

# The Death and Life of Shanghai’s Alleyway Houses: Re-thinking Community and Historic Preservation

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## INTRODUCTION: SHANGHAI’S TRADITIONAL ALLEYWAY HOUSE

In the century following China’s involuntary opening up as a treaty port to foreign powers following its defeat in the first Opium War (1839-1842), Shanghai, along with Hong Kong, Macao, and a few other of China’s coastal cities, shared a similar quasi-colonial history. Although Macao’s cultural interaction with westerners predated the rest by three centuries with the establishment of the Portuguese trade base in settlements in the mid-1550s, it was Shanghai that became known as the ‘Paris of the East’, flourishing as an industrial engine serving the colonial powers, as well as for its leisure businesses. The similarity among these quasi-colonial cities is the ubiquitous presence of western-styled (often

Figure 1: *Lilong* birdseye: A bird’s eye view of new-style lilong housing in Weihai Fang, a compound located along the key shopping artery of Weihai Road. Unlike the British row houses whose the frontage of the house faces each other to share access way, the frontage of the lilong faced only the south, where the natural exposure to the sun could be maximized in order to accommodate the local residents’ need for *fengshui*. Hence, the frontage of the row, then, had to face the back to the previous row. This blurred the line between the different functions of space, as the usage of the front (entrance) was different from the back (e.g., cooking and washing). Besides, since this orientation practically removed the sense of being front or back, it had brought a new meaning of public space unique to Shanghai as a whole. All photos and captions by Sue Anne Tay.

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referred to colloquially as ‘colonial’) urban planning and architecture that dominates the city landscapes, and the co-existence of Westerners and predominantly ethnic Chinese residents. Old photographs, drawings, paintings, and numerous memoirs of western visitors show the hybrid urban characteristics of ‘east meets west’. With different economic trajectories, however, the processes of urban change in the two cities diverged significantly. Shanghai was a city that would soon re-emerge as a metropolis and grow into a megalopolis and global city on an unprecedented scale, especially during the two decades following the economic reform and opening up (*gaige kaifang*) between the early 1980s and the early 2000s. Today, Shanghai is China’s largest city with its 24 million residents and counting. Dominated by skyscrapers, the city’s skyline is a pre-eminent symbol of modernity.<sup>4</sup>

Since the first Opium War, Shanghai has been one of the most convenient points of access for foreign goods, and a site of export of China’s products. The British were the first to arrive in Shanghai in the mid-1840s, and, through Western-style urban planning, created a well-functioning city to accommodate the treaty port’s commercial activities. By way of the then newly-created ‘Land Regulations of 1845’, the British imposed new comprehensive planning policies upon the hitherto organically grown, medium-sized market town.<sup>5</sup> Due to Shanghai’s flat geography, a grid structure was conveniently imposed which became the basis of land division and property investment in the bounded territory called the International Settlement. Both

Figure 2: Cramped homes kitchens: An old resident cooks in a make-shift kitchen placed in the middle of a public corridor of an old apartment located blocks from Shanghai’s Bund. The building was a former office and warehouse operated by the British in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Shanghai was divided into foreign and local concessions.



foreign industries and a local political uprising were the push forces, encouraging rural Chinese to migrate to the concession areas. Local labourers were hired to work in this bounded territory at a low cost, and the new form of housing introduced to accommodate the surge of migrant inflows and overcrowding were condensed replicas of traditional British row houses—a series of short-width houses joined by common sidewalls called the *lilong*. Between the row houses were small lanes providing access to each unit. There were no open spaces buffering these lanes, which automatically served as spaces for cooking, communal meetings, doing laundry, and so on. The name ‘lilong’ was used to describe the layout of the row houses—*li* means neighbourhood and *long* means lanes.<sup>6</sup> With the success of the first few units, the *lilong* neighbourhoods became the dominant form of housing in the city of Shanghai by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and were also later adopted as a housing practice in the French Concession, as well as in other parts of the International Settlement. At the peak of its commercial boom in the 1930s, there were more than 200,000 units of *lilong* houses in the city of Shanghai—which, according to the historian Hanchao Lu, comprised around three-fourths of the housing within the city, in which approximately eighty percent of the citizens resided.<sup>7</sup> These units housed around three million people. It was not until the early 2000s, about twenty years after the economic reform that brought about rapid change in China’s economy, that a greater proportion of people in Shanghai were living in buildings other than the *lilong* houses, namely high and medium-rise apartments.

After the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) declared its victory over the Nationalist Party in 1949, the entire *lilong* housing stock was confiscated and re-distributed among the local residents and workers of varying political and income classes who were assigned into a single unit. These residents and workers would live there until the neighbourhoods were torn down in the decades to come.<sup>8</sup> The 200,000 *lilong* units were just adequate for three million residents in the 1930s, and were unable to accommodate eleven million residents during the initial stage of the experimental opening up and reform era of the early 1980s. The local government turned to the market to unburden itself of the public service of housing maintenance by offering private ownership to the original residents at a low cost, and to build more housing for the new



Figure 3: Alleys of a *shikumen* (the most popular style of the *lilong* houses) compound in Siwen Lane, one of Shanghai’s largest lane neighbourhoods housing at its height, 700 families. Located in the prime downtown area of Jing’An district, the compound has since been slowly demolished to make way for a museum and new residential and corporate buildings.

residents<sup>9</sup>. Thousands of *lilong* neighbourhoods, which by then were deteriorating from overcrowding and degenerating facilities, were removed during this period to make way for higher-density housing options, such as the mid-rise walk-ups and high-rise apartments we see in Shanghai today. According to the Cultural Heritage Protection Department of the Shanghai Municipality Administration of Cultural Heritage,<sup>10</sup> there are less than 100 *lilong* neighbourhoods left in the city, compared to 150 just five years ago.

HOUSING AND HERITAGE

One of the most urgent contemporary problems in cities occurs when the need to preserve monuments of the past clashes with the need to house large numbers of people.<sup>11</sup> As Shanghai focuses on developing its service economy to bolster its global city status, it must build housing for the new workers, from low-income migrant workers, to blue-collar and white-collar skilled

workers, and foreign workers. Shanghai today is the largest city by population in the world, and has been growing at an exceptionally fast rate of about 10% annually since the late 1980s.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, city officials are growing increasingly aware of the brand value in preserving the city’s heritage buildings. In cities that have achieved a global status, such as New York, London, Paris, Tokyo (and perhaps also Hong Kong), there is a dynamic co-existence between economic modernity and state-of-the-art conservation of the remnants of the past. An obvious question arises: what is the use of historic buildings in the era of economic modernity? Responses to this dilemma have varied across the globe. Some have attempted experimental schemes for engaging local populations in historic conservation and site management. Others have simply pushed for mass evictions, often accompanied by police or gang brutality, ‘legitimised’ in the name of a weakly defined ‘common good,’ but practically oriented toward enriching real estate developers and local politicians.<sup>13</sup>

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In arguably the most important doctrine of urbanism in the last century, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*,<sup>14</sup> the late urbanist Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) attacks modern architecture, namely high-rise buildings and large-scale urban planning, for ignoring existing social conditions, advocating instead for the status quo of small-scaled and dense urban neighbourhoods that better provide the residents with a sense of community, security and sustainable form of economy built on social capital. Jacobs is the most important critic of the so-called ‘urban renewal’ regime that she claims renews nothing except the pay checks of the rich, responsible for bulldozing old neighbourhood buildings in place of tall high-rise buildings. She points out that it not only segregates residents from each other, thus diminishing social capital, but also destroys street life. Jacobs was keenly interested in the process by which over time people build up a sense of collective communal responsibility for the architecture, so that it comes to mean more than just physical accommodation, but also has socio-sentimental significance. Jacob’s position therefore, is always grounded in her belief that any large-scale physical intervention program should be inspected scrupulously before official permission to proceed is granted. Hewing to this sensibility, she advocates small streets, shops, and local community spaces. For her, all of these are fundamental to people’s ‘social capital’, that is collective benefits derived from the cooperation between individuals in the community.<sup>15</sup> Jacobs was also a leading activist, fighting for the rights of ordinary citizens. Her championing of the underprivileged remains widely accepted and admired, and her role as an activist accounted for her lack of interest in any conversation with the pro-growth planners.

Jacobs’ portrayal of her neighbourhood, Greenwich Village in the lower west side of Manhattan in the 1960s, emphasised the positive attributes of life in a low-rise organically developed neighbourhood, especially the tightly-knit social relations. As the economist Edward Glaeser points out, however, Jacobs was insistent on preserving the neighbourhood to ‘look and feel’ the way it had been without any regard for changes in the residents’ lifestyle, let alone the on-going demographic flux wrought by the trajectory of housing market and the wider economy.<sup>16</sup> There is no doubt that Jane Jacobs’ ideas were brilliant, and she was right to offer a frank critique of capital-led modern architecture and planning. She believed that any massive physical

intervention (i.e., large scale urban planning) created the problem of housing unaffordability, leading to segregation and, ultimately, social problems. However, by advocating a strict adherence to the status quo, in her hope of maintaining the sense of community, Jacobs precluded the natural demographic cycles and evolving needs of a community. Demographically speaking, residents move in and out; family numbers naturally increase or decrease with each birth or death; and people move around as their needs and lifestyles change. All of these are individual factors that, over time, collectively alter the structure of the neighbourhood’s population. In a similar way, buildings, edifices, and structures are built to last for a certain period of time, depending on the materials, construction technology, maintenance, and so on. Often, removing old, rundown, energy-inefficient and spatially inefficient buildings is more financially feasible, and more physically beneficial to the residents than keeping them, or trying to refurbish them to look as if nothing has changed. By advocating sentimentalism for a traditional lifestyle, Jacobs overlooked the fact that to resist change entirely is inimical to the natural and desirable development of a city. Glaeser disputes Jacobs at the very heart of her argument—economics:

Jacobs thought that preserving older, shorter structures would somehow keep prices affordable for budding entrepreneurs. *That’s not how supply and demand works*. Preserving an older one-story building instead of replacing it with a forty-story building does not preserve affordability. Indeed, opposing new building is the surest way to make a popular area unaffordable. An increase in the supply of houses, or anything else, almost always drives prices down, while restricting the supply of real estate keeps prices high.<sup>17</sup>

This was precisely the reason why Greenwich Village, whose local municipality has continued to adhere strictly to Jacobs’ ideas (to the point that they even named a street after her), is now one of Manhattan’s most expensive real estate markets.<sup>18</sup> Contrary to what she had envisioned, the process of upper-middle class gentrification of the Village and its surrounding areas over the last three decades has created the least diversified neighbourhood in the entire City of New York. Is this what Jane Jacobs would have wanted?

Romanticisation is an issue even for architects and planners of public or community projects.<sup>19</sup> In architecture, selected memories of places serve both as

methodological characterisations, from which architects and planners seek to find similar qualities from places they study, and as models which they want their designs to follow. In other words, for generations of architects and planners reading Jacobs’ writings, it is almost a moral obligation to begin a design project by looking at the community from a very specific sociological angle—the Jacobs’ angle. Because her writings are influential, architects and planners would deliberately seek the characteristics she describes, and then begin the design and planning process from there. Hence, it seems to be that what is important for architects and planners are the ‘impressions’ of a place that they can take as a point of departure, without asking how Jane Jacobs herself arrived at her particular beliefs. Anyone with some knowledge of social studies can easily point out that her portrayal of her relationship with the site and her informants leaves out the sense of time. Greenwich Village in the 1960s is different from the Greenwich Village of today.

As we will outline in this essay, like Greenwich Village, the traditional Shanghainese alleyway houses of today are very different from what they were like a century ago, not only in terms of their contemporary usage, but also the population residing within them. This is despite the fact that there has been no shortage of literature, newspapers, magazines, exhibitions, and reminiscing about the romantic past of these alleyway houses. As foreign researchers in Shanghai, both of us have seen the media coverage, as well as brochures and pamphlets advertising ‘traditional alleyway house tours’ on a regular basis. In fact, Shanghai’s tourism authority has created a pamphlet with the title ‘Tour of *Shikumen* [a type of *lilong*] Lanes: Beautiful China—Classic Shanghai’ in multiple languages for tourists visiting the city, providing information on four traditional Shanghainese neighbourhoods. The pamphlets detail their historic glory, such as when they were built and their original function, architectural style, and, most notably, ‘traces of celebrity’—famous individuals of Shanghai who once resided there in the city’s 1930s heyday. It seems to be the case that presenting artefacts of history is also a form of business, catering especially to foreign visitors and tourists. So, how should we understand the situation, and what should we do about this? In this article, we reject outright this so-called ‘Jacobsian romanticisation’ of an old neighbourhood, and instead advocate a middle way between Jacobs’ and Glaeser’s doctrines.

In Shanghai, the primary case study of our ethnographic research, we have found that many preservationists are following Jacobs in pursuing the regime of historic preservation in a similar way. For example, the preservation of Jing’An District in central Shanghai (once the limelight area of the former International Settlement) is only concerned with the maintenance of the preserved buildings’ exteriors, but not the interiors where the livability of the city’s residents could be observed and *measured*. When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) troops marched into Shanghai to take over the city from the government of the Republic of China ruled by the Nationalist Party or the Guomindang (GMD) in 1949, most of the assets that once belonged to the upper-middleclass, elites, and foreigners, were confiscated and redistributed to the workers who followed the CCP doctrine. Some of these confiscated properties were grandiose villas, sophisticated houses, and beautifully decorated edifices—all testimony to the presence of the highest form of capitalism in 1930s and 40s Shanghai. Since the number of workers who needed houses exceeded the available slots, three to six workers’ families (approximately ten to twenty members) then had to share a house that was once designed for a single family of three or four, over the next three decades until the end of the high communist era in 1978 and the beginning of the economic reform and opening up.<sup>21</sup>

PRESERVATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

During the Communist period before reform and opening up (1949-1978), to accommodate the large-scale redistribution of residents and housing, interior rooms were divided and sub-divided as families grew over the decades, to the point that the square footage per person had diminished to barely legal limits. With scarce housing resources, intensive use of existing buildings exacerbated the deterioration of the buildings. They included informal structures such as cooking stations or sheds that were added to the building by residents pressed for more working space, without any concern (nor technical knowledge) of the building’s structural integrity, let alone concern for stylistic and aesthetic uniformity. The combined changes also undermine fire safety. Additionally, there are multiple problems as a result of the lack of regular maintenance: rainwater leaks through the roof and wall; careless wiring and punctured



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walls to make way for electrical and telephone cables, and deteriorating wooden floors and structures, to name a few. They all contributed to shortening building lifespans at a hyperbolic speed. Many of these buildings are no longer structurally safe, nor sufficiently hygienic to serve as adequate accommodation for most residents.

Thankfully, the urban development process in Shanghai has slowed down during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, owing to the combined efforts of local Shanghainese architectural preservationists who have made their voice heard by the municipal government.<sup>22</sup> These preservationists have demanded that a selected number of edifices and neighbourhoods should be kept intact to prevent Shanghai from turning into another generic city with no historical significance, let alone unique urban characteristics. As mentioned earlier, the preservation program is only concerned with the maintenance of the façade, with only nominal concern for the condition of the interior. In many cases, we have found that the residential advocates support any historic preservation but do not necessarily live in the houses because of their dilapidated interiors, refurbishment of which falls outside the remit of the historic preservation

program. Instead, they rent their rooms to outside tenants, who would then renovate (though often just re-decorate) the apartment to fit the tenants' needs (or taste), and once the lease is over, the renovated room would then return to being as the asset of the original resident. This strategy may sound harmless on the surface, but if we look more carefully, it leads to a voluntary form of gentrification that maintains no sense of historic underpinning, let alone a sense of community belonging. In other words, a visitor may encounter a situation in which he or she is in a centrally located alleyway house neighbourhood, whose occupants are mainly expatriates and non-locals. The visitor may mistake this particular neighbourhood for an example of traditional Shanghainese life, but the sense of history no longer exists, as there is no one to educate that visitor on the historical significance of the place. In Shanghai, where income disparity is wide, generally it is only expatriates or the upper middleclass wishing to claim a sense of 'cultural capital'<sup>23</sup> who can afford to live in a heritage structure. Frequently, they cosmetically redecorate the houses in a manner that attempts to capture their romanticised imaginings of erstwhile Shanghainese lane life.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 4: *Shikumen* alley gossip: Residents gossip in the *shikumen* lanes of Siwen Lane compound, a key artery of community interaction and public household activity.



The original residents, on the other hand, have gradually given up their rights to be in the city in order to receive rent from these tenants. Having weighed the pros and cons, the residents see giving up their space for the privileged classes as a pragmatic way to sustain their life. This affects the whole sense of urbanity, as the city becomes more and more internationalised without any true sense of belonging to hold on to. If the central core of Shanghai, where sophisticated heritage edifices stand, is occupied only by expatriates and wealthy Chinese, what is the point then of being there? Many criticise the 'Disney Land' approach to preservation simply because it only preserves, in some extreme cases recreating the architectural façade, but not the social structure. We know that Disney Land is artificially created for entertainment. Most people who go to a renovated alleyway neighbourhood do not know about the history of the place apart from the apparent fact that they 'look old and different' from the high-rise buildings around it. In their defence, however, some visitors may not appreciate how the original residents really look—for instance, some elderly wandering in their pyjamas<sup>25</sup>—and may find both the presence and behaviour of the expats more agreeable as inhabitants. To achieve the organic approach—as opposed to the Disney Land approach—we believe that the new and the old can co-exist. The original residents are also happy to see the city grow and develop, and they want to be a part of it despite their age. So it is unfair to think that because they are old and likely poor, they shouldn't be living in the city centre. In fact, because of their long history with their neighbourhood, they care the most for the place. Going back to what Jane Jacobs used to say, the sense of belonging 'from within' is precisely what creates the sense of safety and community—not the security cameras and guides in pretentiously odd-looking uniforms hired to symbolise, in the most superficial way, some sense of history.

What we are seeing here, perhaps, is also a response to the solitary individualism brought about by the emergence of urbanism as a way of life.<sup>26</sup> This response is a desire to find community in the romanticisation of lane life. As the writer and urbanist Charles Montgomery reminds us, in the past organically grown cities had a different function. Public space drew people together to interact, transact business, to meet old friends and make new ones, and to learn from one another and from the surrounding built environment.<sup>27</sup> This was the essential function of an

organic city. Today, according to Montgomery, 'modern cities and affluent economies have created a particular kind of social deficit'.<sup>28</sup> Technology has privatised many of the iterative performances of daily life.<sup>29</sup> With a smartphone, and a computer, one can meet friends online, watch movies at home, find love online, and exchange goods and services, so that the humble street is no longer the theatre of the city.<sup>30</sup> Yet, research consistently reiterates an essential human need to be physically in the presence of other people. In his many observations of people's behaviour in public space, the urbanist Jan Gehl found that people congregated not around things, but around other people. 'What is most attractive, what attracts people to stop and linger and look, will invariably be other people. Activity in human life is the greatest attraction in cities'.<sup>31</sup> Historic laneways live through the interactions of their residents, the people who embody the stories of their district and their city. Their presence and history cannot be replaced by newly polished facades and kitsch advertising campaigns which ironically romanticise a past rendered all but sterile by forcing out its most essential ingredient—the people who embody the history of the laneway houses themselves.

## PRACTICAL STRATEGIES: AFFORDABILITY, DIVERSITY, AND LIVELIHOOD

So, in this essay, we propose a practical strategy by which both heritage and livelihood can co-exist—the middle way referred to earlier. Shanghai has many heritage buildings that could be put into better use. The prevailing trend to date has been to turn them into luxury retail shops to make up for the loss of profit should the building be torn down and replaced instead by high-rise buildings. In Shanghai, the high-end retail district known as Xintiandi (lit. 'The New Heaven and Earth') is the epitome of this trend. Once a traditional *lilong* neighbourhood in the former French Concession, the architect of the project envisioned the crisscrossing alleyways in the same fashion of the mountainous alleyways of Siena, when he was planning the revamping process. Eventually, through what the architect himself calls 'adaptive reuse,' the result is a hyper-luxury low-rise retail compound that is both nostalgic to the local residents, and unique to visitors in a city where a modern vision of high-rise buildings has dominated its urban redevelopment for decades.<sup>32</sup>



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This approach, while refreshing and in some ways protective of the city's history, is problematic on many levels. First, the project only serves select groups of people, namely customers for high-end shops who can afford to buy brand name products, furthering the segregation between the upper middle class and the rest. It may be true that Xintiandi also attracts mass domestic tourists who, despite being unable to afford the products sold there at premium prices, can nevertheless enjoy the atmosphere. Yet aspirational tourism does not equate to the sense of belonging and community. While in theory the urban centre belongs to everyone, a project like Xintiandi encourages spatial segregation by killing affordability and scouring the area of the original community to be replaced by high-end retail and dining. Those who can afford to shop and/or eat here are also an itinerant group with no emotional investment in the area. Second, by way of what economists would call the 'network effect,' the popularity of an urban renewal project such as Xintiandi gives the impression to both the developers and the visitors alike that this is the 'only way' to revitalise traditional alleyway house neighbourhoods. In recent years, retail compounds such as Xintiandi have mushroomed all over Shanghai, as well as other parts of China, hoping to replicate the success of the heritage industry—or 'tradition-for-sale tourism', another epithet by which it is known. As recent studies show, the popularity of Xintiandi is partly due to its newness and uniqueness, but once replicas of it are widespread, the excitement seems to dissipate. As a consequence, many projects following the Xintiandi model have been facing economic difficulties. The re-financing process often involves inviting even more expensive retail businesses to open, therefore perpetuating further the impression, or indeed the reality, that this particular form of heritage tourism is reserved only for the upper middle class who could afford it.

As the use of heritage structures for high-end shopping is in decline, there is growing interest in local industry focussed on the experience of quotidian Shanghaiese life. For instance, the recent success stories of a handful of creative zones and neighbourhoods originate from the ways in which low-budget artists and creative entrepreneurs themselves make use of traditional alleyway houses.<sup>33</sup> The attraction of these zones and neighbourhoods, as we have observed, is rooted in the experience of actual everyday life, and the anti-corporatism sentiment associated with them. In a specific

*lilong* neighbourhood in central Shanghai where we have been conducting research,<sup>34</sup> most customers of small businesses there said that they prefer this neighbourhood to a reconstructed compound such as Xintiandi because it is not only more affordable, but also, in a broader sense, 'more real.' This neighbourhood has been undergoing a gradual diversification process thanks to its popularity. As word gets out (with the help of the internet), more and more creative entrepreneurs want to rent spaces in the neighbourhood. More and more original tenants are willing to sublet their rooms. As has been commonly expressed by the customers and the entrepreneurs alike, the uniqueness of a creative industry compound lies in the symbiosis between the private and the commercial residents. The particular 'architectural uniqueness' of the old buildings appeals more to renters and customers from outside than to the original residents. The notion of heritage is both a selling point of an almost dilapidated structure, but also the structural tie between the original residents and the renters since both parties are benefitting from it. Without intervention by the local government or real estate developers, residents in this case are the key actors in the active urban process resulting in both a change in demographic diversity as well as the creative use of heritage buildings. Although this neighbourhood may, on the surface, appear similar to Xintiandi as they both rely on the appeal of 'heritage architecture' to attract customers, the differences between the two places are twofold: first, the residents are not moving out and are remaining part of the lane life; and second, precisely because of their presence, the customers do not feel as though they are in another Disneyfied so-called adaptive architecture complex.

Despite our critique of Jacobs' romanticisation in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, here we turn again to her idea about what makes a 'great neighbourhood,' that is, 'eyes on the street,' and her pragmatic claim on economic activity and business. Jacobs' basic premise is that the city is 'full of strangers,' unlike a village, where the direct interpersonal social contacts amongst a homogenous population are not only still relevant, but also an essential feature of the village's livability.<sup>35</sup> In urban areas, on the other hand, certain interpersonal relationships are not handled directly by the parties involved, but mediated via an array of agentive means, such as law, regulations, urban social norms, and so on, which, most of the time, make the interaction much less straightforward. Once a conflict emerges,

the involved parties do not usually directly address the conflict themselves, but resort to other means. Because, by definition, the city is where many people attempt to live together under the mutual banner of civility, urbanites do not have to try to maintain all their contacts. Hence, in a city, the relationship among urban citizens is structurally a short-term one. For Jane Jacobs, the plausible way of dealing with this structural short-term relationship is to create the density and diversity that would, in turn, galvanise the sense of security—what she famously calls 'eyes on the street.' Whereas in the village, the actual interpersonal relationship is key to the livability, in the city it is the sense of 'we are all in this together,' therefore we must look out for each other, which is central to the sense of urban safety. Where would one like to walk? A vast, empty, and therefore lifeless pavement, or a lively and active street? Intrinsic to such a sense of security then are the activities performed in the public space. Montgomery and Gehl's extensive research pinpoints those attributes of cities that foster activity, community, and thus a sense of security.<sup>36</sup> The

'dispersed city,' as Montgomery labels it (or sprawl as it is commonly known), is now associated with social alienation, obesity, diminished trust, less activism and higher rates of depression. It is, in a word, misanthropic. Density, diversity and intelligent urban design are now widely recognised as key ingredients of a socially sustainable city. For example, Gehl found that people walk through streets with long uniform facades without stopping.<sup>37</sup> If however, the streetscape is broken down into smaller visual units, such as with varied facades, a variety of colours, more openings into smaller building units, and a greater mix of functions per block, then people will stop, congregate and walk more slowly. There are ways to bring out more of Jacobs' 'eyes on the street,' as long as heritage conservation and urban design in general is not overtaken by heavy-handed corporatism. As long as we forget the people in the heritage buildings and in the streets, the purpose of the city as a great public gathering place will continue to escape us.

Finally, in order to sustain such activities, Jacobs argues, business must play a role. This is the point where

Figure 5: *Shikumen* demolition: A *shikumen* house left standing amidst a mostly demolished *lilong* compound in a prime area near Xintiandi.



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even mainstream economists would agree with Jacobs,<sup>38</sup> who is also an ardent critic of how corporate economic activities kill local economy; no matter how much we would like to preserve old buildings for the sake of maintaining the sense of history, those old buildings need to perform, in some way, economic functions that would not make them obsolete or burdensome. This is precisely where the idea of ‘adaptive reuse’ of heritage architecture comes into play.

GROUP PRESERVATION, AND  
DIVERSIFICATION FROM WITHIN

As we have earlier pointed out, the Shanghai government regards historic preservation of select sites, including the traditional alleyway, as essential to the branding of a city with global ambitions. Yet, there is little consideration of how the existing residents of said ‘historical monuments’ fit into the overall architectural preservation of the sites. Hence, we are seeing more of an interest in architectural preservation, rather than a preservation of culture and a way of life. How did we arrive at such a conclusion? Do we feel there is recourse for the preservation of both architecture and community culture together in Shanghai? Or must one be sacrificed for the other? The answer lies in both the planning policy and the historic preservation program. First, you may wonder why designated historic structures are not clustered in groups but scattered around the city. That is because the Shanghai government handpicks select ‘worthy’ structures to preserve, which makes the ‘unworthy’ structures available for immediate bulldozing. Hence, you get many ‘preserved historic sites’ left in the middle of surrounding high-rise buildings, and the remaining residents, who are mostly older, find such encroachment to be daunting. They are used to shopping at cheap street markets but, due to the new urban development, find themselves surrounded by high-rises where fruits and vegetables in their modern supermarkets cost ten times more. The same applies to the social life the residents used to share with neighbours from nearby communities. Once the network of cross-community neighbours is gone, remaining residents are unable to maintain the sense of neighbourhood. After a time this may affect their sense of personhood, encouraging them to eventually move.

Second, there has been little to no effort on the government’s part to maintain the sense of

community. The government’s primary focus has been on revamping the facade of the edifices, but it seems to have no particular interest in the living conditions of the residents. For instance, an admirable amount of investment was made into renovating a number of lilong neighbourhoods to their original 1930s condition as part of the ‘Better City, Better Life’ campaign for the World Expo in 2010. The neighbourhoods have benefitted from this beautification campaign with new pavements, iron gates, brickwork, and so on. The living conditions of the residents, however, remain the same. Some residents have spent their own savings to upgrade their homes—these very small rooms that were given to them 20-30 years ago. But not everyone has the money. Yet while some residents may want to stay on in the community, they may also be tempted to follow previous residents who made good money by renting out their rooms. Others unable to benefit from the process, either due to their personal family situation or the undesirable condition of their homes, become increasingly antagonistic over the perceived unfairness.

These developments may somehow be diversifying the community but are also intensifying tensions among old residents, as well as between them and the newcomers. For instance, in the earlier-mentioned community where we have been conducting this research, there has been a dramatic change in the social structure of community, especially in past decades, as well as the lifestyles introduced by new residents drawn by the superficially good-looking facade. Previously, it would not have been an exaggeration to say that the 3,000 residents of this particular neighbourhood knew each other because most of the public amenities such as telephones, bathrooms, kitchens, and hot water boilers were shared. Today, residents only know their neighbours in their own branch lane. ‘Because people are moving in and out very rapidly, most people here are now strangers to us,’ said one of our key informants, who is also a key senior citizen in the community.


In addition, preservation should not be automatically embraced without casting a sceptical eye. Unlike Rome—which represents the pinnacle of preservation and whose architectural heritage was made of permanent building materials to withstand the test of time—most of the residential architecture in Shanghai, especially the traditional alleyway houses, were not built to last this long. Most of the buildings were put together quickly for economic reasons and were built

to last just a little under 50 years (some of them were even made of wood) but they have been used for more than twice the length of their life expectancy. We believe that there is a possibility for the preservation of both architecture and community culture together—the middle way. For instance, we believe that affordability is a by-product of diversity, an ingredient in almost all great cities. London, for instance, may generally be expensive, but those who know the city well know exactly where to buy good and cheap products. The same applies to Manhattan. The issue here is, even though Shanghai technically belongs to everyone, no one with income lower than that of the upper middle class would want to live in the city if it becomes too expensive. Not only that, the monotony of having just one class of residents in the city is the kiss of death for urban livability. For instance, if the only method of preservation is one that emphasises architecture at the expense of older residents who become displaced (even if they want to be displaced for the money) we will end up with a proto-upper middle class city that lacks diversity and community culture.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, we contend that preservation of architecture alone is insufficient. Diversity is also a key ingredient. We do not believe that the winner-takes-all approach benefits the residents of the city. This also applies to the upper middleclass who will also benefit from it. We believe that if we create a livable environment for the residents, they will want to stick around to tell stories of their past to the younger generation and the newcomers to the city. Isn’t that what preservation is all about? We have discussed at length the sense of safety—or the sense of security—in having neighbours looking out for each other. The sense of personal belonging and social cohesiveness comes from a well-defined neighbourhood and narrow, crowded, multi-use streets. All great cities share in common this sense of personal belonging and social cohesiveness, which, in a globalising world, can only be created within a community that is open to social change and diversity.

Finding the middle way between community and historic preservation means that cities must strike a balance between preserving their heritage, and being open to change. Destroying heritage destroys memory,

community, and a sense of place. Refusing to change can render the city a glamorous but stultifying museum. In finding the ideal balance, we must operate from the paradigm that places residents first. There is a limit to how many heritage buildings one can turn into expat bars, gimmicky restaurants, and luxury stores, which will be the case if preservation programs do not take into account the importance of both the affordability and diversity of the neighbourhood. In other words, how many times can we really go to Disney Land, and still enjoy it? We advocate the methods of ‘group preservation’ and ‘diversification from within,’ which would require efforts from both the local authorities and residents working together. To find the correct balance between preservation and change, both the local authorities and residents need to have a mutual understanding of both the bigger picture, and the ethnographic details of everyday life. Ultimately, what is a city but a collection of diverse individuals drawn together? As Montgomery poignantly reminds us: ‘Most of all, it [a city] should enable us to build and strengthen the bonds between friends, families and strangers that give life meaning, bonds that represent the city’s greatest achievement. ‘ In cities which strike this balance, there is a heightened sense of vitality as residents’ participate in, what Jacobs herself would call, an intricate ‘street ballet’—a pattern of observable comprehensive human activity, that nourishes our sense of belonging and common purpose. 

**Author’s Note:** We would like to thank to Tess Johnston, a long-time resident of Shanghai who needs no introduction for a handful of classics in the study of Shanghai’s pre-1949 Western-style architecture, is an institution. We would like to dedicate this article to our friend Tess, for her dedication in documenting Shanghai’s architectural heritage for the past four decades. In addition, we would like to thank the following individuals, colleagues, and critics, who have helped shape and re-shape the ideas in this article, without whom this article would not have been possible: Kate Baker, Jeremy Cheval, Jeffrey M. Cody, Jeffrey Dobereiner, Magnus Fiskesjö, Harry den Hartog, Matthew Gutmann, Shenjing He, Michael Herzfeld, Roderick Hills, Edward Akintola Hubbard, Jie Li, Samuel Liang, Eriberto P. Lozada Jr., Michael Lestz, John Logan, Fangzhou Liao, Maria Montoya, Sofia Salgado, Alan Smart, Tianshu Pan, Philippe Peycam, Leo Pang, Xinyan Peng, Raymond Pun, Allison Rottman, Qin Shao, Lena Scheen, Jianfa Shen, and Jennifer Tarlin.



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NOTES

1 For those who are interested in history of Shanghai heritage architecture, be sure to visit Sue Anne Tay’s *Shanghai Street Stories* blog – one of the most acclaimed street ‘ethnographic-styled’ photography and photo essay blogs about lifestyle, architecture, heritage edifice, and Shanghai in general which has been featured in several international media. The British newspaper The Guardian has regarded ‘the captivating characters and images of *Shanghai Street Stories*’ as one of the best city blogs in the world, adding, ‘Nobody knows cities better than the bloggers who write from the frontlines’. See ‘The Guardian Cities and Sue Anne Tay, ‘Blogger of the Week: Sue Anne Tay of Shanghai Street Stories: Sue Anne Tay in Shanghai’, *The Guardian* (2014), <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/apr/07/blogger-of-the-week-sue-anne-tay-of-shanghai-street-stories>.

2 The obvious parallel to be drawn between Shanghai and Macao is the presence of this western-styled heritage architecture in the rapidly changing urban fabric, driven by a service economy that requires cities to face the dilemma of preserving monuments of the past, while providing housing for large numbers of residents.

3 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

4 For discussions on the notion of Shanghai modernity and the city’s skyline, see Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan, *Shanghai: Architecture and Urbanism for Modern China* (Munich: New York: Prestel, 2004); Non Arkaraprasertkul, ‘Visualizing Shanghai: The Ascendancy of the Skylines’, *East Asian Studies Journal* 12, no. 2 (2008); Brook Larmer, ‘Shanghai Dreams: China’s Global City Tries to Recapture the Glories of Its Past—This Time on Its Own Terms’, *National Geographic* 2010. Macao, on the other hand, is a city with twenty UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) World Heritage Sites, and a handful of the so-called (and highly contested category of) ‘intangible cultural heritage’. With its local ‘Macanese’ cuisine, a combination of Portuguese, African, Indian and Chinese influences, and preserved Chinese traditions such as ancestral worship and rituals, Macao is a true cultural destination for those seeking more than the experience of economic modernity. Macao, however, has witnessed an alternative form of urbanisation different from that of Shanghai. Macao’s massive landfill, bridge building, and large-scale urban development processes serves its entertainment industry. Known to many as the ‘Las Vegas of the East’, Macao’s gambling industry, as well as the tourism industry supporting it, makes up about half of the city’s revenue.

5 Linda Cooke Johnson, *Shanghai: From Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074-1858* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); Alan Balfour, *Shanghai*, ed. Shiling Zheng (London: Wiley-Academy, 2002); Marie-Claire Bergère, *Shanghai: China’s Gateway to Modernity*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

6 There are variations of this translation. In the classic study by Qian Guan, the author translates *li* as communities, and *long* as lanes: ‘Simply put, lilong housing, is a type of lane-and-community based urban dwelling form’, writes Guan. See Qian Guan, ‘Lilong Housing, a Traditional Settlement Form’ (M.Arch Thesis, McGill University, 1996).

7 Hanchao Lu, ‘Away from Nanking Road: Small Stores and Neighborhood Life in Modern Shanghai’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 54, no. 1 (1995); Louisa Lim, ‘Shanghai Architecture Reflects City’s Many Faces’, *NPR News* (2006), <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6601115>.

8 For the detailed history of the *lilong* see G. Byrne Bracken, *The Shanghai Alleyway House*, vol. 95, Routledge Contemporary China Series (New York: Routledge, 2013).

9 See Ruijue Peng, ‘Towards a New Housing Approach: Analysis of Settlement Environment and Housing Policy in Shanghai, China’ (M.S. Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986).

10 See Jian Yang, ‘Shikumen Pledged Extra Protection after Readers Offer City Suggestions’, *Shanghai Daily*, August 25, 2014; Chehui Peh, ‘Politicizing Heritage: The Intangibility of Shanghai’s Shikumens’ (National University of Singapore, 2014).

11 See Michael Herzfeld, ‘Heritage and the Right to the City: When Securing the Past Creates Insecurity in the Present’, *Heritage & Society* 8, no. 1 (2015).

12 World Population Review, ‘Shanghai Population 2015’ (2014).

13 See Michael Herzfeld, ‘Spatial Clensing: Monumental Vacuity and the Idea of the West’, *Journal of Material Culture* 11, no. 1/2 (2006); Hyun Bang Shin, ‘The Right to the City and Critical Reflections on China’s Property Rights Activism’, *Antipode* (2013); Qin Shao, *Shanghai Gone: Domicide and Defiance in a Chinese Megacity*, State and Society in East Asia (2013).

14 Jacobs, *Death and Life*.

15 Merry I. White, *Coffee Life in Japan*, vol. 36, California Studies in Food and Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 138; Jacobs, *Death and Life*.

16 Edward L. Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

17 Ibid., pp. 147-148

18 Erin Carlyle, ‘New York Dominates 2014 List of America’s Most Expensive Zip Codes’, *ForbesLife* (2014), <http://www.forbes.com/sites/erincarlyle/2014/10/08/new-york-dominates-2014-list-of-americas-most-expensive-zip-codes/>.

19 See Non Arkaraprasertkul, ‘Leaping Beyond Nostalgia: Shanghai’s Urban Life Ethnography’, *The Newsletter of the International Institute for Asian Studies* 55, no. Autumn/Winter (2010).

20 The main page of this pamphlet reads: ‘...Now, in urban area of Shanghai, there are still a number of representative *Shikumen* lanes, where you can enjoy the original flavour of *Shikumen* buildings and get to know the LIFE STYLE of people in traditional lanes. Maybe, you can meet some celebrities by chance’. From *Tour of Shikumen Lanes*, an undated pamphlet produced by Shanghai Tourism Authority.

21 Deborah Pellow, ‘No Place to Live, No Place to Love: Coping in Shanghai’, in *Urban Anthropology in China*, ed. Gregory Eliyu Guldin and Aidan Southall (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1993); Jie Li, *Shanghai Homes: Palimpsests of Private Life* (Columbia University Press, 2015); Paul Harley Hammond, ‘Community Eclipse and Shanghai’s Lilong’ (University of Missouri-Columbia, 2006).

22 Yang, ‘Shikumen Pledged.’

23 That said, in some cases, we also see how expatiate skilled workers try to blend in with the community. See Tom Doctoroff, ‘Life in the ‘Lilong’: My Shanghai Lane House Adventure’, *Huffington Post* (2009), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-doctoroff/life-in-the-lanes-my-shan\\_b\\_250547.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tom-doctoroff/life-in-the-lanes-my-shan_b_250547.html); Non Arkaraprasertkul, ‘Traditionalism as a Way of Life: The Sense of Home in a Shanghai Alleyway’, *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 15, no. 3/4 (2013).

24 For case studies of this particular phenomenon, see ‘Moral Global Storytelling: Reflections on Place and Space in Shanghai’s Urban Neighborhoods’, *Storytelling, Self, Society* 8, no. 3 (2012); ‘Traditionalism’.

25 See Larmer, ‘Shanghai Dreams’; Yubing Gao, ‘The Pajama Game Closes in Shanghai’, *The New York Times* (2010), [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/17/opinion/17gao.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/17/opinion/17gao.html?_r=0).

26 Louis Wirth, ‘Urbanism as a Way of Life’, *American Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (1938).

27 Many urbanists have written about this; some of the classic studies include Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and*

*How They Get You through the Day*, 1st ed. (New York: Paragon House, 1989); Peter G. Rowe, *Civic Realism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); Edmund N. Bacon, *Design of Cities* (London: London: Thames & Hudson, 1967); Christopher Alexander, *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*, ed. Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein, and Structure Center for Environmental (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

28 Charles Montgomery, *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives through Urban Design*, First edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 158.

29 See Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

30 See Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*, ed. Andrew McAfee, First edition. ed. (W.W. Norton & Company, 2014).

31 Montgomery, *Happy City*, p. 155.

32 Greg Yager and Scott Kilbourn, ‘Lessons from Shanghai Xintiandi: China’s Retail Success Story’, *Urban Land Asia* (2004); Fulong Wu and Shenjing He, ‘Property-Led Redevelopment in Post-Reform China: A Case Study of Xintiandi Redevelopment Project in Shanghai’, *Journal of Urban Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2005); see Xuefei Ren, ‘Forward to the Past: Historical Preservation in Globalizing Shanghai’, *City & Community* 7, no. 1 (2008).

33 See Xuefei Ren and Meng Sun, ‘Artistic Urbanization: Creative Industries and Creative Control in Beijing’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 36, no. 3 (2012); Esther Hiu Kwan Yung, Edwin Hon Wan Chan, and Ying Xu, ‘Sustainable Development and the Rehabilitation of a Historic Urban District—Social Sustainability

in the Case of Tianzifang in Shanghai’, *Sustainable Development* 22, no. 2 (2014).

34 See Non Arkaraprasertkul, ‘Shanghai Urban Future: Urbanization, Heritage Industry, and the Political Economy of Urban Space’, in *The 2014 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association*, ed. Sean Mallin, Nicholas Lawrence Caverly, and Erik L Harms (Washington D.C., 2014); ‘Traditionalism’.

35 In addition, owing to the nature of agrarian industry, the villagers cannot afford to be resentful toward one another for too long. In other words, villagers still need to look out for one another because they know that no one is going anywhere. Despite the fact that conflict resolution among villagers might seem brutal or uncivil to outsiders (e.g., physical fights), they resolve conflicts in a way that allows them to return to the status quo in the shortest possible time. Villagers cannot afford to sever relationships since they all rely on one another. In a way, we might say that the relationship in a village is structurally a long-term one. See Xiaotong Fei, Gary G. Hamilton, and Zheng Wang, *From the Soil, the Foundations of Chinese Society: A Translation of Fei Xiaotong’s Xiangtu Zhongguo, with an Introduction and Epilogue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

36 Montgomery, *Happy City*.

37 Ibid.

38 E.g., Richard L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Glaeser, *Triumph*.

39 Yang, ‘Shikumen Pledged’.

40 Bergère, *Shanghai*.

41 Montgomery, *Happy City*, p. 42.

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RESUMOS

Património de Macau: Um Estudo das Tradições e do ADN Cultural da Cidade

Macau, a cidade ocidental mais antiga na Ásia, reconhecida pela UNESCO como Património da Humanidade, foi uma cidade desenvolvida pelos Portugueses numa península vazia nos mares do Sul da China. Este estudo analisa os principais factores na evolução urbana de Macau, particularmente as tipologias portuguesas de edifícios, praças, ruas e ambientes que constituem parte do ADN cultural de Macau, que originaram a sua forte identidade cultural que sobreviveu por cinco séculos num ambiente predominante Chinês. Quais são os principais paradigmas, tipologias, códigos e tradições que construíram a cultura e a cidade ao longo dos séculos e quais os factores cruciais para a sua preservação futura, correcta interpretação e desenvolvimento futuro. A primeira parte desta pesquisa concentra-se em elementos históricos, como a formação da sociedade medieval portuguesa que se reflecte no carácter da cidade. A segunda parte analisa e identifica tipologias urbanas e arquitectónicas do património da cidade como elementos-chave para uma abordagem eficaz em projecto de reabilitação urbano-arquitectónica, necessária para proteger e manter vivas as heranças e tradições que lutam para sobreviver contra as muitas ameaças dos estilos da globalização, camuflados como autênticos ou intervenções minimalistas. São “minimalista” devido à falta de componentes da tradição local que formaram a língua vernácula. Como o conceito de autenticidade só pode ser ligado ao conceito de “autor” como entidade individual ou resultante da tradição colectiva, a identificação do estilo contemporâneo e internacional como “autêntico” só pode trazer desastre ao apagar a memória, tradição e cultura que construiu ao longo dos séculos a identidade cultural única da cidade, enraizada em tradições chinesas e portuguesas.

Este estudo também mostra as ameaças ao património cultural sino-português com a importação de novos paradigmas urbanos de altamente densa Hong Kong e dos casinos mega-shoppings de Las Vegas. [Autor: Francisco Vizeu Pinheiro, pp. 6-27]

A Arqueologia Urbana: Uma Abordagem para Macau

Durante a administração Portuguesa – em Coloane com a colaboração de entidades de Hong Kong, com o Projecto Global de Recuperação das Ruínas de São Paulo e resultante do Projecto do Museu de Macau na Fortaleza do Monte e sua ligação ao Colégio de São Paulo; depois de 1999, na RAEM, em Coloane e ainda na zona Nascente do Colégio de São Paulo. O desenvolvimento urbano da cidade, sua relação com a arqueologia e a pressão imobiliária. A necessidade de uma legislação preventiva, de salvaguarda e de valorização do património arqueológico. A criação de uma carta arqueológica num modelo adequado ao território, visando o registo e salvaguarda dos vestígios patrimoniais que testemunhem a ocupação humana, do passado à actualidade. Esse registo como forma de transmissão do legado cultural às gerações futuras, fundamental para a construção da memória comum, da identidade colectiva – da “Gente de Macau”. A transformação de Macau numa cidade destino de turismo cultural e não só sinónimo de jogo, devido ao seu legado patrimonial arqueológico, histórico e arquitectónico e de simbiose cultural e social únicas. A metodologia para a criação de uma carta arqueológica, desde a compilação das anteriores campanhas, passando pela aquisição de fontes ainda dispersas, até à criação de um zonamento e hierarquização de áreas de potencial arqueológico. A inevitável conclusão de que importa investir na definição e promoção da “auto-estima” na identidade Macaense como forma de garantir a valorização do nosso

património material e imaterial. A proposta de criação de uma equipa multidisciplinar num departamento dinâmico e pro-activo, com um modelo de gestão próprio responsável pela comunicação entre as diversas entidades responsáveis pelo ordenamento do território e pela promoção de um plano de gestão territorial integrado, capaz de garantir a manutenção da classificação d’O Centro Histórico de Macau como Património Mundial. [Autora: Filomena Vicente, pp. 28-44]

O Poder do Fraco na Construção do Lugar: Acupunctura e Outras Terapias para Macau

A globalização, o crescimento urbano acelerado, o aumento da mobilidade e da conectividade virtual, e a resultante redução da atenção ao ambiente físico põem em risco o nosso relacionamento com pessoas e lugares que costumavam ser importantes para nós. Como resultado, perdemos-nos no processo de adaptação ao ambiente urbano, sentindo-nos cada vez mais desenraizados, e tentamos a sua adaptação ao invés, levantando o problema da ligação entre a construção do lugar e a conservação do património. Este fenómeno é particularmente agudo no Delta do Rio das Pérolas, que abriga a mais rápida e extensa urbanização contínua do mundo. Além disso, a população urbana da região está confinada a apenas 10 por cento do seu território, tornando a ocupação extremamente densa. Este crescimento rápido e desigual é um dos maiores desafios enfrentados pela sociedade chinesa e põe em causa os modos tradicionais de planeamento de cidades, gerando a necessidade urgente de estratégias alternativas. Assumindo que a construção do lugar tem uma forte base afectiva, este artigo estuda o afecto na experiência do espaço público para identificar as qualidades arquitectónicas que mais contribuem para a ligação ao lugar. A pesquisa combina noções de arquitectura, fenomenologia, psicologia e neurociências a fim de investigar