restaurants. Not all American social clubs were equally successful. Club Ansonia, for example, was founded in 1905 and closed few years later.

World War I threatened the friendly relations between Shanghai's British and American communities. The British were suspicious of American motives for not entering the war and the American community became isolated, some unable to obtain membership in British clubs. This led Americans to open their own venues. The Chinese Anglo-American Friendship Association was established in 1914 to show that American sympathies were with the British, despite their proclaimed neutrality. America's segregation from the British was, however, pronounced in all fields: American Masons established the new Shanghai Lodge, American businessmen established the American Chamber of Commerce and the American Union of Commerce, American women founded the American Association of University Women and the Mother's Club while American sportsmen established the Socony Football Club and the American Swimming Association. During this period, Americans also founded what became their most important organization – the American Club.

The end of World War I marked the expansion of American influence in Shanghai, visible in the variety of newly established American organizations (the American Bar Association, American Boy Scouts, American Masonic Temple Association, American Players of Shanghai, Daughters of the American Revolution, etc.). Many were for war veterans, like the American Legion, United States Ex-Service Men's Club, United States Fleet Reserve Association and U.S. Panay Memorial Association. There were also several obscure organizations (e.g. the Ku Klux Klan) and semi-secretive organizations like the

Phi Beta Kappa Association of East China. This was also the time when the US Fourth Marine regiment further enriched the American social life by establishing its own social clubs and athletic teams.

The Japanese occupation caused the disappearance of most pre-World War II American clubs. In the postwar period (1945-1949) some older American associations were reestablished and, while some new ones appeared, this turned out to be a short-lived revival of an era which had permanently vanished.

British

The British were the first foreigners to settle in Shanghai, the first to gain extraterritorial rights, the first to establish a foreign settlement, the first to open a consulate, the first to open representative trade offices and also the first to establish social and athletic clubs and associations. Before undertaking negotiations with the Chinese, all other Western powers had the British model in mind regarding extraterritorial rights, opening consulates and establishing commercial firms. The rich social life of old Shanghai also started with the British and all other foreigners were largely influenced by the British social activities and models. After all, the word "club" is English in origin, and when the British came to Shanghai they already had some 150 years of experience in their operation.

The British were famous for bringing their native habits to other parts of the world. Almost every major British colonial city had its own missionary society, racetrack, sports club and various social institutions. Shanghai was no exception in this regard. British missionaries from the London Missionary Society first publicly worshipped at the British Consulate in 1843, opened the Trinity Church in 1847 and founded the first hospital for Chinese, successfully treating 9,000 patients by 1850. Missionaries from other British societies followed the example of the London Missionary Society and soon established their own branches in Shanghai.

British influence was visible in all fields. They established the first sports clubs (paper hunt, football, cricket, rowing), the first amateur theater groups (Rangers and Footpads) the first academic associations (Royal Asiatic Society), the first elite social institutions (Shanghai Club,

Country Club, Shanghai Race Club) and the first Masonic Lodge (Northern Lodge). They organized the first balls and it was not difficult for members of the “four sister societies,” St. Andrew, St. George, St. Patrick and St. David Societies, to find a reason to gather and celebrate. Real political and economical decisions were made behind the scenes by the Royal Empire Society, whose founding members included future Prime Minister Lord Salisbury. The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, another influential organization, established its branch in Shanghai in 1873 to “introduce the western science to China.” Club Chambers, another prestigious British association, was less successful and closed its doors shortly after opening in the 1870s. Until the outbreak of World War I, the British could also join the influential China Association, which first pursued cooperation with the British Foreign Office, but later used all its power to argue that the British Government was failing to effectively represent British mercantile interests in China. The Ministering Children’s League, was created “for children of the educated and wealthier classes – to train them in habits of unselfishness and thoughtfulness for . . . their poorer brothers and sisters.” Some British Jews were not admitted to all elite British establishments. For this reason millionaire Victor Sassoon opened Ciro’s night club, while other Jews opened the Jewish Country Club in response to rejection from the Country Club.

There were, however, many ordinary British clubs which had no reputation for exclusivity or exceptional service. The British community was diverse socially and there were many people who could not afford to pay the high fees of more exclusive clubs. In the mid-19th century, the poor and sick British were treated at the Seamen’s Hospital. During World War I, 15 percent of foreigners were completely dependent on charity, many of them British. Several clubs attracted the less affluent British, especially sailors. The Sailor’s Home, opened in 1860, was a favorite of this crowd – it had dining, smoking, sleeping, reading and washing rooms. Opened in the 1870s, the Captain’s Club was for the enjoyment of coasting vessels’ masters. There was also a place called Toc H or Talbot House, where ex-soldiers were encouraged to mingle and make friends, regardless of rank or status, with the aim to “express its ideals of co-operation and friendship across the normal barriers that

divide people.” After World War I, British sailors and navy officers opened the Union Jack Club, which had a billiard room, an orchestra space and small apartments for general use. This club required no entry or subscription fees.

During World War I, many British men went to war and those who stayed rearranged their activities in accordance with the situation. The British Chamber of Commerce was pushed by the Municipal Council to employ more women so its male employees could join the army. The British Women’s Work Association collected donations, offered medical assistance and produced items needed by British soldiers and sailors. Once the war was over, the British community quickly found new opportunities for social engagement. Shanghai once again became a nice place for British children, who could receive riding lessons at the Pony Club or become members of the Boy Scout or Girl Guide movements. British women established the British Women’s Association. Polo players founded clubs A, B, C and D. Several specialized organizations were also established, such as the Old Carthusian Society, Old Tauntonian Society and Old Westonians. Great Britain dispatched a substantial military force to Shanghai after 1928 and its presence immediately resulted in the creation of new and very successful football clubs—Wiltshire Regiment Sport Club, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment and Lincolnshire Regiment. Ex-soldiers soon established war-veteran organizations: the United Services’ Association, Royal Air Force Association and South African War Veterans Society. The late 1920s witnessed the activities of several extreme anti-communist organizations (Constitutional Defense League and Shanghai Fascists), established to support the authorities in the International Settlement “in the present crisis, and to act in the interests of the entire community.” During this period, the four London-based engineering societies (Royal Engineers Old Comrades’ Association, Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Institution of Civil Engineers and Institution of Electrical Engineers) were also particularly active.

This was also a time when divisions appeared within the British community between short-term residents (consular officials and trade representatives) and the more permanent ‘Shanghaianders,’ many of whom had never been to England. On the one side, Shanghaianders were

accused by London representatives of being opposed to any measures which would weaken their position and were derisively referred to as “small Treaty Port people.” On the other side, Shanghailanders accused London of treachery and betrayal. Surely the most important British Shanghaileander organization was the British Residents Association, which campaigned against the “treachery” of the British Foreign Office, represented Shanghailanders’ interests in the Shanghai Municipal Council and lobbied against extraterritoriality reform. In 1941, with 3,400 members, it became the largest British organization in Shanghai and one of the few organizations that extended membership to women.

Still, during times of war, the British promptly showed their national solidarity. This was so in 1854, during the Crimean War, when the first British war fund was founded. It was the same during World War I, when they established the Royal Flying Corps Hospital Fund, Blue Cross Fund, Star and Garter Fund, British Flower Shops, British Mother’s Fund, Prince of Wales Fund, Queen Mary’s Fund, etc. Likewise, the beginning of World War II in Europe mobilized the British population to establish the Central War Fund, which collected a total of \$3,720,000 before 8 December 1941, when the Japanese occupation caused the closure of almost all British associations.

Most British associations were reestablished after 1945, but they then needed to cope with the loss of extraterritorial rights and the civil war between Communists and Kuomintang. It soon became obvious that many British firms could not compete with their more energetic American counterparts, and that the golden age of British in Shanghai had passed. With the Communist victory in 1949, it became official. The British Residents Association continued its work for several more years, holding its 15th annual general meeting in 1951. The stately Shanghai Club existed for some years after 1949, allowing female membership for the first time. But by the early 1950s, foreigners could no longer legally operate associations and clubs.

By 1957, all British firms except the Shell Company, had been forced to close their doors. The few foreigners still in Shanghai met at the Royal Air Force Club or the International Seamen’s Club, founded as a social establishment for foreign sailors in what was once the Shanghai Club.

In 1959 there were fewer than 100 Westerners in Shanghai, 53 British. In the early 1960s there were around 30 foreign residents in Shanghai, mostly British, Danish and Swedish. They met at the RAF Club, where they could but reminisce about the golden age of old Shanghai.

Chinese

Chinese organizations had much greater membership numbers than their foreign counterparts. After all, there were only tens of thousands of foreigners in Shanghai compared with a few million Chinese. Among the Chinese clubs, native-place associations (*huiguan*), established for members to maintain their connections with their home community, dominated the local scene. The Ningbo organizations were the most numerous, followed by those from Guangdong. As an illustration, more than 30 Guangdong associations were active in Shanghai in 1919. There were also native-place associations from Hunan, Hubei, Zhangzhou, Zhejiang, Shaoxing and other parts of China.

Thus, there was an overwhelming number of Chinese organizations in Shanghai and, because of this, those listed in this book are limited to those with a connection to foreigners and foreign organizations or institutions. Some of them strived for modernization and advocated reforms (Natural Foot Society), some were religious (Union of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism), others agricultural (Agricultural Engineering Society), friendship-based (Anglo-Chinese Friendship Bureau) or political (Chinese Communist Youth League).

Using Western societies as a model, the Chinese established their first modern academic and professional institutions—among them the Chinese Geophysical Society, Chinese Institute of Engineers and Chinese Mathematical Society. Some Chinese establishments were as prestigious as Western clubs, such as the Chinese Jockey Club of Shanghai. There were many business associations: the Guide to the Shanghai Municipal Archives online has published a list of 450 different industrial, trading and banking associations that existed in Shanghai from 1773 to 1959. Chinese organizations were mostly benevolent (Red Cross Society of China, Red Swastika Society, etc.), but there were also many student fraternities (e.g. the Flip Flap Fraternity), literary clubs (Left-Wing Writers' Association) and sport clubs.

French

French residents in Shanghai organized their social life primarily within their Concession, where they had their own Municipal Council, police force, administrative organs and social establishments. There was the Cercle Sportif Français, one of the most famous cosmopolitan social clubs in Shanghai, the Hai Alai Club, attracting many enthusiastic visitors, and the Canidrome, visited every week by thousands of gamblers. The French Chamber of Commerce was among the most successful chambers in Shanghai, receiving annual financial assistance of some \$35,000 from the French Municipal Council. The French also had many leisure clubs (Café Parisian), cultural institutions (Alliance Française de Shanghai), war veterans' societies (Amicale des Anciens Combattants de la Grande Guerre), police clubs (Cercle de la Police Française) and business associations (Cercle des Merchands de Gibier). French Corps Dramatique, founded before 1856, was one of the city's first amateur theatrical groups. There were several influential Catholic associations, many led by the legendary Father R. Jacquinet.

During World War II, the French community became strongly divided between the supporters of General de Gaulle and those who favored the Vichy regime. The French administration accepted the Vichy regime while French supporters of de Gaulle established the Free French Group to recruit volunteers and Croix de Lorraine Fund to collect donations and offer medical assistance to French soldiers. The French era in Shanghai ended symbolically when Louis Fabre, the French police commissioner during Japanese occupation, committed suicide following the formal rendition of the French Concession on 30 July 1943.

German

Before World War I, German residents had a rich social life and were active in the Deutsche Vereinigung, German Yacht Club, Deutscher Kirchengemeinde, Deutscher Seemannsheim and many other organizations. Their main social venues, the German Club Concordia and the German Garden Club, were closed as the result of the outbreak of Sino-German hostilities during World War I. In 1919, around 2,460 German residents were forced to leave Shanghai and, consequently, all German associations ceased to exist.