Balancing commercial and heritage scapes: Atmosphere, vitality and sterility in the urban conservation spaces of Shanghai

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1 Introduction: fear for a loss of place and urban heritage in China; to re-develop or not to redevelop

A cursory glance over the current literature on Chinese urban development and place reveals very critical positions (Mars, 2004; Abrahamson, 2011). Reflecting on the urbanscapes of Shanghai, Mars (2004) has argued that Chinese cities are cities without history; as Mars suggests Chinese cities are ever increasingly adopting:

> shapeless low-rise expansions… punctuated by a myriad of up-market housing projects — densely organised neighbourhoods of repetitive blocks fringed with small trees and parking lots. They are a cross between Celebration (a suburban enclave

developed by the Disney Corporation for the faint at heart, where unhappiness has been officially banned) and The Projects (a concept for inner-city vertical slums for non-Caucasian Americans where happiness is hard to find). They offer the suburban comforts of cheap and tranquil living in Hong Kong-style tower block neighbourhoods. And they all look the same. (Mars, 2004)

However, a more careful examination of this process by He and Wu (2007) shows that a major driving force in the shifting urban landscapes of China has been the growth of 'property-led redevelopment'; specifically as He and Wu attest

attracting a huge amount of domestic and international capital, real estate development effectively solves the problem of financial deficiency in urban redevelopment, which has troubled the local government for a long period. With the capability of instantly promoting economic growth and effectively changing economic image, real estate development has thus acquired an irreplaceable place in the urban economy and provides the major driving force for urban redevelopment (He and Wu, 2007: 194).

But with the rise of this new property-led development, He and Wu also caution that whilst generating economic growth:

urban renewal programmes have devastated the diversity and vibrancy of neighbourhoods… In a period of booming urban redevelopment, tremendous demolition and relocation have been occurring in Chinese cities. It is estimated that from 1990 to 1998, Beijing demolished 4.2 million square metres of housing in the old city… (He and Wu, 2007: 194).

A consequence of this development as He and Wu point out is that countless forms of urban heritage, including the physical and social and cultural heritages of the people living in these traditional houses have been destroyed; Reflecting on these issues, then writers such as Friedmann have lamented the loss of traditional urban street spaces such as the Hutong's in Beijing. In a recent article discussing the loss of place, (2010) Friedmann comments that:

by the turn of the millennium, Beijing's centuries-old hutong were vastly over-crowded, and that the physical infrastructure of the housing was, to put it mildly bad in need of updating and repair. Still hutong alleyways had been part of Beijing's cityscape for over 500 years, and their inhabitants had created a distinctive environment and way of life. I don't want to dwell on this process of erasure or place breaking, but if place is something to be valued… and if there is anything to the notion that cherishing a neighbourhood in which one has spent a significant part of one's life is a significant concept, if sense of place and identity are at issue, then the

demolition of places large and small proposes immense human costs (Friedmann, 157-158).

Clearly then, in the contemporary literature, two main themes capture a great deal of academic studies; these are the themes of property led redevelopment and a senseless loss of place , resulting in the loss of traditional streetscapes and community based forms of social, cultural and economic heritage. Although there have indeed been detractors from this position;

Specifically in recent work on the Lilong's in Shanghai, the Thai writer Non Arkaraprasertkul (2009; 2010) has vehemently argued that the views of these writers in the fields of geography and sociology have often been overly-nostalgic and preservationist in focus; as a result, Arkaraprasertkul has argued that these thinkers have often ignored the actual needs of poorer Chinese people living in these houses; in sum, Arkaraprasertkul's comments could lead us to the suggestion that often a lot of conservationist sentiment applied to China's older quarters are reflective of a kind of conservationist nostalgia from afar, a nostalgia that can also be equated with a Western tourist gaze that is urgently

seeking to preserve spaces of what s/he might term an ‘authentic’ China (my words rather than Arkaraprasertkul’s position);

Rather than viewing Chinese urban space as a tabula Rasa, Arkaraprasertkul’s position is more nuanced and whilst he certainly advocates demolition, Arkaraprasertkul proposes the construction of new Lilong like, low-medium rise high density houses to preserve the physical and social character of these unique Chinese urban spaces.

Thus, Arkaraprasertkul suggests that

> the traditional Lilong house is no longer the most appropriate urban housing for Shanghai…However, it is suggested that a viable solution is low medium-rise high-density, multi-functional, community-orientated urban housing that will preserve the unique nature of individual vibrant neighbourhoods (Arkaraprasertkul, 2009: 12).

2 A *critical conservationist* position

Whilst the arguments of the authors so far are relatively fair, they ignore several major points; firstly, whilst much demolition is certainly taking place, in recent years, many local urban municipal officials in China are also recognising the role of traditional urban quarters in marketing Chinese cities as unique tourist sites; thus, whilst it is

certainly true that demolition is growing at an unprecedented scale, a great deal of commercial led conservation is also taking place that presents a great number of opportunities for social, cultural and economic groups alike; secondly, whilst demolition and the construction of new high quality housing may indeed serve the functional needs of a new generation of Chinese people, the strong demolition argument still ignores the more intangible and tacit bonds that have been created between local people and their housing for years; whilst Arkaraprasertkul's argument certainly makes a lot of sense in an anti-sentimental way, it still seems to ignore the way that people often memories around stone and specific places (no matter how dilapidated these places are); whilst it would certainly be unfair and even oppressive to suggest that Chinese people should be expected to live in antiquated historic houses, that have no facilities, this does not mean that these houses need to be demolished in their droves; whilst Arkaraprasertkul's anti-sentimental argument certainly encourages us to be reflexive, it can be strongly argued that this position is still nevertheless, pretty extreme; moreover, as writers such as Pendlebury (2009) have suggested, often proponents of demolition have often been less cognizant of the different social, cultural and even economic uses of urban heritage over the years;

thus, whilst residents might not want to live in these traditional homes, the potential value for these spaces in terms of their local, cultural and economic viability may yield strong dividends (see Pendlebury, 2009: 113); thus, as research demonstrates in recent years, traditional urban neighbourhoods and older quarters in China is now becoming home to newer kinds of creative business and/or art spaces; whilst this new kind of redevelopment has also brought with it lots of gentrification and tourism, these spaces have also been the site of new and interesting spaces of place-making where artists and/or cafe and restaurant owners have sought to create an alternative 'vibe' to the usual monolithic spaces of the contemporary Chinese city.

Whilst it would be dangerous to suggest that these spaces should mean the eviction of the original residents that live there, nevertheless, it is certainly important to note that (like the west) these new 'alternative' spaces in the Chinese city have certainly brought something of an anti-dote to what appears to be the continual demolition, redevelopment and blandization of urban space; In what follows, then, it is the argument of this author, that whilst traditional residents should have the final say about their 'heritage-space', it is suggested here, that rather than straightforward demolition of these classical spaces, compromises

maybe arrived at between developers, residents and conservationists that could potentially lead to a mixture of new build, (and sometimes demolition), conservation and commerciality that could lead to the production of new kinds of interesting and creative urban space.

In the writing that follows, then, this paper will explore the conservation of some new spaces in the Chinese cities of Beijing and Shanghai; specifically and exploring these cases, it will be argued that whilst there are many pitfalls in the conservation of traditional Chinese urban spaces, nevertheless, conducted in a particular way it is argued here that developers, conservationists and residents may benefit by a combination of mixed-use approaches to traditional urban spaces that satisfies a variety of needs; however, in making these claims it will also be argued here that successful urban conservation is never straight forward and the potential for space to become inscribed and constructed through the lens of more powerful agents is a continual threat.

In this regard, whilst this paper argues for a pro-conservationist perspective, it is also suggested here, that a *critical conservation* approach to China's built landscape's must also include a great deal of reflexivity and mindfulness with regard to the various agents and stakeholders that are seeking to conserve the space; thus, as Jordan

(2006) has written about the conservation of ‘resistance spaces’ in Berlin, even in subaltern spaces, louder and powerful voices can reside; in the following sections, I shall now examine a few examples of urban conservation throughout urban China; I shall draw attention to what I believe are various kinds of interesting and perhaps less interesting attempts at conservation.

However, before we continue, I want to discuss how we might determine interesting from uninteresting urban conservation, because these narratives are purely subjective; to unpack these ideas, I want to firstly explore ideas of sterility and vitality since, these terms often haunt ideas of conservation practice; then, turning to case studies in Shanghai, I want to draw your attention to the different ways in which conservation has been conducted in the city. To explore, Shanghai, I want to suggest that particular static and sterile practices of conservation have been indeed developed in the city; however, by exploring some alternative sites, I want to argue that vital spaces of conservation also exist in the city that may offer simple alternatives to what I shall call the sterile/demolition alternatives.

3 Definitions of urban sterility and vitality.

Ideas of urban vitality and sterility can be related back to the now well critiqued work of Charles Landry; in his article "Urban Vitality: A New Source Of Urban Competitiveness" (2000), Landry argues that vitality is based on the

raw power and energy of a city which needs focusing and directing towards a purpose for it to reach viability. Creativity is the catalyst for vitality, which the creative process focuses. It becomes sustainable and viable through innovations which are of long term benefit to the city. Vitality involves levels of activity - things going on; levels of use - participation; levels of interaction, communication, transaction and exchange; levels of representation - how activity, use and interaction is projected outwards and discussed in the outside world. Viability is concerned with long term self-sufficiency, sustainability, adaptability and self-regeneration. It is necessary to promote vitality in order to achieve viability. Vitality describes the mass of activities, which in and of themselves are not necessarily good or bad. Activity, use and interaction need to be focused towards a set of purposes, goals and objectives for them to have any substantial, positive impact (Landry, 2000).

Of course Landry's focus can be related to a whole-series of creative city style approaches that have been associated with a form of 'hipster embourgeoisment' and conservative ideas of self-reliance (see Peck, 2005); but despite the problems with Landry's work and ideas, the

concept of urban vitality, involving high levels of interactivity, interaction and communication is certainly an interesting concept; one way of reworking the notion of urban vitality might take place through the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari who construct ideas of vitality through notions of immanence; here for Deleuze and Guattari, loosely speaking, immanence refers to the vital potential (in a non-essentialist way) of multiplicities or acausal heterogeneous assemblages of relations (bodies without organs) to produce new events, things, lives and subjects.

> This streaming, spiralling, zigzagging, snaking, feverish line of variation liberates a power of life that human beings had rectified and organisms had confined, and which matter now expresses as the trait, flow or impulse traversing it. If everything is alive, it is not because everything is organic or organized, but, on the contrary, because the organism is a diversion of life. In short the life in question is inorganic, germinal, and intensive, a powerful life without organs, a body that is all the more alive for having no organs (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 499).

Here then, Deleuze-Guattarian ethics often champion deterritorialisation's or spaces of pure immanence and becoming where acausal interactions take place, and as result of these processes new

meanings are acquired and traditional definitions and ideas are reconceptualised; in short Deleuze-Guattarian ethics encourages us to take seriously spaces of chance, randomness, hybridity and *potential* where difference is ubiquitous and where everything and anything is possible.

Taking these ideas and placing them in the urban realm, we can think of vitality in terms of the potential that urban spaces have to produce interactions, becomings, social relations, interactions, divergences and differences. Thus, rather than the 'harnessing of creative energy' for the sake of economic production (in Landry's terms), my suggestion here, is that space is creative and vital when we open up the potential for space to be utilised, interpreted and valued by as many different people as possible; in this way, quite simply, vital space is inclusive space; inclusive space, is that which can draw different types of people together, and can produce interactions and creative outcomes that could not have been realised prior to the meeting place of subjects, relations or events.

Taking ideas of vitality seriously then, we must also consider that space can also produce sterility. Thus if vital space increases flows, interactions and unpredictable becomings, sterile space refers to sites

where life has slowed down, to moments of ‘rootedness and/or bonding, which halts flows and/or social processes’ (Law, 2010: 129); and as I will suggest sterile space, can be produced by a number of features that can reduce inclusivity; this might include the excessive commercialisation of a space; or sterility might come about as a result of the dominance of one group and/or one set of meanings in that space. In short, my claim here is that, spaces are sterile if the potential for different readings, or interactions with a space are limited or traduced.

However, whilst the following writing champions these Deleuze-Guattarian ideas of space, it is also suggested here that these concepts be read as a tool rather than an explain all theory; indeed, whilst this author believes in the possibility of creating inclusive spaces by way of hybridities and heterogeneous becomings, it is recognised here, that subjects’ definitions of inclusive spaces will always already be never complete or singular; in this way rather than seeing inclusive space as an end process, it is the argument of this author, that spaces must be read as ongoing processes which will at times suit some people rather than others; however, as I am suggesting whilst it is impossible for urban planners or designers to please everyone, nevertheless, our task, when constructing space is include as many encounters as possible, be these

physical, social, cultural or economic encounters, since these will always already open up the potential of an urban site.

Encountering conservation space:

In the case of conservation spaces, the potential of these spaces is critical to the creation of more open or inclusive spaces; whilst conservation spaces may seem fixed and/or closed (that is because in essence these spaces are dominated by the preservation or conservation of a series of buildings and/or intangible heritages), the conservation of certain physical forms or relations, does not mean that these spaces have to be fixed in time. Indeed, as I shall suggest in the writing below, whilst the physical fabric of a conservation site may stay the same, new readings, interpretations, uses and even physical re-readings of a space maybe incorporated and or blended with a traditional conservation site/space to maximise the widest number of outcomes and encounters possible.

To explore these issues now, I want to explore the recent history of conservation in Shanghai; as the reader will note, I will firstly explore the more sterile aspects of Shanghai's conservation spaces, before I turn

in more detail to new and contemporary experiments that have been developed to open up traditional heritage spaces in the city.

4 background to the history of conservation in Shanghai:

As He and Wu have pointed out 'from 1995 to 2004, more than 745 thousand households were relocated, and over 33 million square metres of housing were demolished in Shanghai' (He and Wu, 2007: 194). Of these demolitions, as a variety of writers have pointed out, many older buildings, traditional quarters and indeed traditional historic concessions have been destroyed. But with the dawn of the new century increasingly old historical buildings began to be 'rediscovered for their economic value' (Ren, 2008: 24). Thus in 2002, the former mayor of Shanghai Xia Liquing, argued that historic buildings should be viewed as an additional to the progressive development of the city; as Xia Liquing believed the historic quality of Shanghai's urban heritage was critical to its future:

Shanghai is a famous city whose rich historical and cultural content is accredited by the state. The process of constructing a modern international metropolis must take into consideration all the processes of new developing

districts and the conservation and the renewal of old districts within an integrated historical context. . . . [T]he 21st Century is full of promise. In the new century, we will build Shanghai into the largest economic shipping centre in China, placing it in the first rank of historical cultural cities. (Liquing 2002: 148)

Moreover, in 2004, the new mayor of Shanghai Han Zheng developed a slogan that seemed to bring the city's historic past into a modern context: "Building new is development, preserving old is also development" (Ren, 2008: 31);

Thus, as Olds (1997), Weiping Wu (2004), Pan, (2001; 2005), Ren (2008) and Jansson and Lagerkvist, (2009) and others have argued the rise of conservation in Shanghai and particularly the conservation of Lilongs, Shikumen houses and several traditional 1920s and 1930s buildings has emerged within a wider place-making strategy to market the city and produce nostalgia. As Pan (2005) has stated:

> Colonial Shanghai rekindled collective memory and in the process of remembering, itself was re-invented. With its success in the colonial past in setting trends, finding opportunities, and witnessing miracles, Shanghai

> provided a somewhat 'infectiously decadent, but alluring background and setting' (Dai, 1997: 158) especially for those working in the film industry…
>
> … the stereotypes reflected in 'Shanghai nostalgia' were the images of colonial Shanghai as 'Paris of the Orient', 'Whore of Asia' and the 'Paradise of Adventurers'. Yet… it was the native producers who orientalised the oriental to serve their strategic needs (Tinashu Pan, 2004: 13-14).

Here then the importance of this colonial nostalgia, as Jansson and Lagerkvist claim, is that it conjures up imaginaries of cosmopolitanism, tolerance, and financial success (Wu, 2004: 167); moreover, as these writers attest, a valorisation of 1920s and 1930s has allowed developers to 'world' the city and produce it as a 'leading commercial hub' (Jansson and Lagerkvist, 2009: 43).

Particularly, Jansson and Lagerkvist argue that:

> In order to turn this increasingly global city into a leading commercial hub of East Asia, planners and politicians, commercial interests and entrepreneurs have jointly encapsulated the city by employing a Shanghai nostalgia for the Golden Age of the 1920s and 30s (Pan 2005) and by calling for a retroactive future gaze, reminiscent of the inter-war era, planners and policy makers create a hyper-real sense of futurity, inclusive of futures past and futures never fulfilled (Jansson and Lagerkvist, 2009: 43).

Thus, as Ren has eloquently stated, rather than 'hindering urban growth' the new local governmental strategy of historic conservation 'serves the same development goal in globalizing Shanghai. Historical elements in the built environment are selectively recycled to produce a new transnational space' (Ren, 2008: 23).

5 The selection of conservation space?

Arguably, then, the conservation of Shanghai's historic colonial built heritage has, in many ways, meant that other ideas of heritage, buildings and identities have been side-lined. Firstly, in line with the marketisation of the as 1930s heritage colonial heritage, Weiping Wu (2004) has suggested that a great deal of historical conservation in the city has been concerned with the Bund which lies at the centre of the city near the Huangpu river; the bund which of course, was the central trading point during the colonial period (and unofficial heart of the city) houses approximately 250 classical and grand buildings. Moreover, as Wu states the wider waterfront near the bund has also been labelled a

historical protection zone by the government and the main street between the buildings and the water has been widened so tourists can walk there.

Here whilst the conservation of these buildings is certainly important, Wu states that

> the Bund's preservation really has less to do with restoring the buildings than it has to do with widening the street and becoming a new tourist attraction. It is motivated more by the vision of a new Shanghai to rival the old than simply nostalgia for the past glory. Through this promotion of the heritage industry, the government also asserts itself forcefully in the city's future development (Wu, 2004: 171).

Interestingly also as Wu states government departments have also been located here to encourage connections between the contemporary administration and a long history of grandeur, cosmopolitanism and wealth.

Conservation and the Lilong's

But where the bund and the concessions have survived, poorer historic urban spaces (and more dilapidated areas) in the city have faced demolition. Specifically as writers have pointed out, one space in particular that has been subject to a great deal of demolition are the

Lilongs. Lilong, as Arkaraprasertkul (2010d) has claimed literally means "neighbourhood lanes", where *Li* (in pinyin) literally refers to neighbourhoods and *longs* refer to Lanes. The Lilong's as Arkaraprasertkul and others point out refers then to a material physical fabric of lanes and courtyards (and courtyard housing) that were built in the 1840s; after Shanghai became a treaty port (after the Opium Wars), 'British developers built Lilong houses to provide basic accommodation for Chinese labourers. A typical *Lilong* neighbourhood is a walled area community composed of a main lane running all or half-way across each housing block connected by perpendicular branch lanes' (Arkaraprasertkul, 2010d; page 1).

Image 1

Moreover, as Arkaraprasertkul, has pointed out, 'the Lilong was modelled after Western row houses with the Chinese characteristic lanes and courtyards… …houses are clustered to resemble the basic traditional Chinese houses, allowing many families to live together in the same compound' (Arkaraprasertkul, 2009: 17).

Another feature of the Lilong's is the houses or Shikumen (means stone gate); importantly, like western town houses or western terrace houses in the UK, the Shikumen have two to three stories and distinctively they often come with prominent stone gateways.

Image 2

The Shikumen that are attached to each other like terraces are made up of high brick walls that enclose narrow front yards, that are hidden from view. As French has argued at the height of their popularity there were approximately 9, 000 Shikumen in Shanghai housing 60% of the population; however, with continued demolition and the popular growth of the high rise, the proportion of inhabitants in the Shikumen are much lower (French, 2010: 246).

However, whilst the Lilongs can be defined in terms of their physical heritage, writers have also pointed out, that the Lilong's have a long intangible social and cultural heritage. As Arkaraprasertkul has written then,

Because each unit does not have much living space, and the Lilong rows are laid out parallel to each other in a close proximity, lanes are used by Lilong inhabitants as a living space, which is common to the Chinese who see outdoor activities as prominent to communal life. These activities that take place in the lanes range from exercises – particularly Tai-Chi – to commercial activities, hawker businesses, barbers; to recreational activities as well as service, mah-jong, cooking, laundry drying, outdoor eating, sewing food preparation (Arkaraprasertkul, 2009: 20-21).

Having visited the Lilong's in Shanghai myself, I have also witnessed first-hand this impressive urban culture which sits semi-hidden within a vast labyrinthine network of narrow streets, little alcoves and hidden courtyards.

Despite the fact the Lilong's have remained for centuries, in the last few years, as the land they reside on has gone up in value, as a result of speculative building (because they are in the city centre), these buildings have often been demolished; furthermore, as writers have pointed out, often traditional residents have been bought out by the Shanghai municipal council in return for new modern (westernised) apartments with decent sanitary facilities and kitchens (features that are often lacking in the original buildings. However, rather than keeping the

Lilong's for posterity often these buildings are destroyed to make way for commercial developments of huge residential high rise towers.

6 Renovating the Lilong's and Shikumen: The Xintiandi and the Tianzifang areas

Despite the general demolition of the Lilong's conservation has taken place in some places; As Wang and Lau, (2009) have argued, the Lilong's with their colonial association and their complex labyrinthine structure has fascinated tourist's officials and developers alike. Specifically and pointing to one development in particular the Xintiandi (a series of renovated Shikumen houses that has become a retail-shopping district,) Wang and Lau, (2009) have contended that

> Through so called adaptive reuse, US architects [Greg Yager and Scott Kilbourn] demolished old structures and reconstructed them to provide a 1930s appeal. Meanwhile after changes were instituted to the interior space, these lane-houses were converted to wine and dine and retail and entertainment complexes. The project fuelled a wave of nostalgia for the city's splendid past, as it has been previously called the 'Paris of the Orient'. Historical buildings were appreciated as being cool and fashionable, invoking a sudden vigour to every aspect of city life (Wang and Lau, 2009: 59).

The Xintiandi redevelopment, designed by Benjamin T. Wood and Nikken Sekkei International has generally been regarded as a success by many and recently, in an article in the New York Times, the redevelopment has been viewed as a

> "entertainment environment" stuffed with modern restaurants, clubs, cafes and boutiques, accessorized with old bricks, stone gates and ornately carved wooden balconies from the dense warren of old courtyard houses that previously filled those blocks. Xintiandi proved so successful a model for urban redevelopment that it spawned at least dozens of duplicates across the country. Developers now use the term "to Xintiandi" when asking their architects for more aspirational China-lite designs (Iovine, 2006)

However, whilst the Xintiandi might now be viewed as a vital space, (and a space that has been ultimately saved from demolition/land speculation) various comments have suggested that the over commercialisation of the space has brought with it a new kind of cultural sterility. Discussing the Xintiandi project then, Ren has claimed that this new kind of development has turned a historic part of Shanghai into a posh entertainment quarter for '"wealthy Chinese" locals and people

from other provinces, and foreign ex-patriots' (Ren, 2008: 31). Interestingly Ren points out, that the people who use the space and who now live near these spaces are not young affluent professionals looking to live near 'employment opportunities' in the city centre. Rather the people who move in are usually older people with money who are looking to buy older houses as 'assets' with the expectation that these buildings will eventually appreciate and produce a financial return.

All in all as Ren points out, with changing tastes

> historical preservation is driven by expectations for potential economic return through raising property prices as well as attracting investment and tourists. Old historical buildings in Shanghai, once regarded as worthless in the frenzied development boom of the 1990s, have been rediscovered for their economic value (Ren, 2008: 31).

But most importantly here as Ren suggests, what is being conserved here are only 'the shells of old buildings', and social preservation 'a practice of not only preserving historical buildings but also consciously preserving the lifestyles of residents' is not being adopted (Ren, 2008: 31). Ultimately as Ren contends here, the original residents of these spaces (residents who are usually retired or over 60; or

poor) are being increasingly displaced from these new 'heritage zones' (op cit, 31).

Admittedly and paying attention to Arkaraprasertkul's critique of conservationist sentiment, many of the original residents might relish the chance of living in new and comfortable modern apartments; however, as Hammond (2006) has shown whilst many of the residents may well desire the comforts of new apartments, many people long for the personal social relationships and indeed the architectural fabric of the Lilong's. In his recent study then, Hammond illustrates his thesis through *The Sense of Community Index* (SCI) and open-ended interviews;

> Results show that sense of community was clearly higher in the Lilong than current apartments. Results indicated 57% of all SCI questions regarding Lilong were answered in a favourable manner towards community compared with 44% regarding their current apartments. The open-ended interviews strongly support the findings of the SCI. Sense of community has diminished during the massive migration of millions of Shanghainese out of Lilong (Hammond, 2006: 55-56).

Thus, whilst Hammond acknowledges that many of the new residents love the new living standards of the apartments they have

moved to (especially in terms of sanitation), residents still long for the deep social interaction that was fostered in these traditional spaces. But most importantly – and less well explored by Hammond – Hammond's results also show that whilst some ex-residents are very much pro-demolition many of these ex-residents also wanted to see some of the Lilong's conserved for educational purposes.

After suggesting that s/he would like to see 99% of the Lilong's demolished, one of Hammond's respondents commented then:

Hammond: And if you leave them should people live in the 1% that they leave or should they just be like a museum?

Respondent: - Yeah. Maybe just like a museum. I think Shanghai should still have several Lilong like on Shimen Road. Just like a museum to teach others. The only people who choose to stay in Lilong do it because it is convenient to downtown. It's like my old Lilong, you could just walk to Huaihai Road or Nanjing Road (ex-resident of the Lilong's in Hammond, 2006: 78).

Here whilst the respondent was very much pro-demolition of the old, noticeably there is a strong conservation sentiment in this respondent's comment which reveals a sense of nostalgia and a pedagogical responsibility to new generations of Chinese people.

7 Distinctive places: Luwan and The Duolon Road

Whilst the bund and the Lilong's are two of the most prominent spaces that have achieved conservation status in the recent development drive, it is also noteworthy that a few distinctive or exceptional spaces (as identified by the municipal government) have also been ear-marked for conservation; specifically as commentators have observed mainly, the spaces of conservation are either buildings and/or concession streets that can be found outside of the central city. Some of these concessions are now home to a series of luxurious shopping spaces and entertainment zones, like the Xintiandi. As Pan (2004) has pointed the upper quarter in Shanghai particular has been hit by mass gentrification particularly in the Luwan. Luwan which was originally part of the French Concession, is well known as one of the most prestigious sections of the city and as Pan notes, the 'historical building of the Colonial French police station has been renovated and become home to cafes, restaurants and stores selling brand name merchandise' (Pan, 2004: 119).

In the north also another major district that has been subject to this new kind of commercial conservation has been the Duolon Road (originally called Darroch (窦乐安). The Duolon Road built in 1911

exists in the Hongkou District of Shanghai and was built by the Municipal Committee of Shanghai (a committee of Western businessmen); interestingly the road was built outside the international settlement (the British, French and American colonies); interestingly in the 20s and 30s this road became associated with a series of cultural elites and various famous Chinese writers who lived on the road producing new writings and ideas. Writers included such as Lu Xun (lǔ xùn 鲁迅), Mao Dun (máo dùn 茅盾), Guo Moruo (guō mò ruò 郭沫若) and Ye Shentao (yè shèng táo 叶圣陶) to name a few.

Again like Xintiandi, the development approach to the Duolon Road taken by the government has been one of commercial conservation approach where historic space has been constructed as a site for tourists and shoppers alike. And as can be gathered from the various reviews of this space, the Duolon Road has become a very attractive site for tourists and shoppers to the extent that the Shanghai News and Press Bureau of the City has praised the Road as a 'cultural street' that has witnessed a 'hundred years' of Shanghai's history (Cultural-China.

But again, like the Xintiandi, the Duolon Road has also been met by similar criticisms. Thus in the last few years writers and commentators such as Pan Lu (2008)[i] have argued in very political and

economic terms that the Duolon Road has become an unsuccessful historical simulacrum:

> Yet there is a rupture between historical value, market value, and the everyday dynamics of the surrounding neighbourhood. Being too much concerned with exhibiting every inch of cultural relics possible, Duolon Road loses in some way its charm by musealizing itself instead of enlivening its history as a part of its ongoing life… A perceptible economic depression has not left Duolon Road since its reopening. Somehow, by failing to retrieve its former cultural capital, Duolon Road has been reduced to an unsuccessful simulacrum of an old Shanghai that is simply no longer to be found (Pan, 2008: 3)

What is important here as Pan points out is that spaces like the road have been musealized; that is quite simply by attempting to over-emphasize the historical fabric and signifiers in the space, the space ends up producing a sense of 'depression' or sterility that feels lifeless and unenlivening.

In opposition to these spaces, Pan Lu argues that the Shaoxing Road located near to the French Concession is much more interesting. Essentially Pan Lu suggests that one of the most endearing qualities of

the Shaoxing road is that the shops in the road belong mainly to migrants and international arrivals, who have re-interpreted many of the old spaces constructing them in their own style. As Pan Lu contends what is exciting about these spaces – *and what is economically popular about these spaces* – is that the 'local imaginary of the old local milieu [has been given] new life' (Pan, 2008: 5).

But if she is praiseworthy of these developments, then, later in this paper, Pan Lu argues that Bund 18 formerly known as the Macquarie Bank (built in 1923) is possibly one of the most successful architectural developments in the city. Particularly Pan Lu admires the way that in its renovation the bank acquired a 'new life of its own': Thus, Pan Lu states that

> A UNESCO award was given to Bund 18 for its successful renovation in 2005, for its well-balanced combination of historical value and present-day functionality. 'Renovation' as proposed here by Italian architects richly experienced in renovating Venice, is supposedly not to remake the past but rather to provide it with a new life of its own. In this most nostalgic example of architecture we find yet another expression of nostalgia: not as a form of yearning for the return of (or to) the past, but rather as a tool for making history (again). (Pan Lu, 2008: 10).

Here Pan Lu's comments are important in that they suggest a new way of using architectural heritage in the city; as Pan Lu suggests here, an approach that allows historic buildings to be reused in modern or president day functional ways brings new life to the space; thus, rather than spaces steeped in a shallow commercial nostalgia, Pan Lu offers an alternative to the new contemporary *commercial heritage-conservation* drive.

8 the rise of heritage simulacra

Finally and perhaps most importantly in completing my survey of architectural heritage in conservation in Shanghai, I now want to finally discuss the rise of some new simulacra spaces in Shanghai. On one night in the city in September 2010, I was lucky enough to come across an underground Mall in the people's square (in the centre of Shanghai); as I ascended the steps into the Mall I was astounded to find that the Mall had been produced a replica Lilong - see image below:

Image 3

Clearly as you can see from these images, an entirely faux series of Lilong's with faux back lanes have been built by city constructors; and moreover, as I wondered through these faux-lanes I was surrounded by nostalgic images and displays for 1930s Shanghai. As Arkaraprasertkul might argue, these replica lanes could represent a neat compromise between a contemporary conservationists and nostalgia seekers that are seeking to preserve some essence of the Lilong past, and a contemporary Chinese urban population that is looking to live in well-conditioned modern contemporary apartments. But as I walked around this space and the painful attempts to preserve some sense of a nostalgic image of 1930s Shanghai I was hit by waves of sadness; possibly, the kind of sadness that is perhaps displayed in the writing of Philip K Dick when his science-fictional characters come across simulacra's of the past, or even animals – see for instance 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep' (1968). What was evident to me, was that the lanes' have been 'preserved' like this in a faux simulacra space because there is in fact a very strong nostalgia for these lanes (even if many people do not want to live in them). And on walking through the lanes, I was struck by the feeling that developers had almost produced this mall

in a desperate attempt to conserve some image of this Lilong heritage before it is all completely demolished or lost by developers. This simulacrum Lilong Mall represented to me, an implicit understanding that people were already resigned to the fact that the Lilong's will be demolished.

And it is because of this attempt to produce a poor and disneyfied imaginary of the Lilong's in this highly sterile commercial space that makes me believe ultimately that within Shanghai there is still some strong underlying cultural attachment to these spaces; thus for instance in the opening lines of Wang Anyi's The Song of Everlasting Sorrow, we are hit with the following lines:

> Looked down upon from the highest point in the city Shanghai's *longtang* – her vast neighborhoods inside enclosed alleys – are a magnificent sight. The longtang are the backdrop of this city. Streets and buildings emerge around them in a series of dots and lines, like the subtle brushstrokes that bring life to the empty expanses of white paper in a traditional Chinese landscape painting. As day turns into night and the city lights up, these dots and lines begin to glimmer. However, underneath the glitter lies an immense blanket of darkness – these are the *longtang* of Shanghai (Wang, 1995; 2008: 3)

9 Conclusions: vital or sterile spaces? Mixed-use conservation spaces?

In conclusion then this paper has made the claim that there is a case of the conservation of China's traditional urban quarters; of course, as I have pointed out, the conservation of these spaces must not mean however, that the living standards of people are compromised; indeed as Non Arkaraprasertkul (2009; 2010) rightly points out, conservation nostalgia for the Lilong's could mean that many people are imprisoned in poor living quarters (by modern standards) that cannot be easily renovated.

In this way, this paper, to some extent argues that there perhaps is a case for some demolition and relocation if Lilong quarters reduce people's quality of life. Moreover, as Arkaraprasertkul suggests perhaps the rebuilding of new low-rise houses – in the style of the Lilong's – might meet the needs of a variety of social actors from residents, to economists to conservationists alike; and since high rise – as we have

seen – is often blamed for the destruction of traditional neighbourhood ties, then it would seem that the replacement of the Lilong's by new kinds of low-rise housing with Lilong features would be a more than excellent compromise. But this paper has suggested something else. Drawing upon the work of Hammond and others, it has also been argued that conservation of the Lilongs and Shanghai's built heritage should remain for pedagogical and even social psychological reasons; indeed, as I have suggested, in this short work, many of the conservation spaces we have discussed are very much tied up with wider collective and even personal ideas of memory and heritage; and in this regard, whilst demolition might be the answer for some, as I have contended here, for some the traditional buildings of Shanghai also serve as important markers – or anchors – of an age gone by. Particularly as we saw in the work of Hammond for some the historic buildings of Shanghai might actually serve as witnesses of the past, as spaces of educational value; and so in this way, it is the argument here, that there is still indeed a need for historic conservation in Shanghai – especially of spaces such as the Lilong's.

But whilst this paper has provided a pro-conservationist position, it has also been suggested that built conservation might also take place

on more social and functional terms; in this regard, I have argued for what I have called a *critical conservation* position that is wary of what we might describe as 'sterile conservation space'. Indeed, by reviewing many of the distinctive conservation spaces of Shanghai such as the Xintiandi, Luwan and The Duolon Road it has been claimed here that strong commercial approaches to these spaces have in fact produced a very sterile form of urban conservation; particularly and drawing upon the work of Pan Lu and my own conservation experiences of these spaces, it has been argued here that hard commercialisation may reduce the vitality of a conservation space to the point that the space may as well be demolished. Ultimately part of the problem of commercialisation, as I have said, is that developers often embolden the more nostalgic and hyper-real aspects of the heritage space, to the point that the space becomes sealed and or static in time – a process of museumification.

However, and drawing upon the writing of Pan Lu and my own experiences of the city, I have suggested that alternative approaches can and must exist if we are to develop an effective conservation practice; particularly as Pan Lu rightly says, often breathing life into a conservation space, only needs to involve the re-interpretation of a space

in terms of contemporary functionality. Moreover, by exploring the role of foreigners and migrants in these spaces, Pan Lu implies that hybrid identities bring new life to what we might define as well-worn physical narratives of stone.

In this regard, as I have contended in the theoretical apparatus of this paper, the coming together of the past, with new subjectivities in unrealised ways may offer contemporary practitioners with a new approach to what is now regarded as the built heritage of one of China's most amazing and unique cities.

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