

Tradition: Connecting the Past and Present

A Case Study of Xintiandi in Shanghai

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Abstract

Tradition and modernisation are often seen as a binary opposition. In an urban environment, traditional built form seems incompatible to modern way of life, and the adaptation of traditional neighbourhoods to modern use often causes controversy. Nowadays, ideas about ‘what is tradition’ become shifting, and traditional townscape does not necessarily mean an obstacle to modernisation. This paper reveals how the role of traditional elements is played in China’s urban development. The case study of Xintiandi, Shanghai, where traditional townscape is restored, highlights the connection of the city’s past and present. Xintiandi is a successful yet controversial city renewal project, where Shanghai’s traditional housing form *Shikumen* is restored and put into adaptive uses. In the course of urban modernisation, the role of tradition as a representation of the connection between the city’s past and present deserves more study. This paper aims to add a perspective to the literature on the study of tradition. It argues for the diversity and fluidity of the ideas about tradition. In this view, tradition is not necessarily in dichotomy with, or opposite to modernisation; rather, tradition justifies the needs of modernisation and supplements its outcomes. The paper is developed in light of works on tradition by Shils, Hobsbawm, Giddens and others; The case study of Xintiandi shows what Old Shanghai tradition means to this city today, and how traditional elements are adapted and used in the course of urban modernisation.

Keywords: tradition, modernisation, heritage, urban, Shanghai, China

1. Introduction

‘Xintiandi’ refers to a shopping and entertainment precinct in Shanghai, located right at Shanghai’s business heart. Sometimes dubbed as ‘Shanghai’s living room’, Xintiandi offers leisure facilities of both local and international styles. However, the precinct would not be as popular as it is now, without its unique, traditional built landscape. In this precinct, buildings are kept in a form called *Shikumen*, a folk dwelling style that first appeared in the early 20th century. Since the completion, Xintiandi not only has become a popular destination for both locals and visitors in Shanghai; also, its model has been copied by other cities in China (note 1).

The fact that traditional built form is the main attraction of Xintiandi seems somewhat at odd with the frantic rush for urban modernisation in China at present. Why is the word ‘tradition’ able to magnetise public interest in contemporary China, which preoccupied with the stated goal of modernisation? Furthermore, what does the word ‘tradition’ refer to in today’s Shanghai and why ‘tradition’ matters? As a flagship of urban renewal projects in China, Xintiandi has attracted scholarly interests, leading to a dedicated book by Shanghai based historians (Luo & Sha, 2002); as well as a number of journal articles by international researchers (note 2). These publications have focused on architectural and planning history, urban studies and tourism. Taking a different point of view, this paper focuses on tradition as the representation of the connection between the city’s past and the present; one that is reflected by urban renewal processes, in the context of social transformations, as the case study will show.

The term traditional townscape in this paper refers to a historic inner city environment whose built form bears local, folk characteristics. In our days, traditional townscape is disappearing quickly as the result of urban modernisation. Nevertheless, traditional townscape as a special type of cultural landscape also becomes a rare cultural resource, and is being put to adapted uses. The adaptation of traditional townscape often involves alteration of the original elements to suit contemporary needs. This causes controversies (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1990). For instance opinions differed regarding the redevelopment of the Rocks in Sydney, Australia (Waite, 2000; Karskens, 2003). Notably, traditional townscape and city modernisation have often been seen as a pair of rivalries, with the scenario

that either the former hinders the latter or the latter tramples the former. The globalised era sees the rise of new ideas about tradition, with which the relationship between tradition and modernisation goes beyond the familiar binary opposition, as the paper will reveal. The paper argues that the relationship between traditional townscape and urban modernization today is more complicated than that of ‘contestation’ and ‘tension’; in other words the pair ‘tradition’ and ‘modernisation’ do not necessarily stand in dichotomy or opposing each other. Instead, collusion may take place between the two. In the rest of the paper, I will explore the conceptual position of tradition and how it is reflected in the revitalisation of traditional townscape in the process of urban modernisation, through the case study of Xintiandi in Shanghai.

2. Tradition: Ideas and Indications

The literal meaning of the term ‘tradition’ is ‘the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation’ (OUP, 2011). Examining the root of the term, Anthony Giddens suggests that ‘tradition’ basically means ‘to transmit, to give something to another for safekeeping’ (Giddens, 1999). Although it is a noun, ‘tradition’ refers more to a process rather than an object. The connotation of the term, from Giddens’ point of view, can be seen in two dimensions: transmission and continuity. While the definition of the term shows that ‘tradition’ involves the process of ‘transmission’, opinions vary about what is involved in the process; in other words, what ‘tradition’ contains. Edward Shils (1981:12) argues that ‘it (tradition) is anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present’. However, ‘anything’ does not mean ‘everything’ of the past; because the process of handing down something from the past to the present is unlikely to take place in a wholesale manner. Rather, the process of ‘transmission’ inevitably involves selections and negotiations, thus is influenced by current views as well as societal transformations. Whereas the ideas about ‘tradition’ are by no means frozen or single-sided, the term ‘tradition’, as Eric Hobsbawm has revealed, seems to be given the ‘characteristic of invariances’. This is because the past to which traditions refer entails fixed practices, which means a constraint on present practices (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:2). In this vein, tradition is regarded as stagnated and backward, opposing to notions of ‘progress’ and ‘innovation’. Such a connotation of tradition is also reflected in the semantic interpretation of the term. For instance, in its online dictionary, *Collins Thesaurus of the English Language* lists synonyms to the word ‘traditional’, which include ‘old’, ‘conventional’ and ‘historical’; whereas the antonyms of the term are ‘new’, ‘original’ and ‘innovative’ (note 3).

Such a negative view about tradition, as Anthony Giddens points out, shows society’s obsession to progress; furthermore, it reflects society’s neglect of the connection between the past and the present (Giddens, 1999). In Giddens’ point of view, this type of perceptions about tradition among the populace indicates a single-minded pursuit of modernity, with which people ‘never intended a serious engagement with tradition and its role in society’ – instead, they ‘sought to justify their absorption with the new’ (ibid). The anti-tradition sentiment, Giddens pointed out, stemmed from the 18th Century European Enlightenment, as leading thinkers such as Dobserves regarded tradition as merely a shadow side of modernity, an implausible construct that could be easily brushed aside (ibid). In post- Enlightenment eras the anti-tradition sentiments remained strong. As Edward Shils summarised, the proliferated attitude against tradition was that what people had inherited was as bad as could be (Shils, 1981:3). Such an anti-traditional trend of thinking, Shils criticised, was problematic, incomplete and often falling in a paradox:

whereas traditions as normative models of action and belief were regarded as useless and burdensome on the one hand, the operation of traditions was acknowledged and its results were admired on the other (ibid).

Works by scholars such as Maurice Halbwachs and Eric Hobsbawm are helpful to rectify the single-minded rejection of tradition. Their works on the relationship between past and present basically engages three questions: what we do with the past; what the past does for us and what the past does to us. Such an approach to the past is regarded by Jeffery Olick as presentist (Olick, 2007), which emphasises the connection between the past and the present. In the presentist view, tradition is the representation of the connection between the past and the present, rather than the past itself. Also in this view, the past is constructed by the beliefs and aspirations, etc. at present (Coser, 1992:26). This approach thus throws light on the role of tradition in the present society, and reveals that the adaptability is the key attribute of tradition. Indeed, while acknowledging that ‘invariance’ is a typical characteristic of tradition, Hobsbawm also argues that tradition is by no means a frozen entity; rather, it allows adaptation and even invention. Hobsbawm points out that the adaptation, as well as the invention of tradition, takes places as a response to the weakening and destruction of old social patterns by the transformation of society. In

other words, traditions are adapted and invented to suit new social purposes, in changed contexts (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983:4-5). In this vein, tradition can be deployed to legitimate the 'constant change and innovation of the modern world' (ibid) by suggesting a continuity and invariability from the past. Whereas modernity is considered as the break-away from the past (Berman, 1982; Giddens, 1991), a perceivable expression of continuity from the past is vital to the legitimacy of modernisation processes at the present, partially because of people's fear of uncertain future. David Lowenthal remarked that, 'B(b)eleaguered by loss and change, we keep our bearings only by clinging to remnants of stability' (Lowenthal, 1997). Although pertaining the sense of stability, tradition itself is not a 'stable' entity. Indeed, the adaptation and the invention of tradition are innovative processes, as Hobsbawm puts it, 'I(i)n all such cases novelty is no less novel for being able to dress up easily as antiquity' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983:4-5).

The adaptation of any tradition is regarded as a construction process, which depends on what and how society memorises, therefore the adapted or invented traditions are the products of memories of the society – what is referred to by Maurice Halbwachs as 'collective memories' (Halbwachs, 1980, 1992). Articulating the notion of invented tradition, Hobsbawm points out that tradition making can be a very creative process with which we choose the most symbolic and unique elements of past beliefs and practices, assessing their viability and usability against present needs, establishing connections between these elements and our present time (ibid). This process not only reflects the interests of the present society in the past but also signals the impact of the past on the present society.

The revelation of the position of tradition between the past and present is helpful to make sense of the change of the cultural landscape, including that of historic inner city areas. Recent decades have witnessed historic city centres being updated and put to adapted use. In many cases these centres have undergone functional change, most of them are converted to shopping streets. As mentioned earlier, such changes are always controversial. To some, redevelopment projects have changed the association between people and the urban space, thus are threatening the historical continuity as well as the cultural significance of the city. To others, our approach to traditional landscape should reflect the time of change (Fairclough, 2008). In the context of societal transformation, a dialectic analysis of tradition and modernisation would reveal that the binary is not necessarily one that contains tensions only. In other words, tradition and modernisation do not have to be the antipode to each other. While the contestation between tradition and modernisation deserves a thorough study, it will be beneficial to see the other side of the coin, that is, how tradition - most probably in its adapted form - helps to make sense of modernisation processes at the present. The following case study of Xintiandi in Shanghai aims to illustrate this less investigated relationship.

3. Shikumen: the Built Icon of Shanghai Tradition

In 1986 China Post launched a set of fourteen thematic stamps entitled 'Chinese vernacular dwellings', designed by Chen Hanmin, a Shanghai-born artist. Chen chose the image of a Shikumen style dwelling to represent his hometown Shanghai, because this built style is commonly recognised by Shanghai locals as the most typical folk dwelling style of the city (Luo & Wu, 1997).

The emergence and development of Shikumen buildings paralleled with the so-called Old Shanghai period. In 1843, after China's loss of the Opium War to Britain, Shanghai was opened as a 'treaty port' allowing for foreign trade and residence, and was under the separate governance of Chinese, British and French authorities until 1945. In 1945 Shanghai became a special municipality during the KMT regime until 1949, then a municipality under the direct administration of the government of PRC. In scholarly as well as popular literature, Shanghai during the years between 1843 and 1949 is now commonly referred to as 'Old Shanghai'.

Foreign settlement began in Shanghai after Chinese officials and the first British consul to Shanghai reached a land lease agreement in 1843. The following years saw constant expansions of settlement areas, and Shanghai was consequently divided into three enclaves, namely, the International Settlement, the French Concession and the Chinese City. Initially, foreign settlements were not open to local Chinese. In 1853, a peasant uprising led by Little Sword Society broke out and the rebels' troops occupied the Old City for seventeen months. The uprising caused thousands of Chinese refugees to flee the Old City into foreign enclaves for shelters. The influx of Chinese into foreign settlements not only ended the exclusive use of these enclaves by foreigners, but also caused a building boom within them. As a response to land shortage and the escalating land price, new residential buildings adopted the idea of Western row houses to maximise land use. Nevertheless, the early style of such row houses still retained some traditional Chinese architectural elements, the most distinctive feature being a stone framed gate (Wu, 1997) - called Shikumen in Chinese.

The Shikumen style was not of full Chinese origin, but a mix of Chinese and Western architectural components. Its original model could be found in both Chinese courtyard houses (note 4) as well as the Western terrace houses

(ibid). Shikumen houses were built in fishbone-like rows off main streets, and the narrow alleyways between the rows were known as Lilong. For this reason Shikumen houses were also called Lilong houses (note 5). Until the 1980s, about three quarters of dwellings in Shanghai were of Shikumen structures (Luo & Wu, 1997). In his acclaimed book on everyday Shanghai in the early twentieth century, Hanchao Lu (1999) revealed ordinary people's way of life in Old Shanghai's Shikumen neighbourhoods. By 'ordinary people' Lu meant the majority of Shanghaiese. They were neither the wealthy nor the poor, having reasonable means of living yet striving for the better. The proximity to the ocean and the distance from the political centre meant that Shanghai in the nineteenth century was relatively less constrained by Confucius doctrine and its citizens believed more in business success and individual ambitions (Zheng, 1999:21-35). While the ideas and practices of ordinary people shaped the urban culture of Old Shanghai, the built environment of Shikumen served as the seedbed of such ideas and practices. Lu rightly argued that Shikumen neighbourhoods played a decisive role in creating modern Shanghai's commercial life (ibid: 138). This was because houses in a Shikumen neighbourhood always functioned as both shops and dwellings, so commercial activities were blended into Shanghaiese's daily life. Whereas official and scholarly cultures dominated life in Old Beijing, entrepreneurship featured the world-view as well as way of life of Old Shanghai, and stories of self-made figures – from business elites to mob bosses – form an indispensable part of the Old Shanghai legacy. Compared with their inland counter parts, Shanghai locals proved open-minded and practical to imported ideas and practices despite the initial hostility, fear, contempt and bewilderment (Zhang, 1990: 902-5; 939-40), they were quick to adopt modern ways of business and life. Shanghai after the late nineteenth century grew rapidly to become China's most modernized city, its unconventional way of practices was referred to as Haipai (Shanghai style) culture. Rooted in the Chinese superstructure, Haipai culture took its shape under the influence of Western ways of thinking and practices. To ordinary Shanghaiese, Haipai culture reflected their perceptions of life. As historian Xiong Yuezhi put it, Haipai culture epitomized 'the spirit of Shanghai'. The core of the spirit, Xiong summarised, comprised most important attributes of Shanghai and its people: open-mindedness, innovativeness, entrepreneurialism, pragmatism and consumerism (Xiong, 2003).

4. The Loss and Revival of the Spirit of Shanghai Since 1949

As a representation of the 'spirit of Shanghai', Haipai culture reached its hay day in the 1930s. As mentioned above, the formation of Haipai culture can be regarded as the response of Shanghai populace to the social transformation of the time (Luo & Wu, 1997; Xiong, 2003; Zhang 1990, 2014), the trajectory of its development and decline, to a large extent, reflects times of change. In 1949 China underwent a drastic transformation after a regimental change to become a Soviet-type socialist state. For over three decades, China was under the ideology of class struggle, with the whole nation being obsessed with anti-West, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism sentiments. During this period, Old Shanghai was regarded as an epitome of China's humiliation under imperialist and colonialist powers of the West. Not surprisingly, Haipai culture was seen as the product of either capitalism, imperialism or colonialism, or the combination of all three vices, therefore was set to be condemned and purged. A prize-winning 1964 movie *Guards Under Neon Lights* (霓虹灯下的哨兵) told a story of a patrolling squad of Communist Party's People's Liberation Army (PLA) – the Eighth Company – that was stationed on Nanjing Road, Shanghai's commercial heart and the most glamorous shopping street in China. The story began with Shanghai being captured from the KMT by the PLA. Chen Xi, a PLA platoon head of the Eighth Company, who was originally from the countryside, saw his new post as an opportunity to enjoy the city life. Carried away by the glamour and luxury of the modern city, he remarked that, on Nanjing Road 'even the breeze is sweet'. Quickly he was on the brink of corruption, and became slack in disciplines, negligent to his duty, contemptuous to his wife who came from the countryside to visit him. His rapid change caused deep concerns from his comrades, who thought that they would 'either convert Nanjing Road, or be converted by it'. To give Chen Xi a wake-up call about the hidden trap, his comrade cited Mao Zedong's metaphor of 'sugar-coated bullets', which referred to the seductions from the bourgeois lifestyle, material wealth and comfort:

There may be some Communists, who were not conquered by enemies with guns and were worthy of the name of heroes for standing up to these enemies, but who cannot withstand sugar-coated bullets; they will be defeated by sugar-coated bullets. We must guard against such a situation.

The class-struggle ideology was disposed in the 1980s, as the Chinese government opened up the country to the outside world and embraced market economy. China was under another transformation at the turn of the 21st century. The State Government made the decision to develop Shanghai's Pudong, which enabled Shanghai to

reclaim its leading role in China's economy. The new agenda evoked the re-evaluation of the Old Shanghai legacy and Haipai culture. During the 1980s and the 1990s, there appeared a memory boom on Old Shanghai, which was expressed in newspapers, books, movies, TV series and other forms of media. In contrast to the previous views of Old Shanghai as the epitome of capitalist vices as well as China's national humiliation, memories of Old Shanghai during and after the 1990s focused more on positive aspects, where Shanghai was depicted as China's pioneer for modernization. Apart from popular literature on Old Shanghai, scholarly research was also flourishing. One of the important publications on the topic was undertaken by Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences on the urban history of Shanghai from 1840 to 1940, funded by the State Government as a major research of national importance (Zhang, 1990). This research was groundbreaking, as it dropped the class-struggle narrative that prevailed during previous years to adopt a more objective, fact-based perspective about Old Shanghai, and acknowledged the achievements obtained during the Old Shanghai period. The influence of this research could be traced in works on Old Shanghai that followed (note 6), as well as in the interpretation of the Shanghai History Museum.

Alongside the flourishing research on the Old Shanghai was an enthusiasm with the city's built heritage. The enthusiasm was reflected by a growing list of historic properties under the municipal protection. Initially the list included monumental structures, notably those at Shanghai's famous financial quarter at the waterfront (The Bund), most of which were originally occupied by foreign firms; Later the list expanded to include a number of Shikumen neighbourhoods in inner city areas. To justify the move, Shanghai municipal planning authorities argued that Shikumen residential areas were historically and culturally significant, as they showcased the cultural hybridity and vibrant tempo of Old Shanghai, as well as the true spirit of its people (Shanghai Municipal Government, 1991, 2002, 2014). From 1995 to 2015, this list expanded a few times to include 44 'historic precincts' (note 7), including streets and neighbourhoods in former foreign settlements. Among these designated areas was the Hengshan-Fuxing roads precinct, where the site of today's Xintiandi was located.

5. Xintiandi: a Built Icon of the Connection between the Past, Present and Future

The site of Xintiandi today was originally called Taipingqiao, located at the east end of the former French Concession. Its northern block was first built between 1911 and 1933, in the typical Shikumen style, with fifteen alleyways crisscrossing the area. At the turn of the century, most of the houses in that area were dilapidated, some even unsafe for habitation due to overuse and lack of maintenance. Although in poor condition, the Shikumen style still attracted the outsider's eyes for its historical, cultural and architectural charms. Benjamin Wood, the architect from Wood and Zapata in Boston, who eventually took charge of the design of the Xintiandi project, told his interviewer about his first impression of the site: 'It was overwhelming. I had never seen such an architecture style' (Tenison, 2009).

As mentioned above, Old Shanghai was under three different governing systems controlled by the British, the French and the Chinese authorities. The location of Taipingqiao precinct sat at the borders between the Chinese Old City, the French Concession and the International Settlement, where different laws used to apply during the Old Shanghai period. It meant that a wanted outlaw in one area would have walked free in another area. Partially because of this convenient location, the Chinese Communist Party held its first national congress at Taipingqiao. The site of the CCP Congress – a typical Shikumen house right next to the site of Xintiandi – is a national heritage property, thus the neighbourhood at its proximity is under the protection of Shanghai municipal heritage legislation. When Vicent Lo, chairman of the Hong Kong based Shui On Group, won the bidding for the project to redevelop Taipingqiao, he faced the challenge of planning restrictions including the height limits of the precinct. The design of the project was commissioned to an international team of designers comprising architects from the U.S and Singapore, who worked with Shanghai local experts, as well as officials from Shanghai Municipal Government. The strategy for the project was to keep the traditional townscape, which featured Shikumen-style houses and alleyways (Ru & Ding, 2009). Meanwhile, to balance the project budget, local authorities accepted Shui On's proposal to convert the block from a residential quarter into commercial use (Luo, 2001). This change inevitably involved vacating existing houses and relocating the residents. According to a study by He and Wu, for Xintiandi's North Block alone, 1,950 households in the neighbourhood were relocated (He & Wu, 2005). Following the relocation, twenty-five per cent of existing houses were demolished and the remaining ones were either renovated or rebuilt for commercial use (ibid).

In the rapidly modernized city, a traditional townscape evokes fascination from the young, and nostalgia from the old. In the case of Xintiandi, the Shikumen inspires imaginations as well as recollections of the Old Shanghai days. It is, therefore, regarded as a connection between the city's past and present, the continuity of the Old Shanghai legacy (Luo, 2001). 'Xintiandi, where yesterday and tomorrow meet at the present', is the slogan printed on a billboard right at the entrance of the North Block. Here 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow' are put in a figurative use, meaning the past and the future. Xintiandi brings together iconic items that represent the traditional landscape of

Old Shanghai. These include the alleyways, the Shikumen façade that features a set of black wood doors within the stone frame, as well as the decorative motifs of Greco-Roman styles. In the words of the Shanghai-based architect Luo Xiaowei, 'These elements are architectural symbols of Haipai culture' (ibid). Landscaping elements, such as cast iron street lamps and plane trees, are added to enhance the sense of cultural hybridity. The plane tree, allegedly having landed in Shanghai along with the French expatriates in the early twentieth century, was a common type of street tree in the French Concession. For this reason, the plane tree is also called by the Chinese people 'the French plane', as an appreciation of its connection to the Continental cultural landscape.

Near the entrance of Xintiandi's North Block, inside a Shikumen house, is the Wulixiang Museum. In Shanghai dialect, Wulixiang means 'home'. Integrating items of everyday life of a middle class family into the architectural setting, the museum shows a typical Shanghai household in a Shikumen neighbourhood. Upon entering, visitors find themselves in a small courtyard featuring local outdoor furnishing – bonsais, little bamboo chairs, and ceramic water tanks. Inside the house, one can see the influence of modern, Western life style mingled with Chinese daily rituals. For instance, scrolls of Chinese paintings and joss sticks are placed side by side with the electric fan, while the gramophone is playing records of Shanghai Opera. On a baroque style desk there is an abacus, a symbol of the entrepreneurship of ordinary Shanghaiese.

As mentioned before, entrepreneurship is the core of the spirit of Shanghai, permeating the everyday life of Shanghai locals. Shikumen neighbourhood in Old Shanghai was always a space for mixed purposes, as shops juxtaposed with dwellings and commercial activities made an important part of daily life. Today's Xintiandi is thoroughly commercial, with buildings at both the north and south blocks being densely occupied by restaurants, bars, cafes, galleries and specialty stores. However apartment towers at the vicinity of Xintiandi means the tradition of mixed use of the urban space continues at this prime location in Shanghai. Compact as it is, the network of alleyways gives Xintiandi 'a fair amount of street life' (Wai, 2006). As Wai describes, in the small, narrow alleyways, 'every turn has the potential surprises of discovery' (ibid). Inside the aged Shikumen, the most up-to-date amenities appeal the twenty-first century consumers and serve the consumerism that once proliferated in Old Shanghai.

Feedbacks from visitors on a tourism website suggest that Xintiandi is such a place that attracts different people for different reasons. 'Romantic time in a bustling city', 'Very Westernised', 'New place that brings back old days' (note 8), just to quote a few. As stated by Wulixiang Museum, Xintiandi is a place of temporal and cultural hybridity: it is foreign to Chinese and Chinese to foreigners; being nostalgic and trendy at the same time. A model of success, Xintiandi project has won a number of national and international awards, including the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Award for Excellence in 2003. However, Xintiandi also has caused controversies and criticisms. The eviction of former residents – most of whom had to be relocated elsewhere – is regarded as an example of gentrification of local neighbourhood. Some of the criticisms states that the everyday life of Old Shanghai is sanitised so that only the glamorous aspects of the past were exhibited whereas aspects of the everyday Shikumen houses of the past risk submersion (ibid).

6. Conclusion

This paper argues that tradition is not the remnant of past, but a representation of the connection between the past and present, a product of societal transformations. Tradition is cultivated (in many cases invented) and is subject to change to fit the societal transformation. Although tradition pertains the past, it is shaped by the present. Anchoring on a certain points of the past, tradition is deployed to justify present needs. In contemporary urban environment, traditional townscape is the tangible representation of the connection as such (Alsayyad, 2014). Since the 1840s, Shanghai has experienced three major societal transformations. Paralleling the transformations have been the rise and fall of Haipai culture and the spirit of Shanghai. Over more than a century Haipai culture has been shaped, altered, and rebuilt. As a built icon of Haipai culture, Shikumen housing style emerged in the Old Shanghai period, thrived in Old Shanghai, declined after 1950s and revitalized towards the end of the 20th century. Whereas Shikumen was popular in Old Shanghai as a practical solution to housing shortage at the time, it becomes popular again in contemporary Shanghai for different reasons, as the refurbished Shikumen neighbourhood serves different purposes from the past.

Today, Shikumen holds a cultural meaning that engages the Old Shanghai days. To Shanghaiese, Shikumen is a built icon, a symbol of the cultural hybridity, and an indicator of the continuity of Haipai culture the spirit of the city. For this reason, traditional elements at Xintiandi are not simply providing a slice of Old Shanghai. Rather, they are deployed to make Old Shanghai relevant to the present. In other words, traditional elements at Xintiandi play the role to connect past and present – a means with which consumers are transported 'back in time to the era of Old Shanghai' (ibid). More specifically, the reference point of the Old Shanghai for today is based on the essence

of the spirit of this city – openness, innovativeness and entrepreneurialism. The phrase Xintiandi in Chinese language means ‘new heaven and earth’. On the one hand, the term suggests the actual facelift of a dilapidated neighbourhood; on the other hand, in a deeper sense, the term is adopted to express a restored confidence in Shanghai, the Haipai culture and the spirit of this great city. Although a ‘new heaven and earth’, Xintiandi is intended to tell the Old Shanghai legend, and to show the continuum between the old and the new, where the past is an essential element to make the present meaningful.

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Notes

1. This has been noted by Sun (2007), and Zhao (2010)
2. For example, He & Wu (2005); Wai (2006), Yang & Chang (2007), Ren (2008), Lu (2013).
3. See Collins Thesaurus of the English Language, 2002, HarperCollins Publishers.
4. Here the 'courtyard house' mainly refers to that of southern style. This type of courtyard house contains a south-facing main building and a wing on each side, embracing a courtyard in the middle. It does not have the north-facing row that is common to the courtyard house in Beijing and Northern China.
5. For consistency and the convenience of reading, the term Shikumen will be used throughout the paper, as Shikumen is regarded as emblematic of Shanghai's built style.
6. For example Zheng, Z. (1999), Shanghai; Zheng, S. (1999), and Xiong, Y. (2003).
7. See Shanghai Municipal Government: Inventory of Historic Buildings 1991, 1997, 2000, 2004, 2014; Also the official website of Shanghai Municipal Administration for Planning and Land Resources, <http://www.shgtj.gov.cn/bxzc/zsc/lfsfm/>, access date: 23 May 2015
8. See, for example, visitor feedbacks on https://www.tripadvisor.com.au/Attraction_Review-g308272-d324169-Reviews-Xintiandi-Shanghai.html

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