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URBAN REGENERATION UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY, CULTURE AND POLICY: COMPARISON OF THREE HISTORICAL STREETS (AREAS) IN THE FORMER FRENCH CONCESSION IN SHANGHAI

Abstract: *With continuous development of globalization and urban regeneration in contemporary China, comprehensive improvement becomes a common phenomenon. It has also been widely noticed by the public, though, “large-scale demolition and reconstruction” methods have been highly criticized at the same time. Three historical streets (areas), Yongkang Road, Xintiandi Area and Tianzifang Area, in Shanghai's former French Concession, have witnessed varying degrees of micro-renovation and comprehensive improvement in the past 30 years and eventually show a completely different space status. By analyzing and contrasting the diagrams between the histories of these three streets (areas), the change of trade form, evolution of urban form, regeneration of street space and the users, it shows that the social, cultural and policy have a significant effect on Yongkang Road which is plebification, Xintiandi Area which is a classical gentrification area in Shanghai and Tianzifang Area which is gradually coming from plebification to gentrification as well as leading them into a different way. The author attempts to reveal the similarities and differences of socio-cultural forces behind each street (areas) in order to explore different spatial consequences and impacts of various reasons: features and advantages, challenges and difficulties. The study of three historical streets (areas) in the former French Concession shows the influence of social and cultural policy forces on the urban morphology in different areas and inspired the formulation and improvement of street policies in the urban renewal of Shanghai.*

Keywords: *comprehensive improvement, historical streets (areas), urban regeneration.*

Research background

The wave of globalization continues booming, with increasing flows of people and commodities, and the exchanges between the cultures and theories, making Shanghai quickly become a veritable collage city. Like most cities in China, in order to quickly build a metropolis, Shanghai has also adopted “large-scale demolition and construction” methods to relocate residents, demolish old buildings, and create new modern urban spaces. However, when there have been tremendous changes in urban forms and living spaces in Shanghai city, some streets (regions) in Shanghai's former French Concession have only undergone minor changes within decades at the same time, which has been well protected by the laws of Urban Conservation Area.

Xintiandi, Tianzifang and Yongkang Roads in Shanghai's former French Concession are three typical examples of the changing streets (regions) in this complex background. The changes in these three cases in recent decades are also influenced by Shanghai's society, culture, and policy. These three streets (areas) are also a representative case for the research. This article attempts to explore the urban regeneration under the influence of society, culture and policy of Xintiandi, Tianzifang and Yongkang Road streets (regions) by comparing their historical evolution, urban form changes, trade form changes and the changes of users in recent decades. The study of three historical streets (areas) in the former French Concession has also inspired formulation and improvement of street policies in the urban renewal of Shanghai.

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Xin Tian Di, Tian Zi Fang, Yongkang Road Street (area)

Xin Tian Di

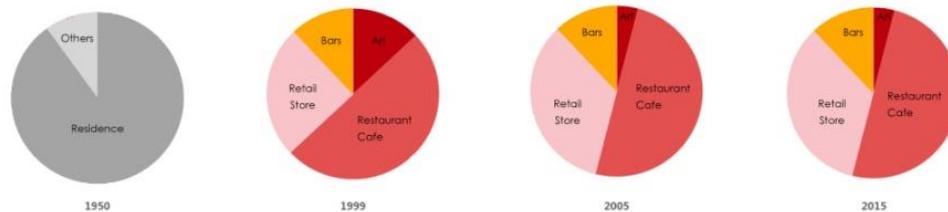
Xin Tian Di is located in the center of Shanghai city and represents a part of the old city reconstruction project in the Taipingqiao area of Luwan District. In the 90s of the last century, it used to be the old-style Shikumen Lane, a densely populated area. As it is impossible to meet the needs of the city's commercial development in the central district of Shanghai, the government decided to reconstruct this area and transform it into a dynamic district by not only providing fashionable business activities, but also a well-made living environment. They also requested that the project must be coordinated with the metropolitan structure of Shanghai city.



Factors Affecting Xintiandi Renewal



Urban form of Xintiandi



Function Ratio of Xintiandi

Figure 1. Xin Tian Di changes

Xin Tian Di has adopted a “Top-down” approach and the government and enterprise cooperation methods in the process of regeneration. They have relocated the local residents and made precise planning and selection of business types to ensure high-quality business. According to the diagram (Fig.1), the urban form has changed after the transformation of Xin Tian Di: the basic block is divided into south and north by Xingye Road, and about one-third of the broken houses in the Shikumen Lane have been demolished to form a pedestrian street running through

the north and south. At the same time, there are various squares of different sizes scattered nearby the main sidewalks. Except for some Shikumen is preserved in the northern part of the area which has made the area still maintaining an old space texture; most of the streets have been transformed into modern urban spaces that are suitable for commercial purposes. The south part of the area is also dominated by new commercial buildings. For the old residence that has been preserved, the internal walls of the houses have been opened up for the commercial needs. The building function has also changed from the original residential function to the restaurant function and advanced consumption shops. The trade form of this area has evolved from an intensive residential area in 1950 to 50% restaurant in 2015, 34% retail, 4% art shop and 12% entertainment. Today, Xintiandi attracts a large number of tourists from all over the world by the characteristics of its fake, but nostalgic bourgeoisie style.

Tian Zi Fang

In comparison with the “top-down”, large-scale and thorough transformation of Xin Tian Di, Tian Zi Fang is the representative of a “bottom-up”, small-scale and gradual way (Sharon Zukin, 2016). Tian Zi Fang was originally Lilong built for a big number of French concession immigrants which later, in 1950s, developed factories inside. Unlike other Lilong districts, it used to be a gathering place of Shanghai artists with a deep creative art culture atmosphere, but full of mundane life as well as of various kinds of inhabitants. Due to the industrial restructuring of Luwan district in the year of 1994, a lot of factories in Lilong were closed. The government later intended to guide Tian Zi Fang and transform it into an art district by transferring the property of factory architectures and, thus, attracting famous artists. Because of the involvement of artists, Tian Zi Fang became a gathering place of creative art industry with a growing bigger reputation. In the year of 2004, the government tried to tear down the old Lilong architectures in Tian Zi Fang, which aroused a strong opposition of experts and artists. Their appeals made a huge impact on the society and soon gained the support of citizens. The popularity of Tian Zi Fang grew fast and called forth the reflection of urban memory. During this small battle of protection, the social power which was made up of the experts, citizens and artists overcame the government and changed the story. The government which used to show up in the figure of authority started to get adapted with the involvement of various social forces by making concessions. The social forces gained a chance to take part in the management and development of Tian Zi Fang with the government supervising and business invitation. The attraction and injection of commercial funding made Tian Zi Fang much more valuable. Original inhabitants came to know the profit of renting. Many ground floors of old architectures, which are as much as 90% nowadays, were rent by altering the property of residence into non-residence. The industries in Tian Zi Fang are now more than art and creation with things like restaurants, retailing shops and tourism pouring in, somehow threatening the space for the art industry. Unlike the peace of co-habitation of artists and residents, various kinds of business have severely destroyed original living atmosphere. Capital profits drive residents lifting up the rent. Meanwhile, due to the lack of efficient supervision of authority, the contradiction between residents and shop owners are growing with the artists leaving.

Yongkang Road Street (area)

If we say that Tian Xi Fang’s transformation was due to artists and residents, then Yongkang Road’s is totally the party of grassroots.

Yongkang Road was previously called as Route Remi with a length of 600 meters full of local mundanity and French concession style. Yongkang Road was a road-side market inside residential district since the rear of 1928. Wasted water with a gross smell flooded everywhere. It was always the alarm of the government. Up till the year of 2006, Xiangyang Road market near Yongkang Road was closed due to the planning and near a thousand merchants had nowhere to go. Yongkang Road then tore down the market to accommodate these merchants and changed its name into Yongkang Li (Li for Lilong).

In 2009, with the help of city renovation, the government and the transformation project party invited investment and tried to turn the open-air market into a distinguished fashion district. Nevertheless due to a number of reasons, Yongkang Road was not that prosperous as hoped.

In 2012, with the project party inviting foreign bar and bistros, Yongkang Road gained a big development. The rent grew up by huge amount, commercial atmosphere became better and Yongkang Road has gradually turned out to be the enclave in downtown Shanghai for youngsters from all over the world to gather. The vividness of Yongkang Road is not only popular among youngsters in Shanghai, but also aroused many reports home and abroad (Wang Yun, 2016).

However, due to the lack of supervision, the conflict between merchants and local residents turned up. Although they charged quite a high fee, noise, shake and dust everywhere severely affected their daily life. Since 2015, Shanghai government started to promote the action of cleaning illegal constructions. Xuhui District started to clean up Hengshan Road-Fuxing Road future area by closing illegal shops and “break-wall” shops. Bars on Yongkang Road were closed almost within one single night. The story burst out online with many reports lamenting the gone street which all made the street even more famous. Nowadays, with the policy easing, some bars have been “reborn” in the residential houses there.

Comparative study of influencing factors: Policy/Capital/Culture

The biggest factor which we can never avoid in the Chinese urban development is the effect of authority institutions. The urban planning, urban development strategy, comprehensive control, resource replacement set by the state authorities have a fundamental influence on the development of the city which can be related to a force majeure. The transformation mode of Xin Tian Di is mainly about the policy leading. The government and ventures cooperated with the government offer preferential policies and fix the problems of demolition, fund attraction and land; and the venture is in charge of practical construction. The policy first has brought clear direction to Xin Tian Di and later a high-efficient comprehensive operation. In merely 3 years, the first period of transformational construction of the whole block has been finished. Ever since then, Xin Tian Di has turned into a popular commercial tourist site from a residential Lilong area. Due to the special transformation mode, the user of the area has thoroughly changed from residents to consumers. People who have been left have now little chance to come back and the original life pattern is completely missing.

In the case of Xin Tian Di, the authority has showed its strength in the following aspects: the ability of using large amount of money, high-efficient execution which can soon promote the quality of facility and spatial environment with a better visual result; maximizing economic benefits; effective regulation according to the market changes. Yet it has still been a bulldozer-like reconstruction with no old memories remained and no benefits for the original residents.

As a comparison, during the transformation of Tian Zi Fang, the earliest art creative industry is also due to the policy involvement. But it is also a conscious let-go of the authority and more a game of capital and culture. The residents, artists and experts have changed its destiny of being torn down. Hence, there has been little change in the texture of the streets of other arts districts. The involvement of the art industry brings new vitality to the block. The accumulation of industry makes it gradually form the unique brand attraction of Tian Zi Fang. New types of commercial capital are in place to promote gradual improvement of infrastructure and environmental quality. Since the replacement was in the way of bottom-up, leading group didn't have an opportunity to change the whole spatial environment. The texture and residents were thus more completely preserved (Fig.2). Mixed population structure of artists, residents and merchants has made the usage of the block more colorful.

The renovation through the market leading to provoke social group changing is for sure somehow efficient and gentle, but it still has two weaknesses: (1) the short eyesight of profit; (2) difficulties in collective behavior control. These two have already showed up in Tian Zi Fang. Many people are unwillingly leaving this area due to the high rent, noise and new coming industry.



Figure 2. Tian Zi Fang changes

Years ago, 52% of the shops were of art and design, with 25% for dining and a mere 7% of retailing. Nowadays, the retailing has come up to 51% and 17% for dining and only 29% of art. The percentage of rented ground floor has reached over 90% from the absolute zero in 2004. The district largest population proportion is made up of merchants and tourists (Zukin, 2016)

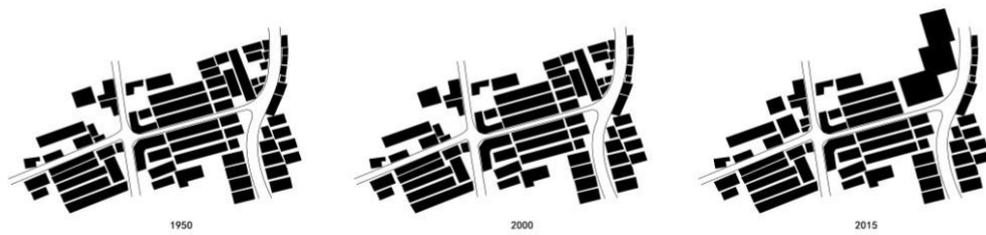
A huge driving force of the capital makes this area increasingly distant from the original “art and creative industries”. The lives of local residents and artists have been eliminated, and most of them are just for the sake of melodrama. When groups of artists and local residents have disappeared completely, the unique value of tianzifang has also vanished. Even with the opportunity of transformation, it is very difficult for tianzifang to make the transformation in a short time.

Yongkang road is a very ordinary street, which is different from the attention of Xin Tian Di and Tian Zi Fang. It is more of a small change, light capital and accidental renewal. The urban morphology has not changed significantly in this area (Fig.3).

After trying political and capital intervention and gaining no result, the street is lucky to fame because of meeting the demand of contemporary young culture by imitation of their social pattern in their country. Being compared with the gentrification-style consumption in Xin Tian Di, young people prefer the local, affordable, casual and free living space. However it still faces some problems: the messy street and low-quality infrastructure and space; immature rules and laws will lead to conflicts in development, such as the noise made by bars which are open from 2 a.m. to 3a.m.



Factors Affecting Yongkang Road Renewal



Urban form of Yongkang Road



Function Ratio of Yongkang Road

Figure 3. Yongkang Road Street (area) changes

Nowadays, the governments and ventures are trying to promote the renovation of the district merely by the policy – from the initial acquiescence to the “one-size-fits-all” comprehensive improvement, to turn the street space into modernized and gentrificationized and thus, providing higher space quality. Now that restaurants and bars have been closed, young mexicans living nearby say in an interview that they are ready to move out of the area and that there is no place for them to stay in the night. Just like Spiro Kostof said, this way will remove the traces that has accumulated around the building and make the building stand in isolation (Kostof, 2005). But the need of local residents and tourists still urge merchants to fight against the strong policy in a gentle way of remaining their specialty and for now not stepping onto the same path as Xin Tian Di and Tian Zi Fang.

According to Allan B. Jacobs, a good street should cover all types of people, not just one social class, one color or one age, instead, it should encourage everyone to get involved. Yongkang Road should be a typical update mode of Chinese cities – based on the local economy and mundane need, without the intervention of huge amount of money, finding its own character during development and promoting a step by step renovation and keeping itself “alive”(Jacobs, 2009)

Conclusion

The urban renewal in China is not linear. There are unbalanced and incomplete development contradictions, even huge gap in similar areas. In the face of complex urban space and streets, the simple “one-size-fits-all” policy, the driving force of social capital and the spontaneity of cultural demand cannot balance the problems of urban development. We can have “Disneylands” like Xin Tian Di in the urban area, but for most of the streets, what is happening, there is real and unique life. To form healthy and sustainable urban streets (area) space and make our city more dynamic, we should balance the developing need of the city, capital benefits and space quality on the base of preserving existing habits and urban memories, not excluding the street life and pursuit of “high-end”, “clean” by combing a counter-weight to public life and thus promoting development through multiple methods.

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