

The Disappeared Shantytown Research on Urban Renewal of Five Residential Areas on Shaanxi Road in Shanghai

Zhaoda Qiu*1
Tongji University

Corresponding author , Chen Qian
Tongji University

Abstract

This paper studies five residential areas at the crossroad of Shaanxi Road and Jianguo Road. These areas bring together the four main forms of residence in downtown of Shanghai. Luxury residential estate take the place of the last ghetto nearby. The façades of the crossroads tell the whole story about urban renewal of urban housing in Shanghai.

Based on the analysis of the history, economy, culture and living conditions of the five blocks, the article summarizes the four reasons for these urban changes (crowd rigid demand, historical conservation movements, economic threshold, cultural power of discourse). Compared with the appearance of changing policy, it further reveals the negative impact brought by the elimination-mechanism that Shanghai used to efface all her shanty town from the map. It indicates the connection between urban vitality and class diversification, which provides a balanced-basis for policy setting of urban renewal movement in future.

1. Background

The "shantytown" was once a large-scale and unique urban ghetto area. Immigrants from outside Shanghai, together with the low-class local people have occupied the area for centuries (fig.1). They occupied about one-fifth of Shanghai's population at most. Shanghai's shantytowns have strange nicknames, mixed ownership, and mixed forms. Many shantytowns have unique cultural and historical factors. It has always been the focus of the urban renewal movement (Shanghai authorized it 'the old city renovation'), because of its lower land

use rate, sanitary and security problems. The impact began in the early 1990s. The government originally planned to eliminate all ghettos before 2005. Due to changes in economic and policy factors, it still determined to remove shantytowns of Shanghai from the map by the end of 2025.

In 2019, Shanghai has completely demolished the main downtown shantytowns in Hongkou, Yangpu, Jing'an, Putuo and other places. The 120,000 square meters of shantytown recently demolished included second-class old lane and workers' estate. The demolition plan, together with latest demolition of illegal temporary construction policies, has compressed the living space of the grass root.

The five residential areas at the crossroad of Jianguo Road and Shaanxi Road are typical examples of the urban renewal movement in the city center. The shantytowns were demolished and transformed into other forms at different times. What is the reason for this transformation? How will it affect the vitality of the city center? What are the future trends of these residential areas? This is what this article attempts to analyze and answer.

2. Changes of residential areas at the crossroads of Shaanxi Road and Jianguo Road

The five residential areas at the crossroad of Jianguo Road and Shaanxi Road includes the four main residential forms of Shanghai downtown i.e. commercial apartment estate, Shikumen Lane, workers' community and the second-class old lane. Shaanxi Road is not only a physical border between the Huangpu and Xuhui Districts, but also the boundary of urban



Figure 1. A Bird-eye view of the Shanghai's "biggest shanty town" in Yangpu district. Photographed by the authors.

plan and its' support system. Since all the ghettos nearby (the last shantytown remaining in downtown of Xuhui District) has been torn down from 1990 to 2008, elite commercial estate has been built on the ruins of shantytown.

2.1 Cité Bourgogne ——Shikumen Lane (Historical Conservation Community)

Cité Bourgogne is located at the north-east corner of crossroad (formerly the French Concession in Shanghai) (fig.2). There are 78 red brick-wood structured houses in three-floor Shikumen, forming a typical layout of alleys and lanes. The former residence of the famous writer Sir Ba Jin is located at No. 52 Cité Bourgogne. In 1989, it was listed as a municipal historical heritage conservation unit. The typical Shikumen buildings such as Cité Bourgogne have become the main part of the city's brilliant memories and have been permanently retained the "authentic" life style of Shanghai. Today, the small attic rooms were rented to the low-end migrants to live in groups, while the bigger suites were well-decorated for air-b&b.

2.2 Bourgogne Apartment —— Common commercial apartment estate

As one of the earliest commercial apartments around 2000, it was in short supply but in great

demand. Although the site located nearby a graveyard which was unlucky for the traditional Chinese. However, there are still many celebrities who have bought houses here. Its name comes from 'Cité Bourgogne'. Four high-rise towers which offer three-room patterns for middle class people stand around the communities. Swimming pool, gym, barber shop, cafe and various facilities serve person by the annex building alongside the Shaanxi Road. A large amount of commercial estate in the downtown has got its land by the demolition of shantytowns, old villages and urban old factories.

2.3 Lane 211, Jianguo West Road Workers Village

Lane 211 is a typical worker s ' new estate, but different from the earliest Shanghai workers' settlements in the 1950s, the workers' new estate built in 1993 is a latest edition with a double-room house type covering over 70 sqm. Lack of parking spaces and community facilities, Lane 211 earns its high rent-rate for the excellent school location and cost-effective room types. This makes it be one of the best school district housing in Shanghai. Children lives here can share the same high-quality education as the elite government officials' descendants. Although, a common suite in this workers

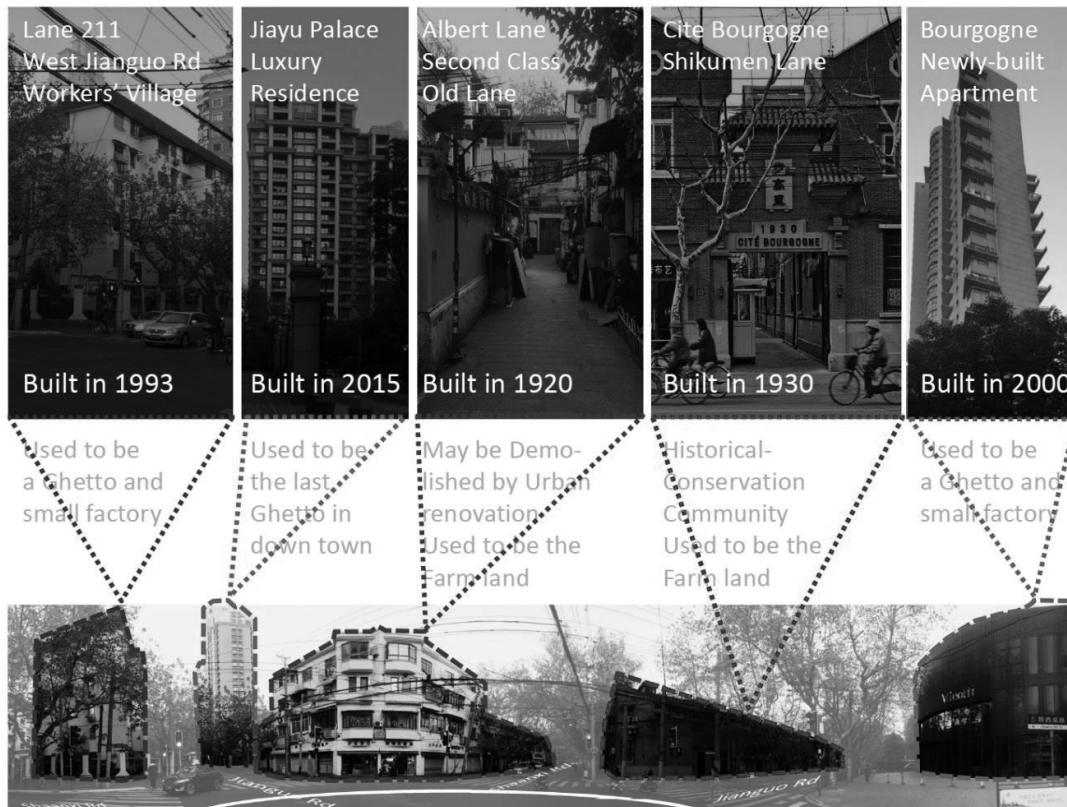


Figure 2. 5 residential areas (community) at the crossroads of Shaanxi Road and Jianguo Road. Drawn by the authors.

village with a decent price is 25% more expensive than same surrounding ones, it still costs only half of Jiayuting (newly-built luxury apartments) within the same school district.

2.4 Albert Lane – Second-Class Old Lane

Albert Lane, facing the famous Cité Bourgogne on South Shaanxi Road, was built in 1920. It consists of 43 three or four-story brick-concrete buildings, and some street-side shops were rebuilt in the late of 1980s. The architectural style is simple, the parking space is not available, and the sanitary equipment is not well-completed. The kitchen and toilet which were originally designed for a single-family use have become separately-used area with brick and wood structures.

The situation here sounds like a paradox. Without reputation like Cite Bourgogne, Albert lane covers a low rent price. Houses here with uncounted common area can only be bought by paying in full without mortgage. This policy makes it lose its price advantage as a decent-

priced school district house. The local tenants began to build their own space to run small business. Authorities began to clear the illegal structures in last 2 years. Without commercial space to run, vendors have left Albert Lane. The repairs of its original poor-living condition costed government a lot every year should have blocked aging of both architecture and population. It pushes the old lane on the list of areas to be demolished in next decade.

2.5 the Disappeared Shantytown —Rise of Luxury Residence

Jiayuting Palace is a neighborhood to Albert Lane. It is a one of the top residential areas in the downtown with excellent facilities and surrounding conditions. The land there was once the last shantytown in Xuhui District. The ghetto began its demolishment from 2000 and finished in 2008. After the completion of Jiayuting Palcace, the surrounding land prices have risen sharply due to the gentrification process has been tremendously rapid. The surrounding

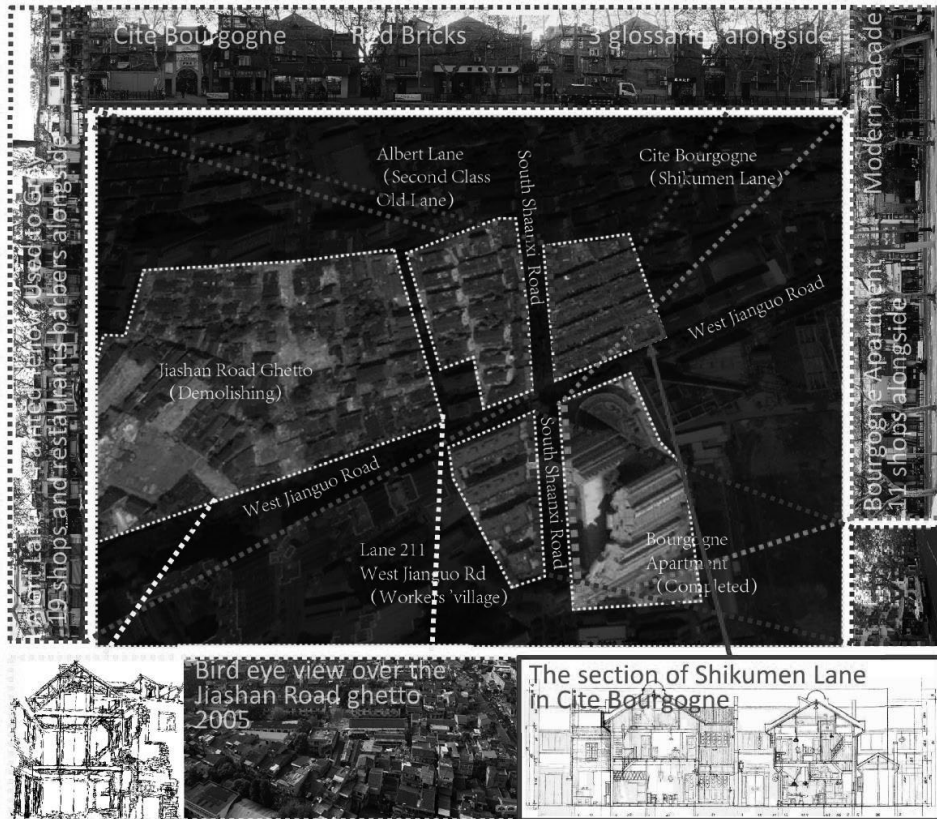


Figure 3. The status analysis of the 5 communities alongside the road, the picture of ghetto on Jiashan Road. Drawn by the authors.

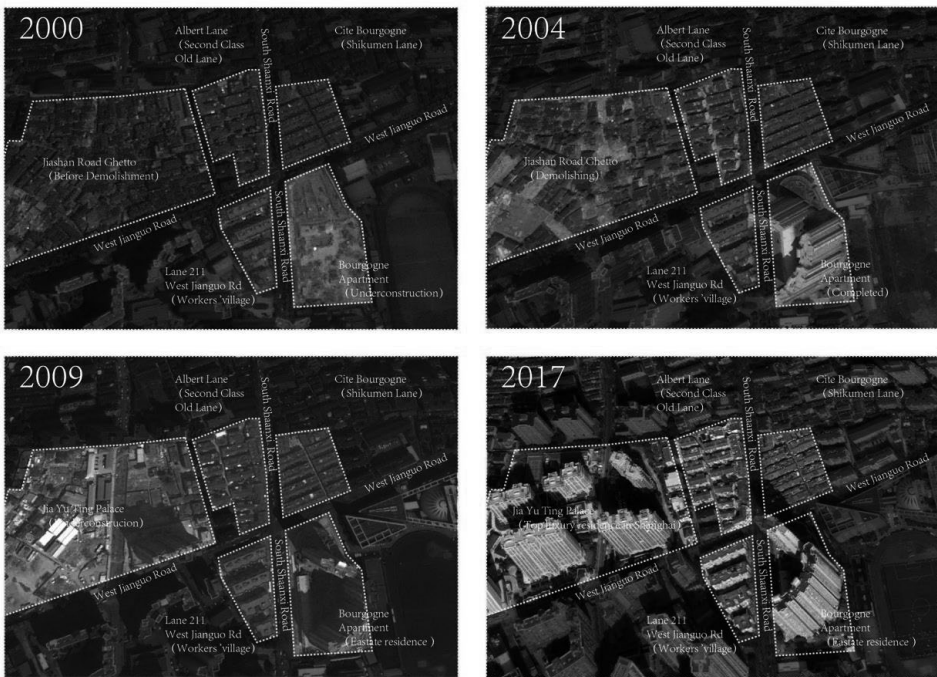


Figure 4. The change of 5 communities in 2 decades in the aspect of ghetto demolition and renewal of the residential estate. Drawn by the authors.

services and infrastructure have also been continuously improved with the emergence of Jiayuting Palace. It always will be a nice story about the gentrification every time we tear down a shantytown.

3 Reasons for the disappearance of shanty towns

Three of the five residential areas at the crossroad of Jianguo Road and Shaanxi used to be shantytowns. However, in 2015, the last shantytown was replaced by high-end housing on this street corner. The demolition of the shantytown was hailed as a triumphant urban renewal activity. When we chose to transfer all the local barbershop, breakfast bar and grocery into the cafe, chic and cyber-fashion shop with the influence of gentrification. The living pressure of surrounding residents here has increased sharply, leading to a change in the population frame of the entire region. The same situation occurs in other corners of Shanghai, especially in dense areas of traditional shantytowns such as Huangpu, Putuo, Jing'an, and Yangpu. Today, at this corner of the street which has five residential forms, why only the shantytown disappeared? What is the reason for this phenomenon?

3.1 Shikumen Lane under the Urban

Historical Preservation Movement

Among the five residential areas of Jianguo Road and Shaanxi Road, Cité Bourgogne, built in the 1930s, is preserved as a historically protected building. Numerous famous writer described the Shanghai Shikumen Lane as the urban background of Shanghai. Various literary and film works directly use Shikumen as a symbol of Eastern modern style, and even misread it as an "authentic" form of residential house. Within symbolic rendering based on the business model, the Shikumen residence has been fixed on the altar. Today, most of the Shikumen lanes have become historical reserved or heritage buildings. Regarding the protective renovation of Shikumen and Old Lane, the government has renovated the kitchen and sanitary parts of the entire background, and later upgraded the fire protection and security facilities.

Actually, a Shikumen apartment which originally designed for one family was allocated to 4-5 families without enough sanitation.

Before 2000, inhabitants here were all local ones. Many of them (above 40%) bought another house to improve their living environment in last 2 decades. Only after the population density becomes lower can their living environment be fundamentally improved. Because of the city's historical protection movement, even though Shikumen buildings have poor living conditions, the area is still well preserved. The current inhabitants are local elderly, low-end laborer tenants and foreigner renter. Many owners have been converted into airbnb, which has improved the old sanitary.

3.2 Suburbanization of low-end communities

Since first two decades of the Policy of Reformation and Opening (1979~1999), the number of migrants in Shanghai had not increased sharply. Unlike other shantytown at the rest of the world, half of the local middle-class citizen used to live in poor areas as a silent majority before the Commercial Housing Policy (1998). In last two decades (1999~2019), purchase potential of local people who used to live in Shikumen, workers village and shantytown bloomed a lot with a sufficient real-estate market supply and a traditional belief in having houses. At the same time, communities in Shanghai gradually moved to the suburbs due to the bottleneck of rigid demand for housing and convenient transportation systems, which accelerated the disappearance of poor communities such as shantytowns here.

The total demand for Shanghai's residential areas is approaching its population peak of 25 million in 2025. Renewal of Shanghai's urban settlements was accompanied by a large influx of people since the end of the last century. In recent years, basis of Shanghai's settlement is mainly through the purchase of real estate or school enrollment, rather than the simple labor-intensive demand. The development of public transportation such as the subway has further promoted the extension of low-end living spaces to the suburbs. New migrants have become an important driving force for the construction and development of Shanghai. They have the same belief of owning a house in Shanghai even in suburbs with low-prices rather than long-renting.

3.3 Economic interests

Demolition from the city center to the suburbs has not only brought huge benefits to the real estate development, but also brought economic subsidies to the demolished residents. After the large-scale urban renewal and population change in Shanghai since the mid-1990s, and the further development of the real estate market, the value of urban living space has increased rapidly. Many companies have huge investment in urban core due to the low density of shantytowns or private houses on land, the cost of demolition is low in early years; the construction density of second-class lane or workers' villages is relatively high and the cost of demolition is also huge. The shantytown is the easiest to demolish, so it has become the focused one (fig.4). Second-class old lane will be next.

Furthermore, the hidden middle-class people who used to live in these areas still have the ownership of these old apartments today. As landlords, they are not eager to sell their apartments in the near future, but are waiting for the benefits from demolition compensation to be maximized. In order to maximize the benefits, areas used to be the shantytowns had developed to be elite high-rise residential such as Jiayuting. At the same time, the diversified development of Shanghai's cities is no longer restricted to the original "upper city" and "lower city" location conditions, and more diversified urban development conditions have made the choice of settlements more stable. Gaining economic benefits has also driven a huge shift in the urban population's spatial location.

3.4 Lack of Cultural Discourse Power

Another reason for disappearance is of their weak cultural discourse power. The demolition behavior of the shantytowns has reflected the people's intention to turn over and reform from the greater political & cultural context. The shantytown area directly implies poverty and oldness. Demolition of these shantytowns also means the socialist discourse system with Chinese characteristics. There is no such discourse conflict with Shikumen, a culture symbol of Shanghai's living form. Workers' village holds the politically correct, or even the moderate second-level old village. The two-year policy on group renting, demolishing illegal buildings and temporary buildings has also greatly affected Shikumen, second-class old lane and Workers' village. The policy furthers

the gentrification and affect the life of many low-end residents in downtown as mentioned.

In short, shantytowns have the lowest threshold of economic benefits, have no foundation in political topic, and never been regarded as a cultural symbols. However, it is worth noting that in the transformation strategy of the middle and low-end living spaces, laissez-faire gentrification is not a good policy. We order Spaghetti and Sushi instead of Yangchun Noodle and Stinking Tofu. The lifestyle used to be here will be faded, while the facade is still being refurbished. Demolishing shantytown will cause it to change its location at once as J. Jacobs mentioned, whether the higher rent will be completely destroyed the native living pattern as S.Zukin said.

4. Conclusion

Based on the interpretation of the Typo-historical development of the five residential communities of Shaanxi Road and Jianguo Road, we can propose four reasons for the change of residential types and the disappearance of shanty towns close to this crossroad. That is, the historical conservation movements focus on the code and regulation of those high-end dwellings, low-end communities move to the suburbs, the economic benefits to gentrify the shantytown attracted the developers' eye. Also the ghettos, together with inhabitants, have little cultural discourse power. This is the epitome of Shanghai's urban renewal movement in last 2 decades.

However, gentrification process, represented by the disappearance of shanty towns, does not always have a positive impact on urban vitality. Shanghai's appearance has become more secure, clean and tidy, but such kind of urban spaces are equally fragile and unitary. Today, most of downtown settlements on behalf of the crossroads on Shaanxi Road and Jianguo Road are still in crisis: Shikumen has gradually departed from the essence of native living and became a chic tourist destination space. Old lane and Workers' villages will still face the possibility of being gradually wiped out by hyper-gentrification if they have lost the public transportation advantage, school district location and low rent-to-sales ratio.

Which trends could affect the urban renewal in downtown? After the demolition of the shanty

town, the public began to debate whether the government will continue to tear down the second-class old lane. All the signs indicate that this clean-up will no longer continue. The one-size-fits-all policy wipes out traces of history too fast and pulls down the urban ecology of the downtown. The authorities will lay down more elaborate regulations to solve this problem. The experience of the study on the five residential communities of Shaanxi Road and Jianguo Road reveals the influence of social forces on the typo-historical development, which enlightens a balanced basis for the urban renewal tactic and a solution of the growing gentrification problem.

Acknowledgements

This work is funded by NSFC (Grant No.51778421).

Chen Qian is the corresponding author of this paper.

Endnotes

1. Feng Li. (2011) Columbia circle: transformation of the social fabric's of a garden residence in shanghai (Hku Theses Online).
2. Zheng Shiling. (2016). 'Reflections on Architectural Heritage Conservation in Shanghai.' *Built Heritage* 1, 1-13.
3. Zukin, S. . (1987). Gentrification: culture and capital in the urban core. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 13, 129-147.