Health Within Limits:  
The Public Health Policy of the Shanghai Municipal Council  

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Abstract  
The International Settlement of Shanghai was bounded to the south by the French Concession, to the east by the Huangpu River, and on all other sides by the Chinese-administered city of Shanghai. It was managed by the Shanghai Municipal Council, which often appeared to prefer to see the settlement as an isolated island, doing its best to ignore the other political authorities in the city and beyond. But when it came to public health, this was impossible. The widely accepted maxim that 'prevention is better than cure' dictated that large-scale measures be taken to improve the health of the general population as the best defence against outbreaks of serious disease. Such measures would be rendered somewhat ineffective if confined to the settlement, especially as these were exceptionally porous boundaries, through which the city’s inhabitants crossed daily. Cooperation with the neighbouring authorities was therefore crucial and unavoidable. This paper explores the ways in which cooperation across the limits of the settlement were attempted, and with what success. It finds that despite numerous obstacles, the trend in the early years of the Nanjing Decade was towards greater cooperation. In this way, the study contributes to a greater understanding of how the Council functioned in the changing political environment of Republican China, and sheds new light on the shifting patterns of power in Shanghai as they were played out in the field of public health.