

**The Shanghai Lilong in the 21st Century
Can Informal Commercial Activity Save this Threatened Urban Space?**

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THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CITY

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The Shanghai *Lilong* in the 21st Century: Can Informal Commercial Activity Save this Threatened Urban Space?

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ABSTRACT

Lilong were gated, hierarchically organized residential compounds built in Shanghai during the colonial era. Stylistically influenced by the West, they also saw China's concept of the home (*jia*) change into something more modern (and Western): the family home, while still a home, could also be seen as a commodity. Once covering 80% of the city, *lilong* are being replaced by denser urban development. This is bad for the preservation of Shanghai's unique vernacular architectural heritage, but we may also be losing potentially useful lessons from the past on ways of generating vibrant community life. This paper will examine four recent redevelopments to look at the role of different entrepreneurs, from large, top-down private developers to small, bottom-up individual owners, to determine which, if any, comes closest to best preserving the spirit of the *lilong*. Jianyeli is a residential gentrification which not only subverts the typology (by being for the rich) but has killed off any street life; Xintiandi is a hugely successful commercial development, but one in which there is no provision for residents; Tianzifang is a more bottom-up commercial redevelopment but is too touristic (it does, however, preserve a lively mix of commercial and residential life); finally, there is Jing'an Villa, where earlier this decade there was a temporary but fascinating efflorescence of bottom-up informal commercial activity instigated by the returning descendant of emigrants in one of the best preserved residential *lilong* in the city. No one redevelopment will point the way to a vibrant future for this threatened typology, but bottom-up informal commercial activity certainly seems a promising way of attempting to preserve it. Combined with lessons from the other redevelopments, we may be able to suggest a better balanced approach to preserving this fascinating and unique urban space for the future.

KEYWORDS

*Lilong, Gentrification, Informal
Commercial Activity*

INTRODUCTION

China was forced to open itself to trade by the Western powers in the 19th century. At a time when the country was still dominated by Confucianism, Chinese society was divided into four classes: scholars, peasants, craftsmen, and merchants (in descending order of importance). Whereas the Western powers believed that 'trade was as natural a human function as breathing and assumed the right to trade with whomsoever they pleased. China did not share this view' (Nield 2015: 1), 'the mandarins who ruled China perceived commerce as an activity undertaken by people of a lower, unrefined kind – be they Chinese or foreign' (Nield 2015: 1). China at this time produced top-quality luxury goods, such as tea, silk, and porcelain, and 'gradually was absorbing a substantial portion of the world's silver supply' (Downs 2014: 108). The British, wanting to redress this imbalance, sought to import their own goods into China, the most lucrative of which was opium, and they waged two wars to do so. The First Opium War (1839-1842) and the Second Opium War (1856-1860) led to a series of treaties, beginning with the Treaty of Nanking on 29 August 1842. Known as the 'unequal treaties', they were foisted onto an unwilling China and are rightly seen as a low point in that country's history.

Under the terms of the Treaty of Nanking China had to pay Britain an indemnity of \$21 million, it also had to cede the island of Hong Kong to Britain in perpetuity, and five ports were opened to foreign trade: Canton (Guangzhou), Amoy (Xiamen), Foochow (Fuzhou), Ningpo (Ningbo), and Shanghai. Henceforth known as the 'treaty ports', they were the first in an ever-increasing series of settlements that spread themselves across China until 11 January 1943, when the Sino-British Treaty for the Relinquishment of Extra-Territorial Rights in China ending the system after 101 years.

On 8 November 1858 opium was legalized in China (Nield 2015: xvi); it remained legal until 1917 (and in Hong Kong until 1945). 'To China the opium trade was an unmixed evil' (Downs 2014: 131), corrupting, demoralizing, and draining specie. The more the authorities tried to stop it, the more it took hold because '[t]he more vigorous the enforcement, the higher were the bribes and the greater the incentive to subvert the

law' (Downs 2014: 119). The British government had always acknowledged the right of the Chinese to prohibit the drug traffic' (Downs 2014: 135), but as Jacques M. Downs says (quoting John King Fairbank) 'the opium trade's "economic value outweighed its moral turpitude:" and Western military and naval superiority enabled Britain to get away with it' (Downs 2014: 135).

But bad and all as this was, it was not the main point of the drug trade because '[w]here opium went, other goods followed. By the 1830s, smuggling involved more than drugs' (Downs 2014: 128). 'Without opium it is difficult to see how the legitimate China trade could have developed' (Downs 2014: 112). One unintended consequence of the opening of China to international trade was modernization; even missionaries played a role in this because it was thanks to their 'schools and other activities that foreign ideas were being introduced to an increasingly politically aware student population' (Nield 2015: 204).

Robert Nield also identifies '[o]ne of the principal and longest-lasting agents of modernization derived from the treaty port system was the complete reorganization of the collection of duty on imports and exports' (Nield 2015: 9). He thinks that 'Chinese commercial ideas and trade practices would have developed without Western input, although perhaps on different lines, but the presence of an alien culture accelerated change' (Nield 2015: 11). Certainly there would be few who would argue with his statement (quoted from Frank Dikötter) that the Treaty Ports represented 'the largest cultural transfer in human history' (Nield 2015: 11).

SHANGHAI

'More than 250 places can be identified as having foreign non-missionary presence or jurisdiction in China before the end of the Treaty Port system in 1943' (Nield 2015: 9), but Shanghai was, without doubt, the biggest success story of them all. From a small circular walled town it grew into the world's sixth-largest port by 1863 (Nield 2015: 202). It was the Treaty Port par excellence. So rich and important had it become that '[i]n 1862 the leaders of Shanghai's foreign commercial community had suggested making the settlements an independent republic' (Nield 2015: 201). The proposal was considered unrealistic, however,

and, besides, it contravened the treaties on which the system was built.

From the moment it became a Treaty Port Shanghai experienced remarkable growth, quickly supplanting Canton as China's leading entrepôt. Every part of the city grew at a staggering pace. The cost of an acre went from around 50 pounds in 1850 to around 20,000 in 1862 (Dong 2000: 16). Shanghai was dominated by an International Settlement, which was a self-governing entity; there was also a French Concession, an old Chinese city, and the rest of city, which was Chinese administered. A tiny colonial elite had little interest in mixing with the vast majority of the city's native population. They saw themselves as separate, even identifying themselves as 'Shanghailanders' as opposed to the native 'Shanghaiense'. By the 1920s and 1930s Shanghai was synonymous with modernity: the city had China's first trams, first stock exchange, first nightclub. Not only did it have the largest population in Asia (three million in 1930), it also had the region's tallest buildings, freest press, most scintillating social life; it also had Asia's most notorious gangsters, drugs, and gambling dens.

Then on 8 December 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and annexed Shanghai's foreign concessions; the city found itself under one jurisdiction for the first time in a century, but this was Japanese. 1943 saw the revocation of the Treaty Port system and after the war Shanghai went through a brief boom followed by a cataclysmic period of corruption and economic mismanagement. Then, on 24 April 1949, Shanghai was liberated by the People's Liberation Army and the People's Republic of China was declared on 1 October, ending once and for all any foreign incursions.

LILONG¹

Treaty Ports proved a magnet for Chinese looking for work or refuge from the upheavals that convulsed the country in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Most of them lived in a type of house that developed in Shanghai and was unique to the city. Known as *lilong*, these were gated, hierarchically organized residential compounds organized in large blocks and subdivided by alleyways. The name means 'neighbourhood alleyway' and they are sometimes called *lilongtang*, which refers to a cluster of houses



FIGURE 1 Aerial view of lilong³



FIGURE 2 Gate into lilong

(*tang* means 'sitting room'), while *longtang* is the alleyway-house itself (i.e. 'alleyway-sitting room'). This is the term most often used in Shanghai itself².

The alleyways themselves were differentiated between a main one, which was four to five metres wide and ran perpendicular to the access street, and smaller ones, which crossed the main alleyway at right angles. Access to the compound was via a gate, which was closed at night. There was often more than one gate, but these tended to close at different times meaning that shortcuts could only be used by those who knew the *lilong* well.

The houses themselves were two to four storeys in height and varied in size and decoration. They were invariably small, the basic unit being 60 to 105 square metres, with two rooms per floor. Commercial activity was confined to the



FIGURE 3 Typical *lilong*

houses facing onto boundary streets, although some informal commercial activity occurred on the main alleyway. The smaller alleyways were used for household chores, informal work, or recreation. The chief factor in their flexibility was a hierarchical system of 'graduated privacy'. This term was originated by Nelson I. Wu in his analysis of traditional Chinese courtyard homes (*siheyuen*) (Wu 1968: 32). It explains the series of spatial progressions within the home, where certain visitors would be allowed as far as the entry vestibule, but friends and family would come into the courtyard and adjacent halls. The deeper recesses of the house were reserved for the family.

The *lilong* formed a village-style neighbourhood (not unlike the *lifang* residential wards of ancient Chinese cities), and a graduated privacy

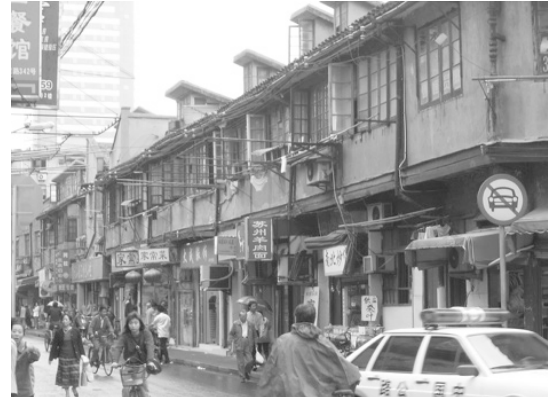


FIGURE 4 Commercial activity on boundary of *lilong*

obtained here as well, governing activities and their location. The sequence of spaces found in the traditional Chinese house was echoed in the *lilong*. Inhabitants (and/or strangers) could move from the main street (which was fully public) through the main alleyway (semi-public) to the smaller alleyways (semi-private), before finally entering the privacy of the individual home. This graduated sequence of spaces determined the activities that took place in the *lilong*, particularly on its different types of alleyways. The main alleyway would see vendors setting up stalls, whereas residents would sit on the smaller side alleyways and watch the street activity. This is where they would also socialize, do household chores, or conduct hobbies. At first glance these activities can seem random but they follow a rigid and logical system of hierarchy governed by graduated privacy.

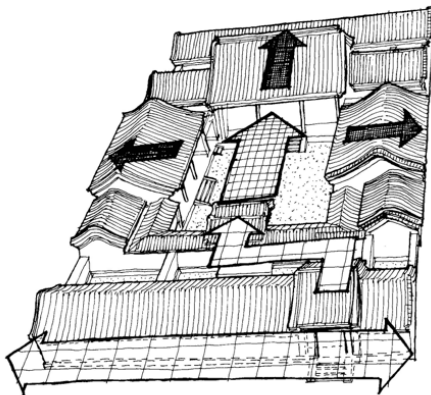


FIGURE 5 'Graduated privacy' in a traditional Chinese courtyard house

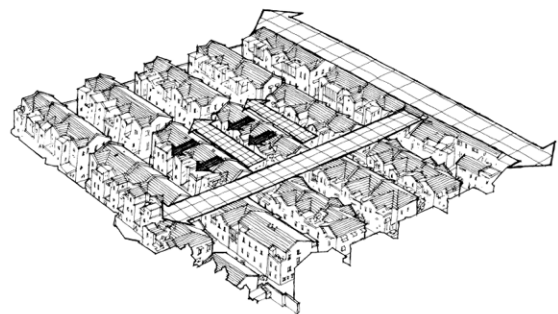


FIGURE 6 'Graduated privacy' in *lilong*



FIGURE 7 Commercial activity on main alleyway



FIGURE 8 Residential activity on side alleyway.

Distinctions between public and private are less sharply drawn than in Asia than in the West. Peter G. Rowe sees this 'blurring of public, semi-public, semi-private and private spatial realms [leading to] a stronger social emphasis on communality, propriety and conformance' (Rowe 2005: 27). Chinese people do seem to live and do more on their streets than Westerners, and it is the subtle progression from public through semi-public/semi-private to private that the *lilong* facilitates that enables them to do so. It is a generator of this lifestyle, because of its built form, but also generated by it, because it reflects a deep-seated Chinese attitude to the use of space. The spaces of the *lilong* have, therefore, a perfectly balanced relationship with the life that is lived in them. Or they had, as we shall see below. But first, a note on how these spaces were used, and why.

NEW MODE OF LIVING

Samuel Y. Liang identifies the earliest Chinese residents of Shanghai as gentry fleeing civil wars and upheavals. The 'hovels, brothels, and opium dens so objectionable to the Western elite provided crucial business opportunities for foreign landowners, as wealth shifted from the declining and displaced landed gentry to new urban capitalists' (Liang 2010: 90). These activities provided business opportunities, something that foreign landowners were quick to capitalize on. They did this through their compradors (Chinese or mixed-race middlemen who conducted business interests). Slowly, wealth began to shift from the displaced and declining landed gentry to a new class of wealthy urban capitalists.

Liang also notes that most Chinese residents of *lilong* saw themselves (much like the Westerners) as sojourners. Both groups saw the city as an opportunity to get rich before retiring to their native lands or provinces. The word 'home' in Chinese is *jia*. This also denotes 'house' and 'family', concepts that cannot be separated as they are in the West. The ideograph for *jia* is an apt symbol as its ten strokes are said to represent a pig under a roof, meaning the family can be seen as 'a related group of people who "eat out of one pot"' (Jervis 2005: 223). This can be literally, as in the daily meal, or figuratively, by the sharing of income (traditionally earned from raising pigs). The family was not only a group that consumed pork, it was also the basic economic unit of

society (by producing that commodity).

Liang sees the *lilong* (or as he calls it, *li*) as radically reconfiguring traditional residential and commercial spaces, with visibility and openness replacing walls and containment. He sees this as subverting the traditional spatial order and hierarchy, with the borderline between elites and lower classes being transgressed and redefined (Liang 2008: 482). He also argues that the social spaces of the *lilong* were demonstrating an analogous transformation, with walls and traditionally self-contained residential spaces being similarly breached. It is important to note that this spatial transformation was not simply a passive response to Western influence, it was actually a reflection of Shanghai's dynamism.

One vitally important point that Liang makes about the *lilong* is the fact that they were no longer regarded as something that a family would hand down through the generations, and this made them radically different from the traditional courtyard house. The *lilong*'s very lack of flexibility (in terms of expansion or contraction) was of course one of the courtyard house's most useful feature. This was not possible in the tighter confines of the *lilong* and must have been a contributory factor to their being seen as 'transferable "commodities" rather than permanent homes to which generations of residents had a strong sense of belonging' (Liang 2008: 493). This 'one size fits all' mentality may also explain how the *lilong* came to be used for such a variety of purposes, from the most common, the family home, to the shophouse on the periphery, and even to other 'house' types that Liang investigated in such details: the brothel, which straddled the commercial and the homely. This polyvalence might seem to point to a bright future for the typology but, as we shall see in the next section, it might not be quite so simple, and for a variety of reasons.

***Lilong* under threat**

By the time of the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 approximately 50% of the total built area of Shanghai was *lilong* (Warr 2007: 251). They accounted for almost three-quarters of the city's residential dwellings, with 70 to 80% of the city's population living in them (Lu 1995: 94). As late as 1990, Zheng Shiling estimates that there were well over 9,000 clusters of them

in the city⁴, but since that time they have been rapidly disappearing. Why?

Shanghai before 1949 was a paragon of capitalist accumulation. Under the Communists it became a paragon of state control. Yet despite its importance to the Chinese economy, and its willingness to accede to Beijing's wishes, the city suffered badly between 1949 and 1990. The central government was, according to the old Chinese proverb, 'draining the pond to catch the fish'. When Deng Xiaoping introduced the Open Door policy in 1978 he set up four new Special Economic Zones (SEZs), but he decided to do so along China's south-east coast. He had toured Asia's 'tiger economies' (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan) and was convinced that capitalism was the way to go, yet was wary of importing yet another Western ideology, since Communism had so conspicuously failed to deliver. He was also wary of introducing anything that might damage Shanghai. Well into the 1980s the city's leaders were side-lined from national decision-making processes. Shanghai was, as a result, unable to lobby for more favourable policies and it saw its only period of (relative) recession in a century-and-a-half of otherwise stellar economic growth.

Eventually in 1984, Beijing allowed Shanghai to have foreign investment. The Yangtze River Delta was opened the following year and by 1986 Shanghai was able to set up three small economic zones. But it was not enough because much of southern China was beginning to boom, leaving Shanghai behind. Shanghai's Mayor, Wang Daohan, launched a Special Economic Zone in Pudong in April 1990 and finally Shanghai was able to reassert itself. The city is now home to



FIGURE 9 *Lilong* under threat from denser urban fabric.

more skyscrapers than Manhattan, and they are not all to be found in Pudong. Ironically, this revitalization of the city is posing an even greater threat to the city's stock of old buildings than anything that happened under the Communists.

Cities are extraordinarily resilient, they can, and do, recover from fire, flood, and warfare. They one thing that cannot withstand is the sudden and catastrophic influx of money. Streams of new money will scour away old buildings and streets and places, not to mention the lifestyles associated with them. All the old well-established networks and ways of life that took generations to build can disappear in a few years, a few days, even, and this is what has been happening to Shanghai since it reopened to the world in the 1990s.

REHABILITATION AND REUSE

The stock of *lilong* had become severely dilapidated during the three-decades-long Communist era. They had survived, but neglect and overcrowding meant that many of them were beyond repair. Peter G. Rowe points out that the squalid, run-down condition of these houses was because they were seen as a reminder of a way of life the Chinese would sooner forget: the Treaty Port era (Rowe 2005: 40). He also reminds us that historic preservation in East-Asian cities is weak (Rowe 2005: 40). It is only in the 21st century that Shanghai has begun to see the tourist potential for its dwindling stock of *lilong*.

One other aspect of Chinese life that has had a big effect in eroding the *lilong*'s attractiveness (while simultaneously increasing that of the Western-style apartment or the suburban house) is the One Child Policy (1979-2015). Forcing people to have small families has been compounded by the fact '[t]he traditional practice of housing extended families, including the elderly, [has] also eroded substantially in East Asia' (Rowe 2005: 40). Many people now prefer to live in newer, cleaner, more comfortable and spacious apartments, even if they are located outside the city centre.

Yet, since the beginning of the 21st century a number of old *lilong* areas have been redeveloped. This section will examine four such redevelopments, looking at the role different entrepreneurs have played, from large, top-down private developers to small, bottom-up



FIGURE 10 Jianyeli (Source: Bart Kuipers)

individuals, to determine which approach (if any) comes closest to preserving the spirit of the *lilong*.

Jianyeli

We begin by looking at Jianyeli, a residential redevelopment by John Portman and Associates. This project, near the corner of Taiyuan and Jianguo West Roads, includes 51 houses and 62 serviced apartments and is aimed at the luxury end of the housing market. Most of the original 1920s' buildings have been dismantled (only one third of them were restored rather than rebuilt). This has been done so that they can be more conveniently modernized (with amenities such as plumbing, electricity, and heating – most of which were absent from the originals) as well as allow for other modern requirements, such as parking and better fire safety. What is interesting is that the luxury market has now begun to take note of the *lilong*. Clearly there is a demand for this type of housing, something which might seem to bode well for its future. Jianyeli could, at first glance, be seen as a healthy sign for the future of the *lilong*, at least it is residential, but in fact this sort of gentrification actually subverts the typology by being for the rich, and has killed off the sort of street life that was the typology's main contribution to city life. As a potential future direction for rehabilitation and reuse it is like one of those *lilong* gateways we saw earlier, which seem to offer a handy shortcut but are in fact a dead end.

Xintiandi

Xintiandi (which means 'new world' in Chinese) is a hugely successful commercial redevelopment

designed by American architects Wood and Zapata. Consisting of two city blocks bordered by Taicang, Zizhong, Madang, and Huangpi South Roads, it forms part of the larger Taipingqiao redevelopment which includes hotels, office towers, and residential facilities. Opened in 2001, it quickly became one of Shanghai's most popular shopping and entertainment hubs. One of the reasons Xintiandi proved so popular was that foreigners thought they were seeing the 'real' Shanghai, while Chinese saw it as exotically foreign (misperceptions that worked in the area's favour).

The *lilong* that house the area's glittering new outlets were newly built using bricks recycled from demolished *lilong* in an attempt to lend an air of authenticity. (There is, in fact, a long tradition of reusing building materials in Shanghai, Samuel Y. Liang says that the Sassoon family frequently employed materials from demolished houses in real-estate developments (Liang 2008: 486).) The concept of authenticity is somewhat different in China than the West. Li Shiqiao says that newly built buildings can be seen as authentically old because they are a continuation of the past, and this is a very ancient tradition in China. Westerners may be tempted to think of Xintiandi as a Disneyland-like reconstruction, but the Chinese do not because the conception of memory that these buildings contain is not the result of confusing the real and the imitated, and this is because they possess what Li calls 'immaterial authenticity' in a collective memory, something that is maintained through (not in spite of) spatial and temporal relocations –

even if this seems odd to Westerners.

Ackbar Abbas makes the point that preservation is not memory. 'Preservation is selective and tends to exclude the dirt and pain' (Abbas 2002: 66), and this, he says, results in a form of kitsch. Xintiandi, too, is a form of kitsch, but we must not let ourselves be blinded by its kitschiness and lose sight of the fact that these buildings, which were once homes, are now shops and restaurants. Any hope of recapturing the lively street life of the *lilong* is gone. The streets are lively, but not lived in; the poor are excluded (supposedly by security guards watching out for beggars) but in reality by the high prices. What made these buildings, and the alleyways between them, interesting is gone: the people who called them home. Cities are not buildings and streets, cities are people and their networks of interaction. It is not the buildings, no matter how superficially pretty they are, that are interesting, it is the way of life they engendered. Xintiandi, while a charming piece of urban regeneration, and a successful one, is preserving nothing more than a shell – an interesting and attractive one, but a shell nonetheless.

Tianzifang

Tianzifang is a bottom-up commercial redevelopment a few blocks southwest of Xintiandi. Also known as Laotianti (Old World), in clear reference to nearby Xintiandi, it is a nebulous redevelopment of *lilong*, warehouses, and former factories that begun between Sinan and Ruijin No. 2 Roads (just south of Jianguo Road Central) and has spread to adjoining areas as it grows in popularity. Consisting of a confusing



FIGURE 11 Xintiandi



FIGURE 12 Tianzifang

warren of twisting passageways, with buildings of different sizes and scale, and sudden changes in ground level, it gives the impression of being more natural than the more rigorously planned Xintiandi. Originally home to studios, galleries, boutiques, and bars, it rapidly became something of a tourist trap, although it does preserve a mix of commercial and residential life. Without the earlier Xintiandi, Tianzifang would never have happened, certainly not in the way it did. There had long been galleries and bookshops here, but they would have been unlikely to coalesce into this Xintiandi-like development had they not had such an example so close by. But it is also thanks to Xintiandi's influence that these long-established cultural outlets have steadily been overtaken by shops catering to a more generic tourist trade.

Jing'an villa

Jing'an Villa is one of the best preserved *lilong* in the city. It saw a brief but fascinating efflorescence of bottom-up informal commercial activity in recent years initiated by *haigui* ('sea turtles', or returning descendants of Shanghai emigrants). Ying Zhou sees this redevelopment, with its echoes of international trend quarters such as Berlin's Prenzlauerberg and New York's Williamsburg, as an interesting variant in the way creative linkages can be spatially manifested. In this case by utilizing the specific spatial characteristics of this particular *lilong* to facilitate entrepreneurial innovation that led to what she rather neatly calls 'gentrification with Chinese characteristics' (Zhou 2015). This she sees as a potentially viable alternative to the demolition-reconstruction cycle of urban redevelopment in Shanghai.

The *haigui* are what she calls 'localized cosmopolitans'. Their access to local culture helps them introduce international products and services while adapting them in situ. Their connections to transnational *and* local networks allows them to operate between the global and the local, and their small-scale creative enterprises had begun to transform Jing'an Villa in a way that was more flexible than by imposing heritage status. In other words, it was diversifying rather than homogenizing. *Haigui* know-how enabled them to cultivate the spatial qualities of the area in a way that seemed to be following on from the bottom-up development at Tianzifang.

Jing'an Villa was traditionally a middle-class *lilong* located between Nanjing and Weihai Roads. Zhou identifies the urban structure of the *lilong*, with its semi-permeable block hierarchy and fine-grained ownership patterns, as being well suited to the commercial realization of new consumption, as well as creating an urban value-chain of living and working that allows for encounters both local and global. What distinguished the area from the more usual processes of residents simply renting out ground-floor space for commercial use, is the clustering of transnational creative activities that this *lilong* attracted. Its cafés, boutiques, designer showrooms, and exhibition-cum-studio spaces all epitomized the lifestyle of these localized cosmopolitans who not only operated them, but who linked an international value chain to locally situated spaces and producers.

The informality of these commercial conversions was indicated by the fact that signage advertising the enterprises appeared only when the venues were open. Without knowing about them, passers-by could easily miss them, a fact that increased their allure, especially for those in search of interesting and authentic-seeming local colour. Visitors who managed to find the area usually had access to selected networks thanks to top-end



FIGURE 13 Jing'an Villa (Source: Li Lü)

design magazines, or who are part of a particular type of expatriate circle whose patronage of the area relished its 'under-the-radar' feel.

Zhou highlighted the *lilong*'s young entrepreneurs' concern over the danger of over-commercialization; her research indicated a ratio of 30:70 commercial to residential (in contrast to Tianzifang's 70:30), but even this ratio seems to have been too high for local residents who felt increasingly harassed by visitors (and who may have been jealous of being excluded from the profits generated by their activities). Whatever was the cause, this informal commercial activity has been shut down. The catalyst for this may have been the closing down of the adjacent Weihai 696 in 2010 which led to an influx of young designers into Jing'an Villa and may have been the tipping point for local residents.

However short-lived an experiment Jing'an Villa was, its combination of local agility and international perspective led to something quite interesting, even if only for a while. That skill-set is still there, especially among the *haigui*, so too are a number of potentially appropriate *lilong*, perhaps we may once again seen such a bottom-up flowering of informal commercial activity in Shanghai? And it may point the way to a more appropriate reuse for this threatened typology.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, developers now see the benefit of reusing *lilong*. Xintiandi is as popular as ever, while the trail it blazed enabled places like Tianzifang and Jianyeli to develop. These different approaches to urban rehabilitation are not really sustainable if we want to see the spirit of the place preserved. Jing'an Villa was an interesting (if short-lived) experiment. Whether it can be a viable alternative to Xintiandi, Tianzifang, or Jianyeli remains to be seen; we may hope so. One thing is certain, it is now increasingly unlikely that a developer would suggest knocking such a place down to make way for a shopping mall or high-rise apartment complex (at least we may hope so).

The main point is that it is not the *lilong* per se that we should be trying to preserve but the rich and vibrant use of space it engendered. Turning them into pretty outlets for international chains (while it does retain some of the buildings) does

nothing to preserve their street life (neither does turning them into homes for the rich, or preserving them as some sort of decorative museum pieces in a heritage enclave). Blind nostalgia for old architectural forms is not going to help these buildings adapt to life in the 21st century, and preserving a shell is missing the point of these buildings. If we are going to preserve anything at all it should be their spirit, then they may be safer for the future (as well as more interesting to visit). It is this we should be seeking to understand, so that urban designers can use lessons learnt from the *lilong* in the future.

Ironically, it seems as if capitalism might be pointing the way to a brighter future for the typology. This is appropriate in Shanghai because it was capitalism that allowed the *lilong* to develop in the first place. It is also ironic, however, because it is capitalism that has been threatening them since the 1990s.

No one redevelopment outlined above will point the way to a vibrant future for the *lilong*. Bottom-up informal commercial activity may seem a promising way of preserving them, but combining lessons from *all* these cases (including, perhaps, what *not to do*, in the case of Jianyeli) may suggest a better-balanced approach for preserving this fascinating, unique, and threatened typology.

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NOTES

1. For a detailed description and analysis of *lilong* see Bracken 2013.
2. For this paper, *lilong* denotes an alleyway-house compound.
3. All photos and drawings are by the author unless otherwise stated.
4. Figure recorded in conversation in 2006.

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