



Facing page: The decorative pavilion in
Victoria Park, Tianjin - see page 3.



TIANJIN AND HEBEI



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TIANJIN (TIENTSIN)

Tianjin Municipality

Treaty Port, British Treaty 1860

Population 1936: 1,292,025

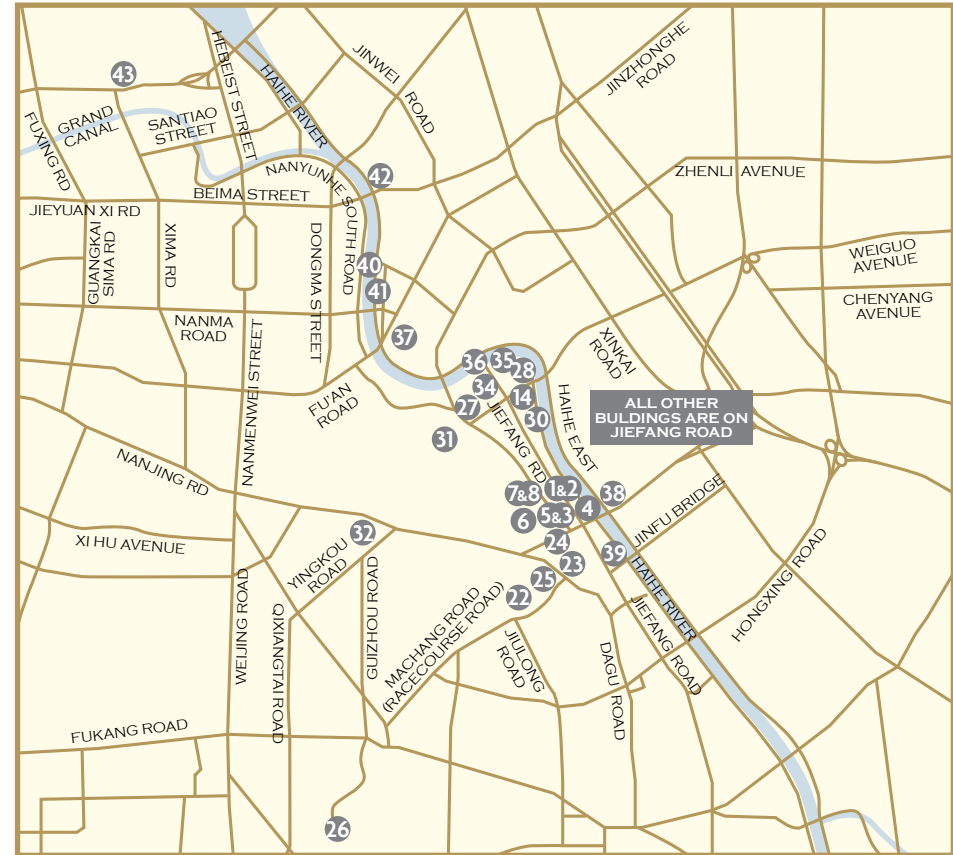
Tianjin became important with the completion of the northern section of the Grand Canal in the early 7th century, enabling cheap transport of food (especially rice and wheat) from the south. By the 10th century the city had become the transshipment point for trade with southern China, adding locally produced salt to the traffic. With the Yuan Dynasty from 1267 and subsequently the Ming and Qing dynasties making Beijing their capital, Tianjin's importance was complete.

An early foreign visit to Tianjin was the 1655-57 embassy to China by the Dutch East India Company. Johannes Nieuhoff, the embassy's chronicler, was impressed with the trading activity he saw:

The city of Tiencienwey ... with strong Walls twenty five Foot high, full of Watch-Towers and Bulwarks, and the Place much set forth with Temples, very populous, and so full of Trade, that hardly the like Commerce is to be found in any other City in all China; for whatsoever Vessels are bound for Peking from any other part of China, must touch here, which occasions an extraordinary Traffick to Shipping which lie continually before this City.

However, it was not for another two hundred years, with the conclusion of the Second Opium War in 1860, that Tianjin was finally prised-open to western trade.

Britain, France and the United States were the first to obtain concessions. In 1880 the US indicated they were no longer interested in theirs and the area was absorbed by the British in 1902. The German and Japanese concessions were formalised in 1895 and 1898, respectively, and between 1900 and 1901 Russia, Italy, Austria-Hungary and Belgium obtained space, making a total of nine foreign concessions, the most in any treaty port in China. However,



the German concession ended in March 1917 with the break in diplomatic relations; the Austro-Hungarian concession was seized by China on declaring war against the Central Powers in August 1917; the Russian concession reverted in 1920 when China withdrew diplomatic recognition following the Russian revolution; and the small, badly-located and undeveloped Belgian concession was returned in 1929.

In 1860, Captain Charles Gordon, later known as Chinese Gordon and Gordon of Khartoum, surveyed and marked-out the British and French concessions together with a French officer. According to O.D. Rasmussen in his book, 'Tientsin - An Illustrated Outline History' (1925):

continued on page 7

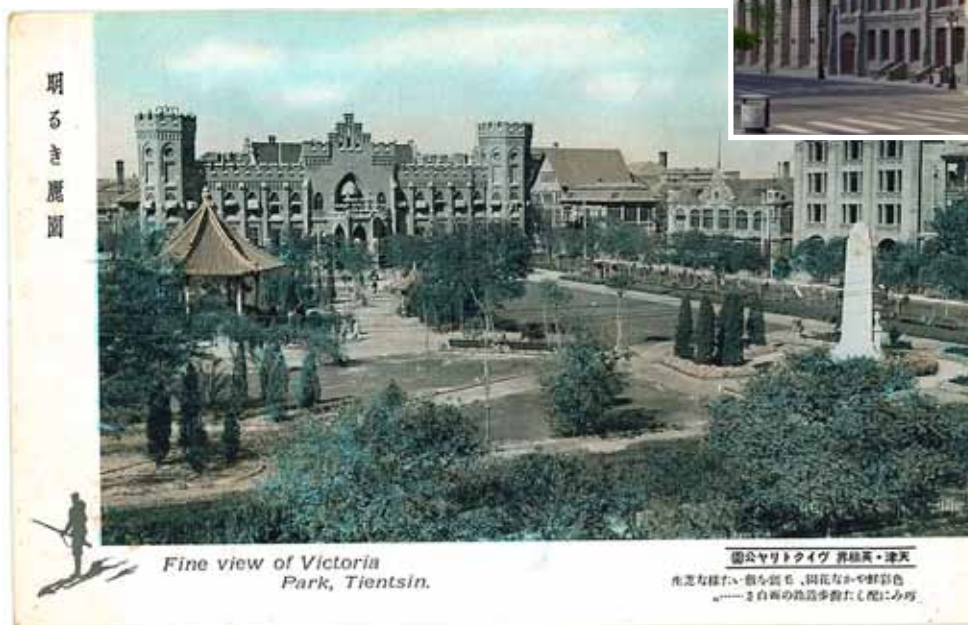


The banks and many trading companies were on Victoria Road, which became the Rue de France in the French concession; the entire road is now called Jiefang Road.

1a Victoria Park a small but popular location in the heart of the British concession. The south-east corner contained a huge bell used as a fire alarm. This was replaced by a cenotaph, identical to that in Whitehall, London, commemorating those killed during the First World War. The cenotaph has been replaced by a small tree. **1b** In 1890 the British Municipal Building, Gordon Hall, was built north of the park. The building was severely damaged by the 1976 Tangshan earthquake and was demolished. In its place now stands the Ritz-Carlton hotel and apartment complex (visible in 1a). A small section of Gordon Hall remains along the eastern side of the Ritz-Carlton **1c**; this is probably a rebuild from original material. During the summer months, a band played from the park's decorative pavilion (see opening page).



1b



There are many spectacular restorations in Tianjin. The city even maintains a depository for old bricks and materials from buildings unavoidably demolished to use in other restorations.

2b



2a The **Astor Hotel** faces the east side of the park. In 2010 a restoration of the hotel was completed. The old brick walls, wooden trimmings, fittings, floors and doors were preserved down to the smallest detail **2b - 2d**.

The result is magnificent. The main bar in the hotel is named after William O'Hara, the last owner of the Astor (from 1903 to 1949). Released from Japanese internment, he re-established the hotel after extensive

2c



2d



renovations. But the municipal authorities confiscated the hotel in lieu of back-taxes and O'Hara left for New Zealand in 1949, heart-broken and virtually penniless.







3 Kailan Mining Administration (KMA)

on Tai'an Road. An appropriately large headquarters for the operator of the Kaiping and other mines, and engineering enterprises. The building seemed empty when we visited but the fine marble entrance lobby was just visible between the locked main doors.

4 The Tientsin Club (1905). Until recently it was possible to enter the former club but it is now occupied by the municipal authorities.



British consular buildings. The British consulate-general was on the bund located in the former Dents' compound **5a**; the area has been redeveloped. The consulate-general's residence from 1911 **5b** on Tai'an Road was purchased from the KMA whose massive

headquarters were next door. The image **5c** during floods in 1939 is courtesy of Mr Ron Bridge whose father took the photo. The vice-consul's residence **5d** from 1911 and **5e** on Jiefang Road.

5c



The two officers placed the boundary stones in the dreary grounds which contained within their areas junk docks, small vegetable gardens, mud heaps, hovels of fishermen, sailors and others, whose wretched groups of squalid huts were divided from each other by narrow tidal ditches ... bordered by meagre ill-kept footpaths. The sites of the two settlements were foul and noxious swamps.

By 1870 in the British concession Victoria (now Jiefang) Road had been laid out and lined with trees, there were several presentable buildings and the bunding of the river had commenced. But the American concession had few if any houses, while the French area was described, again by Rasmussen, *as a wretched terrain given up to pools, cabbage gardens, hot pits for storing fruit and vegetables, and a rowdy, sinful, and criminal population.*

Development proceeded quickly and the Chinese, not to be outdone, implemented a modernisation programme under the leadership of Li Hongzhang, the influential, far-sighted Viceroy of Zhili.

The treaty port's first major disturbance occurred in June 1870 following rumours about Catholic missionaries who were insensitive to local mores and used excess vigour in their conversion techniques. Nuns looking after orphans were thought to be kidnapping children for their body-parts, pickled onions in the kitchens having been mistaken for children's eyes. Unfortunately this was followed by the sudden death and quick burial of a number of children due to an infectious disease. The discovery of the buried bodies proved too much and in the ensuing uproar the French consul was killed along with a number of others who tried to intervene, and the Notre-Dame des Victoires Cathedral and its hospital were torched. Sixteen nuns, thirty converts and as many as one hundred orphans burned to death.

The British disapproved of the missionaries' aggressive recruitment style and thought they only had themselves to blame and so, undeterred by the massacre, development continued apace. In 1890 the administrative centre for the British concession, featuring round towers and battlements, was completed. It was named, at the suggestion of Li Hongzhang, Gordon Hall in memory of the man, killed at Khartoum five years earlier, who was credited with the success of the concession's layout and land programme. Li had befriended Gordon during the defeat of the Taiping rebels and gave a passionate speech in Gordon's memory during the opening ceremony.

Much of the construction in the British concession was overseen by Chairman of the British Municipal Council, Gustav Detring. A German national, Detring had come to China to work for Sir Robert Hart in the customs service. He was customs commissioner at Tianjin for 25 years and a close friend

of Li Hongzhang. Ignoring conflicts of interest, Detring invested in many development projects; at one time he was the largest shareholder in the Astor Hotel and had considerable land holdings in the British concession. Nevertheless, his contribution to the development of Tianjin was huge and there was sadness throughout the city when he died in 1913.

By the 1890s, although the continuing development and business in the concessions was largely beneficial for all, disquiet was growing in the Chinese community. A number of Chinese intellectuals in Tianjin formed the anti-foreign Bourgeois Reform Movement. The emperor was initially sympathetic but before long they were restrained. Others were not so easily dissuaded, most notably the Righteous and Harmonious Fists (*Yihequan*), known more simply as the Boxers. They originated in Shandong in March 1898 in response to the German occupation of Qingdao, the British of Weihai following Russia's lease of Lüshun, and general displeasure at the presence of missionaries and the Chinese government's capitulation to *de facto* foreign invasion. The movement peaked, violently, in 1900.

Tianjin was seriously affected by the Boxer uprising. In mid-June, Chinese troops (surreptitiously supporting the Boxers) shelled the city and the French cathedral was again badly damaged. Before long many sought safety in Gordon Hall, with its baronial-styled battlements and secure basement. The basement of the Astor Hotel also provided some security, although both buildings were often hit. A residents' group, the Tientsin Volunteers, with assistance from a small force of Japanese and Russian regular troops fortuitously in the city, held a perimeter against the Boxers. Concession streets were dangerous but foreign residents could at least find safe shelter somewhere; not so the local Chinese. Anyone with a foreign connection through employment or religion received ruthless treatment from the Boxers and many hundreds died.

By 14 June, a combined international force from eight nations had assembled and advanced to secure the city. While this brought relief to the European inhabitants, Chinese were subject to a campaign of rape and pillage by mostly German and Russian troops. The foreign troops then moved on to relieve the foreign Legation in Beijing and the Qing government conceded in September 1901 with the signing of the Boxer Protocol.

After the foundation of the Republic of China in 1912, Tianjin was largely unaffected by the general turmoil as power shifted between Sun Yat-sen and his Nationalist party and various warlords. Instability, riots and anarchy broke-out randomly across the country. This was nothing new; turbulence had simmered beneath the surface since foreigners first established themselves in the country. Tianjin was under warlord control throughout this period but life and business in the concessions continued as before.

In 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria, culminating with the Pacific theatre of the Second World War. The Japanese, who occupied much of Chinese Tianjin from 1937, entered and subjugated the concessions immediately after their attack on Pearl Harbour.

With the end of the Second World War several businesses attempted to re-establish operations but, with Communist forces soon sweeping across the country, this was to be a short-lived and generally painful effort. The People's Liberation Army captured Tianjin on 15 January 1949.



8a

8b



6 All Saints Church, on Tai'an Road next to the British consulate-general's residence, looked ready to collapse in November 2007; by 2011 it had been impressively restored. The church assembly hall (not visible here) doubled as a school.

7 Victoria Park Mansions on Dagu Road facing Victoria Gardens, opposite the Astor Hotel. It was built in the late 1920s or early 1930s and one of the most sought-after residential addresses in the city.

Liddell Brothers & Co.'s substantial compound, redeveloped except for these two buildings **8a**. Between 1912 and 1917 they were used by the US 15th Infantry before it moved to Racecourse Road. Headquarters and a hospital were in the building on the left while **8b** was the barracks.



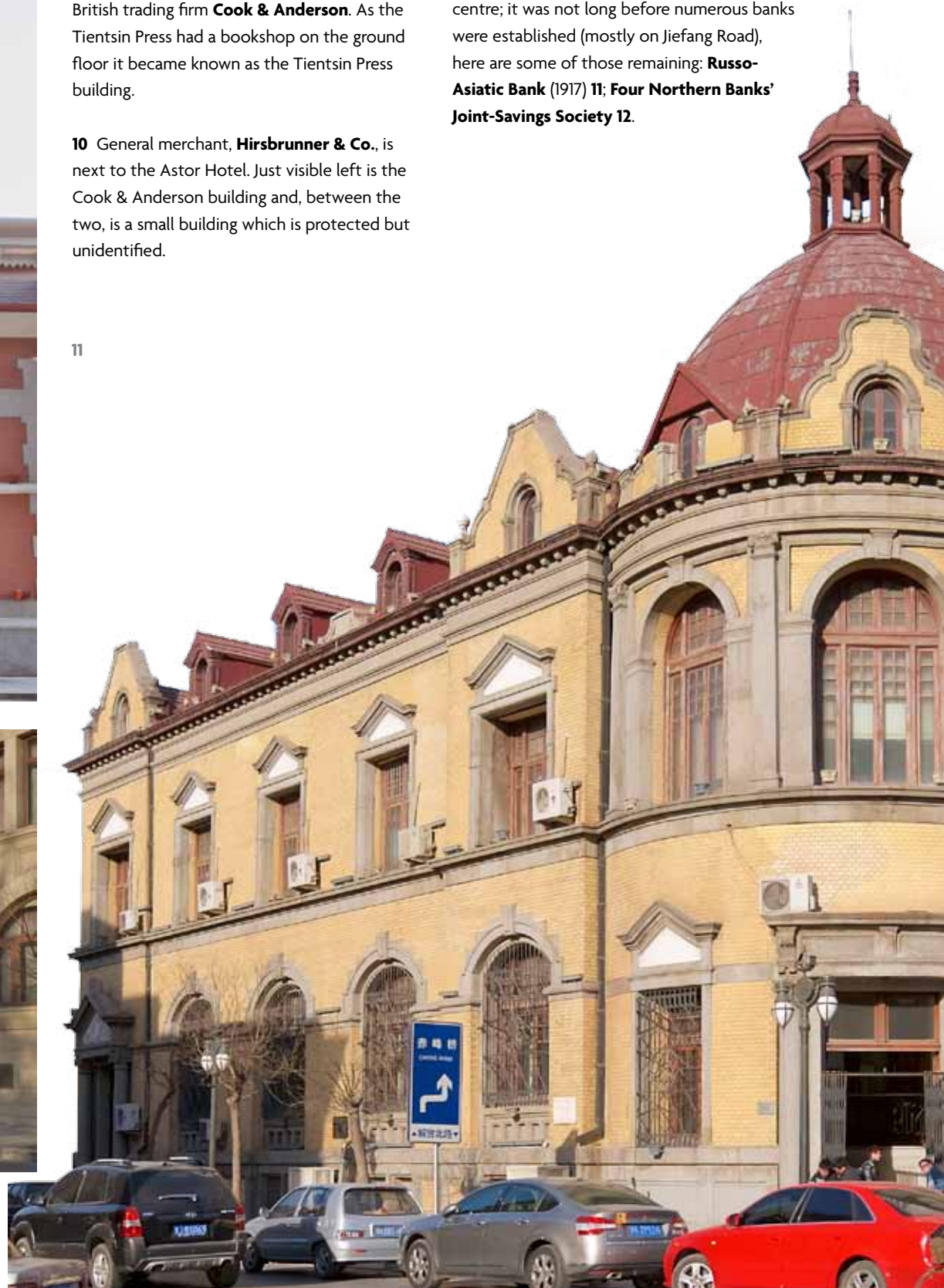


9 The distinctive half-timbered office of British trading firm **Cook & Anderson**. As the Tientsin Press had a bookshop on the ground floor it became known as the Tientsin Press building.

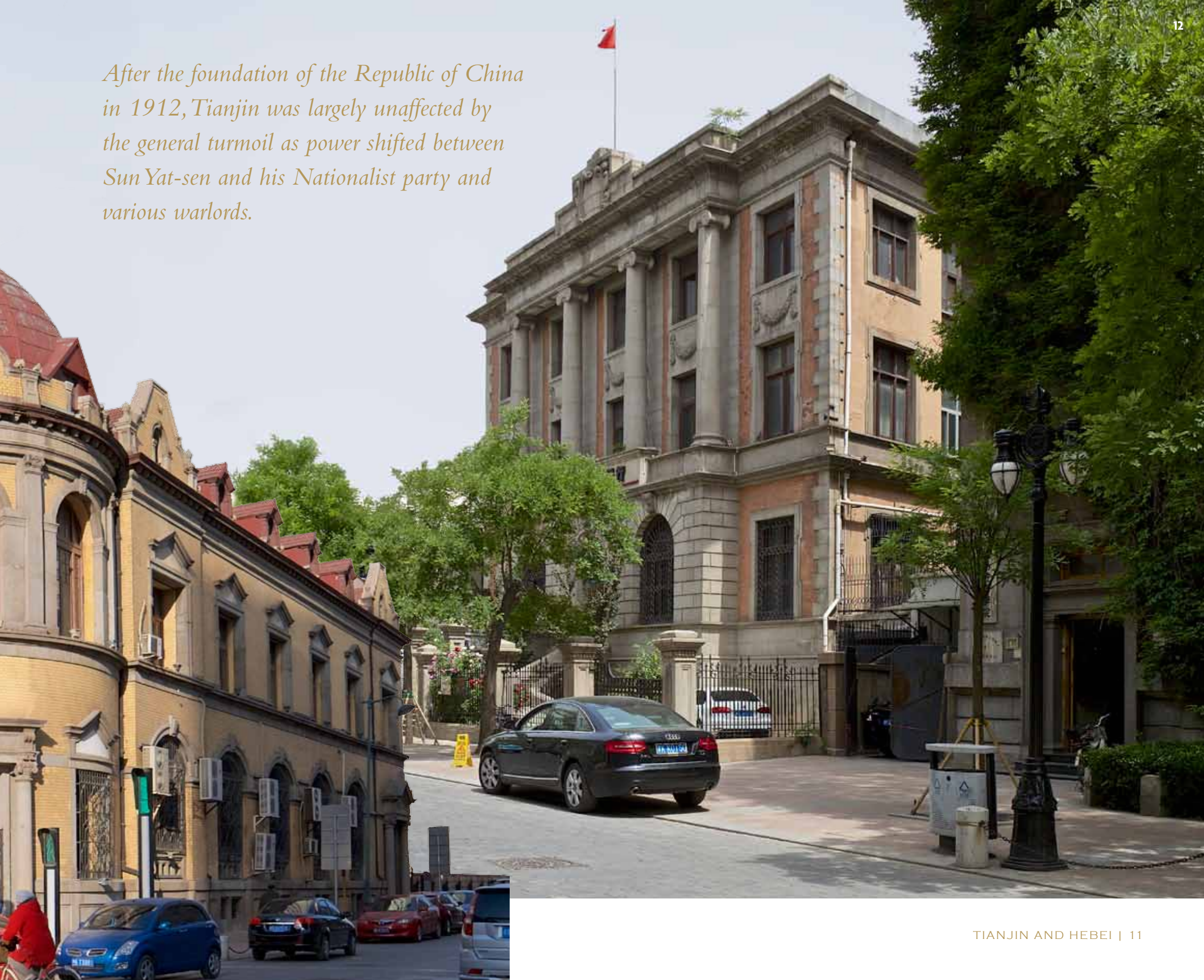
10 General merchant, **Hirsbrunner & Co.**, is next to the Astor Hotel. Just visible left is the Cook & Anderson building and, between the two, is a small building which is protected but unidentified.

Banks. Tianjin rapidly became a major trading centre; it was not long before numerous banks were established (mostly on Jiefang Road), here are some of those remaining: **Russo-Asiatic Bank (1917)** 11; **Four Northern Banks' Joint-Savings Society** 12.

11



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13 HSBC, the first foreign bank to open in Tianjin (this building, completed in 1924, was probably the bank's second premises on this site); **14 Yien Yieh Commercial Bank** (1926) on Chifeng Road in the French Concession; **15 Chartered Bank**; **16 Banque L'Indochine** (also in the French Concession); and **17 Kincheng Bank** established in Tianjin in 1917, but built in 1908 for the Deutsch-Asiatische Bank.



16



18 The **Leopold Building** on Jiefang Road was built in 1938 by Swiss national, Marcel Leopold. Leopold (who lived on the ninth of ten floors) made his fortune trading timepieces and jewellery. The interior combined apartments (third to eighth floors) and offices (lower

floors) finished to high standards with luxurious amenities. The tenth floor housed service machinery, the water tank and servants' quarters. The American consulate-general and library were tenants.



17

18



19a



19a Facing the Leopold Building is **Swires** office, built in 1896. Quiet and worn inside, the revolving front door **19b**, lobby floor and staircase banisters look suitably old **19c**. The photograph **19d** was taken in 1919.

19b



19c



19d







Racecourse Road and Five Avenues.

The British concession was twice extended, mainly for residential purposes. Chinese outnumbered foreigners owning properties here especially after the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911. Princes, courtiers and others who had amassed wealth during Qing

rule moved their valuables and themselves to the relative safety of the British concession, being the largest. Impressive residences (one example 22) were built in the area and most survive. The whole area is now called Five Great Avenues, and Racecourse Road serves as its southern boundary.



20 The art-deco, white building on Jiefang Road is identified as '**Jiu'an Bank**'. It may have housed a bank on the ground floor but this was probably 90 Victoria Road and occupied by APC. That it is now occupied by Sinopec, China's largest oil and energy company, supports this.

21 The offices of **Jardines** on Jiefang Road.



On Racecourse Road is the current incarnation of **Keissling's restaurant 23** in what used to be the Victoria Café. Keissling's was originally in the German concession and its premises and large bakery there were demolished; the site is now a park. Three styles of food are served, one on each of the three floors above the ground level. German themed food is on the third floor which also contains a small brewery.

23



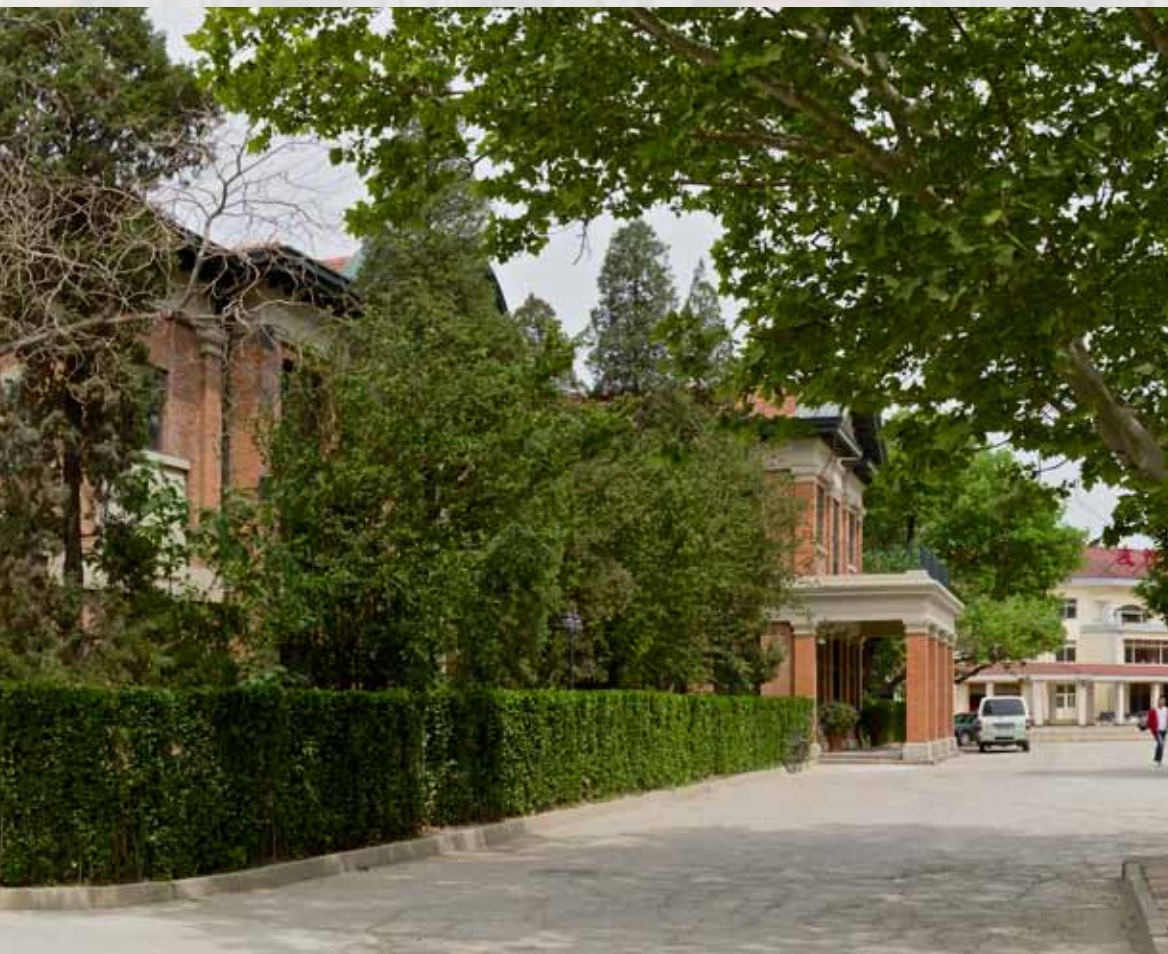
The **State Hotel 24** and **25** the former **Tianjin Grammar School**, now No. 20 Middle School.



The **Tientsin Country Club & Race Club**. Nothing remains of the Race Club building but the old course is discernible from satellite images. However, the Country Club still stands and by May 2014 had been fully restored. I first visited the club in 1997, attended a 'tea dance' in 2002 and had a complete tour in 2004. Then the building looked tired but retained many original features, including the billiards tables. Since its restoration it looks magnificent and is a private club again. Front **26a**, main entrance visible rear right **26b**. The main stairs **26c** leading to the dining room **26d** with its sprung dance floor (not visible; the first of its kind in China). The bowling alley **26e** and heated indoor swimming pool **26f**. The club also has meeting rooms, a small theatre, a squash court and a sports bar.

Jack Kitto's racing badge.









28a



28b

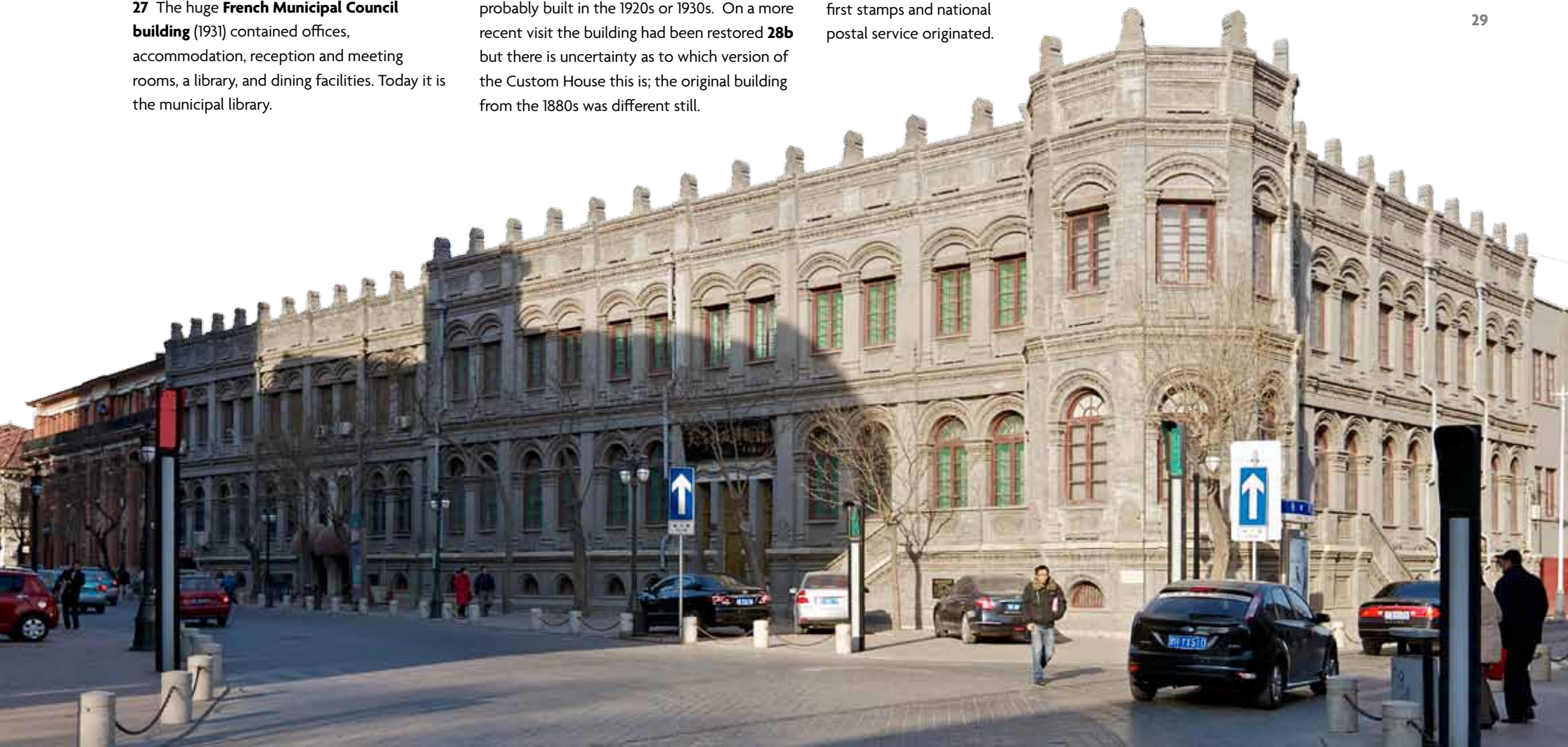
THE FRENCH CONCESSION

27 The huge **French Municipal Council building** (1931) contained offices, accommodation, reception and meeting rooms, a library, and dining facilities. Today it is the municipal library.

28a Custom House. When first photographed, the art-deco building looked the part, probably built in the 1920s or 1930s. On a more recent visit the building had been restored **28b** but there is uncertainty as to which version of the Custom House this is; the original building from the 1880s was different still.

29 The **Post Office** on Jiefang Road (now a postal museum) where China's first stamps and national postal service originated.

29



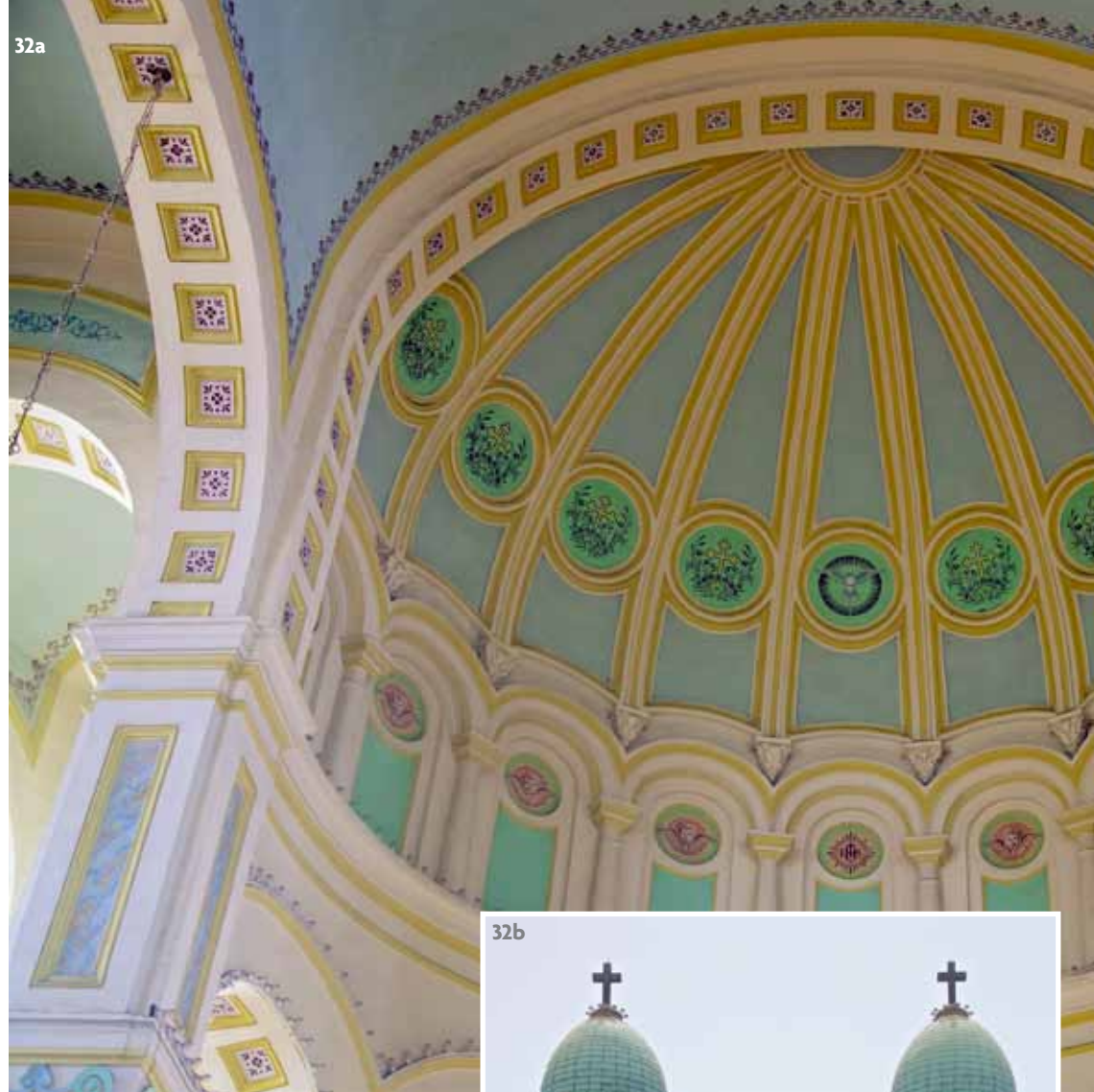
30



31



32a



32b



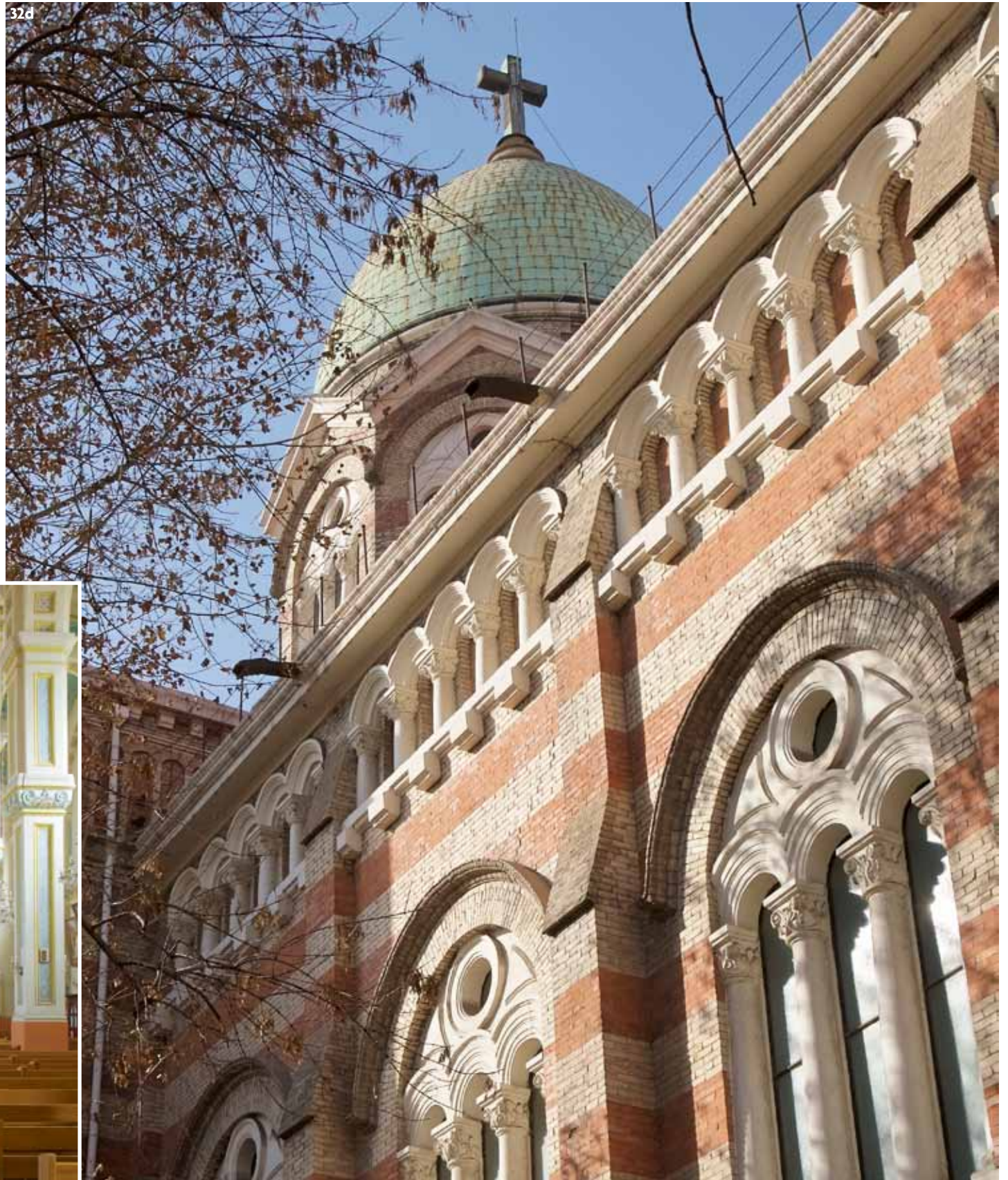
30 The **French consulate**.

31 The art-deco **Bo Hai Building** (1936) close to the French Park. Primarily residential, there were offices on the first two floors.

32a - 32d **St Joseph's Cathedral** (now Xi Kai Cathedral) at the end of the pedestrianised Binjiang Road. Completed in 1916 in the Romanesque style, it took three years to build. Originally the compound included an orphanage, school, kitchen for the poor and the bishop's residence.



32d



32c

33a



33b



34



33a & 33b On Jiefang Road, the 1931 former **French Club** now houses a finance museum.

34 Approaching the International Bridge on Jiefang Road, is the **Imperial Hotel**. The motorbike heads for the bridge and, just visible behind the trees, is a recent building mimicking Gordon Hall, although much larger. The hotel was owned by a British company registered in Hong Kong and opened around 1903.

35 Opposite the Imperial Hotel on Jiefang Road stands the **Belfran Building**, a product of Belgian and French cooperation. The first three floors contained shops and offices; floors four and five each housed two luxurious apartments. Much more recently, the building has had an additional wing and central section added; as is more obvious overleaf.



35



36a



36c



36b



36 The International Bridge; a double-leafed bascule type completed by 1906, possibly as early as 1903, but upriver. In 1926 it was dismantled and moved to its current location.

It was 'international' as it joined the French and Italian concessions. In **36a** the clock tower of Tianjin's main station is visible and in **36c** & **36d**, the Belfran Building.



37a



37c



37a - 37c In the heart of the Italian concession is the **Piazza Regina Elena**, named after Queen Elena of Italy, who reigned from 1900 until 1943. The statue commemorates Italian participation in the First World War.

38 **Russia's consulate** across the river in the Russian concession. Its first consulate opened in 1867; this is more recent.

39 The **German Club Concordia** (1907) on Jiefang Road. Damaged during the 1976 earthquake, it was patched-up but no longer looks its best. Facilities included a bar, dining, reading and billiards rooms and a theatre.



40b



40a



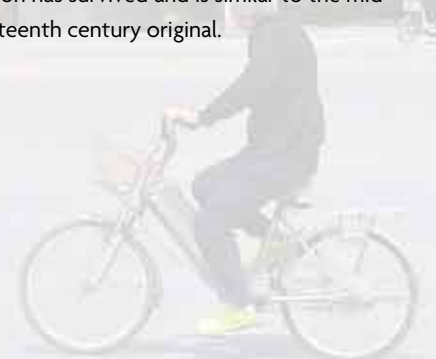
The **Jintang bridge 40a** linked the old city (East Gate) to the Austro-Hungarian concession, although a bridge predates the concession **40b**. It is a swing bridge and now fully pedestrianised, being rather narrow.

41 Built in the Austro-Hungarian concession by **Yuan Shi-kai** (briefly President of the Republic) for his retirement. Completed after his death (aged 56, 1916) and so he never lived there.





42a & 42b The **Cathedral Notre-Dame des Victoires**, not in a concession, is close to where the Grand Canal joins the Haihe River. Twice destroyed and occasionally badly damaged by riots and earthquakes, this version has survived and is similar to the mid-nineteenth century original.



43b



43 The original **Tianjin West Station**, now decommissioned; the current station is visible rear left **43a**. Outside the concessions, it was built by German engineers in 1910.

