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Tianzifang: The Dilemma of Urban Renovation at the Turn of the XXI Century¹

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This article is part of a wider research looking at the impact government decisions have on urban dynamics and urban dwellers in the case of Shanghai and Xi'an, China. The specific case analysed here, the *lilong* (lanes and alleys) of Tianzifang, demonstrates that even if the transformation of the neighbourhood is an inexorable force pushed by the municipality, other forces are at work. As the discussion will show, the role of artists has been of utmost importance in the case of Tianzifang.

Keywords: Neighbourhood, historic preservation, cultural clusters, urban landscape transformation.

Major ethnographic studies made by Chinese scholars before the 1990s focused on Chinese rural areas and ethnic and rural minorities immigrating to the city (Engebretsen 2012, Liu 2002). Metropolises such as Beijing and Shanghai were the first to be put under the microscope through ethnographic studies. Today urban studies are well established in the field of Chinese studies. It is generally admitted by scholars in social sciences that long term fieldwork in a specific site is the prerequisite to any in-depth study (Prato and Pardo 2013). Ethnographic work on the ground has been chosen for this article as it is a powerful tool to understand life in our rapidly changing, complex cities (Pardo and Prato 2018: 2). As China is due to be more and more urbanized according to government plans, the study of different kinds of people living together in a specific area of the city is particularly important in order to identify specific issues in contemporary China, present trends and future trajectories. The case presented in this article shows that beyond government plans, a more nuanced approach to urban development is possible. Urbanization is not happening without contradictions, so the discussion will question the compatibility between preserving historic buildings and blocks while the city is modernising and taking new shape at high speed. It will assess this high tension between contradictory objectives.

In Shanghai, the latest large-scale urban transformation dates back to the 1990s. At that time, Shanghai started to play once again a leading role in the Chinese economy. This new status is reflected in the discourse of the municipality's officials, which emphasizes the deep transformation and modernisation processes of the city (Laurens 2005). To borrow the expression from Lu Duanfang's book title, China today is remaking its urban form (Lu 2006). One focus of this perspective is the city's new architecture, which is intended, first, to embody its status as a major Asian metropolis and, second, to show its potential to become rapidly a global one as well. For Shanghai leaders, the fact that the municipality was selected in 2002 to host the World Exposition (hereafter referred to as Expo) after a tough competition with five

¹ I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers who gave some very useful comments. I would also like to thank Russell L. Moses for his support and good advice. The fieldwork trips in 2010, 2011 and 2012 were funded by PRODIG UMR 8586, the research centre to which I am affiliated.

other international cities was very important. It was seen as a crowning achievement — it was interpreted as recognition of Shanghai as an international metropolis (People's Daily 2004). The official discourse is about global upgrading the city. 'Taking the successful holding of the 2010 World Expo as a driving force to boost the upgrading of the city's energy level and layout adjustment, Shanghai will continually improve its urban eco-environment, accelerate the functional development of Pudong, and advance the building of a modern international city.' (Master City Plan of Shanghai 2001: §14.1). This phenomenon can be observed throughout the world in cities that accommodated Olympic games. Beijing, for example, was transformed at high speed to welcome the summer games in 2008. This was not without its problems and some resistance from the local population (Graezer Bideau 2018).

A similar phenomenon happened in Shanghai, where urban renewal was accelerated once Shanghai was officially chosen to host the Expo. The massive and rapid destruction left little room for discussion and elaboration of a good protection plan. It was only a decade later that the issue raised concerns and some academic started to publish on it; among them, Wu (2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2015), Ren (2008), Tsai (2008), Wang and Yao (2009), just to quote the main Chinese authors who have published in English. Modernisation remained central to the vision that was publicized loudly and clearly in official discourse. The motto chosen was 'Better city, better life'. Actually, it is clearer in Chinese '*chengshi rang shenghuo geng meihao*', which can be read as: 'the city enables life to be even more beautiful'. Human beings are the focus of the visual discourse, with the Chinese character *ren* used as the mascot while the logo is made of the Chinese character for the world *shi* representing three men linked together. In the media, the following themes were developed: protection of the environment, fight against pollution, technological innovation. The authorities promoted a discourse with two different levels. First, they addressed Shanghai's population as a whole, striving to promote a positive image of the Chinese city internationally. Second, they aimed to justify evictions and relocations of the people who were directly affected. For the authorities, Shanghai's urban renovation policies — which mainly targeted areas deemed dilapidated and overcrowded — aimed to modernize these neighbourhoods, improving the comfort and safety of their inhabitants. The goal was to reduce risks such as fire, bad hygiene, robberies, drug traffic, and so on.² In order to give the world a good image of the city, transformations were made all around the city at high speed. Here we clearly see a major contradiction between the global view of planners and local people's interests or wishes. This is so important that it is a central topic in most urban ethnographies (Pardo and Prato 2018: 14).

While the policy makers have a broader view of the municipality, scholars doing ethnographic work have a close-up view (DeSena and Krase 2015). The present article focuses on one location that is part of the historical centre popularly referred to as the former French

² According to Regulations of Shanghai Municipality on City Planning (15/06/1995), article 14, §3 (pp.13-15) 'The redevelopment of old urban areas must concentrate on those areas with a high concentration of dilapidated houses, shacks and temporarily thrown-up dwellings and those areas that are lacking in municipal works and public utility facilities, that are afflicted by traffic congestion or environmental pollution or that are water logging-prone'.

concession:³ Tianzifang (hereafter TZF). Like most of the areas affected by the renovation in Shanghai, TZF is located in the heart of the city: within the first ring road, called the inner ring road.

I carried out participant observation and in-depth interviews from 2005 to 2012. Living close by TZF, I shared residents' daily life until 2010 then from 2010 to 2012 made fieldwork trips once a year from France. I interviewed local residents, economic migrants, shop owners, artists and individuals on duty at the management office. I also interviewed some tourists. This study shows that the Shanghai municipality has learned from its mistakes of massive destruction and can adapt to a certain extent to a new situation that it did not plan.

Contemporary Urban Renovation

The phenomenon of renovating an urban area is quite common, and other major cities vying for international recognition also had to face the same problems in relation to urban transformation.

For Shanghai municipality leaders, modernization meant primarily getting rid of old industrial buildings and dilapidated housing in order to give a beautiful image of the city connected to the world. The goal of the leaders was to transform Shanghai so that it could compete with other global cities (Diglio 2006). As a consequence, the resident population changed and a phenomenon of gentrification followed the transformations made to the city morphology (Iossifova 2009, 2015). In the 1970s in the United States, there was a similar phenomenon. Sharon Zukin explains that the officials believed that cities 'suffered from an image crisis' and in order to upgrade cities they targeted investors and visitors (Zukin 2009: 6). A similar situation has gone on in Shanghai.

In this context, of transformation at high speed, the question of preservation of historical sites is important (Ning 1998). What is to be preserved? How to preserve? Major cities in China went through the same dilemma during the period between the 1980s until the 2000s. The Chinese government establish national guidelines and, at lower levels, each municipality has its own plan to develop the city and its leaders are responsible to achieve it. The municipality of Shanghai adopted a series of regulations in order to rationalise demolition and reconstruction (Shanghai Municipality 1995, 2001, 2002, 2007). Beijing and Xi'an, which have been capital of the Empire and have some buildings listed with UNESCO, have different views on preservation compared with Shanghai, which has no building listed with UNESCO (UN-Habitat 2008, Graezer Bideau 2018). Although Shanghai was officially recognized by the Chinese central government as a 'National Famous Historical and Cultural City' in December 1986, the concept of historical preservation seems quite weak⁴ compared to the dominant

³ The creation of European concessions was the heritage of the first Opium War in 1842. As a result of this war, Shanghai became a treaty port. Foreigners enjoyed extraterritoriality and de facto Chinese government had no control over the administration of the concession (Bergère 2009).

⁴ Article 14 §1-2 states: 'The development of new urban areas and the redevelopment of old urban areas must be integrated in a unified plan, must be planned and arranged rationally, must pursue a course of

modern architecture made of business centres, commercial malls, etc. (Zhong and Chen 2017). In response, the municipality listed places to be preserved, mainly located in the densely-populated city centre: 16 key state-protected relics, 110 key city-protected relics, 21 historical memorial spots and 15 protected sites, altogether there are 400 authorized buildings of historical value (Diglio 2006). In my view, the fact that the oldest buildings in Shanghai go back only to the Concession period is too shameful (this idea is also shared by Diglio 2006). In Xi'an, for example, preserving the remains of the First Emperor (259-210 BC) or the tombs of the Tang dynasty (618-907) are all linked to the glorious past of China. The emotion behind preserving native historical heritage is not the same as preserving colonial style architecture.

Like in many countries in the West, here, too, it is difficult to find the balance between growth and fast development on the one hand and cultural heritage preservation on the other hand. The feelings that Sharon Zukin expresses during her walks in New York city could be the same for a Shanghai dweller: 'I see people, streets, neighbourhoods, and public spaces being upscaled, redeveloped, and homogenized to the point of losing their distinctive identity. Not all of them are historic places, for one of the city's main distinctions is that it nurtures a constant dialogue between the two faces of authenticity: between features that every generation views as "original" because they have been there throughout their lifetimes, and features that each new generation creates on their own' (Zukin 2009: xi). There is a struggle over who controls urban spaces between local residents on the one hand, who want wet markets⁵ and daily use shops, and newer residents and tourists on the other, who largely want leisure activities and high-class shops.

The *Lilong*: A Traditional Neighbourhood in Shanghai

A *lilong* is typical of Shanghai architecture. 'The word, as an abbreviation of *Lilong* housing neighbourhood, is a rich concept that not only refers to the materiality of the dwelling form, but also to the vivid social life within and around it, which can be characterized in at least three ways: 1/ the physical forms of housing [...] which shared a similar neighbourhood structure, being organized along small alleys; 2/ the local community; 3/ a particular dwelling culture created by the inhabitants' (Zhao 2004: 50-51).

The end of the 19th century was marked by political instability, rebellions and the arrival of Westerners in Shanghai. All this pushed many Chinese to find refuge in big cities, like Shanghai (Bergère 2009). Because of the rapid increase of people running away from

comprehensive development, and must give priority to the construction of auxiliary, complementary projects and of infrastructure works, and construction work must be carried out with a relative concentration of resources. The redevelopment of old urban areas must be integrated with the restructuring and redistribution of industries, must rationally readjust the use of land, must keep a check on the building of high-rises, must lower building density, must increase public green space, must help improve urban traffic, must further improve urban infrastructure, and must strengthen the multifunctionality of the city. [...]' (*Regulations of Shanghai Municipality on City Planning*, 1995).

⁵ These markets are places where people can buy fresh vegetables, fruit, live fish and sometimes poultry. There, people can also find a locksmith, a tailor, and so on.

surrounding provinces like Anhui and Jiangsu, housing was not sufficient and some slums and ghettos appeared (Ho 2010). Some housings were just huts called *gundilong* (earth-rolling dragon) and were modelled after the roofs of the riverboats that carried peasants to Shanghai. These people lived first on their boats and after a while moved to the barges and built huts (Ho 2010). Slowly, some new buildings were erected in the undeveloped areas of the foreign settlements during the 1920s. When newcomers arrived at the beginning of the 20th century, in the foreign concessions there were houses that would accommodate extended families called *Shikumen* (literally translated ‘with stone gates’). They were two- or three-story structures made of stone or bricks with a narrow front yard. These *Shikumen* lined the alleys that formed the *Lilongs*.

Chiang Kai-Shek, the Nationalist leader, started to unify China in 1926 under what is known as the Northern Expedition. One year later his army entered Shanghai, pacifying it. China was united under Nationalist rule. The Nationalists made efforts to develop the economy. The last stage of *Lilong* development emerged in a context of dynamic industrialization. The *Lilong* erected at this time had the objective of creating affordable homes for the workers of small production units that were located near the waterways that then crisscrossed Shanghai. *Lilong* design thus moved beyond areas of the French concession, to expand into the rest of Shanghai. As more *lilongs* were built, there were variations in style. However, commonalities remained. These buildings were generally built quickly, using wood or bricks. They usually comprised three floors linked together through alleys and lanes leading to the main gates, which were guarded. This gave a feeling of safety for the inhabitants and allowed them to create strong social ties within a closed perimeter. The intensive use of common areas and a vivid life in the alleys generated a strong sense of community (Qiu 2010).

By the 1950s this type of housing was the most common, accounting for 72.5% of the city’s residential buildings (Zhong and Chen 2017). Of course, they were of various kinds according to the quality of the material used, some high class, others more common (Rutcosky 2007). These constructions were stopped in 1950 when the Communist government took power and changed its policy towards city dwellers. There was no more private property after the 1950s and the State was the only owner. Industries and businesses were nationalized as well as housing. The State was providing accommodation at a very low rent for people working in the cities (Fan 2004).

Tianzifang: A Traditional Lilong in Shanghai



Figure 1. Map of TZF

Tianzifang was built during the 1930s, this was the last stage of *Lilong* construction. It consists of a set of small three-floor buildings made of grey and red bricks and a dozen houses called *Shikumen* of two to three floors. At first, its size was 7.2 hectares. There was only one lane, but since 2010 the perimeter has expanded westward, incorporating other *lilongs* under the label TZF. It is now an administrative part of Luwan district, in the southwestern part of Shanghai's city centre. At the time of its construction, it was part of the French concession.



Figure 2. One of the stone doors in TZ (photo by the author)



Figure 3. One narrow alley after passing the stone doors – All ground floor dwellings are used as shops (photo by the author).

TZF is crammed in between Jianguo Zhong Road to the north — a relatively narrow one-way street with two lanes, lined with plane trees and usually busy — the small Taikang Road to the south — a one-way street that was not very popular before TZF's success — Ruijin Nan Road to the west — an important thoroughfare (also one-way, with two lanes and plane tree-lined) — and finally the small Sinan Road to the east — also one-way, and comparatively less busy. To the south is Zhaojiabang road, one of the municipality's main thruways with six lanes. It was an old waterway used in the past for the transportation of goods produced in the small factories that bordered it. Now covered, it continues to play an important role in Shanghai's transport system.

Since its beginning, a variety of residents lived in TZF. After 1950, some of the *Shikumen* in TZF were destroyed to make room for small factories; the rest were subdivided and made into low-rent apartments. Each building was re-divided creating small flats with an average of 3m² per capita in living space (Zhong and Chen 2017). During the pre-communist period housing was relatively comfortable for an average size family, afterwards it became overpopulated. In addition to workers, residents included minor officials, artists and teachers who took advantage of the low prices of these buildings to move in. The organizational configuration of the *lilong* created very important spatial as well as social constraints for their inhabitants. The kitchen and the bathroom became common spaces. There were no private toilets, so residents had to go to public toilets in the morning, carrying their chamber pots. Another consequence was the degradation of the premises as none of the residents took responsibility for the upkeep of the buildings.

At the end of the 1950s, several lanes in the *lilong* were demolished to make room for six small factories, which produced spare timepieces single parts, canned food, etc. The food factory, which housed a photo gallery, Deke-Erh, until 2012 (Zhou P. 2012), has three floors, and the tallest building has six floors (Liang 2008, Pan 2005).

Today, Luwan is considered a district imbued with a particular nostalgic charm. The area also attracts property developers who want to benefit from the latest urban transformation policies. When private developers collaborating with local authorities took advantage of the opportunity to launch large-scale modernization projects in the district, TZF was one area that attracted them.

From an Unknown *Lilong* to Tianzifang

The six small factories built in TZF during the 1950s filed for bankruptcy in the 1990s and closed. The lower level of the Chinese administration (the street level) decided to rent these empty spaces to a wet market and some daily necessities shop. Later, in the 1990s and early 2000s, step by step, artists took the opportunity to rent former industrial sites at very low prices; here they installed their workshops. A community of painters, sculptors, photographers and designers slowly developed. This is how a former food factory came to house Deke-Erh's photo gallery until 2012 (Zhou P. 2012). The six-floor building is rented to artists (Liang 2008, Pan 2005). Some shops were converted into galleries and artist studios and gradually some restaurants and souvenir shops moved in.

Some of the artists had studied in the West and were aware of places like Soho in New York City. They considered this a model to be followed. They wanted 'to build Shanghai's SOHO at Tianzifang'. In Shanghai at that time, the idea of converting old factory buildings into artistic venues was brand new (Gu 2014). TZF was the pioneer of creative industry in Shanghai.⁶

Some artists have a certain degree of notoriety, like the aforementioned Huang Yongyu, or Chen Yifei, a renowned photographer, one of those with a long stay in North America, where he discovered the practice of converting old factories into art galleries. His contribution was particularly significant for the artists that settled in TZF. By 2004, an estimated 1.8 hectares of TZF's industrial space had been converted into galleries, artists' studios or interior design offices, occupying almost all of the previously available factory space (Wang W. H. 2011). From the start, TZF stood out as different from the other *lilongs* because of the presence of artists (Ley 2003).

Interestingly, the name of Tianzifang was given by the artists in 2002 without consulting the local residents. Given the symbolic importance of giving a name to something (Yu 2015), the fact that people living there were not asked reveals how they had been marginalized in their own living space. What is now called Tianzifang was just known as 'Taikang lu'; until 2008,

⁶ In 2004, TZF was one of the 18 Creative Industry Clusters selected by the Shanghai Municipality (Yu 2015).

no official text had used the name TZF. The name TZF was given by Huang Yongyu.⁷ Tianzifang was the name of a painter from ancient China, who has now fallen into oblivion. The artistic connotation was to become the trademark of the area (Wang J.Q. and Yao Z. G. 2009). The fact that the *lilong* was named by such a highly renowned artist was a good trademark in the eyes of the art connoisseurs and the municipality's authorities (SCIC 2006). Only after the authorities' acknowledgement of the place's identity did the name 'Tianzifang' appear in official documents and on road signs in 2008.

The Population of TZF

The specificity of TZF is that residents, economic migrants, and artists in daytime only, coexist in the same limited space. In other places where artists have settled in Shanghai, such as Suzhou Creek or Red House, there were often only abandoned industrial structures and no inhabitants (Wang J. and Li 2009, Wang J. 2009).

Since the beginning, the artists and the older residents did not have much in common and did not have many opportunities to interact in daily life. In fact, the artists did not live in TZF, but only worked there. They paid rent for their studios to a government office because up to this day the factories are still owned by the local government. Here we have a case of what DeSena call 'parallel cultures' within a community (DeSena 2012). There is a segregation between the two groups who deal with their daily occupations in the same neighbourhood, co-exist but do not interact. They are like strangers to each other.

The residents still living at TZF when I started my research in 2005 came there during the 1950s. They were retired workers or small shop owners. Their level of education was quite low and their revenue likewise.

A third group of people living at TZF are the rural migrants or economic migrants. In the late 1990s, they started to rent rooms from the long-time residents and establish themselves there. They are the only ones who accept to live in dilapidated surroundings without any modern comfort. They usually originated from nearby provinces (Anhui, Jiangsu, Zhejiang), and came in the hope of earning a better living in Shanghai. The residents and the economic migrants interact on a daily basis. They jointly use the common facilities like the toilets and the kitchen. They buy their goods in the same wet markets. Their income levels are not very different, and their level of education is rather similar. According to Chinese law they have no rights at all; they are allowed to stay in Shanghai on a temporary basis. They are mute actors of the social life even if they are also actors in reshaping the urban landscape.

Fighting for Preserving TZF

From 1991 to 2000, the city demolished old houses covering a total area of 28 million square meters and relocated about 0.64 million households. TZF was at high risk of being demolished

⁷ Huang Yongyu, a famous writer and painter, was born in 1924. After suffering from the Cultural Revolution, he continued his artistic activities but focused on calligraphy and wood carving.

like the nearby *lilongs*. It was saved by the mobilisation of different groups of people and also by the Asian Crisis (1997) which stopped some investments.

The first group of actors was composed by the different levels of the administration: the central, the municipal and the district level governments. The Shanghai municipality was interested in issues of renovation. The second group were the private investors, responsible for financing it. They also had their own agenda. These two groups had to negotiate an agreement before any project could carry on. Developers obtained urban land use right and then carried out their project. In this case, in an effort to build a more modern image of Shanghai and to take advantage of an attractive financial opportunity,⁸ city authorities made the deal with a Hong Kong real estate company. This company, ShuiOn Land, has designed several other *lilong* renovations in Shanghai. Its plan was to build large luxury residences and a shopping centre.

As for the inhabitants, the economic migrants who rented a living space were voiceless, so they had no choice but to prepare to move to another place further from the inner city. The old residents were more resigned: ‘the government decided so what can we do?’, ‘we cannot go against the government decision’, ‘we have to follow what we are ordered to do’. These were reactions to be heard from the long-time residents.

Then there were the artists, the later comers. They were the first to react. They became an important group as the influx of artists seeking inspiration and affordable rents had increased. The mobilization of artists, academics⁹ and even political executives took place in various forms to denounce the massive destruction of local heritage. A debate was held in the Luwan district government offices and was not public. Although sometimes violent, the debate did not receive significant media coverage. Some academics who took part in the meetings with the Luwan administration suggest that the main argument was that a modern international metropolis needs to keep some historical enclaves. Second, according to those who wanted to preserve TZF from destruction, the experiment of mixing different groups was going on fine; moreover, the public seemed to appreciate this mix of residential life for the popular classes and artistic flavour. Eventually, Luwan leaders decided to use TZF as an experiment in a new kind of historic preservation. The Asian economic crisis forced the developers to reduce the scale of their project because of the lack of funds and the fall of real estate prices. So, the Luwan district government took the decision to give TZF some time to show what could be done. It is important to note that the decision was made at the lowest level of the administrative hierarchy. It was a real risk for the leaders because if it failed, they would be held responsible.

Despite being the first to be affected by the development project, the degree of involvement of long-time residents was minimal. They appeared to be caught in a dynamic that they were not able to stop. Side-lined from all negotiations, they were to be evicted for the purpose of adding value to the district. Initiated by the government and by private developers, this huge demolition and development project in TZF was to transform completely the district

⁸ ‘In China, in 2010, revenue from trade in real estate accounted for 1/3 of national revenue’ (Yu 2012: 24). And for Beijing and Shanghai it was 1/2 of the local revenue (Yu 2015:7).

⁹ Like Chen Yinfang, then Professor of Sociology at East China Normal University. She published in Chinese about slums in Shanghai and social problems with urban development (Chen 2008).

by reallocating its space. Some people I interviewed said that they were not strong enough to fight against a government decision. They also said they did not want to get into trouble. A very fatalistic feeling was shared by many.

Daily Life Under the Name of TZF

It is only when it was sure that TZF would not be immediately destroyed that negotiations began between the artists, the businessmen and the resident-owners (Shinohara 2009). This was particularly difficult. On the one hand, state regulations prohibited changing the zoning of land use.¹⁰ On the other, because of the large number of owners in such a small area, reaching an agreement became a major challenge. One may need the agreement of six or seven owners to be able to open a shop big enough to accommodate goods and consumers. For Ms Li (55 years old) who had spent her whole life in TZF before getting married, 'People here are uneducated, they don't know how to negotiate with these people from the outside. They feel uneasy about renting their place and moving out of the community far away.' The place as we know it today was born of these different struggles.

During the period when negotiations were going on, TZF was gaining notoriety amongst Shanghai people and it quickly became a trendy place for young people (Guo 2005). But still the situation remained precarious for many of its residents. In 2004, an agreement to save TZF was sealed between the artists, government officials and newcomer entrepreneurs. At the same time, new management structures were created to oversee its development. Till then it had been an informal and small-scale committee. The owners were private ones¹¹ but most of them left to make room for shops or galleries. As Mr Tan (80 years old) told me 'I am happy to leave this place. It is too dirty, too small. I will stay with my daughter who bought a modern flat in Pudong. The rent of my room will help for daily life'.

In order to keep an eye on these transactions, the government decided to create a management committee. The main role of the committee was to prevent disputes given the complexity of establishing a lease. The involvement of municipal authorities in the management of TZF marked a turning point in the evolution of the site. One year later, in 2005, TZF was named 'Shanghai's most creative industrial zone'. This was the final victory for people who wanted to protect TZF from destruction because gaining this title meant that TZF had been formerly recognized as a creative and touristic area that could not be destroyed easily.

Starting from 2004, some residents began renting their property to newcomer artists who did not find room in former factories. They also started to rent to entrepreneurs who opened shops. More and more cafes, restaurants and souvenir boutiques appeared all around. For the residents who wished to move to a less confined environment, the opportunity was too good to

¹⁰ Article 45 of the *Regulations of Shanghai Municipality on City Planning* (1995: 7) states 'The use of an architectural structure must conform with the function designated and approved for it in the Permit for Planning of Construction Project. Any change in the designated function of an architectural structure must be reported to the Municipal or Area/District/County Administrative Department in Charge of City Planning that originally handled the examination and approval procedures for approval'.

¹¹ Since 1986 residents could buy their property and became owners of their flat.

pass up, especially for those who lived on the first or second floor. For those living on the third floor, it was — and still is — quite difficult to find a tenant. Shanghai newspapers reported that the first resident in TZF who embarked on the adventure did a bit of renovation work in his apartment and, before he finished, he was offered 4,000 Yuan per month by a fashion designer, who also ended up hiring him as an employee for a salary of 1,500 Yuan, which represented more than ten times the worker's former monthly income. Today, prices are continuously increasing, and a 40 m² apartment in the main alley can be rented for up to 40,000 Yuan per month.¹²

The creativity of TZF and its official recognition brought great vitality to the community and a substantial increase in income for the residents (Hiu et al. 2014). In 2011, the proportion of rented premises was 75% at number 210, 78% at number 248, and only 28% in the third and final section, one that was developed more recently and is located further west.¹³ In total, 45% of the families that were surveyed chose to remain there, 37% have rented their apartments, and 17% have become entrepreneurs (1% were not able to answer the questionnaire). Out of the 301 families living there, 114 would have like to find a tenant, 34 wanted to leave, 97 wanted to stay, and 75 were not sure. These figures show that the development of TZF had a very significant impact on the residents. Residents, who did not have much to say about the transformation of their community, still wanted to take advantage of the development. The third floor was not easily accessible and often not visible from the alley. Therefore, as I mentioned earlier, it was more difficult to rent, and those residents were often likely to stay.

Alongside this transformation, because the resident population density has been decreasing; one might expect that the structures would be better maintained. However, the increase in the tourist population and the turnover of entrepreneurs (as the rent prices rocket) have had an impact on maintenance. In addition, construction was not planned for shops and restaurants, and few inspections have been performed, so some fear that the buildings might collapse.

During the interviews I had with local residents, some, especially those who lived on the second or third floors, complained about not finding tenants. Many were also distressed by the mass of tourists, who seemed to consider them as curiosities. Another subject of recrimination was the disappearance of small shops useful to residents. For example, the large market at the end of Taikang Road — small hairdressers, shoemakers, glaziers — have all given way to more luxurious boutiques. The retired Ms Li thus complained in 2010: 'Back in the days, I used to go to the market every morning and we would all meet up, chatting while buying vegetables. Now the new market is smaller, some services are no longer available and it's much more expensive. Only fashionable shops are left; it is good for young people and foreigners, but not for people like us!' For Mr Huang, a retired man, the situation is not easier: 'I can only go out early in the morning, otherwise I would have no respite; they [the tourists] all want to take my

¹² This figure was given by several people during interviews in May 2014.

¹³ Results of a public poll ordered by the local committee from Luwan district in 2010. The survey interviewed 671 families in Tianzifang. The whole survey has not been published, but some abstracts are available (Xu 2011).

picture and they make so much noise that my bird becomes frightened. At night, they are shouting and making noise until the late hours. If I could, I would move as quickly as possible. This is not a life!’ Ms Yao, who has been living in a nearby *Lilong* since her childhood and who is selling tea in TZF is critical of residents: ‘people are not sensible; they all think that their small flat on the second or third floor is gold. They are too greedy, so my neighbours below are condemned to cope with noise and daily stress’. Disputes between residents, bar owners and even customers happen from time to time, forcing the neighbourhood committee to intervene. Although residents did not carry out formal demonstrations in front of Luwan’s District Committee, some third-floor residents set up banners denouncing the changes they faced (witnessed by the author in April 2008). This shows sporadic resistance, with little impact on the development of TZF.

The departure of residents has only accelerated since 2000. In 2010 there used to be 670 households living in TZF; now only 80 households remain, most of whom are composed of elderly people. Since 2011, street signs in Chinese and English indicating that visitors are not allowed to penetrate further or that pictures are forbidden beyond a certain limit have started to appear at the end of the shopping alleys. Small booths have been installed at the entrances of the alleys for the security guards on duty;¹⁴ barriers were set up to prevent vehicles and even bicycles from entering.



Figure 4. No tourist allowed (photo by the author)

At the end of 2012, a survey of the tourists visiting TZF commissioned by Luwan district showed that it was ranked last among the Shanghainese sites (Zhou S. L. 2013). According to the journalist who analysed the report, visitors complained that there were too many tourists in the narrow alleys. They also complained about inflated prices for average quality goods. As for

¹⁴ They are paid by the management committee. In China one can see them at the entrance of gated communities and in most public spaces. In that sense TZF is not an exception.

the residents, they did not have any more private space where they could meet amongst themselves. The businessmen were not satisfied either because the rent was now too high, or because there was harsh competition. Some artists had already left for more attractive places. As an example, Deke-Erh, one of the first famous artist to have moved to TZF, left for Suzhou, where the municipality provided him with a large space for a low rent. After a decade of development, there were mixed results. Miss Wu, a Taiwanese, thus explained her feeling: 'During my first visit, while having coffee in an alley, we could see some residents cycling about, carrying the vegetables they had just purchased. This passage of the recent past was quite fascinating. [...] During the past two years, the number of daily visitors has greatly increased. Inside TZF, people have to push and bump into each in order to move forward'.

The co-residence of artists and other residents in a single neighbourhood now appears to be a *victim of its success*. I have described how residents are divided among those who enjoy a comfortable income, and others whose quality of life has deteriorated. As for the artists who allowed TZF to exist, they have started to leave. Rents have become too high, tourists often pass by quickly without making a purchase, and competition has become increasingly tough.



Figure 5a. Before renovation (photo by the author)



Figure 5b. During renovation (photo by the author)



Figure 5c. After renovation (photo by the author)

Conclusion

Modernisation of Shanghai was made at high speed. Issues linked to the protection of historical and cultural heritage have been in contradiction with the desire of municipal leaders to give a modern image of the city. As this article shows, there is another contradiction between the lucrative real-estate transactions and the protection of community life in places like TZF. Participant observation and in-depth interviews highlight an ambivalent feeling among the residents themselves. On the one hand, they have been living a long period of their life in this *Lilong* and they have a strong feeling of being part of a community. On the other hand, they are willing to go and enjoy more comfortable, quieter surroundings. As Mr Li (about 75 years old) told me, 'I wish the government had displaced us (he and his wife) because we would not have to do everything ourselves. We are too old for that and the children don't want to come and visit us: we don't even have private toilets!'

Tourists, who are mostly Chinese, come to walk through the alleys and make a selective reading of the local history through a sanitized reconstruction. They come to find authenticity, which is a very good marketing cultural product. TZF is advertised as authentic and the residents are the guarantee. Bride and groom come to take romantic pictures just like the crowds of tourists.

Today, TZF is a victim of its own success. It is becoming step by step similar to other 'historic villages' and enclaves in China: a reconstructed leisure area with an obsolete fragrance where you can buy the same souvenirs as elsewhere.

Even if negative comments can be heard from the different stakeholders, the relatively harmonious relationship between artists, residents and entrepreneurs is part of the good image on which Shanghai leaders have tried to build. Moreover, in TZF, there were no protests against eviction and no negative media coverage about the displacement of residents. So, harmonious TZF was put forth as a model to be emulated.

China's ongoing rapid urbanisation means that the preservation of local communities and historical spaces as well as the modernisation of the cities will be major challenges for the Chinese authorities. The fact that residents are not involved in the planning process exacerbates a fatalist feeling and dispossesses them of their social network and community memory.

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