

Shanghai's Old Town

The Challenges of Urban Renewal and Strategies for the Protection of Built Heritage

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ABSTRACT

Shanghai's old town (*laochengxiang*) has every quality of a living historic district in the centre of a modern metropolis. Its archaic, small-grain and varied urban form is inhabited by a long-standing local community with strong familial connections to the city. But in the absence of effective conservation mechanisms, the old town's built environment and social fabric are in danger of disappearance, as large pieces of its territory are handed over to commercial developers. The fast pace of blanket modernisation exposes a glaring need for better frameworks of heritage protection. Focusing on the on-going urban renewal project of the Qiaojia Road area, this article illuminates the challenges of heritage management under the pressure of urban development and discusses strategies and attitudes necessary to safeguard Shanghai's historic urban landscape.

Keywords

Shanghai, modernisation, built heritage, preservation, redevelopment, historic urban landscape, architecture, urban vitality

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INTRODUCTION

The world's most admired historic towns and cities possess an organic quality—a wholeness, manifest in their overall form and every detail down to the last ornament.¹ These places are perceived as vibrant, living things, expressions and anchors of local cultural identity. Municipal governments usually recognise the unique value of historic towns and protect them from environmental attrition and the pressures of the free market. The former walled city of Shanghai (*laochengxiang*), which occupies two square kilometres in today's Huangpu District, has all the qualities of an important living historic district. Its archaic, small-grain and varied urban form is populated by a long-standing community with ancient familial connections to the site. But in the absence of effective conservation mechanisms, large pieces of the old town's territory have been handed over to commercial developers. As a result, the old town's urban environment and historic character are in danger of disappearance.

The old town of Shanghai has been the subject of numerous works on geography, history, architecture and culture,² but studies focusing on planning, managing and protecting its historic landscape are in short supply. There is a noticeable absence of critical dialogue on the long-term consequences of the rapid commercial redevelopment, with only a limited number of works studying the consequences of mass relocation of downtown residents to the suburbs and the challenges of recreating communities and rebuilding livelihoods.³ Noticeably absent from the academic discourse is any politically sensitive topic, such as the alliance of municipal authorities with national and transnational investment capital in their drive for the redevelopment of historic urban areas.

On the eve of the Chinese New Year, on January 31, 2019, the Huangpu District government announced the redevelopment (*gaijian*) plan for the area around Qiaojia Road, in the old town.⁴ The area included almost the entire old town's south-eastern quarter (Fig. 1), or 16% of its total area, covering 287,700 sq m and containing more than 30% of its extant historic architecture.⁵ The evacuation of the neighbourhood began in the spring of 2019 and accelerated in the second half of 2020. As in the past, the most frequently cited reason for the modernisation is the improvement of the living conditions of residents, particularly the sanitation problem. In the past, the modernization projects started with the obligatory relocation of the residents, followed by the expropriation and demolition of the buildings, and finished with the construction of large-scale residential and commercial properties. Although no concrete plans for the Qiaojia Road site were made public, in the past, the land cleared of historic housing ended up commercially redeveloped. This puts stress on the resident community, conflicts with the existing legal framework and challenges the municipal guidelines for the protection of architectural heritage. A deeper scrutiny of the modernization process of Qiaojia Road area helps articulate the tensions arising from the push for urban renewal, identify the most common mechanisms of heritage mismanagement and discuss potential solutions.



Fig. 1. Plan of Shanghai's old town, with Qiaoqia Road redevelopment zone highlighted (pink); other active redevelopment zones are in grey: Jinjiafang neighbourhood is on the left; Anren Street zone is on the right.

QIAOQIA ROAD: HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Qiaoqia Road, in the south-eastern quarter of Shanghai's old town, is about 530 meters long. Its trajectory follows the curvilinear route of Qiao Family Creek (Qiaoqiaobang), earlier called Xue Family Creek (Xueqiaobang), a natural waterway that meandered through Shanghai, passing through a culvert in the city wall next to the Little South Gate (Xiaonanmen) and connecting to the Huangpu River. As the oldest residential neighbourhood in central Shanghai, Qiaoqia Road is a palimpsest of various urban forms, from the 16th century to the present era, altogether containing more than 30% of the old town's surviving historic architecture.⁶ This density, variation and architectural richness of this area is partially due to the constraining role of the city wall, erected in 1553, which restricted Shanghai's urban development. The densely populated

eastern half of the walled city contained vital institutions and opulent residences and had convenient pedestrian and waterway connections to the river port. By the end of the 18th century, Shanghai had enough cosmopolitanism and complexity to be considered a city. The density of the intramural cityscape kept increasing, as large estates were divided among the new generations, changing hands and disappearing. Beyond the city wall, the riverside neighbourhood of Dongjiadu was developing, populated by the provincial immigrant shippers, port labourers and artisans. The new properties that emerged in their place were still spacious and luxurious by any standards, composed of multiple interconnected U-shaped courtyards. Scattered among the residences were private academies, temples, monasteries and charity institutions, many of which have partially survive in the Qiaojia Road area (Fig. 2, 3).

The establishment of the Republic in Beijing in 1912 prompted the modernisation of Shanghai's walled city, the dismantling of the old wall and the conversion of the inner city waterways into cobblestone-paved roads. Like elsewhere in Shanghai, complexes of terraced houses, known as *lilong*, emerged on Qiaojia Road in the 1920s. The bombardments at the onset of the Japanese military occupation in 1937 incurred less damage here than in other parts of the city, helping maintain most of the historic urban landscape into the 21st century.⁷ But as a result of overcrowding, unchecked augmentations and modifications, many aged buildings have been partially rebuilt or surrounded by new construction. Still, Qiaojia Road still has every parameter of a great street, as confirmed by a large volume of research, journalism and legislation devoted to it⁸. 'Great streets', as defined by Allan B. Jacobs (1995 and 2011), are those markedly superior in character or quality; they encourage socialisation and serve as forums for public expression; they have narrow sheltered passages protecting pedestrians from moving cars, small blocks that increase comfort and enhance variability, and architecturally rich buildings.⁹

A 2009 analysis of the urban form along Qiaojia Road, which focused on the area of 52,810 sq m, or one-fifth of the present-day redevelopment zone, found 15 buildings and architectural ensembles originating in the Ming era (1368–1644),¹⁰ including several multi-bay two-story residences, a single-story ancestral temple and other urban forms. There are 43 buildings and ensembles dating back to the Qing era (1644–1911), comprised mostly of one- and two-story wood-and-brick courtyard dwellings. There were also 63 *shikumen* and *lilong* type buildings—standalone or arranged in compounds—and another 44 residential and commercial buildings from the Republican era, built between 1911 and 1949.¹¹ Throughout the entire redevelopment zone, various historic artefacts and monuments are scattered: courtyard residences, lane compounds, row houses, inscribed boundary stones, groundwater wells, gates, pillars, plaques, pavements and mature trees. The largest and the most valuable landmark within the Qiaojia Road redevelopment circuit is Shuyinlou, or the Hermit's Library – a vast complex of wood-and-brick halls and towers from the Ming and Qing eras, arranged in courtyards and surrounded by a tall wall.¹² Listed as a Grade AAA national scenic landmark, Shuyinlou has thus far avoided invasive renovation or adaptation for heritage tourism. But as a private property it has been denied any national or international conservation funding. In the past decade the lack of intervention has accelerated its deterioration, leading to the rapid spread of decay, severe weathering of structural and decorative elements and the collapse of some buildings.



Fig. 2. Qiaojia Road, view west. On the right, Ming-era Qiao family's residence (Zuiletang) is surrounded on three sides by lilong complexes from the Republican era; Qing-era courtyard residences are seen in the distance.



Fig. 3. Eastern end of Qiaojia Road. Catalpa Garden mansion (1916) is in the centre; Qing-era garden pavilions behind; the lilong compound Qinshenfang is on the left; Qing-era residence Yijiatang is on the right.



Fig. 4. Color-coded map of Qiaojia Road, included in the 2005 heritage protection guidelines. Red indicates 'architecture to protect'; orange indicates 'historic architecture to preserve'; yellow indicates 'first-rate ordinary historic architecture'; brown indicates 'second-rate ordinary historic architecture'; light-purple is 'architecture due for demolition'; blue is 'other architecture'.

QIAOJIA ROAD: THE FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTION

When Qiaojia Road neighbourhood was set on a fast track of redevelopment, it was in violation of its status as a protected zone within broader municipal guidelines. A heritage preservation framework for the old town exists since November 2003, when the city government outlined twelve historic urban zones for architectural and environmental conservation.¹³ The entire old town (*laochengxiang*), contained within the circle of Renmin Road and Zhonghua Road, was designated as one of these zones. Additionally, in November 2005, the municipal government publicised heritage protection guidelines for the old town,¹⁴ accompanied by a detailed survey prepared by urban planning and architecture experts (Fig. 4). The survey classified the old town's architecture according to its age, value and utility. In the present-day Qiaojia Road redevelopment circuit, more than half the buildings were found to be historic, i.e. dating before 1949. Among them, four were classified as 'architecture to protect' (*baohu jianzhu*), such as the Shuyinlou complex, the late Ming-era ancestral hall of the Xu family, three Qing- and Republican-era buildings in the Catalpa Garden, and the late-Qing fire station watchtower. The next category, 'historic architecture to preserve' (*baoliu lishi jianzhu*), included 30 courtyard buildings and lane compounds. Ranking below it, the category named 'first-rate ordinary historic architecture' (*jiadeng yiban lishi jianzhu*) included 106 buildings and lane complexes in a good state of preservation. The 'second-rate ordinary historic architecture' (*yideng yiban lishi jianzhu*) category, included more than 540 buildings, ranging from courtyard residences to single-bay storefronts. The age, morphology and appearance of these structures were similar to the above categories, but the lower rating opened a possibility for the modification.¹⁵



Fig. 5. Sea Merchant's Guildhall in Dongjiadu, on a lot cleared of other historic housing. 2016.

The largest group within the Qiaojia Road redevelopment circuit, containing over 900 buildings, was named 'architecture due for demolition' (*yingdang chaichu jianzhu*). These were post-1949 homes, shops, service buildings, storefront extensions, canopies over the courtyards, external bathrooms, kitchens, sheds and storage rooms built outside and between pre-existing buildings. More than anything, this category reflected the overpopulation and the residents' attempts to modernise their dwellings and workplaces using minimal means. It was at the expense of these ad-hoc but vital additions that the density of the built environment was to be decreased. The final group, 'other architecture' (*qita jianzhu*) included 38 modern buildings, among which there were apartment houses, schools and covered markets.¹⁶

The 2005 heritage protection guidelines did not provide any enforcement mechanism, leaving their implementation at the discretion of individual developers. They neither prioritised the conservation of historic architecture and urban environment nor addressed the needs of the resident community. They did, however, assess the old town's territory from the perspective of expanding the automobile infrastructure and designating more land for the new construction. But they completely overlooked such concerns as social wellbeing, environmental sustainability and urban vitality. The latter notion, first discussed in Jacobs (1961)¹⁷, implies a continuous presence of pedestrian activity in an urban area throughout the day. Widely embraced by urban planners in the West, urban vitality is not taken seriously by Shanghai planners, although it is inherently present in Shanghai's old town and is synonymous with good health of the urban environment.

City streets exist not only to provide movement and access to property, but also to play symbolic, ceremonial, social and political roles. But Shanghai's planning approach reduces all street functions to the imperative of transportation, while prioritising automobile traffic over other means (pedestrian, electric bicycle, motorbike, public transit). This approach is known to transform vibrant and walkable historic streets into high-volume traffic channels hostile to pedestrians. In 2015, Ninghe Road, which intersected Qiaojia Road and housed an open-air wet market, was widened and opened to automobile traffic, disastrously for the neighbourhood. All the market stalls, kiosks and canopies were demolished, and Ninghe Road became a perpetually clogged traffic artery. Other streets in the area – Meijia Street, Xitangjia Street, South Guangqi Road – are scheduled to follow suit. The planned widening and extension of Penglai Road will intersect a dense residential neighbourhood and bring the automobile traffic to the gate of the Shuyinlou complex.

In the absence of any information about the future of the neighbourhood or a formal dialog with the government and developers, the public discussion about the transformation of the Qiaojia Road neighbourhood has been taking place at online forums. One of the suggestions discussed by the participants was whether the area might fall under the policy of 'keep the houses, don't keep the people' (*liu fang, bu liu ren*).¹⁸ But by the admission of the representative of the Municipal Congress Jiang Huayun, only 'some of the more valuable buildings might be considered for preservation, by means of moving them close together to form a contiguous landscape (*yi di bao hu*)'.¹⁹ Recent urban renewal projects, such as the adjacent Dongjiadu area in 2010–2013, demonstrate the developers' tendency to spare only the officially designated heritage architecture protected by the law. Qiaojia Road area has only four such protected structures. Shuyinlou (77 Tiandeng Lane) and the residence of Xu Guangqi (234–244 Qiaojia Road) are city-level protected cultural landmarks, while Catalpa Garden (113 Qiaojia Road) and Xiaonanmen watchtower (581 Zhonghua Road) are protected at the district level. The rest of the historic landscape is vulnerable in the face of the modernisation.

To understand what happens to the historic landscape when only select historic structures are preserved in a modernised urban context, it is enough to look at the neighbouring district of Dongjiadu. Prior to its redevelopment in 2010–2013, it was a living historic neighbourhood, similar in morphology and character to Qiaojia Road area, but with an added historical connection to the river port and the traditional shipping industry. By the turn of the 21st century, Dongjiadu still had a large number of well-maintained wood-and-brick residences, merchant guild buildings and *lilong* houses. A 2008–2013 topographical research identified more than 50 historic architectural ensembles with outstanding architectural features and in good condition.²⁰ Dongjiadu was never included in the twelve heritage preservation zones, and in the years 2010–2013 more than half of its territory, or 500,000 sq m of historic urban fabric, was demolished. The area was transformed into a rectilinear grid of wide streets lined with high-rise residential and office blocks, named the Dongjiadu Financial District. Only two historic buildings, officially designated city-level protected landmarks, remain in Dongjiadu: St. Xavier's Catholic Cathedral and Sea Merchants' Guildhall (Fig. 5). The outcome of the selective preservation in Dongjiadu is an incoherent urban environment devoid of beauty and cultural significance, unable to sustain a vibrant community.

REAL AND RHETORICAL PROBLEMS OF AGED HOUSING

The low status of built heritage is reflected in Shanghai's media discourse. Before the redevelopment, Qiaojia Road was often described as Shanghai's best-kept secret and a portal to the city's past. Multiple academic and journalistic investigations brought to light the architectural richness of the old town, its role as a retainer of the city's collective memory and its vulnerability in the face of modernisation. In 2017, Qiaojia Road's ambience, landmarks and celebrity anecdotes were featured in an international airline magazine. But more recently the focus on the old town has turned from positive to negative. After the announcement of the redevelopment plan in January 2019, Qiaojia Road area is invariably portrayed as a slum, which the residents are happy to leave behind. 'Goodbye toilet bucket; Qiaojia Road is undergoing renewal,'²¹ is a typical newspaper by-line. In July 2019, the Huangpu District governor Chao Kejian elaborated: 'After successfully expropriating 8,000 old households one year ahead of schedule, we will continue exerting ourselves to complete the expropriation of 12,000 households during the next year. This means eliminating 12,000 toilet buckets! Huangpu is the most important area in the city, and there are still 65,000 toilet buckets in use.'²²

The district's answer to the sanitation problem appears to be the blanket demolition of old housing and the transfer of the land for commercial redevelopment. The association of old housing with unsanitary conditions helps motivate the residents to move out. It is rarely discussed that if the majority of old town residences are state-owned subsidised public housing, the sanitation problem should have been addressed earlier. But the degradation and depreciation of old housing gives an advantage to developers, as it reduces the amount of compensation due to be paid to the residents. Years and decades can pass between the first official announcement of the scheduled modernisation and the distribution of the compensation.²³ During the wait, even the historically valuable, aesthetically attractive and formerly comfortable residences are no longer maintained and fall into an unliveable and dangerous state. The dilapidation of the old town presents a stark contrast with the other parts of the city, which have seen multiple improvements in the recent decades.

Poor living conditions ensure a large degree of popular support of the redevelopment. The news of upcoming demolition sends a signal to the residents of old buildings that after decades of neglect the authorities are finally concerned with their wellbeing. In Wechat groups and web forums, residents share their knowledge of evacuation schedules and compensation programs, trying to predict the outcomes of the relocation lottery. The authorities withhold vital information from the residents and frequently revise compensation formulas. As a result, in spite of the tenfold increase of the housing market prices since 2002, the compensation for expropriated housing per square meter has not even doubled.²⁴ Inadequate compensation pushes many residents to accept relocation to the discounted housing at the periphery of the urban area, with larger and more modern living spaces but poor transportation links. Recent research has found that such forced relocation fails to improve the wellbeing of urban residents²⁵. Migration to the urban edge has been associated with social isolation and economical setbacks, and the new high-rise neighbourhoods are not conducive to the tightly knit communal life and small-scale enterprise.

In Shanghai, urban development depends largely on the new construction, and the lion's share of the city's income is derived from land exploitation. In this situation, historic neighbourhoods are seen as an undesirable presence, gratuitously occupying downtown land and slowing down the city's growth. Individual historic buildings become candidates for preservation only when their decorative features can be exploited commercially. These properties tend to be voided of residents, gutted and substantially rebuilt to suit business uses. 'Upscale preservation' projects like the commercially successful Xintiandi (2001) have been criticised for simulating historic preservation, for monopolising the commons and for making urban housing unaffordable.²⁶ Adapting residential housing to commercial use has been found to dismantle long-time residential communities, infringe on individual private property rights, replace mixed use with single use, and promote income-based inequality²⁷. The new commodity housing is never affordable, and the options for low- and middle-income living in central Shanghai are further diminished, which undermines the people's trust in the local government²⁸.

The evacuation of the Qiaojia Road neighbourhood has been progressing quickly, with windows and doors of vacated houses boarded up, and the alleys and passages closed off. The Huangpu District governor Chao Kejian has repeatedly called to increase the speed of evacuation: 'Time is of utmost concern. After finishing the eastern block of Qiaojia Road, we will get to the west one, and then there is the north block to do.'²⁹ This exploitative pattern of urban renewal contradicts the official rhetoric emphasizing sustainable development. The blanket erasure of historical urban environment and communities precipitate a long-term cultural decline in Shanghai. Heritage mismanagement reflects poorly on the chances of the inclusion of Chinese urban sites into UNESCO Heritage lists, which are viewed nationally as a benchmark of international status and toward which the country's cultural agencies are oriented.³⁰ The reorientation of the municipal authorities' agenda toward a more conscientious management of built heritage could inform the strategies and attitudes necessary to safeguard Shanghai's historic urban landscape.

RESTORATION OF SHANGHAI'S OLD TOWN: ATTITUDES AND STRATEGIES

Urban prosperity does not require the demolition of aged buildings and the displacement of communities, as the European experience suggests, and in spite of the differences in political systems, Shanghai has multiple points of contact with European cities. Beyond its youthful, forward-looking image, it is a mature city, as evidenced by its decentralization and its multiple contiguous historic areas. The total area of Shanghai's twelve protected historic zones exceeds 27 sq. km, which is twice the size of the historic downtown of Rome. The old town – one of twelve historic zones, has the same size as the walled city of Lucca, Italy, or Rhodes, Greece, and it is twice as large as the Old Town of Jerusalem. Its heritage value and tourism potential are undeniable if one shakes off the pervasive spell of the media branding it a ghetto.³¹ The old town occupies a prominent place in Shanghainese cultural production and local identity. It could be a model site for a wide-ranging and inclusive restoration strategy, whose logic would derive from the character and the genealogy of the site and adhere to the spirit and the letter of the current preservation guidelines.



Fig. 6. Resident of the Qing-era garden pavilion, on the territory of the former Catalpa Garden, 2016.



Fig. 7. Street scene on South Guangqi Road, near the intersection with Qiaojia Road, in 2010, before its widening and opening for automobile traffic.

The historic old town could be central to Shanghai's future, similarly to Hong Kong's Pokfulam village. A settlement of 200 people originating as a late 19th-century squatters colony is made up of makeshift structures with corrugated tin roofs, but it is included on the World Monuments Watch (WMW) list alongside some 740 sites globally.³² In spite of the shortage of architectural landmarks, the attraction and strength of Pokfulam lie in the profuse and distinctive variation of forms within the same typology. Shanghai's old town, with its abundant antiquities and cohesive urban landscape, would make a strong candidate for the WMW list. Mature neighbourhoods have a special way of enriching the city, offering a long-term stable base for the community, fostering local entrepreneurialism and generating tourist interest. The old town has an additive, organically formed structure, which makes it a coherent and equilibrated townscape, where each small pattern reinforces the whole image.³³

What is needed is a set of integrated programs to address structural problems and implement long-term improvements in the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions. In recent decades, a number of European-Chinese collaborative projects have addressed historic towns in China and successfully reversed the physical decay, economic stagnation and loss of cultural identity while fostering cultural continuity, social interconnection and tourism.³⁴ Examples include the Zurich IRL-Institut's Shaxi Rehabilitation Project in Yunnan Province,³⁵ or the Sino-Norway cooperative Tang'an Dong Ethnic Eco-museum in Guizhou Province.³⁶ In Shanghai, a positive example is Xinchang water town, in Pudong New Area, which manages to balance tourist development with continued high liveability.³⁷ A recent study focused on Yingping District, Xiamen, proposed a typology- and morphology-based approach for the restoration of the historic downtown.³⁸ Inspired by the Italian practice of 'redevelopment by tradition',³⁹ the authors analysed existing urban morphology and identified integral elements in the urban fabric as the basis for a broader revival. For Xiamen, these elements were arched buildings, courtyard houses and so-called 'Western-style buildings'. For Shanghai's old town, these would be the lane compounds, courtyard complexes and low-rise commercial storefronts and the imprint of a network of old waterways. The quality of construction and the characteristics of individual buildings, clusters and passages could inform the strategies for intervention.

Shanghai old town's unique feature is the overlapping and mutual complementarity of architectural forms from different epochs: 20th-century *lilong* compounds, street-level shophouses from the 18th and 19th centuries, courtyard dwellings from the 16th–19th centuries, and various hybrid buildings. This layering can enrich and guide the restoration strategy. The areas where the most valuable and best-preserved landmarks concentrate can become showpiece passages and clusters, prioritised for conservation and renovation, eventually drawing the 'connective tissue' of interstitial buildings into the rejuvenation program. Elements of this process are outlined in Tongji University's graduate research papers^{40,41}, which define and discuss the creation of 'history corridors', 'public archives' and 'memory centres'. The rejuvenation of individual buildings and complexes, such as Shuyinlou, can recreate the success of its 'sibling' Tianyige library, Ningbo, where the original owners have remained custodians of the museum in their heirloom residence, or the Henghouci guildhall in Zigong, Sichuan Province, where commercial teahouses and antique stores operate in authentic historic spaces around the central courtyard.



Fig. 8. Artist holding her drawing of Qiaojia Road, showing boarded-up windows and doors in anticipation of the demolition. August 2020.

Urban vitality could be the central concept in long-term planning for Shanghai's old town. Urban vitality is present when a neighbourhood has pedestrian flows during the entire day, a large number of cultural events and celebrations over the year, an active street life, and when the place feels lively in general⁴². A crucial indicator of thriving cities, urban vitality is synonymous with good health of urban environment, but it arises only when the built environment has the capacity to boost lively social activities. As various researchers suggest, the presence of aged buildings is a prerequisite for fostering urban vitality.⁴³ Old urban cores in China's cities have been found to have high density of housing and workspace patterns, which promote sufficiently diverse conditions for urban vitality.⁴⁴ Aged housing naturally supports urban vitality, whereas large-scale single-function housing projects fail to create the necessary conditions, becoming zones of low pedestrian intensity and mono-function. Recent studies have found urban vitality declining in Shanghai⁴⁵. Zones with the highest urban vitality were found clustered in the Huangpu, Jing'an and Xuhui Districts, where most of Shanghai's historic housing is located, underscoring the crucial importance of historic housing. By contrast, the modernized Dongjiadu area received a very low urban vitality score in spite of the high density of housing in new apartment blocks.

Studies of Shanghai's characteristic low-rise terraced housing, or *lilong*, confirm that it fulfils the definition of "good" urban form that fosters urban vitality⁴⁶. *Lilong* houses have been on the front line of historic habitat studies and renovation experiments.⁴⁷ Aged between 80

and 100 years old, they still have a cachet of structural durability and social relevance. They readily lend themselves to modernisation while maintaining such positive features as high population density, neighbourliness, safety, familial connectedness, walkability, conditions for small-scale enterprise and local infrastructure. Maintaining the existing community has been an important aspect of all successful renovations in the old town. An experimental rehabilitation project in the lane compound at 252 Penglai Road, carried out in 1991–1993, was an unqualified success for the urban environment. According to the survey accompanying the project, when given a free choice, 19 out of 21 families chose to stay in the renovated apartments.⁴⁸ The project proved that a combination of socialist and market-driven approaches is possible and economically viable.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

Historic towns are resilient but fragile. Changes in population, occupational patterns, lifestyle and technology have made historic neighbourhoods appear inefficient, outmoded and expendable. But old stones are catalysts for thoughts and feelings, and there is a very real emptiness in streets where they are missing. New projects often fail to transition from property developments to neighbourhoods, because magic and neighbourliness cannot be conjured by a plan. 'Great streets' grow slowly, from the accretion of structures manipulated over time by the people who have lived in the same place for multiple generations; top-down urban renewal projects interfere with this delicate process. Globally, many historic cities have been left scarred, when their authorities have been derelict in their custodianship of heritage. On the paper, Shanghai municipal government is committed to the long-term protection of built heritage. Shanghai Master Plan 2017–2035, published in 2018, includes the Old City as one of the 'historic cultural and scenic areas' and envisions the creation of new historical and cultural conservation mechanisms⁵⁰. Putting this commitment into practice would require a substantial revision of the present-day pattern of modernisation of historic districts.

'Any great city needs rich history to support it, including material remains and collective memories of different eras,' stated Tongji University's Li Yingchun at the closing session of a month-long exhibit of documents, artefacts and artworks dedicated to Jinjiafang, in October 2018.⁵¹ Jinjiafang was yet another 'great street' in the low-rise historic neighbourhood known as Laoximen, whose demolition was announced in 2007 and began ten years later. Another enclave of historic urban fabric, wedged between Fangbang and Chenxiangge Roads, was cleared away in 2019, as eviction and expropriation were commencing in the historic neighbourhood of Anren Street (Fig. 1).⁵² The erasure of Shanghai's built heritage is both radical and accelerating. Residents and heritage experts standing in opposition have no shortage of expertise, goodwill and human resource, but there is a glaring need for the official action toward sustainable planning and better heritage management. As it stands, Shanghai's old city is set to disappear within a decade.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR(S)

Katya Knyazeva, from Novosibirsk, Russia, is a historian and a journalist with a focus on urban form, heritage preservation and the Russian diaspora in Shanghai. She is the author of the two-volume history and photographic atlas *Shanghai Old Town. Topography of a Phantom City* (Suzhou Creek Press, 2015 and 2018). Her articles on history and architecture appear in international media and her blog <http://avezink.livejournal.com>. Her scholarly writing can be found in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society China*, *Global History*, and *Built Heritage*. Knyazeva received her second Master's degree from Bologna University and is presently a Research Fellow at the University of Eastern Piedmont, Italy.

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IMAGE SOURCES

Fig. 1, 5, 6, 7 Katya Knyazeva.

Fig. 2, 3 Courtesy of Lu Weiqun, 2020.

Fig. 4 Government of Shanghai, *Shanghai laochengxiang lishi wenhua fengmaoqu baohu guihua*, 2005

Fig. 8 Courtesy of Lily Ng, 2020.

ENDNOTES

1. Alexander, *A New Theory*, 2.
2. He, *Laochengxiang wanqing*; Xu and Zu, *Laochengxiang: Shanghai chengshizhi gen*; Zhu, *Shanghaishi yange dili*; Su, *Shanghai chengqushi*; Knyazeva and Sinykin, *Shanghai Old Town*; Zhu, "Qiaojia Road in the old city area"; Zhang, *Old City*; among others.
3. Among the notable works are Shao, *Shanghai Gone*, and Sommers, "A Tragedy of the Commons".
4. Government of Huangpu District, *Huangpuqu renmin zhengfu*.
5. This calculation refers to the square area of three redevelopment zones around Qiaojia Road (Qiaodong, Qiaoxi and Qiaobei), outlined by East Fuxing Road, Xundao Street, Zhonghua Road, Yujia Lane, South Guangqi Road, Huangjia Road, Ninghe Road, Yeshiyuan Lane, South Henan Road, Nanzhangjia Lane and Wangyun Road.
6. Calculation based on Baidu, *Shanghai laochengxiang lishi wenhua fengmaoqu baohu guihua*.
7. Based on Department of Geography, *Untitled aerial map*.
8. The most recent, and possibly the last, is Ni, *Qiaojialude gushi* (2020).
9. Jacobs, *Great Streets*, 8–11; Jacobs, *The Good City*, 8–9.
10. Fu, *Shanghaishi qiaojialu*.
11. Based on Fu, *Shanghaishi qiaojialu* and Department of Geography, *Untitled aerial map*.
12. Wei, *Shuyinlou jianzhu yanjiu*.
13. Government of Shanghai, *Shanghaishi 12 ge lishi wenhua fengmao baohuqu*.
14. Government of Shanghai, *Shanghai laochengxiang lishi wenhua fengmaoqu baohu guihua*.
15. Ibid.
16. Survey details were absent for certain zones, such as the block outlined by Penglai, Wangyun and Henan Roads, which was designated as land under construction, in anticipation of the continued expansion of Shilin Huayuan multistorey residential complex.
17. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.
18. https://www.libaclub.com/t_7308_10523133_9.htm
19. He Yajun, *Huangpuqu qiaojialu dikuai*.
20. The findings were included in Knyazeva and Sinykin, *Shanghai Old Town, Volume One*.
21. Pengpai Xinwen, *Gaobie shoulin matong*.
22. Huaxiazi FM, *Shanghai gequ qidong*.
23. Government of Huangpu District, *Shanghai shi huangpu qu renmin zhengfu fangwu zhangshou jue ding*.
24. Government of China, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guowuyuan ling di 590 hao*.
25. Day, "Effects of Involuntary Residential Relocation".
26. Laurans, "Shanghai: Modern conveniences".
27. Shao, *Shanghai Gone*.
28. Shih, "The Evolving Law of Disputed Relocation".
29. Sina.com. *Huangpuqu tiqian wancheng 8000 hu*.
30. Bandarin and van Oers, *The Urban Heritage Landscape*.
31. Yang, "Households sign to relocate"; Wang Residents in Qiaojia Road".

32. World Monument Fund, "Pokfulam Village".
33. Alexander, *A Pattern Language*.
34. Galdini, *Urban Regeneration Process*.
35. Feiner et al, *Sustainable Rural Development*.
36. Sun et al, *Terraced Society*.
37. Zeng and Chen, *Exploration of the Protective Development Model*.
38. Xie, *Learning from Italian Typology*.
39. Kupka, *Italy: Redevelopment by Tradition*.
40. Fu, *Shanghaishi Qiaojialu*.
41. Odgers, "Scenes from the Space of Flows".
42. Montgomery, *Making a City*.
43. Lynch, *Good City Form*; Montgomery, *Making a City*; Ravenscroft, "The Vitality and Viability"; Zarin, "Physical and Social Aspects"; Wu et al., "Urban Form Breeds Neighborhood Vibrancy"; and others.
44. Yue et al., "Identifying urban vitality".
45. Yue et al., "Spatial Explicit Assessment of Urban Vitality".
46. Arkaraprasertkul, "Towards modern urban housing".
47. Arkaraprasertkul, "Towards modern urban housing"; Jiang, "Intention to move in renovated historical blocks"; and other works.
48. Morris, "Community or Commodity", 91-92.
49. Liang, *Remaking China's Great Cities*, 171-172.
50. Government of Shanghai, *Shanghai Master Plan 2017-1935*.
51. Xiao Nan, "Li Yingchun".
52. Government of Huangpu District, *Huangpuqu renmin zhengfu guangyu tongyi huangpuqu Fuyou dikuai jiu Chengqu*.