

Green Gang

Qīngbāng 青帮

The Green Gang 青帮 (Qing bang), the most famous and feared secret society in late Qing and Republican China, was centered in Shanghai 上海 and controlled most of the city's criminal rackets. Under the leadership of Du Yuesheng 杜月笙, the Green Gang rose to national prominence in the 1930s.

The Green Gang 青帮 (Qing bang) was the most famous secret-society/underworld-gangster organization in twentieth-century China, controlling a vast array of rackets, primarily in Shanghai, including opium trafficking, prostitution, armed robbery, extortion, kidnaping, child slavery, gambling, and illegal arms sales.

Emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from an earlier criminal/fraternal organization known as the “Friends of the Way of Tranquility and Purity” (Anqing daoyou), the Green Gang itself claimed descent from the seventeenth-century “Three Patriarchs.” These men, Weng Yan, Qian Jian, and Pan Qing, were followers of the Luo sect of folk Buddhism popular among Grand Canal boatmen's associations at the end of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and throughout the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). The Friends of the Way flourished in Shanghai in the middle of the nineteenth century as thousands of displaced peoples from the Taiping Rebellion fled to the city, where they found work and protection among the salt smugglers. Gradually, although historical evidence remains sketchy, certain

branches of the Friends of the Way split off and formed the Green Gang.

The Green Gang's rapid expansion in the Shanghai underworld was fostered by the semicolonial structure of the urban environment. Shanghai at the time was divided into three cities—the Chinese city of Nanshi, the French Concession, and the International Settlement, each of which had jurisdiction over its territory. With its headquarters in one jurisdiction the Green Gang carried out its criminal enterprises in the other two with virtual carte blanche. To aid its criminal activities the Green Gang had many members highly placed in police departments throughout the city.

In the 1920s and 1930s famous Green Gang leaders such as Du Yuesheng (1888–1951), Huang Jinrong (1868–1953), Zhang Renkui (1859–1945), Gu Zhuxuan (1885–1956), and Zhang Xiaolin (1877–1940) brought the Green Gang into the realm of national politics and economic life. With a stranglehold on opium trafficking thanks to an agreement with the authorities in the French Concession, the Green Gang used its considerable profits to become an urban power broker and part of the fabric of everyday Shanghai life.

Throughout the Republican era (1912–1949) the organizationally strong but ideologically weak gang made alliances with whichever political force would best help maintain its interests. At various times the Green Gang forged alliances with warlords, the Nationalist Party (Guomindang), the Communist Party, and even the Japanese during World War II. Most famously, the Green Gang worked hand-in-hand with the Nationalist Party in the 12 April 1927 massacre of five thousand alleged



Tu Yueh-Sheng, known as “Big-eared Tu,” the leader of Shanghai’s notorious Green Gang—a criminal cartel that dominated Chinese drug traffic and heroin exports. PHOTO COURTESY BRIAN CROZIER.

pro-Communist workers known as the “White Terror” (*baise kongbu*).

Du Yuesheng, the primary “leader” of the 1930s Green Gang, which was actually only a loose coterie of overlapping organizations, rose to national prominence and became a figure of Shanghai folklore as he took control of major industries, brokered deals between national workers’ unions and the government, and maintained his iron grip over the vast underworld of Shanghai crime.

The Green Gang declined as an organization when the Communists captured Shanghai in 1949, and most members fled to Hong Kong and Taiwan.

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