

# **Shanghai. A heaven built upon a hell!"**

## **—— A literary study of German-language Shanghai fiction in the 1930s**

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### **Abstract:**

The aim of My PhD thesis is to explain the emergence and perception of literary images of the city Shanghai in the German-language Shanghai fiction in the 1930s. In my research, it is not important whether the images presented are true or not. What is decisive is how the literary images of Shanghai are received and represented in the works analyzed. Equally important are the historical and social backgrounds that influence the emergence and perception of the literary images of Shanghai.

The following 8 novels, 1 juvenile novel and 2 short stories will be analyzed in my thesis:

1. Richard Huelsenbeck: China frisst Menschen. 1930
2. Friedrich Lichtneker: Taifun über Schanghai. 1930
3. Alfred Schirokauer: Schüsse in Schanghai. 1932
4. Richard Huelsenbeck: Fall des Trimmers Lipka. 1932 (Erzählung)
5. Wilhelm Komakichi von Nohara: Erwin in Schanghai. Eine Geschichte aus Chinas Unruhtagen. 1934 (Jugendbuch)
6. Bernhard Kellermann: Jang-Tsze-Kiang. 1934 (Erzählung)
7. Walter Anatole Persich: Die Entscheidung fällt in Shanghai. 1937
8. Friedel Loeff: Der Teufel von Schanghai. 1938
9. Vicki Baum: Hotel Shanghai. 1939
10. Christoph Walter Drey (Walter Anatole Persich): Der letzte Zug nach Schanghai. Ein Roman aus kriegereischer Zeit. 1939
11. Carl Otto Windecker: Abenteuer in Schanghai. 1939

The works are chosen for two reasons. On the one hand, the Shanghai-related works published in the 1930s are relatively more diverse in terms of both quantity and Quality. It consists of adventure novels, crime novels, socially critical novels and war novels. On the other hand, the above-mentioned works refer more to the current social problems because of the specific historical background. Since the establishment of the first concession in Shanghai in 1847, the European subculture had gradually penetrated into all aspects of Shanghai society. Since the turn of the century in 1900, Shanghai has become one of the most important metropolises in East Asia and at the same time a place in China where Western and Eastern cultures came into the most intensive contact with each other. The introduction of foreign capital and modern technology brought rapid economic development to the city, but also social problems such as child labor and a wide gap between rich and poor. Otherwise, Shanghai had also become a place of exile, where several Jewish communities were built. These social phenomena and social problems are manifested in different novels.

In the main part of my thesis, the eleven Shanghai novels and short stories mentioned above are arranged thematically-motively according to the representation of the protagonists, the influences of propaganda, the contrasts between European and Chinese characters and the topography of Shanghai, which is mostly seen as a labyrinth. The exemplary analysis of all eleven works is starting from the space, which is seen as a constitutive element of the epic situation alongside time, character and plot. The integration of the contemporary historical background creates a panorama of metropolitan experience motifs at the intersection of reality and fiction. At the same time, the depiction of the spatial motifs of experience serves as a contemporary historical reflection, so that the imaginary city dimension hidden behind the facades can be reflected.

Since the first foreign concession in Shanghai was established, the city of Shanghai had been divided into two districts, namely the foreign concessions and the Chinese town. On the outside, these two districts are separate. But on closer inspection, they are actually connected. The functions of this city topography can be illustrated by using semiotic spatial models developed by the Russian literary scholar and semiotician Yuri M. Lotman.

According to Lotman, Semiosphäre is divided into a core area and a periphery. From the center to the periphery, there are various power differentials in which the codifying power is spread out from the center. The center has a conservative tendency towards stability and stagnation, while the periphery has a tendency towards instability and creativity. Tensions between the opposing forces of the center and the periphery lead to a center-periphery dynamic.

In my research, I have used the semiotic model to analyze the German-language Shanghai fiction in the 1930s. Although the contradictory elements are located in this separate city, they will be reconnected through the border crossings by the moving figures. Each border crossing is seen as an exchange between the center and the periphery. The borders can be both visible and invisible. The border crossings can be spatial as well as mental. According to Lotman's semiotic model, I have divided the functions of the borders into three categories. Due to the three different functions (separating function; connecting function; filtering function), each border crossing leads to different results (eg. intensification of a crisis; resolution of a crisis; emergence of a new crisis). Both spatial and mental border crossings can lead to labyrinthine urban experiences such as disorientation, self-loss and helplessness. Because of the labyrinth-like structure, the city Shanghai serves on the one hand as a haven for people in crisis; on the other hand as a hotbed for new crises. In other words, on the one hand as a heaven; on the other as hell.