

8 Urbanization and Housing

Socio-Spatial Conflicts over Urban Space in Contemporary Shanghai

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Abstract

Preserving a city's rich cultural heritage may require a balancing act when weighed against market demand. Shanghai's historic row houses, known as the *lilong* – a legacy of Western-influenced housing during the city's time as a treaty port (1842-1943) – are facing extinction at the hands of post-reform property developers seeking valuable land for high-rise condo development. Once the realm of local servants and Chinese laborers, the *lilong* have come to symbolize the pressures of industrialization as migrants from across the country have settled in – China's first encounter with spatial modernity. Through academic discourse, nostalgia has led the claim that the *lilong* should by all means be preserved even for its historic value *per se*. Here I argue: do we really understand enough about the existence of the *lilong* in the context of the rapidly changing structure of modern Chinese society to make such a claim? All study of contemporary urbanization must begin with a study of its residents' processes of adaptation to their radically modernized identities as buffeted by social and political change, which is different from the study of the image that is being projected about its residents' lives either by scholars on one side or by governments on the other. I will explore the dimensions from which urban housing could be studied in the globalizing processes whereby apparently property-led development is becoming standard urban planning practice, with its concomitant influence on the lifestyle of the Chinese today.

Introduction

Studies of post-reform China from various perspectives have addressed growing societal concerns. The process of post-Mao China's economic reform began in the early 1980s, and China has since experienced

massive growth in export revenues and in the development of its domestic market. This development, as all chapters in this volume address, has led to a substantial movement of the population from rural to urban areas to fuel China's industrialized economy.

Urbanization has become one of the key characteristics of contemporary China. The image of today's cosmopolitan, pro-growth, consumer-driven China has fundamentally altered perceptions of pre-reform China.¹ These characteristics are not unique to China, especially when compared to other industrialized East-Asian economies that previously enjoyed rapid growth.² Nevertheless, what is unique to China is the sheer scale at which its process of urbanization has occurred.

Fascinated by the process of urbanization in China, my purpose in this chapter is to make sense of this process in a broader sense and to make use of the understanding of this process in a focused case study of local communities in urban Shanghai. By placing my discussions in theoretical frameworks of urbanization studies from various angles – including history, geography, architecture, sociology, and anthropology – I seek to shed light on the conflicts and tensions over urban space brought about by the transformation of urban space. In this chapter, I specifically draw attention to different perspectives on a particular problem of urban housing in China in the context of a market-oriented economy since the economic reforms implemented in the late 1970s. In other words, the central theme of this chapter is the exploration of the importance of community space in the globalizing processes whereby property-led development is apparently becoming standard urban-planning practice, with its concomitant influence on the lifestyle of the Chinese today.

The subject of this chapter is the late low-rise vernacular housing legacy, built in Shanghai by foreigners who occupied Shanghai since the mid-nineteenth century, known as *lilong*. Before the economic reforms of the late 1970s, *lilong* houses were the dominant form of housing in Shanghai. Today, *lilong* houses stand in sharp contrast with the growing trend of property-led growth that favors higher density and higher-return housing development. Life in the *lilong* neighborhoods is inconvenient compared to the modern life in high-rise apartments. Nevertheless, it also has its advantage, which is the sense of community – something the individual room in high-rise apartments cannot provide. On the other hand, whereas many scholars claim that the *lilong* houses and neighborhoods are representations of the history of Shanghai and therefore must be preserved to maintain the identity of the city, there are a number of arguments about the drawbacks of these *lilong* houses, from the perspective both of the local government and of the residents themselves.

Urbanization, urban process, and housing

In market-oriented economies, the 'urban process' is the process by which cities are largely urbanized as a venue for business to take place in order to absorb both labor and capital surpluses.³ Whereas the 'urbanization process' is the transformational course in which a place becomes urban morphologically, the 'urban process' is a framework that is established to explain the 'capitalistic rationality' of the urbanization process.⁴ Fulong Wu argues that rapid economic growth in China owed its continuity to the astute reconfiguration of urban space and market-oriented land development.⁵ China's urban process involves densifying the inner-city area and expanding the network of transportation to reach undeveloped parts of the city. High-tech parks and other satellite industrial zones were also included in the plan.⁶

Furthermore, the process of land privatization was the mechanism that made the transfer of land-use rights from socialist to market system smooth and active.⁷ As laid out in this sketch, urban development has been a successful tool for economic growth. After housing reform, the real estate markets in urban areas have been dominated by private enterprises and Hong Kong developers. In Shanghai, the real estate market was important in three ways. First and foremost, there was a housing shortage, making the provision of housing crucial to accommodating the growth of the urban population. Second, policy was a means of extracting cash from existing resources; the leasing of land, then, was central to the city's process of capital accumulation.⁸ Finally, the expansion of urban areas through the expansion of residential areas was an 'urban process' in which the labor and capital surpluses could be used efficiently.

In reality, by the mid-1990s, Shanghai was dealing with the problem of over-accumulation of capital, galvanized by China's fixed exchange rate and an intensive export-led labor-intensive economy. The lack of effective demand and domestic consumption were also problematic.⁹ To address both problems, the city decided to stimulate the housing market. The housing reform process proceeded as follows. In order to provide more housing at a rapid pace, the local government had to be untied from socialist-style housing provision through work-unit distribution and subsidization; therefore, the local government sanctioned both private developers (including joint-ventures between private developers and state-owned enterprises) to have a share in the market by investment. By resorting to private developers, Shanghai could produce a large amount of housing units to accommodate the growing population of the emerging urban center it was building. Not only was Shanghai a destination for Chinese jobseekers (and migrants), it was also a destination for foreign entrepreneurs. The involvement of real estate foreign

direct investment (FDI) has subsequently played a crucial role in the spatial restructuring of the city.

Yet, this does not mean that the local government abandoned social housing provision completely. In fact, local government has continued to run a 'dual-track' system; while the real estate market takes care of the upper- and middle-class housing, the local government continues to provide housing to existing residents through relocation and residents tied to the work-unit system through its housing subsidy program. Both tracks necessitated the massive construction of housing units.

Shanghai's *lilong* in context

From this basic overview of urbanization, the urban process, and housing in China, I will now move to the focused subject of this chapter which is the *lilong* houses and neighborhoods. The preservation of a city's rich cultural heritage may require a balancing act when weighted against market demand. In Shanghai, historical row houses, known as the *lilong*, are a legacy of Western influence after China's defeat in the First Opium War and its loss of commercial coastal cities to foreign powers. The *lilong* houses were basically Western row houses transplanted onto Shanghai's soil. British developers first built *lilong* houses to provide basic accommodation for Chinese laborers. A typical *lilong* neighborhood is a walled community composed of a main lane running all or halfway across each block. Smaller lanes branch off, connecting perpendicularly to the main lane in order to provide circulation for other housing units – as many as possible – to be packed into any single neighborhood. The developers saw this layout of *lilong* neighborhoods as the most economical and efficient way to accommodate high densities, foregoing any concern for spatial needs or appropriate sanitary conditions. Architecturally, there was very little reference to the famous Chinese *courtyard houses*, as the purpose of the *lilong* was to create housing of the highest possible density; hence, the conventional luxury of having a courtyard as a communal family space had to be taken away.

The *lilong* houses are also stylistically interesting. Historian Lu Hanchao calls them 'half-breed', as they incorporate both Western and Chinese architectural features.¹⁰ What is special about the houses, however, is the continuity of the way of life of the people who continually adjusted their lifestyle to suit the changing conditions of the *lilong* houses since they were first built in the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹

A *lilong* neighborhood, then, is basically a gated community consisting of rows of *lilong* houses. Inside, continuous peripheral *lilong* houses serve as a single wall around the neighborhood and commercial

Figure 8.1 *Aerial photograph of Shanghai in the 1930s*



An aerial photograph of Shanghai (overlooking the original part of the city called *Puxi*) in the 1930s showing the dominating pattern of *lilong* houses. Only along the waterfront (The Bund; by the Huangpu River at the top of the photograph) were other building types located; most of them were foreigners' houses and their business headquarters.

Photo: courtesy of Virtual Shanghai Project, Christian Henriot, IAO – Lyon 2 University

windows to the outside street. Lanes inside the *lilong* are not only for circulation but are a community space where social activity takes place in lieu of the missing courtyard in traditional Chinese courtyard houses. Life in the *lilong* neighborhoods is communal, social, and intimate, as the small size of the houses and the limited availability of social space constrained any other forms of interaction other than intimate ones. Residents have to come out to the lanes to socialize and before long they get to know each other. Once the realm of local servants, the *lilong* houses have come to symbolize the pressures of urbanization as migrants from across the country have settled into them since the reforms and opening up of China in the 1980s.

I have argued elsewhere that there are indeed contesting issues.¹² In this chapter, I want to point out that the *lilong* houses and neighborhoods are in the middle of three contesting issues. First and foremost is a practical problem – i.e. the housing problems in present-day Shanghai (i.e. inadequate supply and displacement) to which the *lilong* has failed to deliver a viable solution. Housing is my main focus of research in this chapter, but this chapter is *not* solely about housing. What comes to contradict the first idea is therefore the second issue: the role of the *lilong* in the image-making process of Shanghai. Having the *lilong* in the city has pros and cons: *lilong* houses and neighborhoods

Figure 8.2 Diagrams showing the basic structure of a typical *lilong* neighbourhood

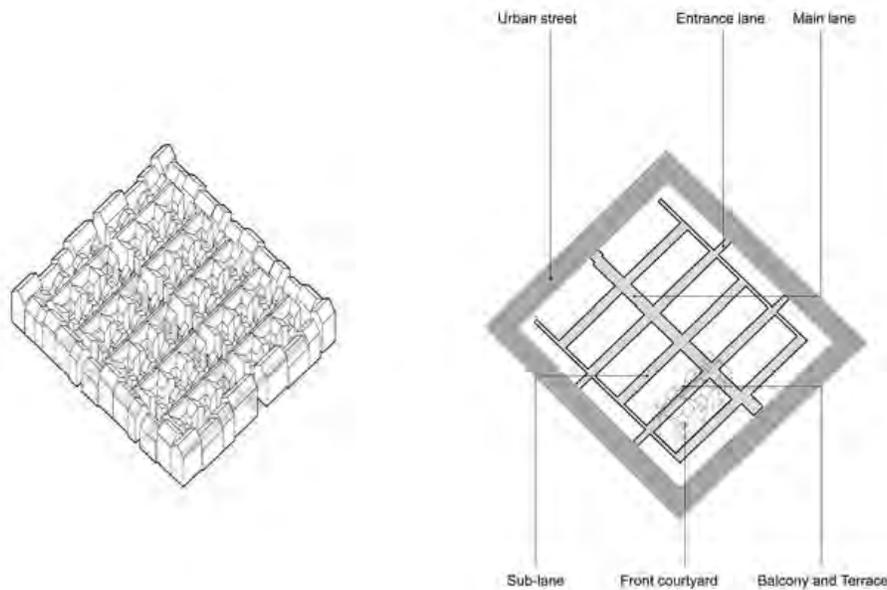


Illustration: Wenjun Ge

in the city could provide Shanghai with some references to the past, but their rundown condition is definitely not eye-pleasing, especially when juxtaposed with the ‘postcard image’ of the new glittering Shanghai.¹³ Finally, the third issue is that the growing preference for other, more modern forms of housing could lead to the voluntary diminishing of the *lilong* housing stock.

As we see in this quick outline of the problem, it is quite obvious that the *lilong* houses and neighborhoods have no ‘single location’ in present-day Shanghai. Put simply: on the one hand, they should be preserved due to their historical value and their role in making Shanghai a cultural city on a par with Western counterparts;¹⁴ but on the other hand, the attempted preservation of the *lilong* houses and neighborhoods ignores the critical housing condition that affects the quality of urban life. The *lilong* neighbourhoods will help Shanghai maintain its connection to the past; yet most people do not want to live there anymore because of the inconvenience and the better options available among modern accommodation, not to mention, perhaps, a self-conscious rejection of what might be considered an outdated lifestyle. So, where should the *lilong* houses and neighborhoods be? In this chapter, I will try to make sense of the situation through the discussion of several key ideas of urbanization and development as well as my own research. All of these are backed up by my ethnographic fieldwork

method, which involves participant observations and semi-structured interviews done in Shanghai from 2009-2010.

Urbanization and housing

Housing issues in Shanghai, in particular, have long been discussed by many scholars from different angles, such as the issues of housing provision, the economy of residents' relocation, migration, the right to the city, and gentrification, to name a few.¹⁵ One example that is central to urban issues in Shanghai is the recent effort of the government to reform housing provision. The interaction between state, market, and society is central to the process of housing development: while the state is obligated to provide housing of adequate standard, it also has an agenda in making space available for economic growth.¹⁶ According to this agenda, a high-rise apartment is a preferred form of investment.

It is useful to understand the historical context of housing provision in Shanghai in conjunction with its urbanization process. In the early stages of the reform, incoming residents were accommodated via several channels with the help of the government through provisions of public housing.¹⁷ Through the work-unit (*danwei*) system, existing urban residents were given the option to stay or to move with reasonable support either in the form of compensation or relocation. Although not entirely equitable, migrants also benefitted from the help of their *danwei* employers and the constant process of negotiation in the system.¹⁸ Such a system, however, had its limit. From an economic and micro-planning perspective, this system was nothing more than debt financing, although one could argue that it was reasonably executed in support of other more profitable economic activities for the better of the economic whole.¹⁹ The need for housing is a basic need; hence access to housing is access to a basic need that needs to be fulfilled.

Nevertheless, when the market became more open to competition from private investors and the government decided to take its hands out of the housing market in order to re-balance the losses from the first debt-financing stage, housing became an issue. For example, in Shanghai, the economy took off in the early 1990s and since then the city has resorted to private investors in order to finance the building of housing units. This strategy, according to many scholars, is a double-edged sword.²⁰ On the one hand, it potentially serves as a viable financial infrastructure, alleviating the burden on the local government and enabling private investors to 'act creatively' in solving the problems of housing shortage. Nevertheless, at the center of the urban residents' discontent is the manipulation of the market due to the lack of transparency in land acquisition.

As Shanghai grows, it needs more space to accommodate its residents. Although the *lilong* houses were by no means low-density houses like the traditional courtyard houses but rather modern medium-density housing designed and built to accommodate large numbers of residents from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the density – or, to use a planning term, ‘plot ratio’ – is not enough to lodge the growing population in the era of a market-oriented economy. As housing stock in China is by and large the product of the socialist regime, up until the reforms the state did not resort to the market in the process of housing relocation. Hence, most of the houses were allocated without any real consideration of the market’s price.²¹ Once the economic reforms were implemented, the local government was responsible for making up the differences between the minimum and the real market price in market-oriented housing situations.²² With the increasing demand for more space to accommodate new residents who move to Shanghai where there are more employment opportunities, the local government sees handing over the tedious work of housing provision to the developers as a way of achieving the desired density and, ultimately, the high economic development their superiors in the central government want to see.²³

Given that many *lilong* neighborhoods are a century or at least half-a-century old, they have been razed to the ground, one after the other, at an unprecedented speed, especially in the past ten years, to make way for a much more economically viable solution for accommodating

Figure 8.3 *A poster at the People’s Republic of China booth at the United National Human Settlements Program (UNHabitat) World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (March 2010)*



The poster shows that the government sees traditional settlements as a ‘shantytown’ and high-rise real estate development as ‘renovation’.

Photo: courtesy of Professor Reinhard Goethert, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

the residents of Shanghai.²⁴ Moreover, sometimes the local government even insists on viewing *lilong* neighborhoods as squatter neighborhoods and therefore dangerous, legitimizing its role in 'cleaning up' to make way for better housing. Whether or not the claim is correct, residents do not usually get the opportunity to speak for themselves and have to watch their houses being razed and be relocated.²⁵

In particular, as the pre-reform government housing provision to support residents could only provide subsidies for housing but not maintenance of the houses, many leftover *lilong* neighborhoods were allowed to deteriorate. On top of that, as many *lilong* neighborhoods accommodate a large number of residents, they do not necessarily look as nice or clean as the modern high-rise condos. Some of the *lilong* neighborhoods, in fact, are similar in appearance to squatter settlements. These residents are not wealthy enough to afford better places to stay; hence the question is not whether they do or do not mind living in such conditions because it is the only option they have. Having no money to afford to renovate their places and having to absorb more people in their houses to earn extra much-needed income, squatter-like conditions are inevitable. For sure we know that the projection of such an image is undesirable to Shanghai, a city that is building new and modern skyscrapers day and night to project the image of a new China to the world.

Lilongs were bulldozed many times, usually in prime urban areas, to make space for the building of more profitable high-rises. The former residents were given the option to move back in if they wished. Some research, however, shows that there was only a limited number of people who were 'lucky enough' to receive such compensation. Nevertheless, unless the building process is somehow brought into more of a balance, the imbalanced building of segregated high-rises will lead to the death of the streets and the death of the sense of community as a whole, which is a major social problem. The impact of family displacement has not been well documented, while the growing capacity of Shanghai to economically accommodate more people is praised and emphasized as an achievement.²⁶ There are clearly negative impacts, namely the weighted changing socio-cultural structure of the city as a whole. That is, if Shanghai only focuses on economic development, welcoming residents who can afford high-rise apartments and continuing to relocate existing residents, the city will soon become less diverse and will lose contact with its original residents, who have lived in these neighborhoods for generations, long before the start of economic reform. Viewed from this angle, as the *lilong* houses and neighborhoods represent a counterbalancing force to the high-rise developments, their existence and right to remain in the city should then be taken into consideration in Shanghai's development plan.

Figure 8.4 *Aerial photographs of Shanghai in the 1930s (left) and 2008 (right)*



Aerial photographs of Shanghai in the 1930s (left) and 2008 (right) comparing the pattern of urban fabric. A large number of *lilong* houses, which were the dominating fabric of the city in the 1930s, have been razed to the ground since the early 1980s, resulting in a mixed fabric of high-rise buildings and *lilong* houses as shown in the photograph on the right.

Photos: courtesy of Virtual Shanghai Project, Christian Henriot, IAO – Lyon 2 University and Google Earth Image

The Past, Place-Making, and Historical Preservation

Despite the fact that the proponents of the *lilong* houses have made it clear that there are various reasons why they should be protected, preservation alone is not going to help. In fact, what is even more difficult to comprehend is the ‘rhetoric’ behind historical preservation. Here I would like to present some traces of this rhetoric and then argue for the methodical means of understanding the idea of historical preservation.

In China, the unprecedented speed of urban development and family planning policy also reverse the process and complicate the issue. In Shanghai, the local government may use the discourse of historical

preservation to keep the houses it deems representative of the city's history, no matter how derelict they are, as a necessary feature of re-conceiving historical vis-à-vis cultural contents needed for a 'metropolis of the twentieth-first century'. In realizing these contradictory forms and processes of regionalism and globalization within the context of Chinese urbanization, I argue that these attempts to incorporate a particular interpretation of history fall short in terms of foresighted city planning and the omission of actual lived experiences, but also by inadequately explicating the tension that exists behind the façade of a Chinese metropolis. One of the major problems here is the sharp divisions between disciplines of study, which have prevented scholars from understanding the issue from a holistic perspective, let alone reflecting on their experiences in conveying a readable narrative of the place they study. What is worse: authoritative studies of spatial consumerism are often based on painstaking studies in the fields of economics and quantitative sociology. These techniques, however, have proven inadequate when studying the underpinning politics of how 'space' is perceived and consumed. Without a critical analysis of how the change has altered late-socialist spatial restructuring through an ethnographic framework, there is no way to penetrate the reality.

That is to say, as pointed out earlier, although today we know how important *lilong* houses are historically, historical preservation of the *lilong* houses can be superficial if it emphasizes mainly the preservation of the appearance of the building. The first trace of the historical preservation policy is the preservation of the meeting place of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which was, as you might have guessed, held in a *lilong* house (which is now, of course, a museum and a National Heritage Site). It makes a sound case to recognize the importance of such a physical urban constituent, especially when this has a direct link to the history of the Communist Party in China's authoritarian regime context.

Viewed from a distance, I must say, this proto-preservation outlook is hardly deniable. The celebrated renovation project of *lilong* houses known as the Xintiandi, a dilapidated *lilong* neighborhood that has been turned into a multimillion-dollar retail district, is seen by many scholars and professionals as a 'good example' of historical preservation.²⁷ A Hong Kong mega-developer, Shui-On Land, took the risk of giving this redevelopment project to an American architect, Benjamin Wood, who came up with the idea of designing a retail district that has the humanized feel of small towns in Italy.²⁸ He asserts strongly:

I disdain preservation ... I don't believe you should proclaim things dead and turn them into museums. I believe you should

breathe life into places. That's my goal. I want to make living areas, where people can eat, drink and enjoy themselves.²⁹

The success in making Xintiandi one of the must-visit districts in Shanghai exemplifies the superficiality of the preservation. Wood himself mentioned that historical preservation was not his main concern but rather the 'unique quality of the space' that a solely Western-trained architect like him saw as appropriate for this project which would be unique to Shanghai, a city where people have become fed up with air-conditioned department stores.³⁰

As Wood himself – a practical architect – admits, the goal of his design is not to preserve the past but to bring some elements of the past to distinguish the project from other retail shopping districts of the present. The cultural claim of restoring a typical neighbourhood is simply false. On the other hand, as one of the goals of this million-dollar development is for it to be something more than merely a self-contained commercial project, to justify this project on the grounds of what we scholars think could have been done better may perhaps have to be rethought. The success of Xintiandi might not be as much in terms of economic or cultural sense, as many argue that the place does not technically generate sustainable incomes given its high development and maintenance costs, and one cannot claim to have rejuvenated the cultural sphere when the displays of high-end products and a hyper-expensive cup of coffee only welcome a certain group of people, most of whom might or might not be residents of Shanghai. However, the project itself is situated at the corner of a gigantic piece of land that the developer is putting efforts into developing into a larger high-end residential and commercial complex. The reason for having Xintiandi might well be argued by the sharp-witted developer who wishes to use it as a cultural landmark for a bigger project that 'will' make money. This argument has been made elsewhere.

In a general sense, the historical preservation campaign of the *lilong* affects the residents' lives in many ways. On the positive side, residents get to remain in the place where they and their ancestors have resided for generations, which is usually the case for the elderly. Many renowned scholars, including the notable urbanist Jane Jacobs, have argued for the maintenance of old neighborhoods as a means of the preservation of the place's livelihood.³¹ While it is difficult to stretch that such a claim is a universal one, many scholars have also pointed out that this could well be the case in Shanghai.³² In my own research, I also found that the sense of community is best maintained by the continuity of the existence of a living community who feels the sense of responsibility in maintaining the social relationship and order among their neighbors.

Among several informants with whom I had discussions and interactions, both formally and informally, there are many similar stories resonating with nostalgia for the good old days when ‘everybody knew each other and cared for each other’. Many of my informants have had the experiences of living in both the *lilong* neighborhoods and the new modern housing – they are people from different generations and have different experiences of China. The communal intimacy was also supported by the architectural structure of the neighborhoods. This was, of course, more than what Jane Jacobs calls the ‘eyes on the street’³³ that helped to sustain the high level of security in the neighborhood, but a real social intimacy at work that operated like interactive password-screening securities. We can imagine this process as the factor of development of the residents’ social life.

On the negative side, many residents are bitter because they cannot renovate their houses simply because their houses are ‘registered as an architectural heritage’. One might be able to think about this question holistically if one put oneself in the shoes of the residents: many of them are living in dilapidated buildings without adequate and stable basic infrastructure such as tap water or electricity, yet they cannot make changes to their houses.³⁴ Despite efforts to rehabilitate some old *lilong* neighborhoods and so-called ‘soft densification’³⁵ to make them more economically viable for the present-day lifestyle by increasing the building density of the neighborhoods, such efforts are still far from being adequate to raise the standard of living of the residents given that they cannot technically do anything to improve the condition of their houses themselves.³⁶ In addition, as the majority of the tenants are not the high and middle-income groups who work in the financial or service sectors, money to renovate their houses is also an issue as most of the time they can only wait for the local government to help.³⁷

In addition, the Historic Preservation Law for both Beijing and Shanghai only took effect in the early 2000s. While one might argue it is better than nothing, the underlying purpose of such a law is questionable. In theory, the law identifies several ‘historic relics’ that the city wants to preserve, but in practice, these gold-inscribed ‘historic relics’ plates only give pause to the process of high-rise development in some areas, preserving old houses and neighborhoods that are still in (re)habitable condition.³⁸ One assumption about the enforcement of this particular law is quite political: as Shanghai tries to re-brand itself to be as important in the way of many successful cities, it would need ‘some history’ to make it more attractive.³⁹ The *lilong* houses, with their sophisticated architectural ornaments and form that are unique to China, are seen as an element of history that would make Shanghai a city of not only the present and the future but also the glorious past. The element of history is important in the process of creating the

Figure 8.5 *A Starbucks coffee shop in Xintiandi retail district*



Photo: Gregory Bracken

Figure 8.6 *The famous view of 'Old Shanghai' during the 1930s*



The colonial past as the source of Shanghai nostalgia as claimed by scholar Zhang Xudong.

Photo: courtesy of Virtual Shanghai Project, Christian Henriot, IAO – Lyon 2 University

Figure 8.7 A typical *lilong* branch lane



A typical *lilong* branch lane where all types of activities ranging from drying clothes to community gathering are normally taking place.

Photo: Non Arkaraprasertkul

perception of Shanghai as a city with cultural attractions. Recently, the 'preservation and maintenance of historic relics' is one of the key indicators that the local government of Shanghai proudly presents in its *Statistical Yearbook*.⁴⁰

This assumption about the politics behind historical preservation is not new to Shanghai. In fact, it is not new at all. Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld, who has widely conducted research on this specific political agenda in many parts of the world, has pointed out that the use of the two terms ‘development’ and ‘historical preservation’ are not always as benevolent and forward-thinking as we think they should be from their literal meanings.⁴¹ The question of ‘historical preservation for whom?’ is then a very challenging question that can only be answered through the acknowledgment of all other socio-cultural changes in post-reform urban China. The rhetoric of historical preservation is juxtaposed with the city’s goal to project its global image representing the contradictions both in terms of ideology of growth and planning.⁴²

What make the *lilong* houses and neighborhoods worth preserving is the *combination* of unique architectural form and the dynamism of the community, not just one or the other. Hence, if one is to preserve only the form but not the community, then it is not preservation, but a *Disneyfication*.⁴³ This marks a condition of post-colonial cities unique to Shanghai, with its two forms of colonial legacy: sophisticated architecture (such as buildings on the Bund) and the run-down *lilong* houses. Whereas the former is seen as the selling point of the city’s history, the latter has an ambiguous status. This uniqueness is, of course, based on the history of the city. Had *lilong* houses been houses for the rich, they might hold a similar status as the architecturally sophisticated buildings on the Bund.⁴⁴

Temporary urban residents and population control policy

Another factor that constitutes the change in the organization of space and diverse forms of communal dwelling in the *lilong* is massive migration.⁴⁵ As Shanghai has the highest economic growth rate in the country, it attracts migrants from surrounding regions.⁴⁶ These migrants do not have the rights to live in the city through the national system of permanent housing registration; hence the solution for their housing choice is basically places where well-off locals would not want to live. The *lilong* neighborhoods are a natural choice in this sense. Therefore, in any of the *lilong* neighborhoods, today we see the mixture of old and new residents, permanent and temporary, fixed and unstable income groups, and so on, all living frugally together in a compound. As the more people there are to share the rent, the better for the residents with unstable incomes, the congestion leads to unsanitary conditions, the dilapidation of infrastructure, and sometimes conflicts between groups, among other problems.

The first area of future research deals with the increasing population and the way in which cities should accommodate them – the hard argument of Housing Studies. There are several aspects to this issue, including inequality and social justice.⁴⁷ Since the reform, concerns over housing-related issues have moved to a central position, especially for local governments of major urban areas. What strategy can provide housing for all of the workers in the city? Moreover, an urban-oriented economy and the abundance of labor in rural areas have given rise to a new category of the urban population: the workers who temporarily migrate to urban areas to find jobs and leave when there aren't any: the so-called 'floating population' (*liudongrenyuan*). The migrant workforce, needless to say, is a considerable source of cheap labor that urbanizing areas depend upon.

By simply removing the obsolete old and replacing it with the more economically viable new, however, as shown in a number of studies, the government only generates new problems. In addition, pushing them to marginal areas in order to reserve the more profitable areas for other forms of investment only exacerbates the problems, including social displacement, inadequacy of public and transportation infrastructure, and informal squatter settlements, to name a few.⁴⁸ Different groups of people from diverse income groups vary in their ability to afford their accommodations. The lack of urban housing registration on the migrants' side only adds more pressure to their situation; yet all actors, including the government which does not look highly upon their role, depend on their inexpensive labor. The local government's biased investment strategy in favor of the groups that have more purchasing power will not only lead to a severe gentrification problem but also to an artificial bubble-like increase of prices in the properties market.⁴⁹ In fact, some studies have shown that this increase in prices of real estate property is the single most controversial political issue in urban areas. This will have an immense impact, manifesting itself as intense socio-economic and financial problems that someone (i.e. the local government) will have to solve.

Furthermore, policy change can also have an impact on the housing problem. The change in the structure of the family after the enforcement of the One Child Policy has had a profound impact on the reorganization of space in a housing unit.⁵⁰ Statistics show that since the reform, the average number of persons per household has consistently declined from 4.6 per household in 1980 to a 'little less than 3 persons' in 2008.⁵¹ With the consistent decline in the number of persons per household (with a projected decline down to 2 or 2.5 persons per household in the next decade), the structure of Shanghai's household is closest to being a modern nuclear family in all of China. With less than three people per household today, residents who no longer need to have

large, often multiple-floor living space for their extended families do not want to tolerate the obsolescence of their 'one-hundred-year-old-plus' *lilong* houses, and would prefer a 'mod cons' room in a modern high-rise apartment.⁵²

One could argue that given the change in the size of the Chinese family due to the One Child Policy, there have been changes in housing preferences among multi-generational Shanghai residents and immigrants. Younger generations, especially those working in the service sector, tend to prefer the smaller space of an apartment for day-to-day living for a couple and one child.⁵³ Moreover, as the One Child Policy also allows resources from the entire family to support a single offspring,⁵⁴ this generation often has the financial support of the family to purchase apartments in newly built high-rise buildings. These are considered to be a more sound choice for their modern lifestyle as well as being an alternative investment to the shaky stock market. Real estate in China has consistently gone up in value since 1979.⁵⁵ It is also worth noting that many of these buyers buy under pressure from their parents. Those of the post-1980s generation are pressured by their parents to divert their money into real estate, often having already benefitted themselves from the high savings rate that finances study abroad and extensive private education programs.⁵⁶

Conclusion

For sure, the living organism of the *lilong* neighborhoods is unique and has been what constituted Shanghai as China's first modern city; yet, the promotion of the *lilong* culture has to be weighed against the skyrocketing housing demand. Here we also recognize the changing preference in housing choice of newer residents. That said, it would make no sense to preserve just the façade of the *lilong* but not the intrinsic quality, as the quality of being a living organism is what makes the *lilong* unique and worth preserving. If the preservation program is to be carried out, then the local government will need more actors to get involved in this program, including residents whose opinions about their living conditions and the present situation in the houses and neighborhoods have to be heard.

To put this in the larger context of the study of contemporary China, what we have learned from the situation of *lilong* houses in Shanghai is the growing social problem that results from the local government's deliberate aim to expedite urban development as a physical terrain of post-reform investment. In this chapter I am not trying to present an argument that there are always conflicts between the two groups – the local government and the people – as most of the previous studies on

the topic have done. In fact, what I am trying to do is to present the nuanced nature of the situation. In my introduction, I show that there are a few attitudes towards the existence of the *lilongs* that both the local government and the people do in fact share. Thus, if there is a conflict, it would be 'inside' the terrain of the attitudes themselves; for example, both parties see the dilapidating conditions of the *lilong* neighborhoods as health hazards, but there would be no open talk if one only wants to minimize the cost of the development and one wants the same way of life to be replicated with better infrastructure. That is to say, there are indeed complexities that underpin the situation, but these complexities are not too difficult to overcome.

The handling of history is another related issue; yet the understanding of how history is related to the social context of the present is something that we have yet to see being crystallized. Shanghai, as Gregory Bracken points out, is a city in which the colonial past has played an important role in both establishing and re-establishing its successful economic base.⁵⁷ Needless to say, the local government, with its efforts to push forward economic growth, does not seem to believe that it needs to hear from the residents when making a decision that will boost growth qualitatively. As post-reform China is focusing on an export-led economy, labor forces are at the heart of its investment strategy. The housing issue, then, becomes the central social infrastructure that the local government needs to provide. How can it provide housing for all the workers in the city? Here, I argue that the current strategy will defeat the purpose of expediting urban development that the local government set itself from the start simply because the price that it has to pay once all the collective problems explode will be colossal.

As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, I will not be able to answer whether the *lilong* houses and neighborhoods 'should or should not exist'. What I can answer is whether or not there has been enough study done about the *lilong* houses and neighborhoods to understand the nature of the question. This is the true aim of this chapter. And the answer is a qualified no.

The most recent ethnography of the *lilong* neighborhoods is from the early 1990s, and the only research papers somewhat commensurate to those ethnographies are those of scholars in professional fields such as architecture, urban planning, housing studies, historical preservation, and so on. These papers, although very useful, have the deliberate aim of drawing 'specific conclusions' based upon specific information that scholars trained in the above-mentioned professional fields are capable of acquiring, which obviously does not include ethnography because a recent ethnographic study simply does not exist.

The existing scholarships on the *lilong* neighborhoods today cannot help us to penetrate the reality of urban life in present-day Shanghai.

There is an urgent need to expand research on China. In the study of urban housing and community in Shanghai, I would like to write this chapter to serve as a preliminary study, as the goal of this chapter suggests from the start. I hope that this chapter will provide a marker that will be tested and amplified by other scholars (including myself in the later stage of my academic career) who visit China.

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Notes

- 1 There are several studies that address this issue. I point to a few that are relevant to this chapter. See Deborah Davis, *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, Studies on China 22 (Berkeley, 2000); Li May Zhang & Aihwa Ong, eds., *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar* (Ithaca, 2008); John R. Logan, ed. *The New Chinese City: Globalization and Market Reform* (Oxford, 2002); Fulong Wu, 'Real Estate Development and the Transformation of Urban Space in China's Transitional Economy with Special Reference to Shanghai,' in *The New Chinese City: Globalization and Market Reform*, ed. John R. Logan (Oxford, 2002); John R. Logan, ed. *Urban China in Transition* (Oxford, 2008).
- 2 See Peter G. Rowe, *East Asia Modern: Shaping the Contemporary City* (London, 2005).
- 3 See David Harvey, 'Urban Process under Capitalism: A Framework for Analysis,' in *Urbanization and Urban Planning in Capitalist Society*, ed. M.J. Dear & A.J. Scott (London, 1981).
- 4 See Chris Hamnett, 'Social Polarisation in Global Cities: Theory and Evidence,' *Urban Studies* 31, no. 3 (1994).
- 5 Fulong Wu, 'China's Recent Urban Development in the Process of Land and Housing Marketisation and Economic Globalisation,' *Habitat International* 25, no. 3 (2001).
- 6 See Susan M. Walcott, 'Shanghai Pudong: Urban Development in an Era of Global-Local Interaction,' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33, no. 2 (2009); Yawei Chen, 'Shanghai Pudong: Urban Development in an Era of Global-Local Interaction' (Ph.D. thesis, Technische Universiteit Delft, 2007); Dennis Yehua Wei, Chi Kin Leung, and Jun Luo, 'Globalizing Shanghai: Foreign Investment and Urban Restructuring,' *Habitat International* 30 (2006).
- 7 See Zhang and Ong (2008).
- 8 See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, 2005). See especially his chapter on the process of urban development in China.
- 9 See Wu in Logan (2002): 161; Chris Hamnett & Yulong Shi, 'The Potential and Prospect for Global Cities in China: In the Context of the World System,' *Geoforum* 33, no. 1 (2002): 132.
- 10 Hanchao Lu, 'Away from Nanking Road: Small Stores and Neighborhood Life in Modern Shanghai,' *Journal of Asian Studies* 54, no. 1 (1995): 117.
- 11 This historical and descriptive part is essential to the understanding of this particular societal and housing context. For a more detailed study, see my earlier work: 'Towards Modern Urban Housing: Redefining Shanghai's lilong,' *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability* 2, no. 1 (2009).
- 12 See my earlier studies: *Shanghai Contemporary: The Politics of Built Form* (Boston, 2007); 'Politicisation and the Rhetoric of Shanghai Urbanism,' *Footprint*, no. 2 (2008); 'Resilient Lilong: An Ethnography of Shanghai's Urban Housing,' *Working Papers Series: Harvard-Yenching Institute* (2009), <http://hyi.scribo.harvard.edu/category/working-paper-series/>; 'Beyond Preservation: Rebuilding Old Shanghai,' *Exposition Magazine of the University of Oxford* 3 (Hilary Term, 2010); 'Visualizing Shanghai: The Ascendancy of the Skylines,' *East Asian Studies Journal* 12, no. 2 (2008); 'Leaping Beyond Nostalgia: Shanghai's Urban Life Ethnography,' *The Newsletter of the International Institute for Asian Studies* 55, no. Autumn/Winter (2010).
- 13 Also in this volume, sociologist Leslie Sklair points out the underlying idea and the impact of the emergence of capitalistic urban form in the context of globalization. For the basic ideas of the concept of globalization in the making of contemporary capitalistic built form and environment, see Leslie Sklair, 'The Transnational Capitalist Class and Contemporary Architecture in Globalizing Cities,' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, no. 3 (2005).

- 14 I would like to invite readers to read the chapters by Lena Scheen and Jacob Dreyer in this volume. They elaborate pertinent points through the view of history and literature (Scheen), and contemporary cultural studies (Dreyer), making connections between Shanghai in the past, present, and especially for Dryer, the 'projected future'. For additional reading, see Jacob Dreyer, 'Shanghai and the 2010 Expo: Staging the City,' in *The Third China Postgraduate Students Conference (CPN)* (Oxford, 2010).
- 15 There is a plethora of sources on this debate, especially after the early 1980s when Shanghai was granted Special Economic Zone status equal to coastal cities, whose status have been lifted since the early 1980s. See Jean Jinghan Chen & David Wills, *The Impact of China's Economic Reforms Upon Land, Property, and Construction* (Aldershot, 1999): 122; Richard Walker & Daniel Buck, 'The Chinese Road,' *New Left Review* 46 (2007): 49-53.
- 16 Fulong Wu, 'Residential Relocation under Market-Oriented Redevelopment: The Process and Outcomes in Urban China,' *Geoforum* 35 (2004): 468.
- 17 See Wu, 'Changes in the Structure of Public Housing Provision in Urban China,' *Urban Studies (Routledge)* 33, no. 9 (1996); Lei Huang, 'Housing Development in the Context of the Modernization, Urbanization and Conservation of Chinese Traditional Cities: Beijing, Shanghai and Suzhou' (Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University, 2000); Fulong Wu, *Globalization and the Chinese City*, Routledge Contemporary China Series (London, 2006).
- 18 See Xiaobo Lü & Elizabeth J. Perry, eds., *Danwei: The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (London, 1997); Fei-Ling Wang, 'Conflicts, Resistance, and the Transformation of the Hukou System,' in *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, ed. Elizabeth J. Perry & Mark Selden (London, 2010).
- 19 See Ruijue Peng, 'Towards a New Housing Approach: Analysis of Settlement Environment and Housing Policy in Shanghai, China' (Boston, 1986); D.J. Dwyer, 'Urban Housing and Planning in China,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 11, no. 4 (1986); Ya Ping Wang & Alan Murie, 'Commercial Housing Development in Urban China,' *Urban Studies* 36, no. 9 (1999).
- 20 See Zhigang Tang, 'The Urban Housing Market in a Transitional Economy: Shanghai as a Case Study' (Ph.D. Thesis, 2006); Wu, *Globalization and the Chinese City*, Fulong Wu, 'Housing Provision under Globalisation: A Case Study of Shanghai,' *Environmental and Planning* 33 (2001).
- 21 T.K. Bhaumik, *Old China's New Economy: The Conquest by a Billion Paupers* (Los Angeles, London, 2009): 175; Lin Chun, 'China Today: "Money Dissolves the Commune",' *New Left Review* 1, no. 201 (1993): 41-45.
- 22 Chen & Wills, *The Impact*, 122-36.
- 23 T.G. McGee, *China's Urban Space: Development under Market Socialism* (London, 2007): 132.
- 24 See Laurence J.C. Ma & Fulong Wu, *Restructuring the Chinese City: Changing Society, Economy and Space* (London & New York, 2005); Fulong Wu & Shenjing He, 'Property-Led Redevelopment in Post-Reform China: A Case Study of Xintiandi Redevelopment Project in Shanghai,' *Journal of Urban Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2005); Fulong Wu, Jiang Xu & Anthony Gar-on Yeh, *Urban Development in Post-Reform China: State, Market, and Space* (London, 2007); Anthony Gar-on Yeh & Fulong Wu, *The Transformation of the Urban Planning System in China from a Centrally-Planned to Transitional Economy* (Oxford, 1999).
- 25 In my own study of Shanghai, I also observe a series of changes on the ground responding to the overall projection of the future by the local government. Although my observation is not based on full-scale anthropological fieldwork but rather a survey of existing literature and a light version of ethnography, I can preliminarily see that the physical forms of historical neighborhood *lilong* houses are located within

- different realms of perceptions. These perceptions are shaped and re-shaped by forces both from within and from globalization. The pattern of urbanization in Shanghai is more or less that of the removal of the 'economically obsolete' and replacing it with the 'economically viable'. As we learned from many that such taxonomy could be rhetorical and does not always speak of actual needs, we have to be very cautious of any kinds of claims. See my paper presented at the Sixth China Urban Housing Conference, 'Towards Shanghai's Urban Housing: Re-Defining Shanghai's Lilong' (Beijing, 2007) as well as my papers 'Politicisation and the Rhetoric of Shanghai Urbanism' and 'Leaping'. See also Michael Herzfeld, *Divine King or Divine Right: Models of Ritual Authority*; Herzfeld, 'Spatial Cleansing: Monumental Vacuity and the Idea of the West', *Journal of Material Culture* 11, no. 1/2 (2006); Herzfeld, *Evicted from Eternity: The Restructuring of Modern Rome* (Chicago, 2009).
- 26 Chen & Wills, *The Impact*, 135-36.
- 27 See Ron Gluckman, 'Shanghai's Stylish Xin Tian Di', (undated), <http://www.gluckman.com/XinTianDi.html>; Albert Wing Tai Wai, 'Place Promotion and Iconography in Shanghai's Xintiandi', *Habitat International* 30, no. 2 (2006); Fulong Wu & Shenjing He, 'Property-Led Redevelopment in Post-Reform China: A Case Study of Xintiandi Redevelopment Project in Shanghai', *Journal of Urban Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2005); Greg Yager & Scott Kilbourn, 'Lessons from Shanghai Xintiandi: China's Retail Success Story', *Urban Land Asia* 2004.
- 28 See Yager & Kilbourn, 'Lessons'.
- 29 Gluckman, 'Shanghai's Stylish Xin Tian Di'.
- 30 The architect Benjamin Wood was one of the supporters of a research project in Shanghai with which I was involved as a student researcher when I was a graduate student in architecture in the US. I also went back to Shanghai in 2007 to have an interview with him for an architectural magazine in Thailand. Hence, on various occasions, I have had opportunities to have a personal conversation with Wood about his project. Many of the comments I quote from Wood are from my personal communication with him (as cited in the text).
- 31 See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Harmondsworth, 1964).
- 32 Among the most comprehensive studies are: D. Louise Morris, *Community or Commodity?: A Study of Lilong Housing in Shanghai* (Vancouver, 1994); Lu, 'Away from Nanking Road: Small Stores and Neighborhood Life in Modern Shanghai'; Qian Guan, 'Lilong Housing, a Traditional Settlement Form' (Master's Thesis, McGill University, 1996); Tianshu Pan, 'Neighborhood Shanghai: Community Building in Five Mile Bridge' (Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University, 2002); Paul Harley Hammond, 'Community Eclipse and Shanghai's Lilong' (University of Missouri-Columbia, 2006); Samuel Y. Liang, 'Where the Courtyard Meets the Street: Spatial Culture of the Li Neighborhoods, Shanghai, 1870-1900', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 67, no. 4 (2008). I myself have benefitted greatly from these sources in all of my work on Shanghai.
- 33 See Jacobs, *Death and Life*.
- 34 Deborah Pellow, 'No Place to Live, No Place to Love: Coping in Shanghai', in *Urban Anthropology in China*, ed. Gregory Eliyu Guldin & Aidan Southall (Leiden, 1993): 397.
- 35 Dwyer, 'Urban Housing', 486.
- 36 See detailed study in Laurence J.C. Ma, 'Urban Housing Supply in the People's Republic of China', in *Urban Development in Modern China*, ed. Laurence J.C. Ma & Edward W. Hanten (Boulder, 1981).
- 37 See Ruijue Peng, 'Urban Housing Trends in Shanghai: Learning from the Neighborhoods in Shanghai (First Year Paper)', Department of Urban Studies and Planning (Cambridge, MA, 1987).

- 38 See Wan-Lin Tsai, 'The Redevelopment and Preservation of Historic Lilong Housing in Shanghai' (M.S. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2008).
- 39 The argument here is that through the process of reinventing history, a community (or a nation at large) could be reconstructed as 'imagined community'. See Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983); E.J. Hobsbawm & T.O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition, Past and Present Publications* (Cambridge, 1983).
- 40 *Shanghai Statistical Yearbook*, ed. Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau (Shanghai, 2009).
- 41 See Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York & London, 2005); Herzfeld, 'Spatial Cleansing'; Herzfeld, *Evicted from Eternity: The Restructuring of Modern Rome*.
- 42 See Hamnett & Shi, 'The Potential and Prospect for Global Cities in China: In the Context of the World System'.
- 43 In fact, the re-building process in Shanghai is quite similar to that of theme park projects, especially those led by property-oriented development per se. For some comparisons and examples, see Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley, 1991).
- 44 In fact, some of them were and are currently in high demand by wealthy residents. Foreigners and wealthy Chinese still generally prefer to live in high-rise condos whose appearance more or less projects a more *modern*, if not advanced, image of the residents. See the chapters by Sklair and Dreyer in this volume. Also recommended are: Hammond, 'Community Eclipse'; Brook Larmer, 'Shanghai Dreams: China's Global City Tries to Recapture the Glories of Its Past – This Time on Its Own Terms', *National Geographic* 2010; George C. S. Lin, 'Reproducing Spaces of Chinese Urbanization: New City-Based and Land-Centred Urban Transformation', *Urban Studies* 44, no. 9 (2007); Wu, 'China's Recent'; Li Zhang, 'Spatiality and Urban Citizenship in Late Socialist China', *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002).
- 45 Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth* (Cambridge, Mass, 2007): 200.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 129.
- 47 See Li Zhang, 'Migration and Privatization of Space and Power in Late Socialist China', *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 1 (2001); Zhang, *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power, and Social Networks within China's Floating Population* (Stanford, 2001); Wang Feng, Xuejin Zuo, & Danching Ruan, 'Rural Migrants in Shanghai: Living under the Shadow of Socialism', *International Migration Review* 36, no. 2 (2002); Rachel Murphy, *How Migrant Labor Is Changing Rural China* (Cambridge, 2002).
- 48 See Zhang, *Strangers*; Biao Xiang, *Transcending Boundaries: Zhejiangcun, The Story of a Migrant Village in Beijing* (Leiden, 2005); Yu Chen, 'Migrants in Shanghai's Manufacturing Companies: Employment Conditions and Policy Implications', *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 2, no. 3 (2009).
- 49 See Wu & He, "Property-Led".
- 50 See Arkaraprasertkul, 'Resilient Lilong: An Ethnography of Shanghai's Urban Housing'; Arkaraprasertkul, 'Beyond Preservation'; Susan E. Short & Zhai Fengying, 'Looking Locally at China's One-Child Policy', *Studies in Family Planning* 29, no. 4 (1998).
- 51 This compares to about 3.5 people for one household for China as a whole. See *Shanghai Statistical Yearbook*; The Economist, *Pocket World in Figures 2010* (London, 2010).
- 52 Though it might seem quite obvious already, geographer Wang Jun re-emphasizes that such changes in housing preference among young professionals working in

Shanghai are inevitable. With a limited budget but the desire to have a contemporary lifestyle and privacy, these young people are much more attracted to the high-rise apartment lifestyle. See Jun Wang, 'Residential Differentiation: The Mapping of Young Professionals' Lifestyle and Their Housing Location Choices in Traditional Shanghai', *Projections: The MIT Journal of Planning* 5 (2006).

- 54 One could also view this from a point of view of consumerism and changing trends (as do Marxist scholars especially), with some ties to the form of dwelling culture inherited from old traditions. See Bin Zhao, "Consumerism, Confucianism, Communism: Making Sense of China Today", *New Left Review* 1, no. 222 (1997).
- 55 Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley, 2008); Naughton, *Chinese Economy*, 172-73.
- 56 I feel that this point could be expanded upon using both qualitative and quantitative data from on-site research. That is, it is obvious that there needs to be more research done in this particular angle.
- 57 See the editor's introduction. Also see Gregory Bracken, 'The Shanghai Model', *International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) Newsletter*, no. 52 (2009), and Bracken, 'Thinking Shanghai'.