

## THE NATURE OF DISASTER IN CHINA

In 1931, China suffered a catastrophic flood that claimed millions of lives. This was neither a natural nor a human-made disaster. Rather, it was created by an interaction between the environment and society. Regular inundation had long been an integral feature of the ecology and culture of the middle Yangzi, yet by the modern era floods had become humanitarian catastrophes. Chris Courtney describes how the ecological and economic effects of the 1931 flood pulse caused widespread famine and epidemics. He takes readers into the inundated streets of Wuhan, describing the terrifying and disorientating sensory environment. He explains why locals believed that an angry Dragon King was causing the flood, and explores how Japanese invasion and war with the Communists inhibited both official relief efforts and refugee coping strategies. This innovative study offers the first in-depth analysis of the 1931 flood, and charts the evolution of one of China's most persistent environmental problems.

Chris Courtney is an environmental and social historian of modern China. He has lived for more than five years in the city of Wuhan, and is passionate about the history and culture of the region. Having completed his PhD at the University of Manchester, he was awarded research fellowships at Gonville and Caius College, University of Cambridge, and at the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore.

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(continued after Index)

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IN CHINA  
THE 1931 YANGZI RIVER FLOOD

Chris Courtney  
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*For Wei Juan 魏娟 and Isobel 魏心悦*

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## NOTE ON LANGUAGE

This book provides Pinyin followed by Simplified Chinese characters for the names of almost all individuals. In the early twentieth century, those who mixed in cosmopolitan circles often adopted Romanised versions of their names that were considered more accessible to non-Chinese speakers. For the sake of consistency, I have rendered all names in Pinyin, yet have provided such variants in the footnotes. For the convenience of non-specialist readers, I have chosen to use the well-known names Sun Yat-sen – instead of Sun Zhongshan 孙中山 – and Chiang Kai-shek – instead of Jiang Jieshi 蒋介石. I refer to the Guomindang 国民党 (or Kuomintang) as the Nationalists and the Chinese Communist Party 共产党 as the Communists throughout. I provide the characters for less well-known toponyms. For the sake of accessibility I have chosen to retain a few inaccurate geographical conventions – in Chinese the Yangzi (or Yangtze) actually refers to a short section of the Long River or Changjiang 长江, and Manchuria is referred to as Dongbei 东北, meaning simply the Northeast. The city known today as Wuhan is a conurbation that comprises the three historically independent municipalities of Hankou (or Hankow), Wuchang and Hanyang. In the early 1930s these cities had yet to be fully unified, yet for the sake of convenience I use the anachronistic term Wuhan throughout. Unless otherwise stated, all financial figures are provided in Chinese yuan. Citations of Chinese literature are provided with a short Pinyin title in the notes. Chinese characters and English translations can be found in the bibliography. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author.