



---

## Shanghai: Modern Conveniences as an Argument for Displacing Residents

The case of Jianyeli, a pilot rejuvenation project

Valérie Laurans

---



### Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/459>

DOI : 10.4000/chinaperspectives.459

ISSN : 1996-4617

### Éditeur

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

### Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 1 avril 2005

ISSN : 2070-3449

### Référence électronique

Valérie Laurans, « Shanghai: Modern Conveniences as an Argument for Displacing Residents », *China Perspectives* [En ligne], 58 | march - april 2005, mis en ligne le 01 avril 2008, consulté le 28 octobre 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/459> ; DOI : 10.4000/chinaperspectives.459

---

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 28 octobre 2019.

© All rights reserved

---

# Shanghai: Modern Conveniences as an Argument for Displacing Residents

The case of Jianyeli, a pilot rejuvenation project

Valérie Laurans

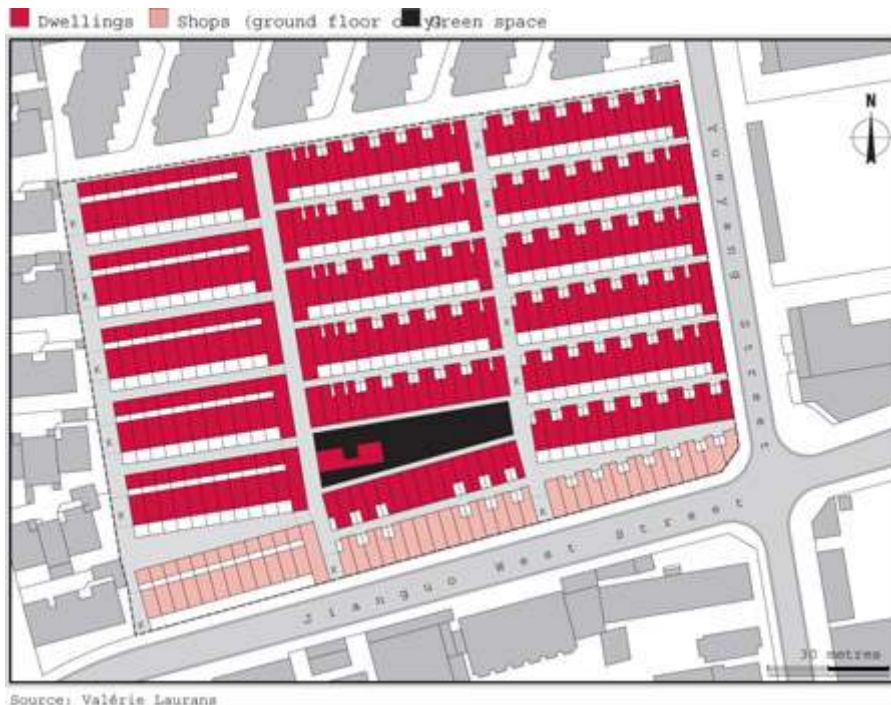
---

- 1 Do the Chinese aspire to modern conveniences? Such a question, which may seem incongruous, embodies the spirit of the times in many big Chinese cities, and particularly in Shanghai. At a time when the residential spaces of this megalopolis are undergoing complete renewal, residents are being encouraged to buy their own homes. While the authorities seek to make urban space profitable, residents are rethinking their conception of domestic comfort. Between the ambitions of politicians and the concerns of residents, access to modern conveniences, while being their common aspiration, is the scene of a clash of ideals between the leaders and the led.
- 2 My initial research explored the huge discrepancy, at the turn of the century, between the availability of a tremendous amount of new housing on the market and actual demand among the population of Shanghai<sup>1</sup>. The question of social change appeared just beneath the surface. The Chinese regime, which is dependent on the continuation of economic reforms, is now working on the construction of a legal framework for urban renewal. Faced with the excesses of property development, what recourse is there for the citizens of Shanghai? This article considers the stakes involved in the housing sector's move into the market economy. It presents the social consequences of the reorganisation of the housing stock in Shanghai and emphasises the fundamental role that the displacement of the population has in the race for urban development. A detailed study of Jianyeli, a historic area which is the object of a pilot urban renewal project, recounts the progress of negotiations begun only after eviction proceedings had begun.  
The modern convenience paradigm or the metamorphoses of access to housing
- 3 In 2000, while the state was completing the dismantling of the *fuli fen fang*, i.e. the allocation of housing within the framework of the welfare system, four-fifths of

metropolitan residents did not wish to invest in the purchase of new housing. As far as the authorities were concerned, the drop in the quality of housing conditions justified changing the rules of access to domestic space: it was a question of shifting from the principle of merit to the logic of the market. For residents, the very status of housing was thus profoundly altered.

- 4 A rare commodity, housing, until the 1990s, was parsimoniously allocated by the state. A resident had no leeway in deciding his place of residence, nor was he recognised as master in his own house. He could at best only enjoy the use of collective property. One of the major consequences of the privatisation of the residential property sector was to give back to housing its status as inalienable property. By a ricochet effect, the relation between the dwelling and its occupants was also profoundly altered. The resident, once passive, suddenly became once more the active agent in his own life. If they had sufficient financial means, the marketing of new housing offered all urban residents the opportunity of anchoring their security in the place of their choice, as well as of making their investment yield a profit. While access to housing was associated with a financial investment, modern conveniences, a privilege to be earned, were associated with ownership. What would be the social consequences of the marketing of new dwellings? Would domestic space become the centre of new demands by the inhabitants? Would these demands close themselves into the private sphere, or, on the contrary, would they contribute to the appearance of a public space based on the assertion of common interests?

#### 1. Buildings in Jianyeli before renovation



- 5 Several research projects are currently examining these questions<sup>2</sup>. In the field of urban studies, Chen Yingfang is taking up the concepts of “the city” and of “urban society” formulated by Max Weber in order to examine the effective status of the contemporary Chinese urban dweller. The gap which exists today between “passive residents” and “citizens participating in the life of the city” raises the question of the

building of social cohesion<sup>3</sup>. The emergence of civil society in Shanghai is also central to Bao Yaming's preoccupations. His research transposes Henri Lefebvre's theses of "the right to the city" and of "the production of space" to the context of Shanghai, and focuses on the changes in public space<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, academics working on "residential communities" (shiqu)<sup>5</sup> and on "residents' associations" (jumin xuehui)<sup>6</sup> envisage residential space as the place of expression of social conflict and of the power relations between the government and society. Benjamin L. Read<sup>7</sup> ponders the representativity and the influence of the elections of co-ownership committees (yuezhu weiyuanhui) in Canton, Chongqing and Peking. In his view, their formation, which is more or less organised by the state, is evidence of urban residents' desire to participate at the lowest level of public life. These organisations may contribute to the formation of a social connection based on the defence of property-owners' rights. Zhu Jiangang<sup>8</sup>, who studies the disputes relating to the non-fulfilment of sales or housing upkeep agreements, is more cautious. To an increasing extent, only a small fraction of the population is concerned: those urban dwellers who have the means to become the owners of new housing. Moreover, where Shanghai is concerned, this research does not take account of the displacement of the population, a phenomenon which is characteristic of urban renewal, and which concerns the majority of urban dwellers who were originally settled in the city centre.

From the reorganisation of the housing stock to the social reconfiguration of the metropolis

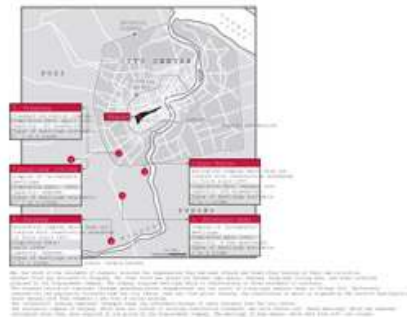
- 6 At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Chinese state undertook the conversion of the housing sector to the market economy. Shanghai, confronted with an endemic housing shortage, adopted a policy of residential property construction on a large scale. This was aimed at three major objectives: the provision of an adequate number of apartments on the edge of the city; promotion of the buying of new housing; and the decongestion of an overcrowded city centre. While these measures appear to aim at the improvement of housing conditions (which were neglected during the first forty years of the communist regime), the short-term objectives are more pragmatic. As is the case with many others, this reform from on high is the result of the determination of the state. For the municipality of Shanghai, the argument of modern conveniences plays the role above all of an incitement. It serves to help economic growth, thanks to the development of property promotion. It also provides a pretext for the renewal of the physical appearance of the city. Lastly, it contributes to the maintenance of social stability, and thus participates in a strategy of relegation of the individual to the private sphere.
- 7 The reorganisation of Shanghai's housing stock took place in three stages, between 1992 and 2004<sup>9</sup>. During an initial experimental stage, from 1992 to 1995, residential property was partly privatised. This stage was marked by the chaotic construction of new housing in the suburbs. The supply on offer, without any connection to the logic of the market, did not correspond to real demand, and was not based on any proven architectural model. Since these dwellings found no buyers, some were acquired by the state, while others were demolished. The second stage (1996-2002) saw the spread of the privatisation of the housing market. This stage was characterised by the regulation of construction and by the massive subdivision of plots available in the immediate periphery. Moreover these new buildings, erected outside the inner circular highway,

were the object of various incentives to home ownership: the establishment of a system of bank loans, standardisation of construction, special promotions, etc.

- 8 Beginning in 2003, buildable space became scarce inside the new perimeter of the city centre (which was defined in 2000 by the outer circular highway). The emphasis then shifted to the renovation of old housing within the historic centre, whose border is the inner circular highway. Urban renewal offered new investment possibilities to property developers. On the one hand, the local authorities wanted to finance the rehabilitation of the housing stock inherited from the time of the Concessions and the Maoist period. On the other hand, bringing the buildings up to standard would allow them to get rid of housing which was unsaleable because of its decrepitude<sup>10</sup>. With the 2010 World Fair on the horizon, the progress of the project had become urgent. This is a media event of prime importance to Shanghai, whose ambition is to join the select club of globalised metropolises.
- 9 From an official point of view, the standardisation of housing in Shanghai is evidence of the general rise in the standard of living. On the ground, the directives of the state translate into a huge commotion and an unprecedented social reconfiguration of urban space. To oversimplify, they tended to disperse poverty in enclaves on the periphery and to concentrate wealth in the heart of the city. Since 1990, 38 million square metres of old buildings have been demolished in the ten central districts of the metropolis. At the same time, over 800,000 families (2.7 million residents) were moved to the suburbs between 1992 and 2001. Since the designation of the city, in 2002, as the site of the World Fair, the work of the bulldozers has intensified. The renewal of the urban centre is believed to have affected 98,750 households (around 340,000 residents) in 2002 and 79,000 (around 270,000 people) in 2003. As of October 1st 2004, the population affected in the first nine months of the year was estimated at 9,500 households (about 33,000 residents)<sup>11</sup>. Whatever the reliability of these official statistics, evicted residents are participating, against their will, in the gentrification of the city centre. The renovation of these densely populated areas by demolition, or more rarely by renewal<sup>12</sup> is the cause of regular demonstrations of discontent. At a special meeting in June 2003, Hang Zhen, the Mayor of Shanghai, is said to have stated that the proliferation of displacement operations, by endangering social stability, were having a negative influence on the development of the metropolis<sup>13</sup>.
- 10 In economic terms, the advantage of the evictions is nonetheless undeniable. According to Wang Lianli, their continuation is even essential. In fact, these mass evictions maintain the property bubble and thus sustain economic development<sup>14</sup>. Yet they also put a strain on the legitimacy of the public authorities. At the local level, arbitration between financial profits and civil interests is proving difficult. The international press has given wide coverage to the excesses of property development everywhere in China. Considering those displaced, it has emphasised the violation of residents' rights<sup>15</sup>. In the face of pressure from the media, the Party's Central Committee approved, at the end of 2003, a national directive forbidding forced evictions. This outline of a judicial framework was reinforced, in March 2004, by inclusion in the Constitution of the right to private property. But angry demonstrations by residents have not decreased<sup>16</sup>.
- 11 While the Shanghai press boasts of the success of "model housing operations"<sup>17</sup>, the national press is debating the adoption of commercial law as the judicial basis for "displacement contracts". Business publications uncover the misappropriation of funds of which some property development companies have been guilty<sup>18</sup>. However, the

validity of such operations is not called into question. On the contrary, they are credited with all sorts of advantages. The “moving” operations (WW, banqian) are said to make it possible for the state to standardise the various forms of home ownership, and to regain possession, “to the advantage of the majority”, of strategic spaces in the city. They are also said to make it possible for low- or middle-income earners to become property owners outside the marketplace, and to accede to modern conveniences in a perimeter which is “close to the city centre”.

## 2. The relocation of the residents of Jianyeli



- 12 In practice, how are these evictions carried out nowadays? What are the reasons for the dissatisfaction of the displaced city dwellers? In what terms are their grievances expressed? An analysis of Jianyeli, a historic district in the city centre in the course of being redeveloped, makes it possible to put forward some answers. This pilot rehabilitation project, directed by the district of Xuhui, is being carried out with public funds. While supposed to be in the public interest, the renewal of Jianyeli has become a wrestling match between the local authorities and residents. The thorny problem of the evictions lies at the heart of the disagreement.

### The renovation of Jianyeli

- 13 Jianyeli is a lilong: a residential district, built between 1930 and 1938, at the heart of the former French Concession in Shanghai. Made up of two- or three-storey semi-detached houses, it was originally designed to house 260 families. In the course of historical events (Japanese occupation, civil war) its original residents temporarily sheltered new arrivals who had come to seek refuge under the authority of the foreign powers. In 1956, the government requisitioned all private dwellings, which led to a redistribution of living spaces. During the Cultural Revolution, the untimely arrival of new

occupants<sup>19</sup>, aggravated the splitting up of Jianyeli's housing. On January 1st 2003, the population of the lilong was estimated at 3,000 residents divided into 1,050 homes<sup>20</sup>.

- 14 The authorities of Xuhui, the district of Shanghai responsible for Jianyeli, are carrying out a policy of urban renewal, following the example of other sectors in the city centre. In this context, Jianyeli enjoys privileged treatment. Its classification in the list of districts to be preserved, as well as its inclusion inside a perimeter which is the object of a conservation plan, has allowed it to avoid demolition and to benefit from a restoration project. Officially, the operation constitutes a priority project for the district of Xuhui. The district is seeking to establish a model for the renovation of the historic areas of central Shanghai. The local authorities are concentrating their efforts on three key areas: the financing of the renovation; the authenticity of the restoration; and the management of the original population. How is the question of the displacement of residents settled?
- 15 From a legal point of view, the eviction of the inhabitants of Jianyeli is based on two regulations published by the Bureau for the Management of Land Resources for Residential Property of the City of Shanghai (Shanghai shi fangwu tudi ziyuan guanli ju): Directive "111" (dated November 1st 2001)<sup>21</sup> on the management of the displacement of urban residents, and another directive which deals with the preservation of the fabric of the historic areas of Shanghai<sup>22</sup>.
- 16 In August 2003, the Displacement Company of Xuhui, which has State Enterprise status and is responsible for having the area evacuated, circulated by means of public billboards, an initial notice aimed at the residents of Jianyeli<sup>23</sup>. This announcement was followed by a practical information operation. The two regulations referred to were distributed to each household, along with the compensation each person would be eligible for, according to the characteristics of their lodging. The local press then published several dossiers justifying, on the one hand, the necessity for the renovation project and debating, on the other hand, the methods to be adopted in the restoration of the built environment. The Displacement Company, for its part, refused to produce the authorisation of the municipality officially approving the evictions. All demands for justification of the legitimacy of the procedure being applied were also ignored. The grounds for the agreement offered to the residents of the lilong were not only impenetrable, they were also not open to discussion. Moreover the terms of the transaction were not to their advantage. It offered them modest lodgings in a faraway suburb<sup>24</sup> or the payment of financial compensation, which was deemed inadequate. Nevertheless, 30% of the residents accepted the Displacement Company's offer, and left within the specified deadline. The others did not move, despite a double reiteration of the eviction order. Jianyeli then became the scene of confrontations between the district authorities, represented by the Displacement Company, and the recalcitrant residents, entrenched in their stronghold. The standoff continued until the end of 2003. The deadline for the evictions was then extended to June 2004.

The resistance of the residents

- 17 At the beginning of August 2003, the district of Xuhui published a decree putting an end to the residents' right to use the lodgings in Jianyeli. This right had, originally, been granted to the occupants on an indefinite basis. The residents of Jianyeli were unable to become the owners of their lodgings for two reasons: firstly the division of each housing unit would be between too many families, and secondly the decrepitude of the buildings. The non-compliance of the lodgings with the new standards: lack of

individual bathrooms, sharing of kitchens, inadequacy of the drainage system, etc., made the lodgings in Jianyeli unsaleable.

- 18 The decree published by the district of Xuhui gave formal notice of imminent eviction; this took place on August 18th 2003.
- 19 The form and the amount of the compensation given to the occupants of Jianyeli for evacuating the premises were at the entire discretion of the Displacement Company of the district of Xuhui. The value of the buildings was fixed well below the going market rate<sup>25</sup>. The Displacement Company did not, moreover, provide any measure of priority in favour of the residents being able to return to the renovated lodgings. The lodgings will thus be available to the former residents at the same market price as to new buyers... In answer to the pressing questions of the residents who hoped to be able to move back into their homes, the Displacement Company skipped round the problem by announcing a crippling sale price: five million yuan<sup>26</sup>, at the very least, per restored house. The displacement compensation was of course far from equivalent to such a sum. There was therefore no hope of being rehoused in the same place.
- 20 These conditions were not subject to preliminary consultation with the residents, nor to arbitration with the help of independent experts. A month after the formal eviction notice, the response of the majority of the residents to the authoritarian injunction to leave, and to the inadequacy of the compensation, was a refusal to comply. Initially, responsibility for this state of affairs did not fall on the municipality of Shanghai, but on the Displacement Company of the district of Xuhui. According to the residents, the Company took advantage of legal loopholes to impose its own interpretation of the law, and thus benefit from the evictions. In the absence of any possibility of appealing, the residents began to negotiate, case by case, an agreement in their favour. Each was confronted with a choice between three ways of resisting: “waiting for new and more favourable offers” (W, deng); “leaving it to the state” (W, kao) to manage their material difficulties; or “making trouble” (W, nao) by taking it out on the officials of the Displacement Company.
- 21 In the eyes of the authorities, Jianyeli amounts to no more than a mere pocket of poverty at the heart of a strategic area. Keeping it in its existing state does not correspond to the policy of prestigious representation which the government intends to apply. Nor is it profitable in economic terms: the powerful Bureau for the Management of Land Resources for Residential Property of Xuhui district hopes to obtain a greater profit from such an under-exploited plot of land. Lastly the status quo does not satisfy the residents themselves: the dilapidated state of the neighbourhood is a source of endless complaints to local government. In short, for both administrators and citizens the renewal of Jianyeli is as necessary as it is unavoidable. But on what basis should it be carried out? From a practical point of view, taking into account the demands of the original inhabitants would certainly have given rise to problems because of the density of the population. But other stakes were probably decisive in the fate of the residents of the lilong.
- 22 It is necessary to mention, on this subject, the diverging interests of the various administrative entities in charge of the dossier: the city planning bureaux at the city level and of the district of Xuhui, on the one hand, and on the other the bureaux of land management and their local client: the Residential Property Group of the district of Xuhui (Xuhuiqu fangdiqun)<sup>27</sup>. The city planners, referring to the master plan for 2000-2020, emphasise the necessity for preservation; the land managers, for their part,



using as an argument the financial cost of such an approach, opt for the demolition of Jianyeli and the construction of new buildings. The debate was not yet settled when the evictions began, and in any case its outcome matters little to the co-ordinator of the project, the director of the Xuhui district. As the one responsible for the carrying out of the operation, his interests lie in swift completion of the work, on which his personal political career depends.

“Rooted households”<sup>28</sup> versus the “hoodlum company”<sup>29</sup>

- 23 From June 2004, the Xuhui district Displacement Company is believed to have no longer obtained any credit from the Construction Bank (Zhongguo jianshi yinghang). Whether for lack of finance, or for other reasons, the process of displacement then came to a halt. In the summer swelter the lodgings which were already demolished became nests for rats and insects and an acrid smell of decay built up there. The status quo lasted until the inspection, in September 2004, of the progress of the project by Sun Chao, Mayor of the Xuhui district. The municipality decided to speed up the evictions. To this end, it made more funds available. Despite these efforts, there still remained, at the beginning of November 2004, around 250 of the approximately 1,000 households initially living in the lilong.
- 24 The Displacement Company then implemented a new strategy. On November 25th it brought in 200 migrant workers (mingong). These were not, however, workers such as those who, having come with their families in March 2004, were working on the demolition of the vacated dwellings (about 50 people). The new arrivals were specially recruited to lay siege to the resisting residents. Divided into teams, each one directed by a leader with a walkie-talkie, they followed the movements and activities of the inhabitants according to the orders of the Displacement Company. The population of the lilong then divided into three groups: the recalcitrant residents, the workers carrying out the demolition, and the employees of the hoodlum company. The task of the latter, who earn a good salary—50 yuan a day<sup>30</sup>—was for the time being to make the residents' life impossible by frightening and mistreating them. A range of tactics were used to dislodge the defenders.
- 25 The mingong received orders to take over all the spaces in the lilong: which is to say the communal spaces and the empty houses, of course, but also the houses where some dwellings were still occupied. This enabled the Displacement Company to carry out an initial demonstration of strength: under its directives, the migrants broke down the outside doors of the houses while their occupants were out. They then took over the spaces initially occupied by former joint tenants who had already left.
- 26 In a second strike, the mingong every day, from 5am until 10pm, went up and down the lilong, equipped with loudspeakers and whistles, banging on doors, etc. On several occasions the racket continued late into the night. The psychological pressure was also adjusted to the situation of each household. An old person had broadcast, outside their windows, the Buddhist prayers chanted during funeral rites. In front of a house where there was a new-born baby, the migrants howled and hammered on the door to accompany its frightened cries. Residents who had broken off negotiations with the employees of the Displacement Company were subjected to special treatment: a group of “workers” would settle in front of their home to “play poker”, which is to say to make a noise of course, but also to get in the way of the occupants' movements, and possibly to get involved in verbal and physical battles with them. The group would disperse on the day when the Displacement Company could once again come and

present its offer; it would immediately gather again if the negotiations were unsuccessful.

- 27 Threats and intimidation rapidly bore fruit: by mid-December half of the terrified inhabitants had moved out. Around a hundred households accepted the new and improved offers. This carrot and stick policy led them to sign the displacement contract against their will and to leave the location as quickly as possible. By the middle of December 2004, there remained the residents who were initially the best housed and some diehards. None of them cited that they had the right to use their dwelling, as a reason to remain, even though this is recognised as equivalent to a right to the property, and which could not be taken from them by the renovation of the building where their dwelling was. These entrenched residents refused to leave because they felt they had not been justly treated, and were infuriated by the procedures, the attitude and the Ubuesque discourse of the representatives of the Displacement Company. They complained of the violation of human rights to which they were being subjected, but did not demand their rights. They seemed resigned and simply demanded more “reasonable” (WW, heli) compensation for the despoilment of their property.
- 28 These invincibles had to face new difficulties. The campaign of breaking and entering occupied dwellings continued. It was then accompanied with devastation, plunder and theft: windows, doors and locks broken, plumbing, furniture and air-conditioners damaged, bicycles, clothing, microwaves and washing-machines stolen, etc. These acts of vandalism were preferably perpetrated while the occupants were absent, but the cover of night (with lighting cables having been cut) was sometimes sufficient to cover the thefts. Significantly, the perpetrators did not so much look for money and valuables, as for anything which was useful in everyday life. For these events the Displacement Company declined any responsibility. As for the police, they sympathised with dumbfounded inhabitants or asked them to point out those responsible so that they could arrest them!
- 29 The lilong had not been cleaned for a long time. The communal spaces and demolished dwellings had become piles of rubbish. There was now added the excrement of the 200 migrant workers, which also served as projectiles thrown through windows and into the courtyards.
- 30 Serious altercations between employees of the Displacement Company and the residents, which ended in grievous bodily harm (broken ribs and jaws), numbered at least half a dozen also took place from the beginning of the eviction process. While not a daily occurrence, they were nonetheless the main reason for the discontent of the residents and for explosions of collective anger. In November 2003, the residents of Jianyeli had come together spontaneously and blocked the access to the headquarters of Displacement Company, situated close to the lilong, after three residents had been beaten up. On November 28th 2004, in the evening, they blocked the traffic again on Jianguo Street leading to their lilong to protest the physical abuse of an elderly person who had intervened in a dispute. That day, the crowd was only willing to disperse on the arrival of the district Mayor in person. Five representatives volunteered then to express the demands of the residents as a whole. They demanded that their physical protection and the security of their possessions be assured, the immediate dismissal of the mingong, and the opportunity to return to their dwellings at the end of the

renovation procedure. The Mayor listened and offered reassuring words. But he did not accede to the substance of their demands.

Modern conveniences under duress: adapting to circumstances or how to benefit from fate?

- 31 Since the beginning of the eviction process at Jianyeli, numerous individual complaints and several collective petitions, accusing the Xuhui Displacement Company of misappropriation of funds, were deposited at neighbourhood (jiedao), district and city levels. None, however, has led to state intervention in favour of the plaintiffs. Why do these demands not produce more responses? As the residents see it, the scandalous behaviour to which they are being subjected, is attributed to the lack of direct dialogue between the leaders and the led. Lost in the maze of bureaucracy, their case arouses at best indifference, and at worst a refusal to take it into consideration. Many residents are disoriented, and Party members in particular feel betrayed: they no longer know who to talk to, or who to trust. According to them, the power of the state is a “two-faced social institution” (bai shehui, hei shehui), concealing an organised crime operation beneath apparently honourable intentions. The regime thus places itself “above the law which it builds up while evading it” (quan ban fa, er bu shi fa ban quan). It is using a “double-edged sword” (hei dao, bai dao)—invoking the legitimate power of the law when the latter serves its own interests, while resorting to illegal practices when its objectives are threatened. Why did the residents of Jianyeli insist on recognition of a right which, quite obviously, does not apply to their case? They saw no point in referring to and following the law, but were also divided as to how to respond in the face of the acts of the Displacement Company.
- 32 Beyond the general feeling of revolt, the last residents of the lilong had difficulty in formulating common demands. Having had their fingers burned in the successive waves of repression since the birth of the People's Republic, they were distrustful of any form of organised demand. While the oldest describe the situation in terms of the terror they felt under the Japanese occupation, the middle-aged recall the atmosphere of suspicion that prevailed during the Cultural Revolution. From the memories of the denunciations, they have learned the following lesson: trust nobody, keep the interests of the family circle foremost, and do not worry about the fate of others. From the trauma of the repression of 1989 there persists a disillusionment about protest. Public action in broad daylight not only seems derisory to them, it is above all considered dangerous. Such a perception was maintained, for example, by the rumours during the Zhou Zhengyi case<sup>31</sup>. This fear, whether justified or groundless, is deliberately exploited.
- 33 At the same time, access to modern conveniences, presented as a unique opportunity offered by rehousing in the suburbs, serves as bait. As members of the underclass, the ordinary people, (laobaixing), that is to say “without power, money or support” (wu quan, wu qian, wu guanxi), the residents of Jianyeli were resigned, since the economic reforms, to counting for very little. The displacements offered them an opportunity to enjoy benefits which were much more attractive, in the short term, than the recognition of their rights. The residents would willingly have shown disdain for any claims to justice or legality, and would have contented themselves with their fate, if they had not had the feeling of being subjected to treatment that was “unequal” (bu gongping), or even “contrary to good sense” (bu jiang daoli), and in fact “unfavourable” (bu hesuan). All in all, the more the financial compensation is deemed to be

insufficient, the more unjust the logic of the evictions seems to the residents. Moreover, because of the ill-treatment inflicted on them, it was no longer possible for them to stick imperturbably to their positions.

- 34 The success of their demands could depend both on their clear-sightedness and their capacity for endurance. They have two weapons at their disposal with which to defend themselves completely legally: time and an appeal to the Complaints Bureau (shangfang). Time is against the government, since the lack of return is excessively expensive for the financial players. Thus in Shanghai the obstinate refusal of a single resident is said to have frustrated more than one urban renewal programme, whether commercial or in the public interest. Hence the necessity for the state to show consideration for the interests of all. The appeals procedure makes it possible to denounce the illegal practices to which citizens can be subjected. Setting the administrative machinery in motion, it can play on the conflicting political stakes within the Party. In this case, the directives of the central state aimed at preserving social stability may also have the purpose of reining in the excesses of property development.
- 35 In the face of the “incivility” (bu wenming) of the procedures used by the Displacement Company, some Jianyeli residents therefore attempted an “appeal” to Peking. A group of about ten households came together on December 19th 2004 to send an emissary to carry their complaints to the capital. By doing this, they hoped to obtain from the Ministry of Construction the opening of an enquiry into their case, and thus to bring pressure to bear on the Displacement Company. Their representative left on December 20th 2004 to deliver a dossier to the Complaints Bureau of the State Council (guowuyuan xinfang bangongshi). The complaint was not accepted. Since it had not been the object of a preliminary appeal to the courts, it could not be examined. The messenger was advised, however, to go to the Ministry of Construction and explain the complaint. The crimes related did not unfortunately seem to move the employees of the department concerned. They concluded that “there is nothing to get alarmed about” (mei you shizixing de wenti). In other words, there was no crime sufficiently sensational to justify an enquiry in Jianyeli...
- 36 Was this a failure? For half of those who signed the appeal, negotiations were successfully concluded within ten days of their action, without any link between cause and effect to connect the two events. Compensation of a few hundred yuan<sup>32</sup> was allowed them for the thefts committed by the migrants. The other half did not wait for the effects of the complaint either. Some residents opted for a strategy of “moving by escape” (duoban)<sup>33</sup> and left their dwellings without receiving any compensation, in the hope of being able to negotiate later in exchange for their co-operation. Others decided to stake all by refusing to let themselves be intimidated, or by staying on the defensive night and day to protect their property. In the lilong, some residents have been using parallel strategies: one family appealed to an influential relative who lives in the United States, another boasts of having recourse to the services of a secret society (hei shehui).
- 37 The deadline for the eviction procedure, which was to expire on December 31st 2004, was once again postponed for three months. The number of migrants was halved. The real demolition work began<sup>34</sup>. On January 5th 2005, however, acts of vandalism—break-ins, burglaries, the wrecking of private dwellings—began with renewed intensity. According to the employees of the Displacement Company, there remained at that time,

around a hundred households in Jianyeli whose “problems would very soon be resolved”<sup>35</sup>.

Pressure without repression: the definition of the implicit rules of the game

38 In sum, Jianyeli, as the object of a pilot urban renewal project, allows the district of Xuhui to test new methods for three areas of the renovation of the historic centre of Shanghai. Firstly the financing is controlled by the local authorities; for this reason the evacuation of the site is carried out with public funds without the external intervention of a property development company. Secondly the renovation of the buildings has to conform with its use as housing, as the original construction. Thirdly, the project, which uses as a pretext the improvement of housing conditions, claims to proceed from a balance between the power of the state and the interests of the population...

39 However Jianyeli, as is the case for most residential sectors undergoing renovation, has become the scene and has the stakes of an ordinary power struggle. Some of the objectives of the operation, whether they be the enhancement of the district of Xuhui, the recognition of the personal merit of its director, or the quest for profits for the local authorities, are at the root of the problem. The latter lies in the combination by the authorities of two incompatible roles: those of administrator and of economic player. The residents' dispute stems from the sale of dwellings which are extremely well situated, of which the municipality has become the owner only by the hazards of history. They are not taken in, they know that the dwellings they occupied, in some cases for several generations, will be resold for a fortune. For the local government it is difficult to be both judge and jury without breaking the law, which is to say without adapting the municipal regulations to its own convenience and without skirting around the directives of the central government. It is thus the methods of re-establishing control inherited from the Maoist period which are used to settle differences. The Displacement Company, to which the district of Xuhui has delegated the problem, believes that only the fear of punishment can weaken the will of the inhabitants to continue to resist their displacement. It therefore tries to find ways to put pressure on the residents, knowing that it can count neither on the army nor on the police for assistance. The mingong, deliberately set against the recalcitrants, are here given a new role. The Displacement Company provides them with an opportunity to take their frustrations out on city dwellers, who usually despise them. It also has in them a classic scapegoat who can be blamed for all the damage done.

40 Moreover, the outcome of the negotiation process shows how, by coming to terms with a displacement project which is imposed on them, the majority of the residents of Jianyeli consider that they are benefiting from the situation by acceding to more modern conveniences. In reality, they are exchanging the increasingly coveted privilege of living in the centre of the city for a benefit which is not necessarily within their grasp: that of having as many separate lodgings as there are households per family. That also explains why some dissatisfied households, having been pushed into a corner, resort to organising themselves temporarily in order to defend their common interests.

How have the rules of the game changed?

41 In Shanghai, the move of the residential property sector into the market economy is taking place within the context of a chronic housing shortage. The radical change in the rules of access to housing, marked by the abandonment of the old system, is coupled with an improvement in standards of domestic comfort. Many urban dwellers,

however, have neither the desire nor the means to pay the price of such a process. The consequences are numerous and significant. Residential space is being redistributed in accordance with a new social segregation. Three objectives are being pursued by the housing reorganisation policy. First of all it is a case of sustaining economic development, secondly of promoting the renewal of the physical appearance of the city, and finally of perpetuating social stability. On this last point, the financial investment represented by housing, as well as the enjoyment of better housing conditions, should, according to Chinese leaders, contribute to relegating social demands to within the boundaries of the private sphere. The implementation of these different objectives gives rise, however, to two major types of protest: the first concerns the privatisation of the management of new housing which is put on the market. The second concerns the policy of renovation of old housing. The example of Jianyeli thus illustrates a struggle for “urban dominance” (the physical and symbolic takeover of urban space, to the benefit of those who really hold power)<sup>36</sup> linked to the question of the wholesale displacement of the residents of the centre of the city.

- 42 As the referees in an unequal struggle, the Shanghai authorities are facing a strategic challenge. With the aim of stimulating the building sector and of financing the renovation of old housing, they are making a bet on favouring the financial players, while trying to show consideration for the interests of the residents. Despite the increasing inequality in access to housing, the desire of both the central government and the local authorities to avoid confrontation increases the margin for individual manoeuvre. This does not, however, mean that such confrontation does not take place. It is becoming a means of negotiation which is risky, but can prove to be advantageous both to the representatives of the municipality and to the residents. In fact, the residents involved in a displacement project rarely have the means of attaining ownership of a new dwelling by way of the market. The displacements are therefore accepted if the conditions of their application are negotiated. Individual control of one's own destiny and that of one's family comes before the construction of an ideal of equity applicable to all. Satisfaction or vexation are in fact relative to subjective improvement in each particular case, assessed in the light of the course of one specific life.
- 43 From the government's point of view, the negotiations should make it possible to restrain the demands of dissatisfied residents. These circumstantial agreements, concluded at great expense, are aimed at maintaining social peace. If the ruled have the possibility of demanding, on an individual basis, the granting of wider privileges, the recalcitrants are unlikely to organise. The constitution of civil society remains constrained in that respect. Moreover, this social compromise constitutes a dilemma for local government in several respects. How can they keep alive the feeling that daily life is being constantly improved? How can they raise the financing needed to continue the renovation of the residential housing stock? Also, how can they offer attractive deals to foreign investors while working on drawing up a legal framework for urban development? The displacements of city-dwellers, which make it possible to strike an ad hoc balance between economic interests and the interests of the population, may be the answer. This would consist of protecting the power of the state from political protest, by negotiating, with an atomised society, the granting of specific benefits.
- 44 Translated from the French original by Michael Black

---

 NOTES

1. Cf Valérie Laurans, "Housing and comfort in Shanghai. The example of the Wanli model residential complex", *China Perspectives*, No. 39, January-February 2002, pp. 36-44.
2. See Valérie Laurans, "Shanghai dans le champ des études urbaines. Un aperçu de la recherche shanghaienne sur la ville au tournant du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle" (Shanghai in the field of urban studies. An overview of Shanghai research on the city at the dawn of the twenty-first century), a study commissioned by the French Human and Social Sciences Agency in Peking, [www.antenne-pek.in.com](http://www.antenne-pek.in.com).
3. "In fact, we are not at all used to being considered city dwellers [...], even in the heart of the city where we live, we count as mere residents. [...] beyond the commercial market, and its own particular economic organisation and legal institutions, a real city is also characterized by the emergence of an autonomous civil society". Chen Yingfang, *Shimin yu chengshi shehui* (City dwellers and urban society), *Dangdai wenhua yanjiu wang* (Contemporary culture research network), [www.cul-studies.com](http://www.cul-studies.com), 20th December 2004.
4. Bao Yaming, *You dangzhi de quanli. Xiaofei shihui yu dushi wenhua yanjiu* (*The Rights of a Flâneur. Consumer Society and Urban Cultural Studies*), Zhongguo dangdai xueshu sixian wenku (Contemporary Chinese Scientific Thought Series), Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, Peking, 2004, 276 p. After *Bars in Shanghai* (2001), *The Rights of a Flâneur* describes the process of cultural and social standardisation to which commercial logic reduces the public spaces of the metropolis.
5. Li Youmei, Director of the Sociology Department of Shanghai University, has researched the structural reform of the urban administration of Shanghai and into the management of new residential communities.
6. Wang Kun, a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) in Paris, is studying the privatisation of the management of residential complexes under the direction of Professor Erhard Friedberg.
7. Benjamin L. Read, "Democratizing the Neighbourhood New Private Housing and Home-owner Self-organization in Urban China", in *The China Journal*, No. 49, January 2003, pp. 31-59.
8. Zhu Jiangang, *Guo yu jia zhijian: Shanghai lingli de shimin tuanti yu shiqu yundong de minzhu zhi* (*Between the Family and the State. An Ethnography of the Civil Associations and Community Movements in a Shanghai lilong Neighborhood*), doctoral thesis in anthropology, under the direction of Professor Joseph Bosco, Chinese University of Hong Kong, July 2002, 250 p.
9. For more details of the massive construction of new housing in Shanghai, see Valérie Laurans, "Housing and Comfort in Shanghai", *op. cit.*
10. Bringing decrepit housing up to standard consists mainly of lowering its occupational density, renovating the wiring and plumbing, providing each apartment with its own kitchen and bathroom, etc.
11. According to the guidelines of the overall plan for 2000-2020, the population of the ten central districts of Shanghai is to be kept at around eight million.
12. Since 1999, two pockets of housing have been the object of renewal operations. Each has been accompanied by the displacement of the entire original population: Xintiandi, a district of Luwan, and Jianyeli, a district of Xuhui.

13. Liu Ju, “Dongqian weisha zheyang nan ?”, *Xin zhuzhai shidian*, (Why do the displacements cause so many problems?), *New home vision*, January 24th 2005, Internet version, <http://www.newhouse.chinanews.com.cn>
14. Wang Lianli, “Dongqian maodun shi bu pingdeng jiaoyi chansheng de jieyou” (The contradictions of the displacements are the result of unfair transactions), *Beijing dajun jingji guancha yanjiu zhongxin* (Dajun Center for Economics Watch and Studies), Peking, March 16th 2004, and “Shanghai wei chengshi gaizao suo fuchu de daijia” (The cost of urban renewal in Shanghai), *Beijing dajun jingji guancha yanjiu zhongxin*, Peking, March 15th 2004, available at [www.dajun.com.cn](http://www.dajun.com.cn)
15. For an example in the French press, see Philippe Pataud-Célérier, “La Chine en mutation, Shanghai sans toits ni lois” (Changing China, Homeless and Lawless Shanghai) , *Le Monde diplomatique*, March 2004.
16. Residential displacements come before redundancies as the cause of complaints lodged with the central government. See Liu Ju, “Dongqian weisha zheyang nan ?”, *op. cit.*
17. On the subject of a displacement operation carried out in the district of Yangpu, the Shanghai evening daily *Xinmin wanbao* headlined on the December 19th 2004: “Displaced residents queue up to sign up” (WWWWWWWW, *dongqian jumin paidui qianyue*). On the January 9th, the same daily gave a highly evasive account of a fire which had occurred in a *lilong* under demolition in the district of Xuhui. Of criminal origin according to neighbours, the incident caused the deaths of two residents who were refusing to leave.
18. See Xie Guanfei, “Bu shi ‘buchong anzhi’ er shi ‘jiaozheng caichan guanxi’” (Not ‘compensating for the dispersements’ but ‘adjusting the exchanges of property’) *Zhongguo jingji shibao* (*China Economic Times*), August 27th 2003. Ren Bo, “Chaiqian zhi su” (News of the dispersements), *Caijing*, No. 87, July 5th 2003.
19. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, one or several of the rooms of dwellings in Jianyeli which housed a single household were requisitioned by the local Housing Management Bureau (WWW, *fang guan suo*). These requisitions were aimed at punishing the “enemy classes” and made it possible to house the homeless of the district.
20. *Xuhui bao*, *Jianyeli gaizao baohu zhuankan* (Xuhui Journal, special edition on the renovation of Jianyeli), August 18th 2003. The figures provided by the Jianyeli residents' committee, calculated on the number of *hukou* registered in the *lilong* (which is to say not counting temporary residents such as the migrants) are different: they count 4,300 residents in 1,455 households. Calculated in the mid-1990s, these figures do not show the decongestion of the *lilong* which followed the liberalisation of access to housing. Here I call “home” a group of people who are related and occupy the same dwelling. The latter shelters in the same space several generations or several related members of a family who wish to separate into different “households”.
21. Bureau for the Management of Land Resources for Residential Property of the City of Shanghai, *Shanghai shi chengshi fangwu chaiqian shishi xize, 2001/10/1* (Management of the displacement of urban residents of the city of Shanghai. Detailed regulations of application, October 1st 2001).
22. Bureau for the Management of Land Resources for Residential Property of the City of Shanghai, *Shanghai shi lishi wenhua fengmao qu he youxiu lishi jianzhu baohu tiaoli, Shanghai shi fangwu tudi ziyuan guanli ju, 2002/11* (Regulation for the preservation of sectors of historic and cultural character and of the eminent historical architecture of the city of Shanghai, November 2002).



23. Between August and November 2003, the period corresponding to the beginning of the evacuation of the *lilong*, three public notices (WW, *tonggao*) were drawn up by Xuhui Displacement Company, aimed at the residents of Jianyeli.
24. See the map showing the location of rehousing complexes.
25. The average compensation was initially calculated on the basis of 4,700 yuan (470 euros) per square metre of habitable space. The market price for “buying out” the right to use a similar dwelling (a private transaction accepted by the Residential Property Management Bureau) is between 12,000 and 15,000 yuan (1,200 to 1,500 euros) per square metre.
26. 500,000 euros.
27. This is a state enterprise entrusted, after the administrative reform of the city, with the management of the public housing stock which was formerly attributed to the various “Housing Management Bureaux” (WWW, *fangguan suo*) of the district of Xuhui. As such, it is entrusted with the “restoration” (i.e. demolition followed by the reconstruction of similar buildings) of dwellings which are listed as historic buildings of the city.
28. WWW, *dingzi hu*: popular parlance for those households most determined to resist a displacement directive.
29. WWW, *liumang gongsi*: a term used by residents for the displacement companies.
30. 5 euros.
31. A Shanghai property magnate who was arrested following the accusations of Zheng Enchong, a lawyer who represented the interests of residents who had been evicted without compensation. The leaders of the protest movement, and then Zheng Enchong himself, were arrested. The latter was imprisoned for divulging state secrets to an NGO: Amnesty International. The case received a lot of coverage in the Chinese and international press. See in particular Lin Huawei, “Zhou Zhengyi xingshuai” (The rise and fall of Zhou Zhengyi), *Caijing*, No. 86, June 20th 2003.
32. A few tens of euros.
33. Following the maxim “In the face of a battle that is sure to be lost, victory lies in flight” (*re bu qi, duo de qi*).
34. The administration entrusted with the dossier finally opted for a “restoration” project which called for the demolition of most of the original buildings.
35. “There are about a hundred families still (in Jianyeli). They are all experiencing difficulties, but these will very soon be resolved”. (*Xianzai [zai Jianyeli] hai you 100 dou hu. Tamen dou shi you kunnan de, danshi wenti hen kuai jiu hui jie jue*).
36. See Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'espace* (The Production of Space), Anthropos, Paris, 2000.

---

## RÉSUMÉS

This article focuses on the means of attaining modern conveniences in housing in Shanghai at the beginning of the twentieth century. More precisely, it examines the social consequences of the state's lack of investment in the housing sector. Does the evolution of property legislation

call state domination into question? How much influence does the mobilisation of property legislation have in terms of the accession to material benefits? A detailed study of the pilot rehabilitation project which the historic area of Jiayeli is undergoing makes it possible to understand the role played by modern conveniences in the displacement of urban residents in Shanghai.