

“Receive – Reform – Regenerate - Restore”
Shanghai Rotary Club Beggars Home Project 1940

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1 July 2014

The Rotary Club of Shanghai (上海扶輪社) joined hands with the Shanghai Municipal Council (上海公共租界工部局) and the Salvation Army (救世軍) in 1940 to solve thousands of beggars' problem. A Beggars Home was erected for the purposes of “Receive, Reform, Regenerate, Restore” the homeless. Dr. Fong Foo-Sec (龐富灼博士) of was formerly a Salvation Army officer in U.S.A. before he joined the Shanghai Rotary Club in 1922.

Into the large cities of China drain the miseries of a land worn by flood, drought, and war, artisans without jobs and farmers far from the soil roamed the streets, begging from more fortune human beings money for food, clothing, and shelter. This aroused the great concern of the Shanghai Rotarians. The Club with 110 members, drawn from 14 nationalities, studied the need, then set up a special Beggar Problem Committee to get action. A camp was then erected to take the unfortunates off the streets and to train them for relocation in community life.



上海工部局暨扶輪社委託救世軍主辦乞丐收容所

Main entrance of the Beggars Home which was jointly sponsored by the Shanghai Rotary Club and the Shanghai Municipal Council, and managed by The Salvation Army



Zabei District (閘北區) after the Japanese bombing in the January 28 incident in 1932



The Chinese 19th Route Army in defensive position in the Battle of Shanghai (1932)



Remembrance service for Chinese troops fallen in the Battle of Shanghai (1932)



The Bund of the Shanghai International Settlement as in 1932

Where came the Beggars

In January 1932, when the Japanese Navy launched its first attack on the city, (上海「一·二八」事變) Shanghai experienced for the first time both the brunt of modern warfare and the combination of intra-muros fighting and refugees. The three months experience of war was not totally new to Shanghai, and neither the sudden and massive arrival of destitute population was a novelty. In fact, since the nineteenth century, the city had seen various waves of refugees that were either linked to natural disasters or, more often, to human conflicts. Shanghai was probably the first large metropolis to experience large-scale modern warfare in its very midst.

Due to the incident happened on 7 July 1937 at the Marco Polo Bridge in Peiping (北平) (*Beijing*), led to outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (七七盧溝橋事變日本侵華). When war dawned again on Shanghai in August, tragedy and misery hit almost every corner of the whole city. The Battle of Shanghai (淞滬會戰) was the first of the 22 major engagements fought between the National Revolutionary Army of the Republic of China and the Imperial Japanese Forces. It was one of the largest and bloodiest battles of the entire war, described as “Stalingrad on the Yangtze”. Bitter and brutal fighting with intense bombings from ships and planes over, in and around the city, taking millions of civilians as actual though unintended targets, creating total chaos among the residents, and installing disorder as normality. The war threw literally hundreds of thousands of people on the streets. As war expanded to the countryside, millions became refugees. Few villages within a 50-mile radius of Shanghai escaped attention and thousands of unfortunate non-combatants were bombed out of their homes.

This was the first such experience for a metropolis the size of Shanghai that by then ranked as the fifth city in the world (3.5 million). What also made it unusual was its political structure. The foreign settlements, that represented the most developed part and the actual center of the city, were administered by foreign powers – The Municipal Council. Their extraterritorial status made them an island of relative protection in times of upheaval, but in 1937 the effects of modern war blurred these distinctions. In an area of less than six square miles that normally cared for a population of close to two millions, war brought in just a few weeks utterly destitute refugees by the hundreds of thousands. As one district after the other, within and on every side of the city – except the International Settlement – came under the scourge of war, there followed an almost complete evacuation of the dispossessed to the settlements.

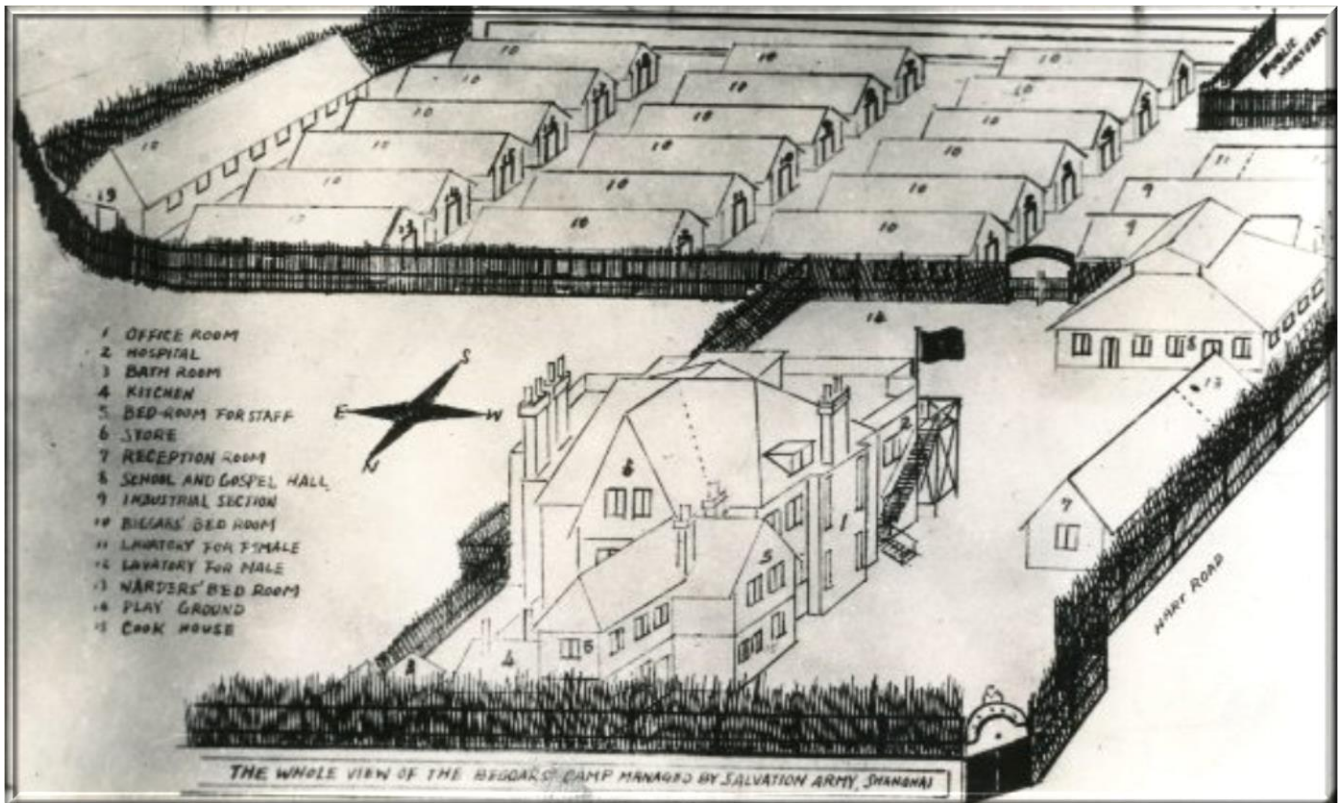
Not all refugees were as fortunate, especially during the initial phase of the conflict. Those who had no family support, as a temporary emergency measure or out of sheer exhaustion, simply settled anywhere: *“They overran the streets and huddled like pigs in sties in empty buildings, vacant lots, on window sills, in gutters and alleys. They sprawled for naps, nursed their babies, ate (when they could find or beg food) and lived their private life in public.”* (*“Traffic in Tragedy”* 《*The China Weekly*》, 13 August 1938, p. 344)

No matter how many refugees were taken in and fed in refugee camps, thousands still remained without a place or sources from which to fill their rice bowl. Decayed buildings that should have been razed now housed their hundreds where once one or a few families lived. Every foot of space was occupied in some down-town office buildings that confronted rich window displays and rushing traffic. In a dark movie theater, new audiences of these homeless and empty-handed make their beds between the narrow rows of seats. Scarcely better off were the

incalculable throngs that crowd beyond belief street upon street of the poorer houses where the congestion, cost and strain drives out the weak as recruits for fresh camps and taxed hospitals.

The number of these truly shelterless refugees was estimated at 75,000 in December 1937, but the figure must have been higher. They represented the most pitiful lot of all. The unregulated occupation of all sorts of unsuitable places throughout the International Settlement presented a genuine challenge to the authorities. Whereas they could guarantee minimum levels of food and health protection in camps, the “street population” was fully beyond its reach and represented a potential threat for the health and safety of the other residents. Homeless and parentless young Chinese boys and girls were roaming the streets, huddling in doorways at night. There was a growing concern about these youngsters who found no other means to secure food than to steal it, cutting rice bags, snatching food from counters. It does not appear from the official records that there was a systematic policy of removing these refugees to camps, but the authorities monitored quite closely the areas where homeless refugees had congregated. A number of them must have found their way to refugee camps, but up to 1940 official records show the persistence of small pockets of homeless refugees.

The Project



A perspective sketch of the Beggars Home (source: The Salvation Army)

Beggars Home was opened on 1 January 1941, situated on a former drill ground used by the U.S. Marines, and comprising 26 houses with accommodation for 1,900 people along with a gospel hall and a hospital. This settlement, set up with the support of the Shanghai Rotary Club

and the Shanghai Municipal Council and operated by The Salvation Army, was a response to the large number of homeless people in the city, many of them refugees. The Chinese Civil War (國共內戰) had begun in 1927 and the Japanese invasion in 1937 only exacerbated the flow of people away from violence and banditry in the countryside towards the relative safety of the cities. Shanghai itself (except the International Settlement) was occupied by the Japanese military forces in November 1937.

The express aim of the camp was “to receive, reform, regenerate, and restore to society” the homeless population of Shanghai. It included a school for adults and children (where the Chinese phonetic script was taught) and workshops for handicrafts such as weaving, basket making, carpentry and tailoring. All the work of the Home was carried on by the residents themselves, including a camp guard to assist in maintaining good order. Men, women and children were gathered up by the police and brought to the Home in police vans. New arrivals were photographed, fingerprinted and classified into groups according to professional abilities and their province of origin. Their clothes (described in ‘All the World’ as ‘verminous, germ-laden rags’) were burned to prevent disease entering the Home and cotton-padded clothing provided.



The original intention of the Municipal Council had been to make confinement in the Home compulsory, but this was abandoned in light of the good behaviour of the first groups of “beggars” admitted to the Home. It was then decided that, due to the success of these first groups, admission to the Home would prioritize drug addicts and people with severe illnesses and physical disabilities.

The residents were to leave as soon as they were able to earn a living and, by August 1941 it was reported by The Salvation Army that: “*the camp has now actually become, as originally intended, a ‘Clearing House.’ Some stay at the camp for a few days and are then sent home or back to their relations, whilst others stay for a prolonged period before being sent to work or ‘cleared’ in some other way.*”

In November 1941 The Salvation Army reported that, after operating since 1 January 1941 it had been decided to close the Shanghai Beggars Home at the end of March 1942. However records were destroyed during the Pacific War. No detail information is found. The Project had been reported by 《*The Rotarian*》 in the October Issue of 1941. The next 6 pages extracted from the magazine gives the story illustrated with photos.

Less WOE in Shanghai

The Rotary Club joins hands with the Salvation Army and the Municipal Council to solve the beggar problem.

INTO the large cities of China drain the miseries of a land worn by flood, drought, and war. Artisans without jobs and farmers far from the soil roam the streets, begging from more fortunate human beings money for food, clothing, shelter.

In Shanghai last year the situation was acute—and of great concern to the Rotary Club. Its 110 members, drawn from 14 nationalities, studied it, then set up a special Beggar Problem Committee to get action. A camp was proposed to take the unfortunates off the streets and to train them for relocation in community life.

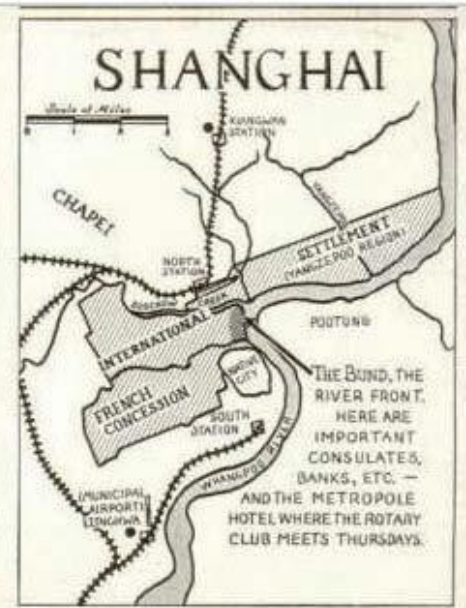
The Municipal Council agreed to provide the ground and to finance the project in part from the voluntary amusement tax. The Rotary Club would be the clearinghouse for reception and disbursement of funds. The Salvation Army would administer the camp.

So the camp was built. These two candid photographs start a dramatic picture-told story of how this remarkable example of Community Service operates. The first shows two derelicts being roused from the sleep of exhaustion. In the next, they and others are being escorted through the streets to the camp. Now, turn the page—



Photos except otherwise indicated: P. F. C.





LARGE huts—24 of them—comprise the Beggars' Camp (left). Airy, weatherproofed, they are equipped with bamboo beds, will accommodate 1,900. The map shows the International Settlement at Shanghai, location of the camp.

Photo: (left below) PIX



UPON ARRIVAL at the camp, beggars are registered and classified. Note the mask on a staff member. Filthy rags are destroyed, new clothes issued.



CLEAN AND CLAD, inmates partake of their varied diet of rice, vegetables, and cereals, found by experience to be nutritionally satisfactory. The little tot below concentrates on his bowl of rice.





ABOVE: A camp rule: All must work. Youngsters also lend a willing shoulder. Tradesmen are given an opportunity to ply their skills.

BELOW: Half work, half school, is the routine for juveniles at the camp. Carpentry, tailoring, bootmaking, and basket weaving train hands for economic usefulness.



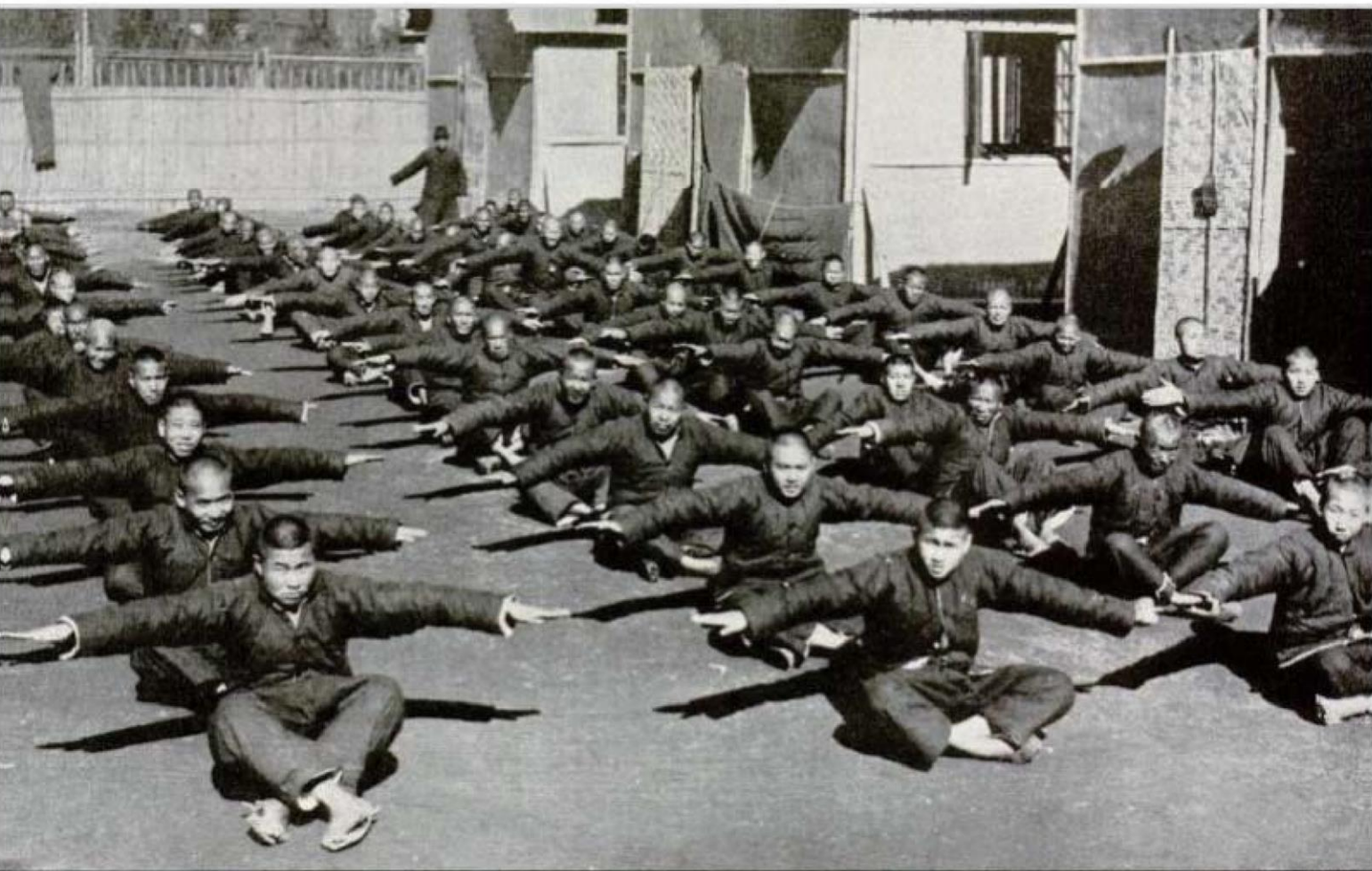


Photo: PIX

VITAL to rehabilitation is good health. Gymnastics (above) are part of the daily program. A doctor and two nurses are on the administrative staff.

A PHOTO FINISH (below) marks a race in this day's sports events. It's fun with a purpose—to build strength into the bodies of these erstwhile gamins.





A TUG for tots (above), with odds even—though the quartette on the right seems a bit worried. The onlookers are satisfied the best team will win.

AND WIN it did, handily! It is hard to believe—yet true—that these happy, clamorous youngsters were salvaged from Shanghai's teeming streets.





Photos (above & left below) PEX

FEW BEGGARS are able to read, but they listen eagerly to those who can. Some speak Japanese and English, as well as their own mother tongue.



YOUNG AND OLD study arithmetic together under the direction of an experienced teacher. A course in Chinese phonetics was recently added.

BEGGARS needing hospital care are given the best of medical attention. Many of them suffer from running sores, skin diseases, or tuberculosis.

RELIGIOUS instruction also has a place, for the Salvation Army believes "there can be no permanent reformation without inward renewal."

