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COILED COLONIALITIES: PIANOS AND PLACE SIGNIFICATION IN SHANGHAI'S TREATY PORT HISTORY

> [T]he great works of the Western classical music tradition are so widely admired in China. Some 36 million Chinese children are studying the piano [in 2011], six times the number of American children.[1]

'From Confucius to Chopin' – an essay from 2012, from which this epigraph originates – exposes a particular narrative of binaries with little in between. The (unnamed) writer presents their account as follows: 'Western classical music [in China from the nineteenth century] [...] quickly gained popularity and prestige as a symbol of the Western "culture of scientific progress and modernization". The rigors of classical training [in turn] fit the Confucian value of self-cultivation through self-discipline'.[2] The undated accompanying photo, along with its caption, is even more reductive in its portrayal of the Chinese body: 'In Beijing, renowned Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim instructs young musicians'.[3] Truth be told, an unnamed conductor in the image, towering above the seated and baton-less Barenboim, exudes and gesticulates confidence. Reading between the lines, Washington's views of China are potentially at stake as well, especially when we factor in the essay's publication in *The Wilson Quarterly*, a current affairs magazine affiliated with the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, a DC-based think tank. This provenance, however, not to mention the essay's concomitant causality, would arguably have been of minimal interest to the magazine's readership in the 2010s. Of greater immediate appeal would have been the statistic cited in the essay, by which 'Chinese children' and 'American children' are pitted against each other in crass comparison. Staged against this rivalrous backdrop of 6 million versus 36 million young pianists, the protagonist pairing of Confucius and Chopin seems rather to be complementary, alliterating in concert and even softening the geopolitical tensions of China–US state relations well into the twenty-first century. Yet the correlation that has been touted here in a think tank publication – between 'Western classical music' as a sweeping influence and its foothold 'in the East' – leaves a lot to be desired. *Pace* Confucius and Chopin, there is more to contemplate than a mere tale of culture and progress. For the facile bifurcation of East and West not only fuels an orientalist imagination of pianos and European music cultures. It also overlooks a complex picture of instruments and such cultures in terms of their constant and

1
'From Confucius to Chopin', *The Wilson Quarterly*, 36/2 (2012), 71. This essay draws on Hao Huang, 'Why Chinese People Play Western Classical Music: Transcultural Roots of Music Philosophy', *International Journal of Music Education*, 30/2 (2012), 161–176.

2
'From Confucius to Chopin', 71.

3
Ibid.

changing inflections of coloniality, here understood as a deep-rooted historical condition replaying itself in strange, latent ways.

So far as Shanghai's treaty port history is concerned, the slapdash sequencing of Confucius and Chopin in a contemporary journalistic piece makes it instructive to explore anew the piano and its role *as* subject, enmeshed as it is within the treaty port as a peculiar plural setting, within the treaty port's workings of music, power and place, and within its multiple entanglements with coloniality – in situ and over time. In a sense, the piano (as) subject lives vicariously through its allusions to colonialism's hangover codes and structures. This breathing piano finds resonance in Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, which offers some helpful initial clues on an expressive 'vitality' of things – a political ecology of objects that are autonomously operative in their capacity 'to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own' and are manifest in their traces of 'independence or aliveness'.[4] Moreover, the piano subject takes Bennett's thesis to another realm of vitality, namely, time. From matter to moment, from thing to temporal being, the piano can give an animate quality to fragments of the past, open up meanings of continuity and change, and reveal the ongoing and varied effects of colonial legacies. Worth emphasising, then, is the piano's ability to reflect its imbrications with coloniality. By the same token, the piano functions as a sentient witness of this condition. Thus, the present article will conceptualise and investigate the piano's role as subject, by cross-examining colonialities in and across French Shanghai of the 1930s and Chinese Nationalist Shanghai of the 1940s, as viewed through the lens of place and place signification.

Indeed, the piano is not merely a played instrument. Behind its symbolism – as a globally celebrated culture and established practice – lies a troubled image of blood, sweat and sales. Notable in this regard is Sean Murray's transnational take on pianos, empire and colonialism, mapped in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century contexts of mass production, extraction and exploitation.[5] Such an approach entails a 'sketch of the social life of perhaps the most culturally important modern musical instrument', with particular focus on the booming American piano industry, and a discussion that interweaves the piano's 'defining materials' of ebony and ivory with attendant narratives of colonial violence, slavery and forced labour.[6] From the latter transpires a grievous dark side to the production of pianos and the importing of ivory from the Congo Free State, a private monarchy owned by Leopold II of Belgium, with these damning implications:

> [Although it] is not clear whether the relationship between the American piano industry and the Congo is representative of the piano industry worldwide [in the early twentieth century] [...] American companies dominated the world piano market, and in an era when

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Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi, viii.

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Sean Murray, 'Pianos, Ivory, and Empire', *American Music Review*, 38/2 (2009), 3–5, 14–15.

6
Ibid., 3.

> United States manufacturers churned out as many as a few hundred thousand instruments a year, it is safe to conclude that the American demand for pianos was devastating.[7]

All this, in the name of 'civility'. Murray thus issues a reminder that colonial atrocities and the lives that they took contributed to the creation and culturing of a middle-class femininity, and a white bourgeois domesticity writ large. But while he sheds light on pianos and enslaved production, lost lives and invested luxuries, his assumption remains that 'pianos and ivory [inherently] do not have agency or sociality in the same way people do'.[8] But are pianos no more than dead silent witnesses? Murray's spectre of slaughter, or his cited estimate of ten million extraction deaths in Congo between 1880 and 1920 – drawing on *King Leopold's Ghost*,[9] Adam Hochschild's account of colonial Africa – suffices to suggest that it is neither inconceivable nor unlikely for the piano subject to have been immune to prolonged acts of violence. The piano, far from being an unaffected subject, reverberates in life and body through these 'civilising' colonising moments – a grotesque show of coloniality.

Granted, in development theories of the later twentieth century, the piano subject is seen as operating more conspicuously, here in terms of the lopsided coordinates it occupies, as well as between value-laden notions such as 'First World' and 'Third World'.[10] *Piano and Politics in China*, by political theorist Richard Curt Kraus, is especially telling in this regard, not to mention the fact that its publication year coincides strikingly with the fall of the Berlin Wall.[11] Kraus begins as follows: 'I place China's [internal] cultural conflicts [in the course of the twentieth century] in an international perspective; [for] disputes over Third World pianos cannot be understood without reference to China's *place at the farthest edge* [my italics] of an expanding Western international order'.[12] In fairness to his methodology, Kraus takes particular interest in what he refers to as 'China's experience', more specifically by examining the country's middle-class constituents and cosmopolitans. Yet the resultant periphery of 'Third World pianos', situated at the 'farthest edge', raises eyebrows right away. In adopting such an approach, Kraus could not resist rehearsing music's 'international-language myth' as he terms it, one that has been perpetuated by 'powerful nations, whose often well-intentioned citizens need to prettify their cultural influence over weaker peoples'.[13] The trans/historical question of civility and coloniality arises yet again, this time in a sustained othering of a modernising other, in which the Western piano subject almost becomes complicit in a skewed, dualist world order. Thus, the book conveys China's place *as placed* within the shifting but still asymmetric equation of international relations in the late 1980s. At stake is an ideologically charged stance that amplifies the fall of the Iron Curtain on one hand, and gives new impetus to Cold War

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Ibid., 13. On Belgian imperialism and musical culture, see Catherine Hughes, 'Branding Brussels Musically: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism in the Interwar Years', PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015.

8
Murray, 'Pianos, Ivory, and Empire', 3.

9
Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 233.

10
On the cultural politics of worldisms and their intricate relationship with knowledge production, a pertinent reference is Chen Kuan-Hsing, *Asia as Method: Towards Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

11
Richard Curt Kraus, *Piano and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

12
Ibid., ix.

13
Ibid., ix–x.

global politics on the other, as re-enacted through the legacy logics of capitalism and communism.[14]

China's place in the historical consciousness, however, is not only defiant of such straitjacketing, but is also revealing of coloniality as a splintered condition in the history of both the nation and Shanghai as a treaty port. Herein lies the fragmentary character of treaty port history as a stray subset of colonial history: getting the lay of the land engenders the exact opposite and sets expectations of coherence adrift. Instructive in this regard are discussions of place as a discursive and philosophical category, which received intensified attention in musicological writings of the 2010s, most notably Daniel M. Grimley's 2018 monograph *Delius and the Sound of Place*.[15] In examining various subject relationships in, with and through place, Grimley maps an interpretation of place as matrix, placed cross-dimensionally 'in its sophisticated configuration of materiality, locality, identity, temporality, and sites of experience'.[16] From the composer's multi-referential corpus, this loose assemblage of place readings can be put to use even more liberally elsewhere, both to engage in a de-othering of China's geopolitical fixity (as perceived through a post-1989 lens) and to engage in its hydra-headed coloniality. Seen in this light, the piano subject in treaty port history evinces a constant, self-orienting sense of place and, in that same capacity, breaks 'China's place' free from more rigid delineations of Cold War historiography, as intimated earlier. Furthermore, the twinned positioning of piano as subject and coloniality as condition signals a shift towards a partial, and never complete, picture of China's and Shanghai's treaty port history, which is framed more as a chaotic jumble of places, and less as a series of actors and events representing a single studied era, despite its demonstrable sweep across the second half of the nineteenth century and the first four decades of the twentieth.

Such partiality is key to exploring an alternative understanding of agency that penetrates the outer political meanings of China's 'colonial formations', of which Bryna Goodman and David S. G. Goodman have observed: '[c]olonialism in China was a piecemeal agglomeration' of territorial claims, ranging from 'formal colonies' and 'treaty-port enclaves' along the coast to 'all manner of inland and peripheral intrusions' along its waterways and railways.[17] Yet, although the lived presences of China's foreign signatory powers are doubtless evident, especially in the treaty port, the inner worlds of collective and cultural experiences do not always align in coterminous fashion with the macro-configurations of 'law, land, power', to borrow the sub-title from Robert Bickers and Isabella Jackson's 2016 volume on treaty ports in modern China.[18] Conversely, treaty port structures and their status quos of rule and administration may or may not speak entirely to these worlds and experiences. The fact that treaty port Shanghai's International Settlement and French Concession had distinct

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More recent scholarship of the 2020s has taken an interest in further interrogating the transnational realities of these post-1989 logics. See e.g. Penny M. Von Eschen, *Paradoxes of Nostalgia: Cold War Triumphalism and Global Disorder since 1989* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022).

15
Daniel M. Grimley, *Delius and the Sound of Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

16
Ibid., 19.

17
Bryna Goodman and David S. G. Goodman (eds), *Twentieth-Century Colonialism and China: Localities, the Everyday, and the World* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1–2.

18
Robert Bickers and Isabella Jackson (eds), *Treaty Ports in Modern China: Law, Land, Power* (London: Routledge, 2016).

systems of municipal governance, for instance (the former, virtually self-governed by an elected body of treaty signatory nationals, and the latter, overseen by the consul general), does not necessarily produce a clear-cut profile of the treaty port and its enclave-like existences, let alone over time. Pianos, then, serve (in) an intricate and interior conception of treaty port history that part-entraps and part-confounds jurisdictional holds on power.[19] Agency gains a new purchase in this understanding of enclosure and experience, one to which the piano subject imparts mishmash meanings of power and perplexity, territory and ambience. Such a qualification also helps to revisit the implications of legalese and extraterritoriality stemming from the 'unequal treaties' of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the piano fits only nominally with Bickers and Jackson's pithy introduction to the treaties:

> The context in which [the combination of commercial trade and foreign residence] develops is that of the 'treaty system', a term which describes the set of privileges secured by foreign powers in treaties negotiated with the Qing state in the aftermath of [the First Opium War and] the 1842 Sino-British treaty of Nanjing [...]. Subsequent agreements saw the establishment of the principle of consular jurisdiction of Britons in China, that is, extraterritoriality: they were subject not to Qing law, but to the jurisdiction of their consuls [...]. New treaties and agreements [additionally] opened further ports in North China and along the Yangzi River. Other foreign powers took advantage of these developments to negotiate their own agreements with the Qing, and most-favoured-nation clauses ensured that privileges secured by one were applied to all.[20]

To be sure, extraterritoriality has conventionally been and remains a primary consideration for treaty port scholarship on colonial China. In her comparative study of extraterritorial jurisdiction in the Ottoman Empire and nineteenth-century Qing China, international law scholar Mariya Tait Sliys provides a useful genealogy of this peculiar practice of legal immunity and its protracted history, noting: 'The first *de facto* extraterritorial arrangements in China appear to date back to the end of the eighteenth century, when aliens trading in [southern] Canton under the flags of the English, Dutch and Portuguese East India Companies began to exempt themselves from the operation of local law'.[21] This purveyed idea of diplomacy-as-immunity, linked inextricably with a virulent opium trade at the time, spreads too into other areas of the Qing Empire. Of the exploitation and expansion of foreign jurisdictional frameworks beyond eighteenth-century Canton, Pär Kristoffer Cassel observes: '[By the mid-nineteenth century] Shanghai had developed into the hub of the treaty port system in East Asia, where consular courts from a variety of different countries coexisted with a number of local Chinese

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A related recent piece is the blog post published on 30 September 2022 on the 'Historical Photographs of China' platform, developed by the University of Bristol, adding fascinating context in this instance on Sam Lazaro Bros., a musical instrument shop and importer in 1920s–1940s Shanghai, founded by three brothers of Goan Portuguese origin. See Helena F. S. Lopes, 'A name, a photograph, and a history of global connections', accessed 30 September 2022, accessed 22 October 2022.

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Ibid., 1–2.

21
Mariya Tait Slys, *Exporting Legality: The Rise and Fall of Exterritorial Jurisdiction in the Ottoman Empire and China* (Geneva: Graduate Institute Publications, 2014), 11. For a similar comparative approach, see Turan Kayaoğlu, *Legal Imperialism: Sovereignty and Extraterritoriality in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

courts, creating a very complex legal order'.[22] Yet, extraterritoriality as provision and privilege, galvanising further foreign incursions into China, does not translate wholesale into the same enjoyment of commercial and strategic benefits among the treaty signatories, despite the most-favoured-nation treatment accorded them all. Carles Brasó Broggi and David Martinez-Roblez have pointed out, for instance, the marginal and marginalised role of Spain due to its waning colonial influence in the region and 'severe deficits in its trade with China [well into] the first decades of the twentieth century'.[23] Their reading from 2019 highlights not only the continued marginalisation of 'peripheral' trading powers in treaty port historiography, when compared with the 'core' trading powers of Britain, Japan and the United States, but also the overlooked and divergent meanings of extraterritoriality in colonial China, notwithstanding the penetrative colonial influences made possible by the arbitrary legality of the treaties.

Granted, the reassessment of treaty port dynamics has already found resonance in the material dimensions of everyday life within treaty port communities. For Donna Brunnero and Stephanie Villata Puig and the contributors to their edited volume, for example, the objective is to develop an '[interior] intimate view of the treaty ports as they were experienced by foreign communities', a fresh perspective as they see it that encompasses the gamut of 'routines and feelings'.[24] But while such an emphasis puts the focus firmly on discrete textures of living within the treaty port, it does not account for inner paradoxes of enclosure and experience, for one thing, and their regulatory manifestations across the treaty-port and post-treaty-port years, for another. Hence my thesis of coiled colonialities that extend through temporal significations of place. Shanghai's French Concession in the 1930s, along with its incorporation back into the city's Chinese Nationalist Municipality from the mid to the late 1940s, are especially pertinent moments of inquiry for this reason, due to the close proximity in time of a foreign-leased territory on the one hand, and the apparent return of Chinese rule on the other, following Japan's surrender in 1945 and the signatories' relinquishment of extraterritoriality at the end of the Second World War.[25] Additionally, these identified areas expose an underlying process of continuity-*in*-change, amid and despite the resumption of sovereignty.

Power and perplexity: the 'soft piano'

But first, in the French Concession of the 1930s and early 1940s, the piano subject acquired signifying potential through what it was inadvertently pitted against: the prohibition of large and 'loud' musical forces across a range of licensed establishments, from cafés and restaurants to dance halls, nightlife venues and skating rinks. By

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Pär Kristoffer Cassel, *Grounds of Judgment: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth-Century China and Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 63.

23
Carles Brasó Broggi and David Martinez-Roblez, 'Beyond Colonial Dichotomies: The deficits of Spain and the peripheral powers in treaty-port China', *Modern Asian Studies*, 53/4 (2019), 1227.

24
Donna Brunnero and Stephanie Villata Puig (eds), *Life in Treaty Port China and Japan* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1.

25
This particular interest in the treaty port and its constructions of place draws partly on, but also engenders a new discussion and historical analysis from, two unpublished case studies in my earlier doctoral work. See Yvonne Liao, 'Western Music and Municipality in 1930s and 1940s Shanghai', PhD diss., King's College London, 2016.

way of illustration, the directive from the French Municipal Council (Conseil d'Administration Municipale), issued in response to a café-restaurant's application to feature a symphony orchestra in its summer garden on Rue Admiral Courbet (古拔路), stated as a matter of approval: 'aucun instrument de cuivre' ('no brass instruments').[26] Bundled together, then, in this mix of enclosure within enclosure, were the regulated spaces of live entertainment premises and the municipal stipulations of sonic regulation. Place, by extension, gained significance through a compounded sense of order and ordering. The piano subject fed off these constituents of place, which were also bound up with the self-projection of the French Concession as the French municipality of the treaty port. The naming of the Concession's streets and thoroughfares after Third Republic figures, for a start – including Admiral Amédée Courbet in the brief opening illustration above, who assumed a commanding role in Sino-French conflicts of the 1880s – was itself symbolic of the enclave-like locality of the French colonial presence in Shanghai.

Indeed, on one level, any discussion of pianos and their place signification in the French Concession would be impossible without first considering its concomitant hold on power. The Concession was Shanghai's 'French quarter', a municipality administratively distinct from the British-influenced International Settlement, and that of Greater Shanghai, which came under the purview of the Chinese Nationalists from the 1920s.[27] Where the city's extraterritorial interests were concerned, the British and the French had longstanding competing agendas in terms of how the treaty port should be run. *The Land Regulations and Bye-Laws for the Foreign Settlement in Shanghai*, a British report produced in the late 1930s, took a dig at French territoriality:

> France obtained the same [treaty] rights in China as Great Britain. The stipulations were identical with those of the Land Regulations of 1845 [the code of Shanghai's British Settlement before it merged with the American area], with the only exception that the French Consul went much farther in his claim for jurisdiction over the French Concession than his British colleague. He proclaimed as a principle that 'no Chinese or foreign official would be allowed to exercise his power within the boundaries of the French Concession'. It was bounded on the south side of the city (*Nantao*); on the north by the *Yankingpang* [*Yangjingbang*, a creek], which separated it from the British Settlement; on the east by the *Hwangpoo* [*Huangpu*] River; and on the west by the line of the 'temple of Gold of War and the bridge of the Chow family'. By acts of successive usurpation during the Taiping Rebellion this area was extended to the south and to the west, bringing the total area to nearly two hundred acres.[28]

The writer of the report was not grossly inaccurate in this observation; to begin with, the French Concession saw a number

26
Shanghai Municipal Archives (hereafter SMA), U38-4-1370-0525; exact date unknown. To cross-reference Shanghai's past and present street names, refer for example to Xue Liyong, *Jiedao beihou: Haishang diming xunzong* [Behind the streets: the search for Shanghai's street names] (Shanghai: Tongji University Press, 2008).

27
The French Concession has been a prominent topic of cross-cultural research in treaty port studies and Shanghai studies. A notable example is the 2014 bilingual conference held in Shanghai, '*Concession Française et Shanghai à l'Époque moderne*' (法租界与近代上海), which was co-organised by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and the Lyon Institute of East Asian Studies.

28
The Land Regulations and Bye-Laws for the Foreign Settlement in Shanghai, 1845–1930 (Shanghai: A.B.C. Press, 1937), 12; first printed in 1926 by the Commercial Press in Shanghai, and in 1937 by A.B.C. Press. Held currently at the Xujiahui Library in Shanghai, it is a bilingual report alternating between English and Chinese. The Taiping Rebellion to which it refers was a civil war fought in the mid-nineteenth century between the Qing Dynasty and the Han Christian millenarian movement of the Heavenly Kingdom of Peace. Displaced by bloodshed in and outside Shanghai, many Chinese fled into Shanghai's foreign-leased areas.

of expansions in 1861, 1899 and 1914, and although the Concession did not develop into a colony, it had a colonial style of rule with a hierarchical chain of command. The officer in charge of the French Municipal Council, to whom departments such as the Municipal Police (Garde Municipale) were answerable, was the French Consul General in Shanghai. The same report also noted, 'all real power was in the hands [of this appointed official], who was only responsible to his superiors [back in France]', and that the 'difference of spirit characterizing the authorities of [Shanghai's] International Settlement and the French Consul-General [resulted] in the liberal administration of the Settlement on one hand and the autocratic manner in which the French Concession was governed by the French Consul on the other'.[29] British bias and self-regard doubtless found their way into such a comparison, one likely purpose of which was to propagate with greater intensity the British cause in Shanghai. Yet the International Settlement was indeed not controlled entirely by the British, and in the 1930s and early 1940s the Shanghai Municipal Council, its governing body, had a mixture of British, American, Chinese and Japanese members. In contrast, treaty turf mattered particularly to the French, inasmuch as it cemented their jurisdictional hold within the treaty port. Wary of the British political agenda from the outset, in 1862 the French instituted their own governing body, the French Municipal Council.[30] The French Consul General in Shanghai went on to object against the proposed Land Regulations four years later, specifically the British and American plan to form a municipal system together that took shape as the Shanghai Municipal Council.

The fraught coexistence of a singular consular concession and an 'international settlement' caused the rift between France and the Anglo-American alliance to grow. For although there was no traceable point from which they became administratively autonomous, by the late nineteenth century these areas operated separately on different visions and claims. Complicating this landscape, however, and almost contradicting it, was the fact that the municipalities of the French Concession, International Settlement and Greater Shanghai did not have erected borders, and that the so-called foreign enclaves defied any description of a colonial possession. The seeds of a more insidious terrestrial coloniality were planted in this geography of enclosure, which was rooted initially in the various individual leases, for the treaties made it possible for signatory nationals to rent plots and buildings from the Chinese at fixed and favourable tariffs.[31] Boundary stones, placed under the joint supervision of the national consuls and the local authorities, defined the land rented.[32] Over time, then, the visuality and power bases of Shanghai's treaty signatories – a conglomerate presence in itself – stemmed from a motley combination of leases, street signage, colonial urban architecture and the day-to-day affairs of the municipal councils. Importantly,

29
Land Regulations and Bye-Laws, 12.

30
The composition of the French Municipal Council and other administrative matters were laid out in the Municipal Regulations of the French Concession (Le Règlement d'Organisation Municipale de la Concession Française) on 11 July 1866. According to these Regulations, the French Municipal Council was to have four French and four foreign members elected by the ratepayers, i.e. taxpayers of the French Concession. The Regulations were amended in 1909 and revised in 1927. Modifications notwithstanding, the French Consul General remained the officer in charge of the Concession.

31
On the terms of these leases, a useful reference is Cai Yutian, Sang Yonglin and Lu Wenda (eds), *Shanghai Daoqi* [Title deeds in Shanghai] (Shanghai: Guji Press, 1997).

32
Land Regulations and Bye-Laws, 12–14.

too, this divergent self-fashioning of the treaty port produced its variegations of place. Whereas the International Settlement came to function as Shanghai's de facto business district, the French Concession – south of the Settlement and about half its size – gained a reputation as an upscale retail and residential district. Panoramic maps from the time put into sharp relief the residences, lawns and green plots of the French Concession, against the densely packed banks, hotels, businesses or *hong* (行) and department stores in the International Settlement.[33] Tess Johnston's portrayal of a ritzy Frenchtown in the early decades of the twentieth century, despite the sentimentalist overtones of an 'old China Hand' writing in 2000, depicts an element of *joie de vivre*: '[Here] the French would teach you how to live [...]. [To be found were the] many amusements and diversions for both foreigners and Chinese, their elegant restaurants and cafés and scores of cabarets, nightclubs and exotically named (and staffed) ballrooms'.[34] The thoroughfares of Avenue Joffre (霞飛路) and Avenue Pétain (貝當路) – boulevards named after Third Republic generals that were lined with fashionable shops, mansions and high-end apartments – gave every appearance of being the attractions *du jour*. Peopling these scenes were the Concession's residents, venue operators and patrons, comprising mainly American, British, Chinese, French and Russian subjects, including émigrés.

Yet, there was much more to this picturesque modernist view of treaty port activity, middle-class urbanity and cosmopolitan everyday life. For the streets of the French Concession also embodied a socio-political economy, one synchronised with the regime of a consular municipality and its purported values of order and ordering. Pianos, in this mould of power, became place signifiers, because of their implied restraint and respectability. The 'soft piano' emerged as a containable subject, in contrast to the racy sounds of brass instruments, swing bands and outdoor dancing. The social noise associated with the latter seemed *contra* the desired status quo. The French municipality, to put it another way, attempted to steer what it wanted (not) to hear. Based on the available evidence, the licensing of eating and drinking establishments and entertainment venues functioned as both an administrative and jurisdictional mechanism, for although the licences in question pertained to the premises and not music per se, the stipulations often concerned the nature and scale of performances, from their immediate sites to their lived surroundings. Approval thus centred on the French Municipal Council's prescribed parameters of performance. Hence pianos, by extension – whether they were actual references or allusions – signified place through an instrumentality of colonial rule that was at once legal and sonic in scope. This particularising of Concession, regulation and sound, as in the case of the Majestic Garden, a café-restaurant with a dance garden on Avenue Haig (海格路), saw

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From *Lao Shanghai baiye zhinan* [Directory of businesses in Old Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2008). This is a reprint of the two-part volume *Shanghai shi hanghao tulu* [A pictorial directory of hongs in Shanghai]. The first part was published in 1937, the second in 1947.

34
Tess Johnston and Deke Erh, *Frenchtown Shanghai: Western Architecture in Shanghai's Old French Concession* (Hong Kong: Old China Hand Press, 2000), 12.

a licence granted on the provisos that the house orchestra have no more than six musicians and no brass instruments.[35] Moreover, the quietening agency of the soft piano was implicitly acknowledged by proprietors and operators alike in their applications, judging by what has survived from the dossiers kept by the French Municipal Council, now held at the Shanghai Municipal Archives. The Russian David Solomon Dvorjetz, for example, who proposed to open DD's, a café-restaurant on Avenue Joffre, was keen to clarify the composition of its new resident ensemble, which he added was nothing more than string instruments, a piano and an accordion.[36] Going beyond this acquiescence to what was deemed acceptable, the periodic silences and spatial limits that would have squared with the soft piano and its signification can be inferred from other extant applications. M. Novosseloff, who submitted their paperwork for a summer restaurant at the Little Hotel on Route des Soeurs (聖母院路) in May 1931, noted to the authorities that live music at the restaurant would not exceed its meal times.[37] S. F. Yong of the proposed Conkling Café-Restaurant on Route Ratard (巨籟達路) provided assurances to the same effect, emphasising: 'No dancing girls or hostesses will be provided, but only classical and small-ensemble dance music [that will be] played [inside] the premises'.[38]

Such attitudes reflected a striking dynamic of mutually dependent opposites. The soft piano of the French municipality, due precisely to its rendered image and temperament, evinced hard qualities, socially, with the effects of conditioning place and its restraint of experience, as in the foregoing examples, and constructing place more generically through a collective ordering. This penchant for ordering can also be construed as a class-based respectability writ large, a sentiment shared by the Concession's residents such as R. J. McMullen, Chairman of the Board of the Shanghai American School. To the French Municipal Council, he wrote: 'My attention has been called to rumors circulating in the community that a cabaret will soon be opened on a lot adjoining the Shanghai American School campus. The many Americans attracted to locate in the Concession are as interested as [the authorities] are in seeing that [the community] will not be invaded by cabarets or night clubs'.[39] Reporting the said developments in May 1942, McMullen was no lone advocate in instigating a form of resident protectionism, a mindset analogous and complementary to the residency of the soft classical piano at the Concession's licensed establishments and venues. A surviving letter from four years earlier, involving a Mrs Helen Brock on Avenue du Roi Albert (亞爾培路), not only conveyed her approval of the use of rubber-wheel skates instead of steel ones at the nearby Iceland Skating Rink as well as large advertising boards to 'block the spreading of sound in skating', but also warned the operator in no uncertain terms: 'I am very glad to see that you are taking these precautions against the noise.

35
SMA, U38-4-1373-0844.

36
SMA, U38-4-1373-0844.

37
SMA, U38-4-1370-0564.

38
SMA, U38-4-1373-0765.

39
SMA, U38-4-1370-0310.

I hope that you will carry out all the conditions that you have made in your letter [and should] there be any complaints, I shall have to write officially [and] have this stopped'.[40] Notwithstanding their personal agenda, and the possibility that McMullen and Brock could not have spoken entirely for their neighbourhoods at the time, the French jurisdiction seemed to project itself through its tacit registers as delineated through the soft piano. The apparent disapproval of 'noise' or, for that matter, outdoor dance music and brass instruments was no mere directive of a foreign municipal council exercising consular colonial rule, in continued contrast to the Shanghai Municipal Council in the International Settlement. The piano subject and its associated curtailing role on one level, combined with its proxy values of restraint and respectability on another, produced a key signification of place inside an overall enclosure of a Concession and its socio-political economy, making the French treaty presence within the treaty port doubly evident in that regard.

Yet, within this enclosure, how hegemonic was the soft piano as a reifying regulatory power? Put even more forcefully, did power always manifest itself as a pure expression of jurisdictional power? The Majestic Garden, for one, embodied a state of perplexity, inasmuch as it simultaneously loosened and tightened the licensing mechanism of the French Municipal Council. For the very workings of the piano as a place signifier – seemingly equipoised between its hard and soft opposites – were also complicated by its own regulatory agency. Indeed, it would be all too easy to take at face value what was initially documented in the English-language *North-China Daily News* in August 1933, a month after the Majestic licence was approved, about the assurances that had been offered to Concession residents:

> M. E. Fauraz, acting Director-General [of the French Municipality] gave consideration to letters of protest concerning the opening of a dance hall [i.e. the proposed Majestic Garden] in a mainly residential district. The Commission [of the Municipality], he said, decided to grant permission for the opening of a café-restaurant and dance hall on the understanding that the establishment should be of a high-class character, and that the music played should not be of such a nature as to annoy the neighbourhood.[41]

While portrayed ostensibly as a sophisticated venue of a 'high-class character', subsequent (archival) representations of the Majestic teetered between the strict, and strictly enforced, regulations of which the piano was a potent symbol, and additional latitude that those regulations inadvertently provided. On one hand, the 'special conditions' of the licence, stipulating no brass instruments and a small ensemble of not more than six musicians, produced an ongoing yet futile correspondence from 1933 to 1936 between the

40
SMA, U38-4-1319-2469.

41
North-China Daily News, 2 August 1933.

French Municipal Council and Y. C. Vong, the proprietor, who made a number of attempts to use brass instruments and enlarge the Majestic ensemble from six to ten, then to eight musicians after the authorities' outright rejection, again to no avail. On the other hand, the brass descriptor produced a strange rationalising effect by which other non-brass instruments, lumped together as a category, were justified by virtue of their perceived conformity with the regulations. Merely a week after the *North-China Daily News* covered the inauguration of the venue, the following was reported in the same paper: 'According to a resident in one of the houses overlooking the [Majestic] garden, the pavilion was in its original position on Thursday night. A number of Chinese dancing girls were present, and brass instruments appeared to be used. [The] sides of the pavilion were closed in by partitions, but the doors were left wide open'.[42] Not only did municipal officials ignore this complaint; they actually *aligned* their verdict with regulatory speak. The music, according to the paper, 'had been described to the authorities as "very smooth", [while Fauraz] understood [that] no brass instruments were used. A saxophone [in his judgment] would not be regarded as coming in this category'.[43] Regardless of the unsubstantiated nature of this assessment and the manner in which it was reached, the Majestic saxophone could be said to have been conferred the role of a surrogate soft piano, despite its implied association in the news with dancing hostesses and rowdy entertainment.

More revealing perhaps, the sanctioned and subjectivised saxophone sheds light on the effectiveness of licensing regulations as a French jurisdictional instrument in 1930s Shanghai, or how variances in regulation confounded the profile of the French Concession. Digressions are not uncommon or surprising in themselves; what transpires from the Majestic, nonetheless, is a baffling interplay between power and perplexity, enclosure and experience within Shanghai's French municipality. In this interpretation, which adds nuance to the existing discussion of restraint and respectability, place signification in the consular municipality of the treaty port is, and is not, squarely determined by its attributes of maintained order and ordering. As such, this attempted orientation of place becomes its own contradiction. Caught in that contradiction, the soft piano fades into oblivion while securing traction with officials and applicants alike as an instrument of licence.

Experience, too, assumes a layered reality. Consider, for example, the appearance of other French cultural registers, notably Parisian variety entertainment that took root locally in the Concession, which would have also conflicted with the regulatory predilections of the French Municipal Council for European classical music as the 'right class' of music. The sounds that filled the spaces of the Concession's licensed establishments, by contrast, were often the

42
North-China Daily News, 9 August 1933.

43
Ibid.

suggestive alternative sounds of French popular entertainment. A telling clue is the publicity for Café Renaissance on Avenue Joffre, one of many similar advertisements in the broadsheet *Le Journal de Shanghai*, which paints a picture of Parisian café-concerts and music halls in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, transplanted to Shanghai several decades later:

> Tous les soirs
> CAFÉ RENAISSANCE
> (Le café européen)
> présente
> M. Moonzeff
> Chanteur bohémien
> Francisca et ses danses espagnoles
> Mlle. Regée
> dans son répertoire de chansons populaires
> et l'orchestre SCHWARTZLEDER[44]
>
> [Every evening\ CAFÉ RENAISSANCE\The European café\ presents Mr. Moonzeff\Bohemian Singer\Francisca and her Spanish dances\Miss Regée\in her repertoire of popular songs\and the SCHWARTZLEDER orchestra]

The programme, juxtaposing individual singers and their renditions of chansons with dance numbers, bore a resemblance to entertainment that encompassed such genres as the sentimental romance, French and other national folk songs, military songs, opera arias, operetta excerpts, *mélodies* and jazz. At the Renaissance in the early 1940s, Moonzeff and Regée would possibly have performed their own *tour de chant*, described by Steven Moore Whiting as an extended series of songs, 'a sort of spectacle put on by a single interpreter, who had to show enough talent and versatility to hold the stage by himself [or herself] for such a long time to the satisfaction of the public'.[45] Taking into account the Spanish dance act, the double bill of a chanteur and chanteuse and an ensemble that was likely a dance orchestra, accompanying the singers and patrons, entertainment at the Renaissance probably went on until the early hours of the morning. Further, these activities threw into relief a clear disconnect between French political authority and cultural influence in Shanghai, between the soft classical piano and the crowd-pleasing orchestra. Along the French Concession's vectors of place, as in its licensed venues and major thoroughfares, Parisian variety entertainment thrived in abundance, if the newspaper publicity were to be consulted again as an indicative source. Similar to the Renaissance, L'Art Café et Music Hall on Avenue Joffre advertised frequently in *Le Journal de Shanghai* and provided a ready fanfare for its glitzy daily offerings:

44
Le Journal de Shanghai, 1 March 1941.

45
Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 28–29.

TOUS LES JOURS
GRAND PROGRAMME MUSICAL
REVUES, CHOEURS, DUOS
ET SOLOS
BALLETS
CHANSONS EN VOGUE
CHANSONS À SUCCÈS DES DERNIERS FILMS
LE MEILLEUR ORCHESTRE[46]

[EVERYDAY\GRAND MUSICAL PROGRAMME\REVUES, CHOIRS, DUOS\AND SOLOS\BALLETS\SONGS IN VOGUE\HIT SONGS FROM THE LATEST FILMS\THE BEST ORCHESTRA]

This billing departed wholesale from the municipal standards of licence and regulation; it looked and sounded as if the soft piano had almost receded. Exuberance was the order of the day, and judging from the magnitude and spectrum of the performing forces, as well as the opulence of bodily display and the programming of the most current songs, entertainment at L'Art was predominantly in the style of Parisian music halls. More generally, of these establishments and their genre of revues, Stephen Moore Whiting observes: 'Dance replaced dialogue [for example, topical commentary by a master of ceremonies], and the orchestra became ubiquitous. The true "star" of music hall became the staging, supported by continuous orchestra music and by ensemble dancing – the whole bound by a principle of obligatory excess'.[47] Although additional evidence was not forthcoming as to whether revues at L'Art (as a reimagined genre) fitted entirely with this description, the café and music hall's operation and provision seemed to mirror an element of Parisian variety entertainment in 1930s Shanghai, functioning as a counterweight to the soft piano, hitherto the normative emblem of the treaty port's French municipality.

But what fundamentally, in terms of place signification, stands out about so-called classical pianos on one hand and renditions of Parisian variety entertainment on the other? When taken together, they reveal cracks in Shanghai's French jurisdiction, enough to cause obfuscation but not enough to call it into question. For although the surviving sources, as well as discrepancies between the Concession's newspapers and municipal documents, point to blatant inconsistencies in regulating, the replication of revues and similar staged formats neither overtakes nor cancels out the residency of the soft piano. This ambivalence of place, encapsulated in licensed venues and their spaces, blends order and disorder as part of the coiled coloniality of the Concession – a perpetual indefinable condition that obscures meanings of power and perplexity, enclosure and experience. Certainly, the musical presence and sexualised undertones of establishments such as L'Art, marked by their 'unruly' elements of spectacle and dance, could have nuanced

46
Le Journal de Shanghai, 10 March 1938.

47
Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 30–31.

the administrative presence of the French Municipal Council, but the Concession's co-cultivating of French cultural traits and French municipal structure made it impossible for Parisian popular entertainment to undermine the very regulations that bound it. The Concession's enclosed political and social economies, within which also existed a range of musical entertainments, thus created a peculiar internal experience of prescription and variety, itself a curious symptom of the French treaty presence in Shanghai. Paris, so to speak, did not displace pianos from their signifying, homogenising role in the French municipality. Conversely, the soft piano, non-brass instruments and their associated 'type' of classical music – regardless of what this repertoire might have actually involved – did not prevent Parisian variety entertainment from taking root. In a sense, the entrenched coloniality of the French Concession lay not in its physical demarcation of place, but in its conflicted material properties of 'things French', such as, but not limited to, the soft piano and revue orchestras, thereby aligning and misaligning with an apparent notion of place as engendered by the French licensing regime in Shanghai. This self-reordering amounted to an existential dilemma undermining the French jurisdiction in the treaty port, where power and perplexity were two sides of the same coin.

Territory and ambience: the 'hidden piano'

From the French Concession of the 1930s and early 1940s, and what it reveals about the embedded nature of coloniality in the treaty port, I now turn to the 'unified' single municipality of Chinese Nationalist Shanghai between the mid and late 1940s. The period in question lies between Japan's surrender in 1945, marking the end of the Second World War, and the Chinese Communist victory over the Chinese Nationalists, when the Republican era (1911–1949) associated with the latter came to a close.[48] In focusing on the post-war years, it may be tempting to emphasise as an historical event the resumption of the Chinese Civil War, fuelled by the longstanding rivalry between the Nationalist Party led by Jiang Jieshi (蔣介石) and the Chinese Communist Party under Mao Zedong (毛澤東).[49] The former's loss of ground resulted in their retreat from Mainland China to the island of Taiwan, and the founding of the Republic of China on the island and the People's Republic of China on the mainland.[50] Ideology and party politics were not the only determinants, however, and if the post-war moment in twentieth-century Chinese history were to be scrutinised further, the return of Nationalist sovereignty after Japan's surrender saw the conclusion of the treaty port era (1842–1945), the signatories' relinquishment of their rights and concessions, and an end to Shanghai's fragmented geography of foreign-and-Chinese municipalities, as well as the years of Japanese occupation (1941–1945).

48
Two notable dates are 27 May 1949, when the People's Liberation Army entered Shanghai, and 1 October 1949, the inauguration of the People's Republic of China.

49
Ideologically opposed, the Chinese Nationalists and the Chinese Communists engaged in military conflict from 1927 to 1949. Although the two sides joined forces temporarily in 1937 to fight against the Japanese, their differences still ran deep after the war. In the words of Michael Lynch: 'It was under American auspices that in August 1945 Chiang Kaishek [Jiang Jieshi] and Mao Zedong met personally for the first time in twenty years. The two leaders agreed on a truce, but it is doubtful whether either of them intended it to last. It was no surprise, therefore, that within a few months such agreement as had been reached had broken down. Formally, negotiations still continued, but by June 1946 the two sides were openly fighting each other again. The Americans – who had previously not fully grasped the depth of the GMD-CCP [Guomindang-Chinese Communist Party] animosity – abandoned their role as mediators and by January 1947 had withdrawn from China, although they continued to provide the GMD with military advisers and equipment'. Michael Lynch, *The Chinese Civil War 1945–49* (Oxford: Osprey, 2010), 9.

50
Thereafter, both competing states – the Republic of China (ROC) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) –claimed to be the sole legitimate government. The ROC represented China at the United Nations until 1971, after which it was replaced by the PRC.

Given this context, how did pianos signify or re-signify place in Shanghai as a regained territory and city? If the previous section exposes an inner coloniality, the coming discussion sheds light on coloniality as it played out over time – a curious sort of continuity-in-change. Here, the Nationalists' policy on entertainment taxation between the mid and late 1940s, combined with their musical taxation of Shanghai's eating and drinking establishments, provides fascinating insights into coloniality as a shifting (yet) ingrained condition. On one level, the duality of power and perplexity produces a fresh discursive meaning in the post-war municipality, as understood through its native regulatory dynamics. Whereas earlier coloniality revolves around a jurisdictional hold on power, this condition re-emerges in tension between reclaimed sovereign territory and the hospitality trade's defence of ambience. There was to all appearances a recasting of enclosure and experience within a category of taxable venues that claimed to serve food and drinks, not dancing entertainment, as their raison d'être, with the piano assuming a new hidden character in terms of appropriating and profiling the now-particularised spaces of cafés, restaurants and bars. Transcending the soft/hard binary, the surviving correspondence between Shanghai's municipal officials and eating and drinking establishments thus takes on a more complex tone than the French licensing ban on brass instruments. Notionally, ideas of place move from wholesale constructions of class and classical music in the French Concession to the minutiae of tax classification in Chinese Nationalist Shanghai with its convoluted tiered rates, resulting in a protracted discourse between administrators and operators. Manifesting itself through this exchange, the 'hidden piano' can bring a more nuanced perspective on everyday agency, crucially offering another view on the macropolitics of the post-Japanese and pre-Communist years, for these may simply be described as the final years of Nationalist rule in China, dominated by violent warfare and economic chaos. Yet despite the problems of post-war hyperinflation and rampant corruption, the available evidence not only reveals a regime of musical taxation and a municipality eager to stamp its administrative authority and inculcate moral authority. It also documents contemporary debates about taxable musical provisions in the city's eating and drinking establishments, which includes in equal measure the written opinions of municipal authorities and of the establishments and their guilds.[51]

Nonetheless, on a deeper level, an overarching regulatory thread shapes this trajectory across the treaty port and post-treaty port periods, extending from the licensing mechanism of Shanghai's French Municipal Council to the entertainment tax policy of its Chinese municipality. Even after the city turned a new leaf, music and performance remained linked with sex and dance during the post-war years. Judging from the Nationalist tax code, which will be examined below, music's presence in entertainment venues was

51
Of corruption in the Guomindang, Michael Lynch observes how '[f]ar from being a party of the people, the GMD under Chiang [Jiang] became a party of China's small and political elite. It drew its support from the bankers and merchants of urban China, who tended either to despise or ignore the impoverished peasants of the countryside. The consequence was that the GMD government, reliant on deals with the shady elements in Chinese society, became essentially corrupt, gaining an unenviable but deserved reputation for nepotism and partiality'. See Lynch, *The Chinese Civil War*, 84.

deemed a de facto invitation to debauchery, capable of whetting the dancer's appetite; everything ran counter to the authorities' aims of restoring governance and sovereignty. From a treaty port concession to the post-war city, regulation now took the form of an instrument of taxation. Ostensibly, it targeted music's ability to stimulate bodily movement and intensify contact, which was regarded as indulgent and profligate amid an ailing economy, to which Shanghai was expected to make a substantial contribution. According to Odd Arne Westad:

> By early 1946, the *Guomindang* [Nationalist] government was getting desperately short of cash with which to fund its plans for the civilian and military buildup of postwar China. The money from cheap U. S. wartime loans was running out, and corruption and the lack of an efficient civil service prevented tax money from reaching the central government [in Nanjing].[52]

Whether or not money was solicited in the name of morals, the city's entertainment venues quickly came under policy scrutiny. For example, in February 1946 – less than a year after Japan's surrender – cinemas, dance halls, skating rinks and *tanci* houses (彈子房) were all required to resubmit licence paperwork.[53] Although entertainment taxation in Shanghai was not unprecedented, with 'excessive and arbitrary taxes' levied on cabarets and similar industries during the Japanese occupation, the mid to late 1940s witnessed even more draconian rates due to increased hostility towards live and recorded music on the premises, and its (alleged) propensity to engender licentious behaviour.[54] So, the Nationalist clampdown on vices and dancing was also a pre-installed curb on assessments of music and performance, as befitted its stringent citywide taxation. On the other side, for Shanghai's Chinese restaurants and Western eating and drinking establishments, it was paramount that they persuade the tax authorities of their subdued musical settings for food and beverage consumption, unlike concert halls and theatres, for instance, the patronage of which relied primarily or entirely on musical events.[55] In some cases, claims of a so-called distinct sonic environment were rhetorical and/or likely to be financially motivated; even so, the correspondence was extensive and lasted from the mid-1940s through to the late 1940s, practically until the time when the Nationalists lost their grip and when the People's Liberation Army entered the city. Moreover, these claims demonstrate how a sub-category of taxable venues endeavoured to account for their musical offerings, showing how they attempted to influence the authorities and gain the classification they sought.

In such a light, one can understand the coloniality of post-war Shanghai as a self-perpetuating process of continuity-in-change, i.e. when viewed in terms of the city's ongoing place regulation as

52
Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946–1950* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 73–74, 86–87.

53
SMA, S325-1-24. *Tanci* was a popular vocal art form composed of spoken storytelling and sung ballads.

54
Andrew David Field, *Shanghai's Dancing World: Cabaret Culture and Urban Politics, 1919–1954* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2010), 225–232.

55
Regarding the contemporary classification of Chinese restaurant establishments, a useful reference is the taxonomy of regional and local cuisines at the time, such as Guangdong, Suzhou, Anhui and Native Shanghai. See SMA S323-1-8-1.

it relates to the venues concerned, most if not all of which already existed in the treaty port. In other words, this condition warrants a reading that approaches the residual registers of treaty port history as afterlives. In Nationalist Shanghai of the 1940s, constructions of place reify municipal authority on the one hand and defy its logic on the other, in some alignment with – but also in contrast to – the jurisdictional speak of the 'soft piano' and the existential dilemma of the French Concession. An intriguing feature of re-grounding territory and sovereignty is an inward emphasis on site and seclusion, or the blurring of enclosure and experience within seclusion. In this re-signification of place, the 'hidden piano' resurfaces and recedes. As can be inferred from the case of the 'Nightclub Café' in 1946, the piano's contribution, even though not explicitly stated in the operator's letter, functions by proxy through (its) purported playing limits.[56] Granted, the control element of time is not dissimilar to that observed earlier in the Concession's establishments, but here, obscurity becomes its own veiled quality. Having been charged by the Shanghai Finance Bureau the higher entertainment tax rate of forty per cent that was applicable to nightclubs and commercial dance halls, the establishment protested against the decision and maintained that it was just a café, named 'Nightclub' (夜總會).[57] In an effort to differentiate itself from the taxable category of nightclubs, which, in the operator's words, 'specialized in entertainment' (專資娛樂), the Nightclub was keen to highlight an atmosphere of retreat and ambience: live music in that formulation was 'supplied merely as an adornment' (供點綴而已), and restricted from 3 pm to 6:30 pm and from 7 pm to 11 pm.[58] A few pages later in the correspondence, the café's operator's petition appeared to have succeeded. The Northern District (滬北區) Tax Office accepted the reasoning and informed the Finance Bureau that the café's primary purpose was to sell food and beverages. Willing to retract its decision, the Bureau gave the café the lower tax rate of thirty per cent, applicable to eating and drinking establishments in which music did not exceed half of their daily hours of operation. As a condition of approval, the venue's name had to be changed; the higher rate would be reinstated if the Nightclub did not comply.

Interpretively, throughout this paperwork, piano and performance shifted in and out of place as transient ancillary features of post-war eating and drinking establishments. Place status meant tax status: the higher tax rate for nightclubs and dance halls reflected a punitive stance and a particular censure, which can be found for example in the Shanghai Social Bureau's restriction of tea dances to Sunday afternoons, and its initiative in March 1948 to ban dancing in successive phases and revoke licences issued to taxi hostesses.[59] To borrow Andrew Field's description: '[S]tarting in 1945 the Nationalist government took a heavy hand to the city's nightlife and entertainment industry', which then led to a nationwide ban on cabarets and the 'Dancers' Uprising' in Shanghai in 1948.[60] Despite

56
SMA, Q432-2-1542.

57
I provide the original English names of the establishments where available, and/or their original Chinese names where available. In the event that English names are not available, the Chinese names are either translated or transliterated using the *pinyin* method.

58
SMA, Q432-2-1542.

59
SMA, Q6-10-373. Other examples of regulation include the Shanghai Police Bureau's proposed regulation of waitresses in bars and cafés in March 1946. The underlying concern was that the waitresses were de facto dance hostesses and did not have the required licences (see SMA, Q109-1-407). There was also an instruction dated March 1949 from the Police Bureau to the Finance Bureau, asking the latter not to grant new licences to eating and drinking establishments with music and dance floors, a mere two months before the Communists officially assumed control of the city (see SMA, Q432-2-1281).

60
Field, *Shanghai's Dancing World*, 234.

the fact that musical instruments did not correlate with, and were not used to calculate, percentages at the time, the hidden piano – or its supposed quality of unobtrusiveness – could arguably provide an additional perspective on the mechanics of the Nationalist tax instrument, which were characterised by tiered and increasingly distinguishable rates: [61]

Before 1 February 1947
i) Entertainment tax (娛樂稅) applicable to dance establishments: 40%
ii) Entertainment tax applicable to establishments in which music time did not exceed a half of their daily hours of operation: 30%
iii) Feast tax (筵席稅) applicable to establishments with no music: 20%

From 1 February 1947
i) Entertainment tax applicable to dance establishments: 50%
ii) Entertainment tax applicable to establishments in which music time did not exceed a half of their daily hours of operation: 25%
iii) Feast tax applicable to establishments with no music: 15%

It is clear from the marked gradation of rates that the authorities discouraged the combination of dance and music as much as possible, whether played live, on the radio, or from records. Time-limited performances in Shanghai's eating and drinking establishments, for which the hidden piano and smaller ensembles 'in the background' would have been deemed a lower tax risk, seemed to have been considered the bottom line and a counterweight to dance (as) entertainment, though the differences between the two were never clear-cut. There were instances in which nightclubs and eating and drinking establishments appeared more similar than the latter would have the officials believe. Reference was made for example to promiscuous behaviour at Sun Light Café, with waitresses apparently becoming bargirls during its music hours (7 pm to 11 pm), according to the tax collectors.[62]

Whether or not Sun Light morphed into something else, the intricacies of territory and taxation, site and ambience cannot be dissociated from spectral senses of place and place regulation, lingering on as a peculiar hangover in post-war Shanghai. As if they were embroiled in a circular coloniality of power, administration and governance, the city's venues were subjected to both a familiar social ordering and a new municipal tax/onomic order, amid and despite wholesale change from foreign jurisdictional control to Chinese sovereignty. The hospitality trade attempted to negotiate this change, not because of a seismic shift as such, but because of an ineluctable impact of rule, jumbling the treaty port city's recent past and immediate present. An illustration is the petition from eating and drinking establishments to the Shanghai Social Bureau in 1949, a good four years after signatories' relinquishment of treaty rights and concessions. Now, the post-treaty signatories – none of

61
SMA, Q432-2-1931.

62
SMA, Q432-2-1542. Report from the Hongkou District Tax Office to the Shanghai Finance Bureau in September 1946.

them foreign subjects – came from redrawn administrative areas of the defunct treaty port, such as the already-discussed Renaissance Café, an establishment known for its Parisian entertainment in Madang (馬當) District, previously a part of the French Concession, and the Palace Hotel (滙中飯店) restaurant in the Central District, previously a part of the International Settlement.[63] These post-war signatories protested against the Shanghai Municipal Assembly's decision to reclassify cafés and restaurants with dance floors and live music as dance halls, pointing to their original primary purpose as cafés and restaurants, not commercial dance halls. In their judgment, they should only pay taxes for the times and sectioned premises with live music, for their performances and dance floors were 'simply meant to enhance patrons' enjoyment (僅為顧客助興)'. In a similar petition, over a dozen bars, including May Lung Bar, Star Bar and Swan Bar in the Central District, emphasised their existing membership of the Shanghai Commercial Guild of Cafés and Restaurants (上海市西菜業同業公會).[64] Insisting that they did not have dance floors, that they only supplied 'simple, unfussy music (簡陋之音樂)' and that this music helped 'alleviate loneliness (聊解寂寞)', the bars were anxious to establish their differences from dance halls. The joint minutes of the Shanghai Commercial Guild of Cafés and Restaurants and the Shanghai Commercial Guild of Chinese Restaurants (上海市酒菜商業同業公會) also mentioned how the attendees objected to the re-categorisation of their establishments as dance halls, additionally proposing that they collectively abandon their musical offerings and dance floors if their calls went unheeded.[65]

While the piano subject remains elusive amid this paper trail of documentation, it signifies even more about that imaginary of place. As indicated by the establishments and the trade's line of defence, music as a taxable component was to be understood more as a matter of enhancement than as a form of entertainment. In that connection, the questionnaires circulated by the Shanghai Commercial Guild of Cafés and Restaurants to its members in August 1946 prove another fascinating source of information, specifically their enumeration of house musicians and the continued documented presence of former French colonial landmarks and French Concession establishments, such as DD's (now D. D. S.) on Avenue Joffre.[66] Table 1 below shows a brief summary of the questionnaires returned to the Guild:

63
SMA, S325-1-24.

64
SMA, S325-1-24. Dated 19 January 1948.

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SMA, S325-1-24.

66
SMA, S325-1-24-1.

Establishment	Musicians
Arcadia Café and Restaurant, Rue Admiral Courbet (古拔路)	8
Argentina, Avenue Haig (海格路)	4
Atlanta Bar and Restaurant, Route Père Robert (金神父路)	2
Browning Café, Ming Hong Road (閩行路)	3
D. D. S. Café, Avenue Joffre (霞飛路)	5
Daisy Bar and Café, Broadway (百老滙路)	2
Fuluola (富羅拉) Café, Yu Hang Road (有恆路)	3
Golden Gate Café, Rue du Consulat (領事館路)	3
Golden Valley Restaurant, Thibet Road (西藏路)	5
Honolulu Café and Bar, Avenue Joffre	3
Jazz Café, Thibet Road	5
Jingmei (精美) Restaurant, Nanking Road (南京路)	5
Kavkaz, Avenue Joffre	7
Kiev Restaurant, North Szechuan Road (北西川路)	4
Nanyang Garden Restaurant, Sinan Road (思南路)	6
New Deal Bar, Route Père Robert	2
Nightclub Café, North Szechuan Road	4
Qichongtian (七重天) Café, Nanking Road	4
Restaurant Senet, Rue Lafayette (辣斐德路)	3
River Bar, Broadway	3
Silk Hat, Rue des Soeurs (聖母院路)	5
Sun Sun Sky Terrace Restaurant, Nanking Road	7
Welcome Café, Yu Yuen Road (愚園路)	4
YAR Café and Restaurant, Route Cardinal Mercier (邁爾西愛路)	2

Table 1. Summary of house musicians based on completed guild questionnaires.[67]

The data produces an average of four house musicians per establishment, and although the questionnaires do not give details of instrumentation, it is not far-fetched to assume that many of these small ensembles would typically have had the piano as a main and/or accompanying instrument. In providing fodder for Shanghai's cafés, restaurants and bars, the hidden (and tacitly featured) piano signifies place yet again, as it imbues post-war eating and drinking establishments with quiet mystique, if only as a way to camouflage their roots and links to the colonial treaty port in the context of Nationalist regulation and reclaimed territory. In a later ethnography of British high street shops, Tia DeNora refers to music's capacity 'for creating and heightening scenic specificity, for imparting a sense of occasion', and although

67 Here I reproduce the Chinese street names and their transliterations from the surviving questionnaires.

her findings concern research from the 1990s, her idea of music as a device of social occasioning, generating atmosphere and consumer agency, is nonetheless instructive.[68] In much the same way that this retail landscape created environments of enclosure and experience through music, Shanghai's eating and drinking establishments purported to create and preserve an ambience that was ethereal yet alive. If true, and hedged against higher entertainment taxes, these curated immersive qualities would have shaped and been shaped by the hidden piano and its constituent ensembles on-site, accompanying the patrons' activities of dining, drinking and conversing, functioning as a supplement to food and beverage service, and lending a certain 'aesthetic texture', to echo DeNora's expression.[69] The claims of Shanghai's eating and drinking establishments – particularly around the elements of 'enhancement' and 'simple, unfussy music' – had a fundamental message, then, in that the enactment of performances (as a tax buffer) meant more than the performances themselves. Within this safeguarded imaginary of place, seemingly immune to sex and sin, these establishments attempted to demonstrate their 'moral correctness' and their status as a distinct category of venue.

Yet the very conditions of treaty port coloniality also complicated patterns of enforcement and compliance; just as the coloniality of the Concession was internally conflicted, the coiled coloniality of place regulation occurred as an uncertain process of continuity-in-change in late-1940s Shanghai. The hidden piano and the venues in which it was situated did not signal a finite friction between territory and ambience, sovereignty and site. If anything, the piano functioned as a mediating subject, interacting in tension with, rather than in opposition to, the Nationalist regime of social order and ordering. In some cases, the tax instrument even benefitted the resident piano due to the latter's ostensible ability to stay out of the spotlight. In an assessment of Café Victor, for instance, Madang officials noted that there was no dance floor or band, and that the piano was only played occasionally by the patrons. The Finance Bureau's subsequent ruling, that the Victor was eligible for the lower tax rate, spoke to its (professed) identity as a self-regulated café environment, in which the piano was judged to have assumed appropriate passive agency. Elsewhere, the same agency was viewed in a similar light, albeit in a less favourable overall assessment. The Finance Bureau, having decided to investigate over a dozen Jewish bars in Hongkou (虹口) – an administrative district and former occupied area in which refugees from Nazi Europe were detained and segregated by the Japanese – reported that musical instruments 'except' pianos were put away whenever tax officials inspected.[70] The piano subject, not exactly in need of being concealed, seemed to have retained its role as an ancillary feature of the establishment. Yet it was also alleged that the proprietors, many of them surviving refugees according to the 'Foreign Census Forms' (外僑戶口調查表)

68
Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 138–139.

69
Ibid., 110.

70
SMA, Q432-2-1543. Dated September 1946. The bars investigated were Acropolis, American, Delphi, Elite, Golden Sun, Imperator, Merry, Monti Caro, Moon Palace, Moka Efti, Rex, Rio, Take It Easy, Victory and White Bear.

of the time, often played the instruments as well.[71] The Bureau's ruling did not find an ambience of enclosure and experience, as the bars would have it. Whatever the circumstances, the post-war piano bore witness to the persistent effects of municipal power as articulated by and entangled with the city's venues. Further, the post-war piano brought into stark focus the dynamics of place regulation and place negotiation, lives and afterlives, often operating between tax (as) territory and remnant traces of site and community. The post-war piano gave no indication either that these dynamics could resolve, which is perhaps the most haunting symptom yet of Shanghai's incessant coloniality – a condition that was tied to the surreptitious cyclic return of its treaty port existence.

Colonialities without recourse

By highlighting the piano subject and its place signification through multiple considerations of enclosure and experience, I have explored the coiled workings of coloniality in Shanghai's treaty port history, as well as interlocked meanings of power and perplexity, territory and ambience across venues in the French Concession and the Chinese Nationalist municipality. Importantly, too, the treaty port was more than a distinctive setting in the re/writing of colonial histories. What else might we learn about colonialities in the plural, as gleaned from insights derived from the piano subject? Put another way, how can such an analysis offer another perspective on existing theories of coloniality? By now, it will be apparent that I have opted not to focus on the seminal writings of Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo. Without negating their far-reaching contributions, it is nonetheless necessary to think about the conclusiveness of colonial logics of modernity – apparent endpoints that have been framed respectively by Quijano and Mignolo as terminal symptoms of coloniality, affecting and distorting ways of knowing. From Latin America to Asia and the Middle East and to Africa, Quijano observes this about the global impact of coloniality, not least *cultural* coloniality: 'Coloniality is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed. It doesn't exhaust, obviously, the conditions nor the modes of exploitation and domination between peoples. But it hasn't ceased to be, for 500 years, their main framework'.[72] Delving still further into the insidious state of coloniality and its systemic manifestations, Mignolo discusses the necessity of an outcome-led theory, in the form of de-coloniality, which entails 'working toward a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ [...]. [This is also] where decolonization of the mind [and epistemic delinking] should begin. The struggle is for changing the terms in addition to

71
Hongkou District Archive, Shanghai, 48–116, 48–164, 48–165, 48–366, 48–377.

72
Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, 21/2–3 (2007), 168–178, 170.

the content of the conversation'.[73] Clearly, Quijano and Mignolo are both keen to emphasise coloniality's longstanding trajectory as they identify it across the continents and centuries, a trajectory that has culminated in a deep-seated malaise, and in Mignolo's judgment, there is extended potential for disrupting coloniality's embedded and debilitating effects. Indeed, coloniality as an ongoing question matters in thought and in implication, because it exposes the conception of a zero-sum game in which widespread Europeanisation has gained gross disproportionate advantage over colonised and repressed cultures, with lasting problematic consequences.

So far as historical analysis is concerned, such theorisation is not without limitations, for a monolithic hegemonic Europe can again take over in singular overriding fashion, even provoking a teleological exceptionalism, despite the unmistakable impact of colonial modernity. Quijano's commentary readily conveys a sense of totality, and with it an inherent paradox of reification: 'Through the political, military and technological power of its foremost societies, European or Western culture imposed its paradigmatic image and its principal cognitive elements as the norm of orientation on *all* cultural development [my italics], particularly the intellectual and the artistic'.[74] The perils of colonisation never follow a predictable path, however, and the synthesis of pianos and treaty port history provides an alternative take, arguably, on music and coloniality in part-discrete, part-intersecting contexts, as exemplified by observations of social order and ordering in and across Shanghai's French Concession and Chinese Nationalist municipality. Moreover, these peculiarities of place, as signified by the piano subject, help to eschew the rigidity of a foreign/indigenous dichotomy when working with surviving materials, due to the street knowledge that they can reveal, most notably through locational parameters and municipal taxonomies, as in the case of French regulatory licences and Chinese tax correspondence. By the same token, research into cultural coloniality should engage not only with present and future aspirations of restorative justice, such as Quijano and Mignolo have explored, but also with continuing precise enquiries into colonial histories as discursive lived settings, ever configured with moments and spaces, without recourse to neat theories. This mindset does not detract from the question of coloniality or put an entirely different spin on its study; rather, it calls for sustained close examination of the colonial musical condition according to its many processes and permutations, intertwined variously with discourses of power, administration and governance, and their agentic subjects. So, colonialities in the plural beget non-conclusive colonialities – in themselves awkward, yet telling, narratives of musical lives that neither ascribe to, nor yield to, the catchy pairing of Confucius and Chopin.

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Walter D. Mignolo, 'Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality', *Cultural Studies*, 21/2–3 (2007), 459.

74
Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', 170.

ABSTRACT
Pianos find resonance in Shanghai's treaty port history through their constant and changing inflections of coloniality, here understood as a deep-rooted historical condition replaying itself in strange, latent ways. Accordingly, this article explores the piano's role *as* subject, enmeshed as it is within the treaty port as a peculiar plural setting, within the treaty port's workings of music, power and place, and within the treaty port's multiple entanglements with coloniality – in situ and over time.

The piano, in a sense, lives vicariously through its allusions to colonialism's hangover codes and structures. In turn, I conceptualise and investigate the piano (as) subject by cross-examining colonialities in and across French Shanghai of the 1930s and Chinese Nationalist Shanghai of the 1940s. Significantly, this discussion extends through temporal significations of place, revealing inner paradoxes of enclosure and experience, for one thing, and their regulatory manifestations across Shanghai's treaty-port and post-treaty-port years, for another. Indeed, Shanghai's French Concession in the 1930s, along with its incorporation back into the city's Chinese Nationalist municipality from the mid to the late 1940s, are especially pertinent moments of inquiry, for these identified areas expose an underlying process of continuity-*in*-change, amid and despite the post-war resumption of sovereignty.

Further such particularities help to eschew the rigidity of a foreign/indigenous dichotomy. Through observations of social order and ordering, as derived from the piano subject and its place signification, I explore the coiled workings of coloniality in Shanghai's treaty port history, as well as interlocked meanings of power and perplexity, territory and ambience across licensed and taxable venues in the French Concession and the Chinese Nationalist municipality. Finally, from the treaty port setting, wider reflections follow on what I term 'colonialities without recourse', by which colonialities in the plural beget non-conclusive colonialities – in themselves awkward, yet telling, narratives of musical lives.

KEYWORDS
colonialities, pianos, place signification, Shanghai, treaty port history

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