Abstract

This thesis investigates the regulation of entertainment establishments in the International Settlement of Shanghai, 1927-1937. Focusing on cabarets, dancing halls, and amusement centers, it shows the complex interaction of different regulatory bodies, including the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) and Chinese nationalist government, and the KMT Shanghai Branch, with social forces in the larger state-society framework during the Nanjing decade.

Based chiefly on archival sources, the first part of this thesis demonstrates that the SMC made great efforts to regulate the public entertainment establishments through a license regime, in order to maintain order while taking into account business interests. Due to insufficient police forces, however, the SMC's actual control over those establishments was limited. Secondly, I examine the Chinese authorities' effort to extend their power into the entertainment world of the International Settlement. The nationalist government sought significant financial support by cooperating with the prosperous entertainment industry, whereas the KMT Shanghai Branch attempted to promote public morality and civility by investigating the city's entertainment venues and urging the SMC to prohibit gambling games. I show that despite occasional frictions on some minor issues, the various authorities could collaborate effectively with each other.

The society showed its vigor and flexibility in response to both sides of authorities. To a great degree, the cabarets, dancing halls and amusement centers pursued their own interests, continually challenging the SMC's licensing regime. On the other hand, they
obeyed, ignored or exploited the demands and the protection from the Chinese authorities
as they saw fit their needs. The society in the public entertainment places refused
manipulation by any government authority, be it foreign or indigenous. This study
therefore concludes that, in the International Settlement, the society is the key point of an
unstable and complex triangle of state-society relations, and that no government during
the Nanjing decade achieved a complete regulatory control over society.