

# CHARTING URBAN SHANGHAI

## Cheng Xiaoqing and His Huo Sang Universe (1931–1933)

JIANG Wei (姜巍)

Department of Translation, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

### 1/ Introduction

CHENG Xiaoqing (程小青, 1893–1976) was one self-taught writer who was active in the Republican period (fl. 1910s–1940s). In addition to his multitudinous translations of English crime fiction into Chinese, he was best-known for his creation of the Chinese serial detective Huo Sang (霍桑). Stationing at No. 77 Avenue Road (today known as West Beijing Road) in the International Settlement of Shanghai, Huo Sang receives both public and private commissions from all walks of life, fighting against crimes and social injustice. Fifteen years after Huo Sang's literary debut, thirty-two stories were collected and published under the title of *The Complete Cases of Huo Sang* (1931–1933), which forms the basis of this research.



Fig. 1. Selected works of Huo Sang's adventures by Cheng Xiaoqing. Source: Private Collection. Courtesy of Mr. Hua Sibi (華斯比).

### 2/ Narrativizing Shanghai

Crime fiction burgeons with urbanization. To think of Sherlock Holmes is to recall the foggy Victorian London, Arsène Lupin to his fin-de-siècle Paris, and Philip Marlowe to his 1930s Los Angeles, to name but a few. Crime fiction writers narrativize the urban space where their detective heroes dwell. Two questions thus arise: (1) How is Republican Shanghai represented in *The Collected Cases of Huo Sang*? (2) What could we possibly deduce from Cheng's signified Shanghai?

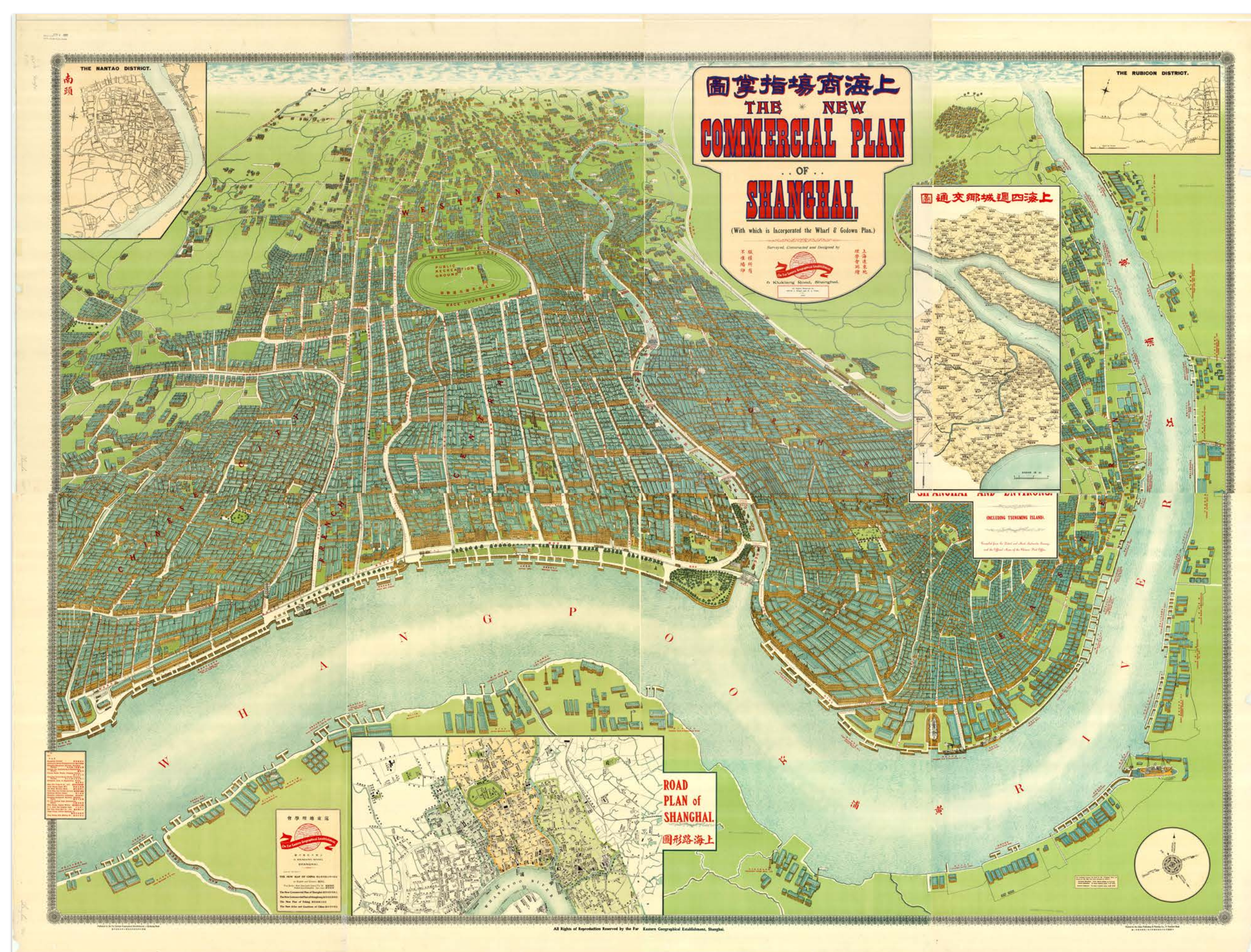


Fig. 3. The Far Eastern Geographical Establishment, *The New Commercial Plan of Shanghai*, 1915, 86 × 56 cm, printed by the China Publishing Co. Source: American Geographical Society Library and University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries Digital Collection.

### 3/ Methodology

Inspired by cultural geographer Michael Crang and literary historian Franco Moretti, I examine the thirty-two Huo Sang cases which form a self-enclosed narrative universe, extract identifiable locations referred therein, pin these entries onto one base map (in this paper I choose *The New Map of Shanghai* (1937) drafted by Fusazō Sugie 杉江房造) and use parallel maps for cross-reference where necessary, look for patterns of spatial distribution, and conclude with a symptomatic reading.

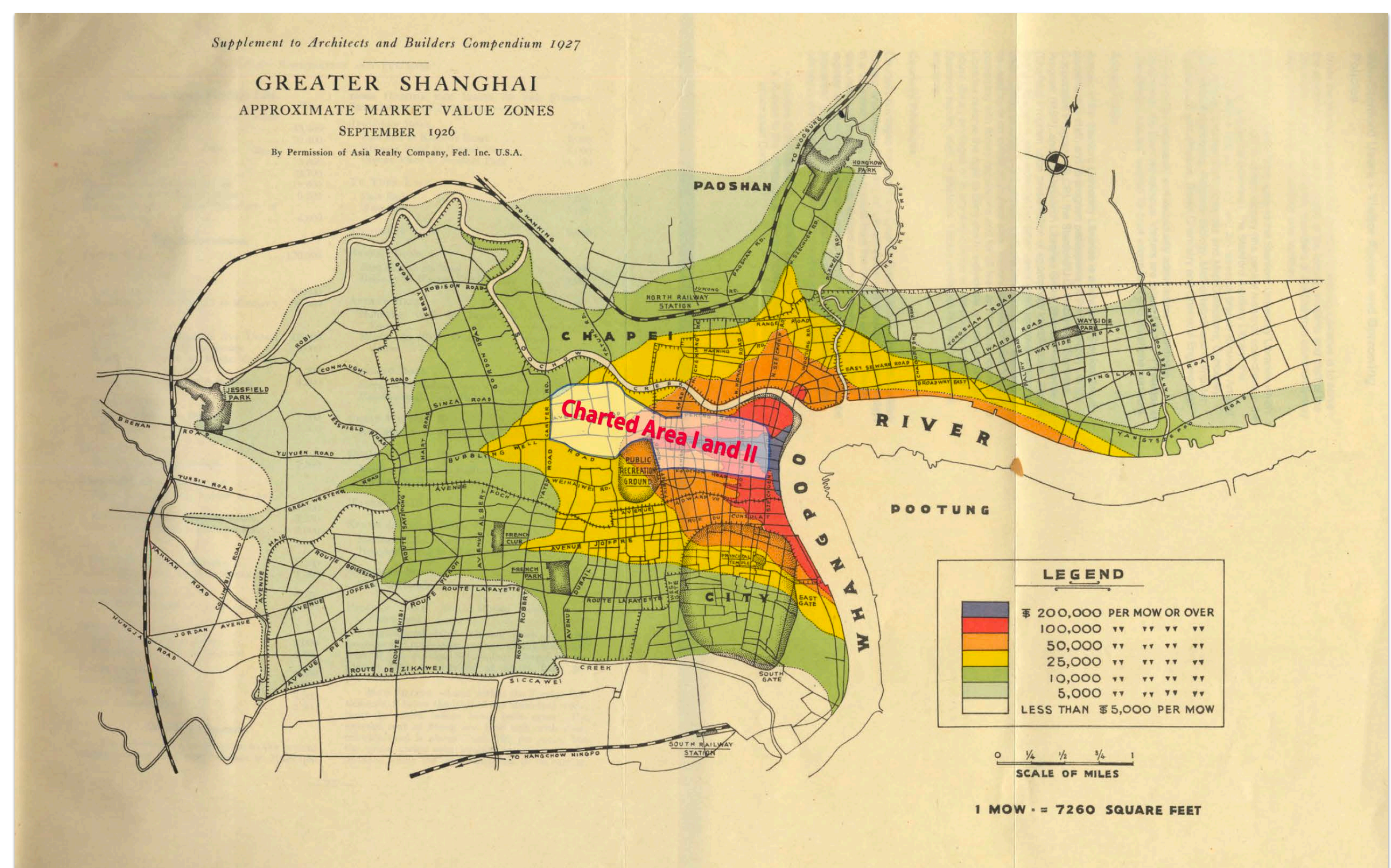


Fig. 2. Charted Areas I (commercial) and II (residential) of *The Collected Cases of Huo Sang*. Modification by the author. Cartographical Source: "Greater Shanghai: Approximate Market Value Zones, September 1926," Virtual Shanghai Project, <https://www.virtualshanghai.net/>.

### 4/ Findings

In the fictional universe of Huo Sang, young people who are attracted by the glamorous siren of Shanghai are doomed to end up with a tragedy. Statistics collected indicate a higher probability that tragic events will take place in the International Settlement. Shanghai is narrativized as the place where the fire of crime burns, faith evaporated, morality tampered, self-maintenance lost—and the extraterritorial occupation of the International Settlement should take the major blame.

N. B. This unpublished paper has been read on the conference "Land in China, 1900–2024," jointly held by The Chinese University of Hong Kong–Chiung Ching-kuo Foundation Asia-Pacific Center for Chinese Studies, Institute of Chinese Studies, and Center for China Studies on January 5, 2024.