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Introduction

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Introduction

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“Urban Chinese Living” speaks to a vibrant field of research in recent years. The essays grouped here examine aspects of Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They build on what we know of these cities in history and expand on the conception of the city as a particular site of discourse formation.

Wennan Liu’s essay on the campaigns that sought to ban cigarette smoking in Tianjin and Shanghai on the eve of the 1911 Revolution offers a social analysis of the discursive constructions that connected smoking and China. The article shows how Christian missionary temperance activists and elite Chinese opinion makers, citing science and economy, mobilized related yet different systems of symbolic representations to target the consumer behavior of the individual. Jia Si’s essay on the use of English as a cultural phenomenon in treaty-port Shanghai presents the phrasebooks and sentence structures that turned elements of English into street vocabulary among traders and urbanites. Igor Chabrowski’s essay on the rhymed chants that described Chongqing’s geography for laborers who entrusted the songs to memory invokes the city both in the way it might have sounded and how it had been laid out.

All three historical essays included here scrutinize the city as the kind of space that generated particular forms in the circulation of sounds, signs, and symbols, and demonstrate how such circulations, in turn, rendered each of the cities legible.

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