How Shanghai's Urban Heritage Conservation Plan Loses Effect? Paradoxical Governance Goals and Disparities in the Regeneration of Residential Historic Neighborhoods

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Abstract

Shanghai is a pioneer for urban heritage conservation in China. However, a sharp turn has emerged since 2018, where existing regeneration pathways for historic residential neighbourhoods are replaced by governmental buyouts, total demolition, and exclusive luxury housing redevelopments, facilitated by conservation masterplan revisions achieved through invitational expert participation. This paper examines the multiple self-contradictory goals that the local government plans or claims to achieve behind this sharp redevelopmental turn, and argues that these paradoxical goals – together with widespread debates and contestations across various realms that transform into coalitions of distinct stances – have necessitated the creation of a complex governmentality mediated through mainstream narratives about urban renewal. As a case study, we mapped sweeping land buyout, urban fabric change, and conservation masterplan breaches/revisions in Shanghai's Historic City Centre (*Laochengxiang*), and carried out discourse analysis based on text and video materials (n=393) to reveal dynamics of contestation, coalition formation, and governmentality production. While the Shanghai case echoes existing models such as state-initiated social engineering and state entrepreneurialism, emerging traits of "new municipalism" (manifested by self-mobilisation of non-government stakeholders) are also observed. With this perspective, we analysed risks and disparities in Shanghai's urban renewal movement, and discussed ways forward focusing on community agency.

Keywords: urban regeneration, historic district, contestation, governmentality, state entrepreneurialism, new municipalism.

1 Urban Heritage Conservation in Shanghai: Context and a Redevelopmental Turn

With a variety of heritage designations including 44 historic districts, 250 historic cityscape blocks and 397 historic cityscape streets, Shanghai is considered a pioneer for urban heritage conservation in China. In this section, we review the evolution of urban heritage conservation pathways in Shanghai as they relate to urban renewal agendas (Fig. 1 - Fig. 3), examine the sudden redevelopmental turn that resulted in the demolition of much of the city's historic fabric since 2018, analyse the multiple self-contradicting governance goals behind this sweeping city-led urban renewal movement, and raise our hypothesis that a governmentality is established to demonstrate achievement of these goals and resolve concerns and dissents regarding mass displacement, gentrification, and the loss of cultural heritage.

1.1 "Strictest Protection Measures": The Evolution of Urban Heritage Conservation Mechanisms in Shanghai

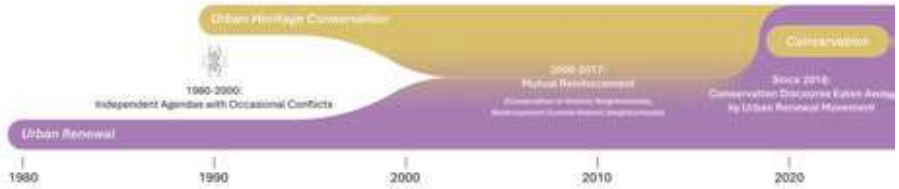

Fig. 1. Evolution of the relationship between urban heritage conservation and urban renewal in Shanghai.

1980s-2000: "Shanty Area Renewal" and Early Efforts of Heritage Conservation.

As China entered its marketisation and economic reform era, Shanghai's urban renewal project took stage in the 1980s. Early governmental focus was placed on evacuating "shanty areas" (棚户区) where per-capita housing area was less than 2 m^2, and portable toilet buckets, coal stoves, intertwined electric cables, and makeshift kitchens in corridors were prevalent (Shanghai Observer, 2018). Higher-rise and higher-value developments would be allowed block-by-block in these areas, as land was bought-up by the government and resold to developers, while existing residents were compensated by cash or apartments (either commodity housing or government-built resettlement communities, both largely in the suburbs) (Wu and Li, 2024; Chen et al., 2018; Chen, 2018).

Faced with drastic changes that started to happen in historic urban space, an awareness for cultural heritage conservation started to emerge. In 1986, Shanghai was designated among the second batch of China's National Historic and Cultural Cities. During the 1990s, early building-scale conservation efforts showed promising results: *Shanghai Municipal Regulations on the Protection and Management of Excellent Modern Buildings* was enacted in 1991, and by 1999, 398 such buildings had been designated (Zheng, 2017). Efforts for historic district conservation also took shape, as 234 neighbourhoods and 440 historic building clusters were identified. Nevertheless, due to a lack of enforcement mechanisms, some historic districts still witnessed wholesale demolition (Shao, 2016).

2000-2017: The Rise of Urban Heritage Conservation in an Expanding City.

New developments were concentrated in the outskirts, as Shanghai rapidly expanded into its suburbs and satellite towns in the early 21st century. In the city centre, salvaging cultural heritage became a consensus after the past decade of "great demolition and construction" (大拆大建).

Shortly after the promulgation of *Shanghai Municipal Regulations on the Protection of Historic and Cultural Areas and Excellent Historic Buildings* (《上海市历史文化风貌区和优秀历史建筑保护条例》, hereinafter *Shanghai Regulations*) in 2002, the city raised an agenda to establish "the strictest heritage protection measures"; as a move to operationalise urban-scale heritage conservation, conservation masterplans were formulated for 12 historic districts in the city centre, which were designed to replace detailed masterplans (控制性详细规划) for these areas and serve as sole binding documents regulating land use, development and redevelopment as they relate to built heritage (Shao, 2016, p. 3).

The last update of municipally protected heritage assets was made in 2017, with a range of designations that cover 12 historic districts in the inner-city, and 32 in the suburbs and Pudong New District; 397 historic cityscape streets, 79 historic cityscape rivers, and 250 historic cityscape blocks; 1,058 listings of excellent historic buildings (covering 3,075 individual structures), and 7.3 million m^2 of local alleyway housing (里弄, or *li*-long, as Shanghai's traditional local housing type blending Chinese courtyard and Western attached townhouse typologies).

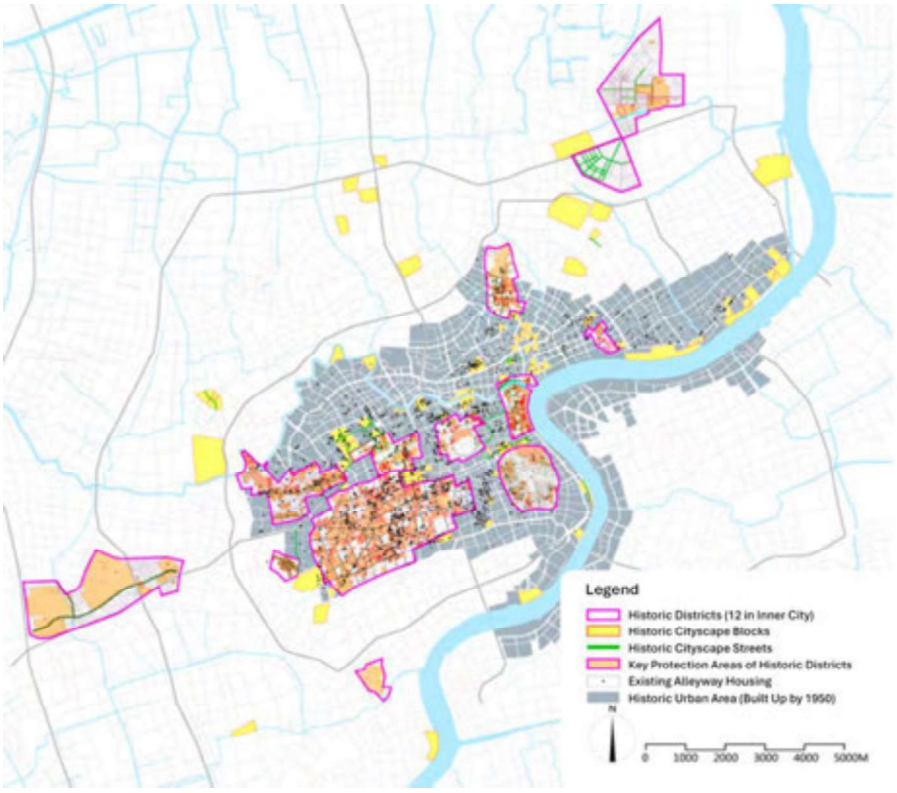

Fig. 2. Designated historic assets in Shanghai by 2017.
Source: Zhou, 2016. Translated by authors.

1.2 Three Typical Regeneration Pathways for Residential Historic Districts

Over the above two periods, flagship regeneration projects were carried out in several residential historic districts or neighbourhoods with higher heritage value and architectural quality, demonstrating three major pathways that represent local practice (Fig. 3) and showcase different stances in balancing heritage (in form and material terms), social, and economic values.

1) **Commercialisation-Oriented Restoration led by developers**, where local government and developers collaborate to turn a historic district into middle-class retail use while relocating existing residents and largely retaining the physical fabric.

2) **Fine-Grained Conservation based on government investment**, as historic districts with high architectural quality receive continuous governmental investments that help to acquire individually designated buildings and revitalise them into public cultural spaces, and subsidy the maintenance of historic alleyway blocks that serve as public or private housing.

3) **Mixed-Use Conversion initiated by local residents and partner stakeholders.** The most famous case for this pathway is *Tianzifang*, where local residents formed an autonomous association and rented unused industrial spaces and their alleyway housing units to artists and retail businesses under the support of local community council (街道), achieving the co-living of local residents, new migrants, and tourists.

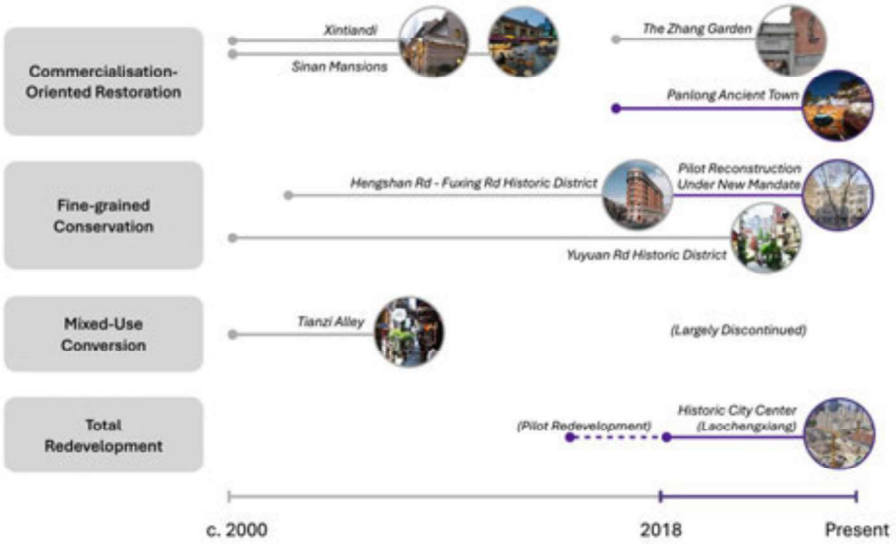

Fig. 3. Regeneration of residential historic districts in Shanghai: models and key cases.
Source: Thumbnails from the Internet; illustration by authors.

1.3 A Sudden Redevelopmental Turn

After the "shanty area renewal" movement, urban renewal programs have been continued in Shanghai under the name of "old district renewal" (旧区改造) (Wan, 2022). However, much prudence was given to neighbourhoods with heritage designation or potentially worth preserving. In 2017, local government policies stressed that living condition improvement should be placed *under* the condition that old buildings in inner-city (such as various forms of alleyway housing) must be protected in principle and demolished only under exceptions (The Paper, 2017).

However, since 2018, many residential historic districts and neighbourhoods in the city centre have been targeted for urban renewal accompanying local administration changes. In 2020, the

city started a "three-year old district renewal battle" (三年旧改攻坚战), requiring old districts to be renewed "as fast and early as possible" (Shanghai Press Release, 2021). As an urban renewal agenda was written into the Central Government's *Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan* in 2021 (Central Government of China, 2021), Shanghai raised an *Urban Renewal Action Plan* (SMBPNR, 2023) with a key goal to eliminate all "low-quality housing" (locally called "second-class dilapidated housing and below, or 二级以下旧里) in inner-city by 2025, which collocates substantially with the 7.3 million m^2 of alleyway housing that should be preserved, making them a targeted site of intervention (Huangpu District Housing Management Bureau, 2023; Zhang, 2021). By 2022, urban renewal for all major blocks of "low-quality housing" had come into effect (Shanghai Observer, 2022).

Fig. 4. Demolition and redevelopment in the current urban renewal movement. (a) An ongoing redevelopment project (Jade Fragrance Garden, Phase II) in *Laochengxiang*, 2022; (b) Qiaojia Road, *Laochengxiang*, 2024.
Source: (a) National Business Daily, 2022; (b) photo by authors.

Such rapid pace gives rise to a "total redevelopment" model applied to many historic neighbourhoods and districts – particularly *Laochengxiang* (老城厢), Shanghai's historic city centre – as an exact copy of the "great demolition and construction" movement in the 1990s (see Zhang, 2021). Governmental buyouts are prevalent, as land was cleared and resold for often luxury redevelopment, only sparing very few most important landmarks (see Knyazeva, 2022; Zhang and Wu, 2021). All local residents are relocated in the process upon cash compensation, with conservation masterplans or detailed masterplans revised (through the invitational participation of experts) to allow for unprecedented high-density redevelopments of 100 or even 150 metres (see Fig. 9(a)). Urban historic fabric is replaced by exclusive gated communities of upper-class attached townhouses and high-rise apartments, which completely alter socio-spatial patterns made up of historic buildings, streets, alleys, retail storefronts and public spaces, killing community vitality manifested in mixed uses and a mixed residential profile – the exact key characters that make alleyway housing blocks amiable spaces and self-supporting "cities within cities" (Zhao et al., 2023). While a short-term "triple-win" result is seemingly achieved for local government, developers, and residents, many areas with distinct

historic urban and social fabric – which constitute an important cultural infrastructure for global cities (UNESCO, 2013) – are permanently lost.

While there are still a few projects that adopt the "commercialisation-oriented restoration" pathway (e.g., Panlong Ancient Town), or even seek to reconstruct below-standard alleyway housing for existing residents out of governmental cost in an attempt to prove the continuity of "fine-grained conservation" (e.g., the Cloud Water Villas (云水别墅) in Hengshan Rd-Fuxing Rd Historic District, see Shanghai Observer, 2024), demolition and out-of-context redevelopment undoubtedly play a predominant role in the current urban renewal movement.

This government-led urban renewal movement shows a very strong character of state-led gentrification (He, 2019), and reflects the state entrepreneurialism model (Wu et al., 2022) where the state acts through the market, but also has broader political agendas beyond growth-machine logics. In fact, it may even be regarded as a case of "state-initiated social engineering" (Scott, 1999, 4), given the close collaboration between the government, developers, and government-owned land expropriation companies, as well as local community councils, neighbourhood associations (居委会), and conservation masterplan revision mechanisms being mobilised for the agenda.

On the other hand, counternarratives for conservation haven't been able to have any comparable agency, and as we will continue to show, a governmentality has been formed to attribute the dilapidation of historic districts to heritage itself, and create a binary opposition between heritage conservation and living condition improvement. In sum, the current urban renewal movement signals the abandonment of Shanghai's urban heritage conservation measures formed upon three decades of exploration, and leads to extensive disappearance of historic urban landscape as the city's heritage conservation masterplan fails to function.

1.4 Paradoxical Governance Goals, Contestations, and the Creation of a Governmentality

At the backdrop of this sharp and enormous redevelopmental turn, we ask the following questions:

- What are the goals that the local government plans or claims to achieve behind this sweeping urban renewal movement? How are top-down narratives and the combination of different types of regeneration/redevelopment projects utilised to support these goals?
- How are urban renewal campaigns received, debated and contested on-the-ground? What are the contradictory voices projected in different realms of discourse (specifically, the public, the academia, and social organisations / participatory political parties (民主党派) which serve an advisory role in China's urban governance), and how have them influenced the trajectory of this movement?

Our hypothesis is that there are multiple self-contradictory governance goals – whether explicit or implicit – in the urban renewal movement, including land finance, living condition improvement, and cultural heritage revitalisation, which are all written under the low-quality housing elimination mandate by 2025. Meanwhile, widespread debates and contestations have emerged across different realms of discourse, forming into coalitions of distinct stances. These conditions necessitate the production of a relatively complex governmentality mediated through mainstream narratives that renders urban renewal as a progressive movement, opposes heritage conservation against living condition improvement, reduces the scope of "cultural heritage",

frames heritage conservation as a result of urban renewal, and capitalises the cultural and historic connections of historic neighbourhoods to appeal to potential luxury housing buyers; it even manifests itself through flagship programs on intangible and cultural history, and sympathies displayed to local residents on their "bittersweet" experience. These techniques serve not only to resolve concerns and dissents, but also to demonstrate achievement of the government's own paradoxical goals. In the following sections, we seek to ground-truth this observation through policy, discourse and spatial analyses, featuring a case study of Shanghai's historic city centre (*Laochengxiang*).

To begin with, we argue that Shanghai's current urban renewal movement reveals the following self-contradictory governance goals:

- **Low-Quality Housing Elimination** as the overarching political agenda. Completion of buyout/expropriation programs in inner-city districts was celebrated as a major achievement of the local government in 2022, and was viewed as successful completion of a key agenda that involved three decades of effort (Shanghai Huangpu, 2022b).
- **Living Standard Improvement** as the justifying rationale. Extremely congested living environment, safety risks posed by exposed electricity cables, lack of basic living and sanitary infrastructure, and particularly, the persisting existence of portable toilet buckets ("马桶") have been repeatedly used as rhetorics to stress the living standard improvement dimension of urban renewal, which in turn serves to rally public support (especially support of local residents) and suppress pro-conservation voices (see for example, Xinhua News, 2019).
- **Cultural Heritage Revitalisation** as a side goal that is strongly claimed but barely achieved. While carrying out large-scale redevelopments that wipe away historic urban fabric, new concepts such as "urban fabric conservation" and "cityscape conservation" were constructed in local policies, to allow for practices that breach existing conservation masterplans (Zhang, 2021).
- **Land Finance** as an unspoken, but arguably the most important motive. State land ownership allows local government to use revenue collected between buyout and relocation costs and development right sale income to serve its needs or goals (see Wu, 2021). In Shanghai's case, many historic districts and neighbourhoods with dilapidated "low-quality housing" are located in the very core of the city, and are repeatedly sold for record-breaking prices: for example, several blocks in the Historic City Centre (*Laochengxiang*) were sold at ¥17.6 billion ($2.7 billion) in 2021; in 2023, 10 land tracts along the historic East Jinling Road (see Fig. 13) were sold for an astounding ¥22.1 billion ($3.15 billion) (National Business Daily, 2022; 2023).

As governmental buyout programs often manage to garner majority support by local homeowners, all these imperatives – except cultural heritage revitalisation – seem to work well with the urban renewal project on-the-ground. However, as we will show through the case of *Laochengxiang*, heritage conservation – both as a stated goal of the local government and a highly contested debate across different realms of the local society – is something that ultimately has to be responded to, and ostensibly resolved, through the creation of a govermentality embedded in mainstream narratives.

2 Contradictions, Debates, and Governmentality in Practice: The Case of Historic City Centre (*Laochengxiang*)

The city government-led wholesale redevelopment campaign was not implemented without controversy and pushback. Much of such conflict has focused on the Historic City Centre (*Laochengxiang*/老城厢) of Shanghai, a designated historic district of around 2 square kilometres that stemmed from Shanghai's indigenous walled city, and is commonly understood as the city's "origin point" (note 1). In this section, we use *Laochengxiang* as a case study to understand how existing heritage conservation masterplan is breached in Shanghai's urban renewal movement, and how contradictions and debates emerged across various realms into coalitions of distinct stances, and finally got resolved through the creation of a complex governmentality mediated through multiple mechanisms of public communication and political participation.

2.1 The Pilot Redevelopment Project: Jade Fragrance Garden (露香园)

Fig. 5. The location of *Laochengxiang*, based on a 1918 map.
Source: Library of Congress. Annotation by authors based on Zhou, 1999.

With more than 700 years of history, *Laochengxiang* is the origin of Shanghai's local culture. Labelled as "The Chinese City" in colonial-era maps, its historic urban fabric comprises streets filled from waterways, vernacular dwellings, temples/churches, administrative complexes, gardens, academies and public spaces (marketplaces, alleyways, and guild halls) surrounded by a city wall-turned circular road, offering a unique counternarrative juxtaposed with the colonial modernity embodied in the urban landscape of former British, American, and French settlements around it (Chen, 2004; Wang et al., 2017; Zhang and Wu, 2021; Qian, 2021) (Fig. 5). Buildings in *The Chinese City* historically possessed more informality than those in Western settlements, given their wooden construction and an often lack of sanitary systems such as tap water and toilet (Roskam, 2019, p. 107). Spontaneous and unregulated densification persisted for most of the 20th century, making *Laochengxiang* the densest area in Shanghai while exacerbating safety, congestion, and sanitary issues (Zhang, 2020; Zhang and Wu, 2021) (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Views of *Laochengxiang*. (a) The Yu Garden, a local landmark; (b) street view before current urban renewal. Source: (a) - Tripadvisor; (b) - photo by authors, 2016.

By 2005 – when the conservation masterplan of *Laochengxiang* was made – some high-rise developments had already emerged within its boundaries (Fig. 7). Since then, a standoff between urban renewal and heritage conservation was achieved, leaving urban fabric in *Laochengxiang* largely untouched, except for occasional repairs and demolition of some illegal additions.

This fragile continuity was first disrupted in 2013, when a pilot luxury residential redevelopment project named "Jade Fragrance Garden" (*luxiangyuan*/露香园) (note 2) located in *Laochengxiang*'s northwestern corner went on market for pre-sale. Totalling 300,000 m^2 of floor area, the project incorporated attached townhouses, high-rise apartments up to 100m, club houses, and "two hotels of different formats" (Fig. 8(a)). According to historic sale data from local real property platforms Fang.com and Sohu Focus, high-rise apartments in Jade Fragrance Garden were initially touted at ¥80,000 ($13,000)/$m^2$ (as compared to an average ¥56,800 ($9,200)/$m^2$ within the city centre around the same time), with exceptionally large unit sizes of 200-570 m^2. In 2020, its attached townhouses were launched as a rare find in city centre at a price of ¥210,000 ($31,000)/$m^2$, while price for its high-rise apartments had risen to ¥140,000 ($20,700)/$m^2$ (Fang.com, 2013; 2024; Sohu Focus, 2024; SRETA, 2023).

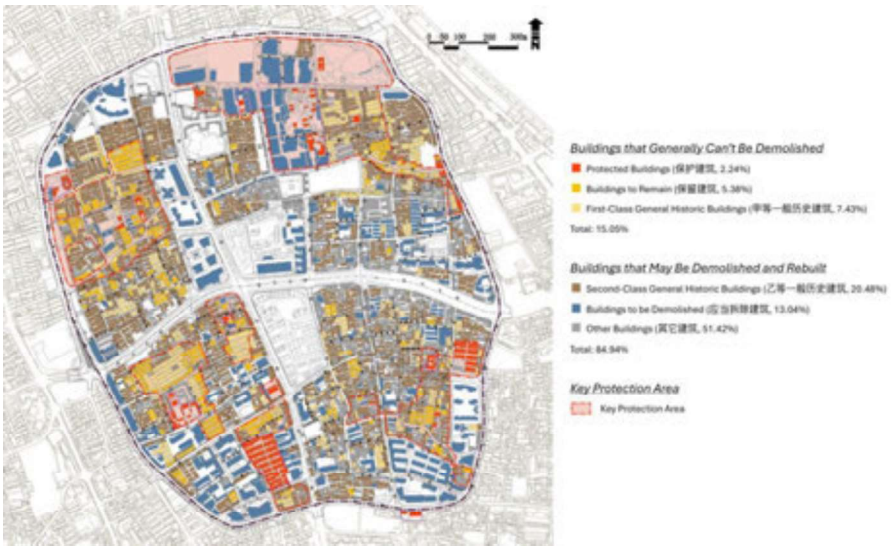

Fig. 7. *Laochengxiang*'s Conservation Masterplan, 2005.
Source: Wu and Wang, 2007, pp. 142-143; annotation by authors, based on Zhou, 2016.

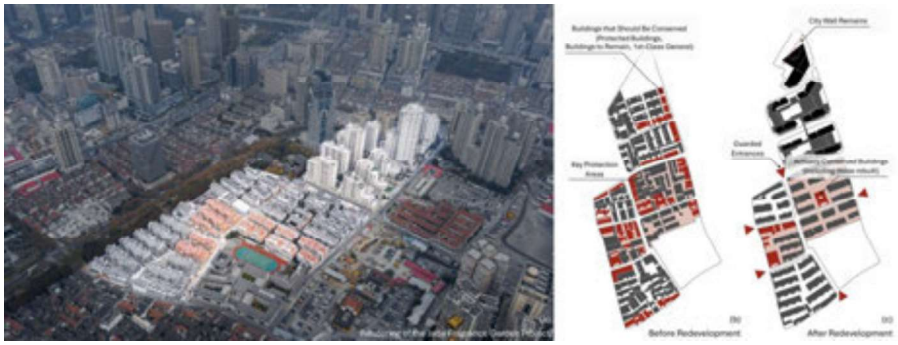

Fig. 8. Urban fabric change brought by the Jade Fragrance Garden Project.
Source: (a) - BIDG; (b) (c) - illustration by authors.

Developed by a joint venture of two major municipal enterprises – Shanghai Municipal Investment Group and Shanghai Construction Group, this redevelopment totally eradicated historic fabric on its site, breaching important designations in *Laochengxiang*'s conservation masterplan (Fig. 8(b) & 8(c)). First of all, not all historic buildings that should be retained were retained, and among those that were spared, at least one (the Zhao Residence) was first demolished and then reconstructed as a "historic and cultural centre"; secondly, one of the only two remaining sections of *Laochengxiang*'s historic city wall was demolished in the redevelopment process; thirdly, while the townhouse-type redevelopment offers a somewhat context-aware scale (albeit presenting a hyper-gentrified image), it contradicts with the masterplan's regulation that new construction shall be strictly discouraged in the key protection area; and finally, intense high-rise developments broke *Laochengxiang*'s landscape continuity

and very sense of place (see Sohu Focus, 2024; Xinmin Evening News, 2012; Shanghai Evening Post, 2012; Shanghai Press Release, 2020).

Besides formal and material changes, it is the displacement and elimination of mixed uses and mixed residential profile manifested in this exclusive luxury redevelopment, as well as the privatisation of these urban blocks (public alleys between luxury townhouses have been guarded as of the authors' site visit in spring 2024) that ultimately killed the site's authenticity and vitality. Furthermore, very little of the site's cultural history is commemorated or spatialised in the project (except for its name, which refers to a garden that existed here until the mid-19th century), while it effectively capitalises on presenting a "Shanghai style blending the East and the West" and "inheriting and carrying forward the cultural context of *Laochengxiang*" (BIDG, 2024; CREDAward, 2021).

2.2 Sweeping Buyout Programs and Breached Conservation Masterplan

The Jade Fragrance Garden project set an example for what would follow on a sweeping scale for the whole Laochengxiang: exclusive luxury townhouses paired with high-rise apartments. Based on notices posted on Huangpu District Government's official website, we mapped land tracts that have been subject to governmental buyout and expropriation since 2015 (Fig. 9(b)), which constitute around 50% of the whole area of *Laochengxiang*. Along with another around 35% of the area that already witnessed large-scale redevelopment or had out-of-context buildings by 2015, *Laochengxiang* is placed under a massive process of social-spatial restructuring.

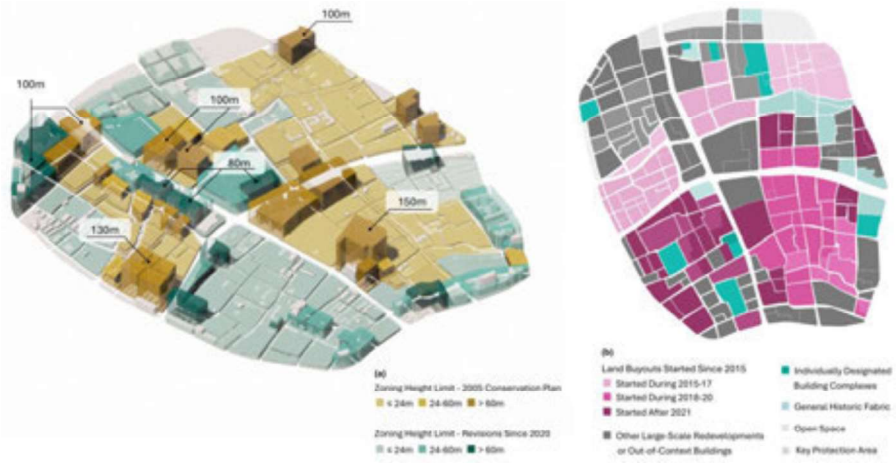

Fig. 9. Conservation masterplan revision and land buyouts in *Laochengxiang*.
Data Source: Huangpu District Government Portal; The 2005 Conservation Masterplan; Google Earth.
Illustration by authors.

On tracts where governmental buyout has been completed while redevelopment has not yet started, all residents have been relocated, and all ground-floor openings of existing buildings have generally been sealed with cement (see Fig. 13). While official narrative for this new round urban renewal is to "keep the buildings, and relocate the people" (*liufang buliuren*, or 留房不

留人, see Knyazeva, 2022), prevalent wholesale demolitions (see Fig. 4(b)) suggest that the very physical fabric is very well likely to be lost as well.

To understand how these sweeping changes were legalised against - and meanwhile predicated upon - the city's early 2000s conservation policy-making, we need to take a closer look into the details of *Laochengxiang*'s 2005 heritage conservation masterplan (Fig. 7) and its subsequent rezoning process (Fig. 9-10). In the 2005 masterplan, buildings in *Laochengxiang* were coded into six categories, from higher to lower heritage value:

1) "protected buildings" (保护建筑, 2.24% of the building stock), which are buildings subject to individual heritage designation and protection under other laws, such as Cultural Relic Protection Units under the *Cultural Relics Protection Law* (《文物保护法》) and "Excellent Historic Buildings" under the *Shanghai Regulations*;
2) "buildings to remain" (保留建筑, 5.38% of the building stock), which can be altered, but not relocated or demolished in principle;
3) "first-class general historic buildings" (甲等一般历史建筑, 7.43% of the building stock), which generally shouldn't be demolished, unless they are reconstructed in original forms;
4) "second-class general historic buildings" (乙等一般历史建筑, 20.48% of the building stock), which can be replaced by new buildings that fit into the historic context and fabric;
5) "buildings to be demolished" (应当拆除建筑, 13.04% of the building stock), which are out-of-context buildings built after 1949; and
6) other buildings (51.42% of the building stock).

This classification is accompanied with the designation of "key protection areas" (核心保护范围), where new construction and expansion is "strictly controlled" and floor area ratio (FAR) is not allowed to increase from the 2005 baseline.

Paralleling government buyouts, this conservation masterplan has witnessed multiple local revisions since 2020, many of which are backed by specific redevelopment schemes. Height limit for some blocks were loosened to 100 or even 150 metres (Fig. 9(a)), and major changes or breaches happened regarding previously instated rules (Fig. 10):

- Blocks of "second-class general historic buildings" (which constitute the expansive historic urban fabric in *Laochengxiang*) are almost always demolished, and replaced by townhouses or out-of-context towers depending on whether they are located in the key protection area or not.
- Most "buildings to remain" and "first-class general historic buildings" would also be demolished. Some of these designations are deleted in newer iterations of the plan, and some are lost during redevelopment implementation.
- Afterall, what seems to be spared are only "protected buildings", or those individually protected by other laws (see Knyazeva, 2022; Zhang, 2021).
- Key protection areas have been reduced to merely a context control area, compromising strict restrictions on new construction.

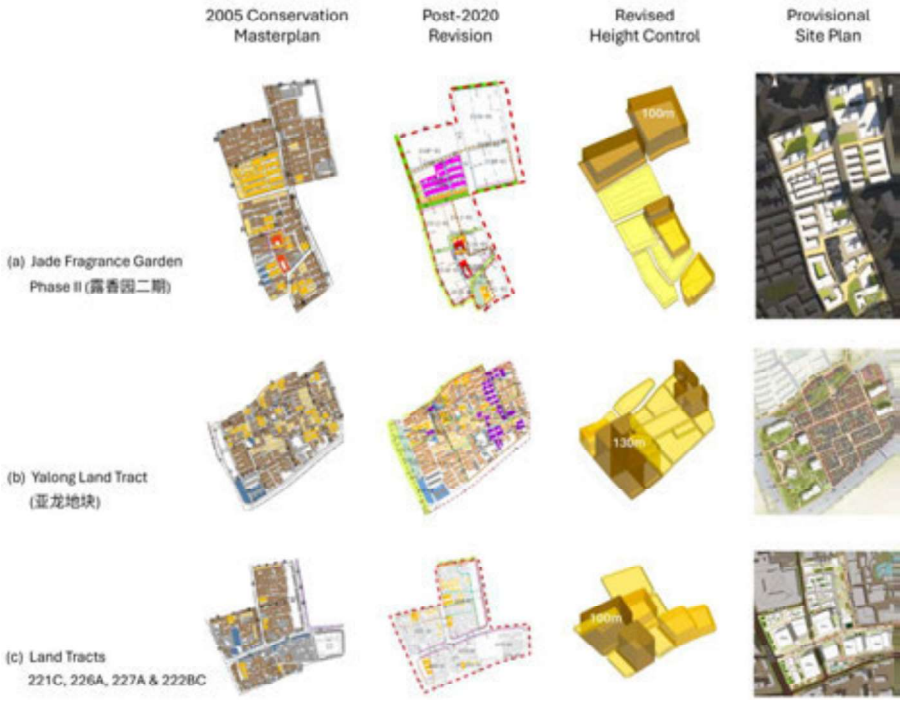

Fig. 10. Cases of conservation masterplan revision.
Data Source: Huangpu District Government. Illustration by authors.

While Shanghai doesn't yet have a public hearing process for rezoning, many of these changes wouldn't have been possible without the *special expert argumentation procedure* (专家特别论证制度) which involves the invited participation of experts within a pool. While pervasive zoning changes against heritage conservation principles demonstrate the shortcomings of invited participation, they are also in many ways predicated by flaws in the 2005 conservation masterplan, which include:

- An architectural significance-oriented approach that systematically downplayed the value of vernacular and indigenous historic urban fabrics of higher informality. Only around 15% of all buildings were designated as "undemolishable" (protected, buildings to remain, or first-class general), and the "key protection area" only covered around 27% of *Laochengxiang* (Zhou, 2016).
- Inconsistent building classifications and conservation guidelines among masterplans of the city's first batch of historic districts (twelve in the city centre), and a common lack of enforcement mechanisms. In *Laochengxiang*'s case, this has reduced the effectiveness of conservation masterplan to nearly zero.
- A relatively laissez-faire attitude to high-density redevelopments outside the key protection area. A significant number of blocks had already been zoned to 50-100m in the 2005 masterplan, especially those along the horizontal and vertical arteries that cut across *Laochengxiang*, and those in its periphery.

2.3 Widespread Contestations and Formation of Coalitions

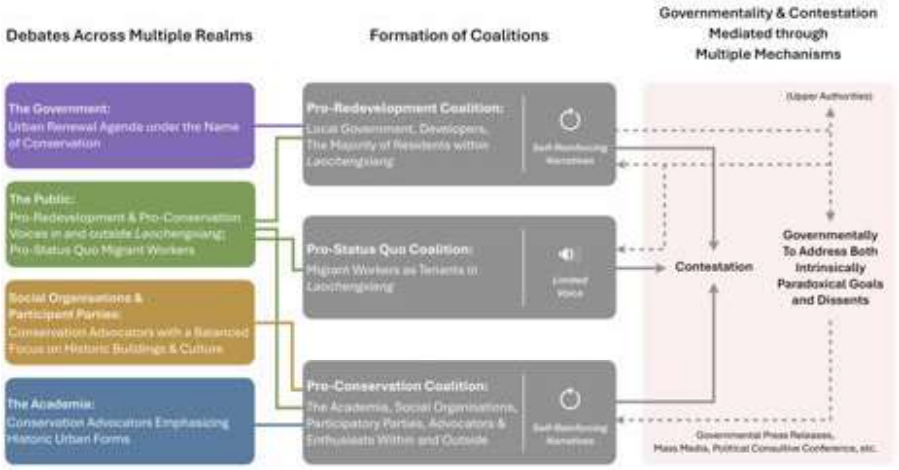

Fig. 11. The formation of coalitions and interactions between them in the widespread debate regarding *Laochengxiang*'s future.

The radical urban renewal movement has spurred polarised public responses and produced a ripple effect that gives rise to widespread contestations and debates. In the following two sections, we examine how debates across different independent realms overlap on, interconnect with and permeate into each other, forming three coalitions of distinct stances (pro-redevelopment, pro-status quo and pro-conservation), which leads to the contestation of ideas and the emergence of a top-down governmentality that are mediated through multiple mechanisms of public communication and political participation (Fig. 11). We argue that such governmentality serves dual purposes, as it addresses both the intrinsically paradoxical goals of the local government itself, and resolves dissents raised by other coalitions.

Our analysis employs a discourse analysis method and is based on evidence presented by publicly available materials including online posts (news articles, blog posts, social media posts, etc.), governmental planning and policy documents, press releases and correspondences, documentaries (*Farewell, My Humble Adobe* ("老城厢·上海的家") and *Reshaping Laochengxiang* ("重塑老城厢") by the *Doculife* channel of city-owned Shanghai Media Group), uploaded videos, academic papers, and particularly their comment sections whenever available. We gathered these materials through online search (see note 3 for detailed parameters), ending up with 289 online articles, 26 governmental documents, 34 journal papers, and 44 videos (including the 2 aforementioned documentaries), creating a total sample size of 393.

We first corralled these materials into four realms: the government, the public, social organisations and participatory political parties, as well as the academia. We then conducted a word-cloud analysis (through NVivo) for text-based materials to reveal the predominant stances and narratives in each realm, with results shown in Fig. 12.

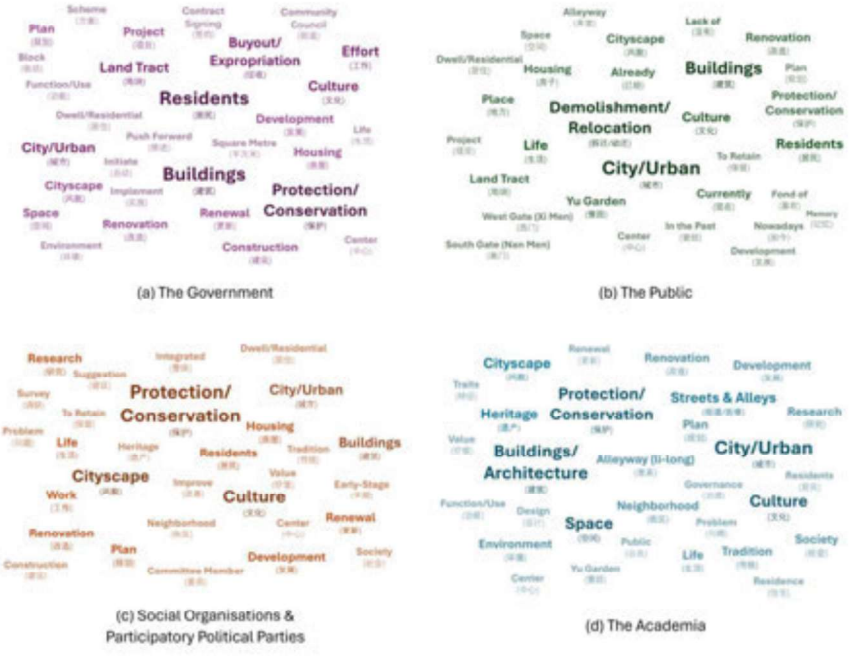

Fig. 12. Word-cloud analysis of narratives by realm of debate.

Overall speaking, the governmental narrative highlights the buildings (it seeks to redevelop) and the residents (it seeks to relocate), while extensively uses the word "protection/conservation" (保 护) to explain its rationale. However, the "protection/conservation" keyword is accompanied by a long list of high-frequency terms associated with the sweeping movement of total redevelopment, such as "buyout/expropriation", "land tract", "community council", "contract signing", "construction", "push forward", "implement", and "initiate". Contrasting this narrative, the key perception of the public is "demolishment/relocation" (the Chinese word "拆迁" means both these two concepts), which suggests ongoing substantial changes to their built environment and loss of their memory and culture (as evidenced by keywords such as "in the past", "currently"/"nowadays", "to retain", "already", and a number of very specific locales, such as West Gate, South Gate, and Yu Garden). On the other hand, both social organisations/participatory political parties and the academia show a strong pro-conservation stance, with the former placing a more balanced focus between built heritage and cultural traditions, while the latter making a vociferous outcry for the protection of buildings and the integrated conservation of historic urban landscape (as evidenced particularly by multiple street-scaled keywords in this realm, including "street" itself (街道), "alleys" (街巷), and "alleyways" (里弄/*li-long*) as a specific local urban space).

Based on this overall understanding, we then examined collected materials piece by piece, to understand the nuances associated with the debates and paradoxes within each realm:

- **Governmental Narratives.** The actual behaviour of the local government is undoubtedly pro-total redevelopment. However, a number of its on-the-ground programs – such as exhibitions, lectures, workshops, oral history programs, and volunteering events where elementary school pupils introduce *Laochengxiang*'s vanished city gates on bus line 11 that goes along its boundary (Shanghai Huangpu, 2023b) – also incorporate a strong inclination to commemorate local heritage and cultural history. Nevertheless, these programs largely focus on the intangible cultural history of the area, without countering the physical wiping-away of historic fabric that characterises much of the debate around *Laochengxiang*.

- **Narratives in the Public Realm.** Public narratives around the redevelopment of *Laochengxiang* is particularly contested, as some online articles with explicit stances may garner more than 100 comments, igniting heated disputes among commentors. The broader *public* in examined materials may be characterised into the following four groups:
  a) Pro-redevelopment local homeowners. Homeowners in *Laochengixang* generally display a strong support for "old district renewal" (Zhou, 2018; Tang, 2019; Shanghai Huangpu, 2023a), which creates a wide divergence between them and pro-conservation experts. Some resident would ask: "why wouldn't those who fight for preserving *Laochengxiang* live here? We've had enough" (Jiang, 2019, comment section).
  b) Enthusiasts and conservation advocators in and outside *Laochengxiang.* Many bloggers, vloggers, photographers, and those lived or frequented *Laochengxiang* have come back to visit local shops again or record its daily life before it "loses connection and memories" (see NetEase Witness, 2019; SH Citywalk, 2021). A netizen questions the renewal movement, stating that the neighbourhood was demolished simply because it was "deemed valueless by the rich" (Yisanxian, 2021, comment section). Enthusiasts who live in *Laochengxiang* have also made much effort in studying, recording, and commemorating its history and physical remains, with a local journalist going through the lengths of publishing books at his own costs (Wang, 2020; Mi, 2020; Yi, 2023; Yan, 2024).
  c) The unheard pro-status quo voice of migrant tenants. By 2019, more than 40% (85,000) of *Laochengxiang*'s 200,000 residents are migrant workers (Zhang, 2020), who reside in small and subdivided units, and make an urban living upon the low rent associated with informality. They seem to possess a pro-status quo stance, as either the restoration required by heritage conservation or the displacement brought by urban renewal brings significant uncertainty to their livelihood (see Chen, 2023). Due to limited agency in urban politics and on social networks, their voices are heard not directly, but through attention given by the public news media.
  d) Advertorials by developers. Not unlike how the Jade Fragrance Garden project was advertised, advertorials for ongoing new developments are seen in the news media, singing praise to *Laochengxiang*'s cultural glamour as Shanghai's origin point, and claiming to have inherited such glamour through the creation of luxury properties. For instance, a project boasts "low-density Shanghai-style villas" that "uncover obliterated redolence from past days" and transform *Laochengxiang* from "Shanghai's origin" into "Shanghai's heart" (Shanghai Observer, 2023).

- **Social Groups and Participatory Political Parties.** China operates upon a multi-party collaboration system (多党合作制度), where the governing Communist Party is accompanied by eight other participatory parties serving advisory roles, through the Policital Consultative Conferences (政协) at multiple levels. In recent years, at least four participatory parties – Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese KMT (民革) (Zhan, 2022),

China Democratic League (民盟) (2018), Association for Promoting Democracy (民进) (Shanghai Observer, 2019), and Jiusan Society (九三学社) (2017) – have actively advocated for more serious and intergrated conservation of *Laochengxiang*'s cultural heritage and better recognition of its values via the political consultative conference platform. Generally, these recommendations showcase a strong focus on the human aspect of cultural heritage, addressing issues such as large-scale displacement, the hollowing local community, loss of intangible heritage and livelihood, and underutilisation of not-yet-demolished buildings. Meanwhile, various social groups and NGOs also contributed to create a more concerted effort (see Guo, 2019; Zhu and Wang, 2022).

- **Voices from the academia.** Local scholars in the fields of urban planning and heritage conservation have been long-time advocators of *Laochengxiang*'s integrated conservation as well. In a 2017 symposium on *Laochengxiang*'s *Past, Present and Future,* local scholars stated that "we can't see *Laochengxiang* disappear piece by piece in front of our eyes" (Website on Architectural Conservation, 2017). Particularly, many scholars have developed critical counter-narratives regarding the official rationales for redevelopment: Zhang (2021) used the word "constructive destruction" to describe the result of living condition improvement being established *against* heritage conservation efforts, and stated that "simplified movements may eradicate toilet buckets, but not poverty." Similarly, architectural historian Li Yingchun questioned "why can't we just have several good public toilets?" (see Jiang, 2019).

The analysis above reveals the intricacies that have emerged in the debates, narratives and stances *within* each realm, but what makes the *Laochengxiang* case even more complex and interesting is that like-minded groups have interconnected across realms in dynamic ways and formed coalitions based on their stances. In many cases, inter-realm collaboration serves to reinforce a coalition's narratives, casting a stronger social impact. Specifically, the following three coalitions are observed in the power struggle to define *Laochengxiang*'s future:

- **The pro-redevelopment coalition**, which consists of the local government, invited experts, city-owned or private developers, and the majority of local homeowners. The pro-redevelopment stance of local homeowners has made it possible for the government to paint urban renewal as a beneficial process responding to local residents' needs and outcries, as governmental press releases often portray senior local residents who have been yearning for living condition improvement throughout their whole life, and describe the applause and cheers when their dreams finally come true (Shanghai Huangpu, 2022a; 2023a; Tang, 2019; Doculife, 2023). Interestingly, the "masses of positive cases" during Covid pandemic is also used as a rationale for relocation, not unlike the role of toilet buckets (Tang, 2022b; Zhou, 2022).

- **The pro-status quo coalition.** As mentioned earlier, the pro-status quo coalition is mainly composed of migrant workers as tenants, who actually don't showcase a strong sense of alliance due to their marginalised voice and lack of partners in other realms of discourse.

- **The pro-conservation coalition**, represented by local academia, social organizations and participatory political parties, and conservation advocators and enthusiasts within and outside *Laochengxiang.* In fact, several leading scholars advocating for integrated conservation are themselves high-ranked members of participatory political parties, and have played a major role in the formation of policy suggestions and proposals raised by these parties. On-the-ground in *Laochengxiang*, local scholar Li Yingchun has collaborated

with architects and photographers in the survey of alleyway housing blocks under renewal, interviewing local residents and conveying research outcomes via multiple channels including exhibition, academic publication, and book for the public (see Mi, 2021; Sinan Books, 2018; Jiang, 2019).

2.4 Governmentality as a Coping Mechanism

What we have seen in this coalition politics is that first, conflicting voices have clashed and contested intensively with each other in the mass media space. While many of these outlets are ultimately owned by or connected with state-owned news enterprises, they have still managed to present complex debates in many nuanced ways. A plethora of online posts and self-produced reports have undoubtedly further nourished these debates.

More importantly, we observed a governmentality created by the pro-redevelopment coalition (largely the local government, but also like-minded developers) operationalised through mainstream narratives that seemingly resolve dissents and concerns from the pro-status quo and pro-conservation coalitions. Akin to Stenson and Watt's (1999) view that the "social" is reformulated instead of displaced in neoliberal governance, we argue that the heritage conservation imperative is not only suppressed in a binary manner against living condition improvement, but also reformulated and achieved in ostensible and reduced ways. Moreover, in *Laochengxiang*'s case, narratives of governmentality may also be used upwards to demonstrate to higher authorities that self-contradictory policy agendas (as we discussed in Section 1.4) have all been successfully implemented. These governmentality-embedded narratives are manifested along the following directions:

- **Rendering urban renewal as a progressive movement, particularly by stressing its living condition improvement dimension.** As we've discussed earlier, unsanitary and undignified state of living environment represented by tiny per-capita space, toilet buckets, and high rate of Covid infection have repeatedly been used to rally local resident and public support for urban renewal. More importantly, this also facilitates and justifies a binary opposition between urban renewal and heritage conservation. For instance, the Qiaojia Road neighborhood in *Laochengxiang* which possesses historic street patterns (filled from rivers and streams), local courtyard houses (Zhu and Wang, 2022) and histories of many important figures (see Shen, 2023) was deemed as the area of "worst architectural quality" (Tang, 2022a), where residents would have to "look up to the Oriental Pearl TV Tower with a toilet bucket in hand" (Tang et al., 2022). Along this line, dilapidation and degradation of the area is attributed to heritage itself, pro-conservation voices are easily viewed as objection to the provision of dignified living environment, and mass relocation in the name of living condition improvement paves way for intensive redevelopment that follows.

- **Claiming that the area's cultural heritage – which has been largely reduced to buildings with individual heritage designation – has been comprehensively preserved along with and as a result of urban renewal**, through the following ways:
  a) Reducing the scope of local cultural heritage. In an official reply to a political consultative conference proposal, Huangpu District Government frames local heritage conservation guidelines as to "conserve individual legally protected buildings outside key protection area, while regulating the amount and height of new construction within key protection area" (Huangpu District Government, 2021). This interpretation largely disregarded important designations in the conservation masterplan, paving ways for demolition and luxury redevelopments.

b) Framing heritage conservation as a result of urban renewal. Two frequently mentioned success stories in governmental press releases are the *Shuyin Building* (书隐楼) and the Confucious Temple, which are acquired by the government and conserved or restored during urban renewal (Tang, 2023; Shanghai Municipal Government, 2022). However, conservation of these landmarks doesn't necessarily have to happen through urban renewal, and there seems to be no mention of how selected conservation and restoration was achieved at the cost of eliminating expansive areas of historic fabric.
c) Capitalising on *Laochengxiang*'s cultural richness and historic connections, and equating conservation with luxury townhouse redevelopment. Many redevelopment projects have made extensive effort in framing *Laochengxiang*'s cultural, historic, and spiritual qualities as major selling points, while claiming to have "inherited" culture and history through their luxury townhouses that in fact wiped away *Laochengxiang*'s historic urban landscape.
d) Flagship programs and projects on intangible and cultural history. As we've discussed in Governmental Narratives (Section 2.3), besides the above interpretations that twisted the concept of heritage conservation, there are indeed official programs to commemorate and communicate local cultural history. However, they largely focus on intangible histories and memories, and have limited influence on the diminishment of physical and community fabric that is currently happening.

- **Sympathising with the place attachment of local residents, while painting displacement and relocation as a bittersweet experience for a brighter tomorrow.** "There will be housing that fits me somewhere anyways," says a young migrant tenant who works as a barista in an interview (The Paper, 2022); "I wouldn't be willing to live in the old place after experiencing my new apartment," says a senior citizen in *Farewell, My Humble Adobe*. While this may be the case for them, urban renewal may also be eating away affordable housing options in city centre for migrant workers in large, and there are actually many aged people who still choose to live by themselves in rental units nearby *Laochengxiang* due to the place attachment they can't give up (Li, 2023). These situations reflect the flip side of urban renewal, which Qin (2013) would call "domicide".

2.5 An Ignored Place of Contestation: Historic Neighbourhoods Outside Historic Districts

While *Laochengxiang* has grabbed the attention of a great amount of people who live in or care about Shanghai, there are other arguably no less significant historic neighbourhoods in-between historic districts that have been evacuated and sealed or are being razed. As Shao (2016) argues, since Shanghai's heritage conservation plans are designed to replace detailed masterplans of specific neighbourhoods, there lacks an urban-scaled spatial strategy for heritage conservation, and conservation efforts within fragmented historic districts have actually accelerated demolition outside and in between them. While many of these neighbourhoods are placed under newer types of heritage designations (such as historic cityscape blocks and historic cityscape streets), these statuses – like designations in *Laochengxiang*'s conservation masterplan – had very little impact on their redevelopment. Similarly, the site of a UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation-winning project – West Guizhou Lilong (UNESCO, 2022) – has also been sealed and evacuated as of spring 2024 (Fig. 13(5)). These notable cases are recorded in Fig. 13.

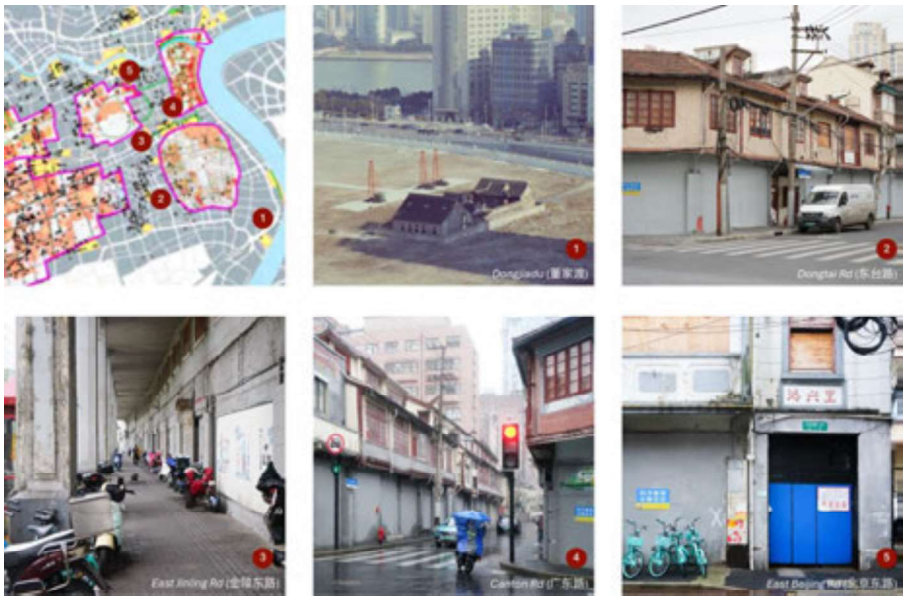

Fig. 13. Historic neighbourhoods under buyout/expropriation or redevelopment outside designated historic districts. Source: 1 – Knyazeva, 2022; others – photos by authors.

3 Risks and Disparities in Redevelopment-Oriented Urban Regeneration Practice

So far, we have demonstrated how a ferocious urban renewal movement happened in Shanghai's historic districts and neighbourhoods in recent years in breach of local heritage conservation masterplans, and how a governmentality is formed in mainstream discourse to ostensibly resolve dissents and prove the achievement of self-contradictory governance goals. While the governmentality embedded in mainstream narratives may produce a seemingly self-consistent rationale for the government, there are in fact multiple risks and disparities in this fierce redevelopment-oriented urban regeneration practice.

- The loss of vernacular historic urban landscape and urban spatial justice. The so-called "low quality housing" (or "second-class dilapidated housing and below") blocks – which generally collocate with Shanghai's 7.3 million m^2 of alleyway housing fabric – are crucial carriers of Shanghai's indigenous historic urban landscape, and manifest the grassroots side of Shanghai's urbanity which has been profoundly shaped by its long history as a hub for migrants and immigrants. The selected and biased conservation practice based on so-called "architectural significance" (Avrami, 2020) is therefore destroying both valuable historic urban fabric and the grassroots and indigenous lifestyle manifested in local communities (which made alleyway housing blocks unique *cities within cities*). The hyper-gentrification brought by a homogeneous upper-class population associated with luxury townhouses and high-rise apartments that come after demolition and displacement will inevitably exacerbate residential segregation and class stratification, further harming the social justice of urban space (Zhang, 2021).

- Inequities in governmental investment and the failure of neighbourhood self-governance. The systematic undervaluation of vernacular heritage with greater informality has caused great imbalances in governmental investment. Under the same mandate to "eliminate low-quality housing", residents in historic districts of higher architectural quality and socioeconomic status (for example, those who live in the *Cloud Water Villas* which is located in the former French Settlement and a middle-class neighbourhood today) would be able to enjoy fine-grained conservation schemes supported by substantial governmental cost, while many migrants and grassroots local residents in general alleyway housing blocks would have to be displaced or relocated. Meanwhile, neighbourhood associations – which should serve as a self-governing entity representing and reconciliating multiple forms of grassroots interests – have regrettably become a tool to persuade local residents to relocate under the municipal government's land finance imperatives.

- Unsustainable path dependency on land finance. The "total redevelopment" pathway undoubtedly produces the quickest and largest financial revenue for the local government. While land tracts of demolished historic districts in the city centre are sold at record-breaking prices, there is no guarantee that this model will work as well in outer-city neighbourhoods beyond these flagship projects, especially considering China's property market that is weakening and turning more volatile. On the other hand, our preliminary calculation suggests that it would cost the local government ¥0.87-1.22 trillion ($120-168 billion, note 4) to buy out all "low-quality housing" in Shanghai, which may imply a significant financial risk and burden.

4 Discussion: The Rise of New Municipalism and a Pending Refocus on Community

4.1 New Municipalism in Shanghai: A New Possibility?

In the Shanghai case, the intensive contestations across realms targeted at the government-led sweeping redevelopment movement did not significantly change the trajectory of this agenda – instead, they only facilitated the production of a governmentality. However, we observed the emergence of some traits of "new municipalism" in this process, manifested by:

1) The occurrence of multiple contestations and contradictions outside the governmental decision-making process, which reflects the inability of invited participation in reaching consensus;
2) Existing political participation tools (e.g., the political consultative conference platform) that have been used in an unprecedentedly efficient manner, and voices outside the government that have casted stronger and more frequent impact than usual;
3) On the heated debate regarding *Laochengixang*'s future, the spontaneous coalition of non-governmental stakeholders have emerged and made a presence in the forms of news reports, social media, social organisations, and academic events. In this case, the local academia serves as a key node linking participatory political parties, professionals, and local residents in a joined force to survey *Laochengxiang* and advocate for its conservation.

While the pro-conservation and pro-status quo coalitions didn't achieve any substantive self-governance in *Laochengxiang*'s urban space, we still found many similarities between the trends described above and the new municipalism movement currently taking stage in Europe (Thompson, 2021). We believe that creating a larger agency for spontaneously formed

coalitions by the broader public would be an effective way to balance the crises among state-market-society relationship in Shanghai's urban renewal movement; however, a focus should be placed on mechanisms to operationalise such agency (e.g., pro-bono lawsuits on heritage conservation), and fair attention paid to disadvantaged and marginalised groups (e.g., migrant worker tenants). The emerging concept of new municipalism has provided us with a valuable perspective to observe subtly changing power dynamics in China's urban governance.

4.2 Why Shanghai Matters?

We reckon that Chinese cities are embedded with multiple exceptionalities in terms of governance models and mechanisms, creating a dependency on specific urban theories (e.g., the state entrepreneurialism model – see Wu et al., 2022). However, the Shanghai case seems to demonstrate multiple connections to urban issue across the East and the West, as well as the Global North and the Global South. As we've discussed, the close collaboration between the government, developers, and government-owned land expropriation companies and apparent land finance rationales behind urban renewal display significant Chinese characteristics (see Wu, 2021); on the contrary, extensive debates, political (or potentially political) expressions, and formation of coalitions by stakeholders outside the government show traits of new municipalism. Along another axis, *Laochengxiang*'s informality represented by its disorderly built environment and high density is very similar to the typical environment of Global South cities, while its heritage valorisation system that largely builds upon architectural and material lexicons apparently follows Global North pathways (which may in part explain why the city's heritage conservation plan failed on this specific neighbourhood). These connections make conflicts in the regeneration of historic residential neighbourhoods in Shanghai relevant to broader urban contexts, and are thus worth further investigation.

4.3 Ways Forward – Updating Spatial Strategies and Refocusing on the Community

Laochengxiang's heritage conservation plan displays a discrete focus on architectural and spatial conservation. Ironically, it didn't end up protecting either the historic urban fabric, or local culture and lifestyle. Existing studies have raised many solutions in the spatial dimension, including: respecting the legal validity of conservation masterplan, and avoiding "constructive destruction" (Zhang, 2021); recognising the values of alleyway housing and vernacular heritage, and propelling integrated conservation instead of renewal upon demolition (Zhao et al., 2023; Zhang, 2021); developing enforcement mechanisms of conservation masterplan, and protecting the alleyway fabric through progressive and small-scaled regeneration (Zhang and Wu, 2021; Cai and Huang, 2022); facilitating gradual de-densification by allowing voluntary, household-by-household relocation (see Xinhua News, 2019); balancing governmental cost in urban regeneration through transferrable development rights (TDR) (Jiusan Society, 2017), etc. These solutions all correspond to our analysis on how the heritage conservation masterplan was breached. Although some studies expressed explicit attention to the human dimension of heritage (see Zhou, 2023), less recommendations have been made on community agency – which includes not only local residents, but also the broader public. On the agenda of "integrated conservation", we'd like to conclude with the following supplemental suggestions.

- A consensus is urgently needed to structurally revert the systematic undervaluation of indigenous urban heritage. The labelling of indigenous historic urban fabric with more informality as "dilapidated districts" caused the abandonment of urban heritage conservation measures formed in Shanghai upon decades of exploration, which reveals the

poignant need to rethink the values of urban conservation, by weighing the significance of Shanghai's root and origin point against architectural significance-based criteria.

- In practice, current demolition work must be halted, with the production of new conservation planning measures targeting deficiencies in *Laochengxiang*'s 2005 conservation masterplan. Key focuses shall be placed on more strict design review for renewal projects, and the creation of more refined streetscape design guidelines (like those adopted in Hengshan Rd-Fuxing Rd Historic District as an icon of fine-grained conservation, see Wang and Xue, 2021) to address the pairing of exclusive townhouses and high-rise apartments that greatly undermine street experience.

- The *Laochengxiang* case demonstrates that cultural heritage is inseparable not only with the local community, but also with the broader public as it serves as an important symbol of urban cultural identity. Regarding the human dimensions in heritage conservation practice, we believe that:
  1) More transparency should be given to the making and revision of local conservation masterplans by implementing public hearing procedures or similar measures, as they help address shortcomings of invited participation and the evasion of debates afforded by narratives of governmentality, and help achieve a healthier state-market-society relationship.
  2) The extremely explicit pro-gentrification and anti-grassroots stance of top-down urban renewal should be rectified before all local grassroots lifestyle and retail scenes are wiped away. Mandatory affordable housing requirements shall be incorporated into redevelopment plans, to better preserve the character of alleyway neighbourhoods and give basic care to the migrant tenants' rights to the city.
  3) An asset-based community development model shall be adopted, with more focus on investing on the community itself, vis a vis on the renovation, renewal, or demolition of built heritage. During the "Reshaping *Laochengxiang*" governance experiment carried out around 2016, local communities implemented micro fire stations, public kitchens and bathrooms under the support of district government, which enhanced the area's liveability, and spurred community vitality (Doculife, 2019). We call for a comeback to such community-based, acupuncture-mannered regeneration approach, where heritage conservation goals are achieved via investments on community livelihood, small businesses (e.g., craftsmanship and local eateries), and infrastructure that actually enhance day-to-day liveability.

Notes

1 The concept of *Laochengxiang* refers to both the historic walled city (*cheng)* and a strip of blocks outside the city wall along the nearby Huangpu River *(xiang)*. We use the word here to indicate only the historic district that covers the historic walled city (now an urban area surrounded by a circular road).
2 The official translation for the project is Aroma Garden. However, we use the literal translation "Jade Fragrance Garden" to reveal connection between the redevelopment project's name and the actual garden that existed in history on site.
3 Online search parameters for discourse analysis: Chinese keywords "Shanghai" + "Laochengxiang" + "Conservation" or "Old District Renewal" or "relocation" ("上海" + "老城厢" + "保护" or "旧改" or "拆迁"/"动迁") at Google and Baidu, and Chinese keywords "Shanghai" + "Laochengxiang" at academic publication platform CNKI, as well as more targeted perusal of local government portals for disclosed information. First 200 results are collected for each pair of keywords and website, when total results exceed this number. Repetitive materials, those solely referring to neighbourhoods outside the historic district, and those of little relevance to the current urban renewal movement are excluded from analysis.
4 This preliminary calculation is based on the estimation that overall cash compensation for each m^2 of alleyway housing (including bonuses and subsidies) would be around two times the housing price nearby. Upper-limit and lower-limit values are calculated by multiplying Shanghai's alleway housing stock (7.3 million m^2) with 2 times the average housing price in 7 inner-city districts (around ¥84,000/m^2), and 2 times citywide average (around ¥60,000/m^2), respectively.

5 Conversion between CNY and USD is made based on estimated exchange rates in different years.

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