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Transformation of Urban Communities from Within: Residents' Role in Lilong's Attributive Switch Between Market-led Commodity and State-controlled Property

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The state has owned most historical buildings since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Residents within are entitled to the right to use the house in the form of a lease. After entering a free trade housing market in 1988, residents in historic neighbourhoods of Shanghai have been suffering uncertainty of their identities. Residents' role, responsibilities and obligations within urban transformation, has always been in suspense and strongly affected by multiple stakeholders' decisions. Based on an analysis of the relationship between the native residents and the historic Lilong communities they are living in, this paper examines stakeholders' heritage approaches in three typical transforming project, to explore residents' mobility and behaviour within varied urban transformation and socio-economic development. Through a literature review, fieldwork and a pilot study in Xintiandi, Tianzifang and Chunyangli districts, urban transformation in historic urban communities from within is found literally rare in China. This paper argues that residents could not clarify their role by living in urban heritage, neither obtaining house-ownership to define their position nor being treated as one component of urban heritage. Government in China has been indeed the character who mediates between all stakeholders and bears the most burden.

Keywords: urban transformation, Lilong houses, historic urban communities, native residents, participation, housing policy, government, intangible heritage

Introduction

The evolution of urban community in Shanghai has almost reflected this city's history of migration. Developing from a fishing village to a marvellous metropolis, the old town of Shanghai was originally enclosed by fortified walls and surrounded by swamp, cultivated land and the Huangpu River at the east (Figure 1). Different from most traditional Chinese old towns, not planned in a square urban texture and straight roads, the urban growth has followed a more organic and natural pattern. Such spontaneous expanding status settled the inclusiveness of foreign intervention in Shanghai. Discovering this characteristic of the city, settlers from Europe and United States exploited great business opportunities from burgeoning mercantile communities, which were established as a result of social rebellions and population increase; they consequently created a real estate market in Shanghai for the first time by exposing commercial housing to international trade. Lilong houses (alleyway houses, 里弄) were indeed the products led by such marketing environment¹. The former free trade market of Lilong houses was prohibited by the state between 1949 and 1978 during the Mao era. Lilong houses in this period were not general commodities for commercial transaction, but reward or state subsidies to people allocated by administration, to meet national economic and planning strategy². The Maoist housing policy reform largely reduced the value and vitality of housing market and weakened the relationship between residents and their living places as well³.

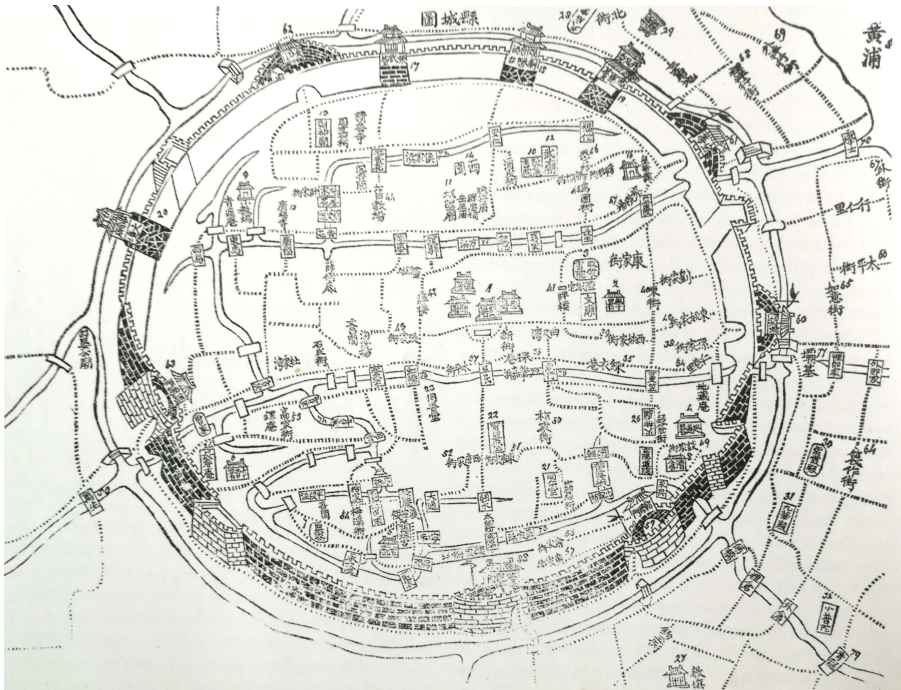


Figure 1. Unknown. General Description of Shanghai. *The walled old town of Shanghai, showing swamp, cultivated land and initial roads.* [Mission Press, 1850]

Since the state has continuously owned most historical buildings, native residents' role in historic urban communities within urban transformation is constrained within a certain range. Influenced by international tendency of housing privatization, the central government of China launched several economic measures in the late 1970s, to realize the reform and opening-up policy starting in 1978⁴. With the promulgation of the land leasing policy of Shanghai in 1988, attribute of land usage in Lilong districts has changed and faced different transforming modes⁵. For example, a considerable number of abandoned and dilapidated Lilong houses encountered with massive demolition and renovation of the city builders in the 1990s⁶. Shenjing He and Fulong Wu demonstrate that in the project of Xintiandi, urban redevelopment of historic site was led by property, to attract private sectors⁷. Furthermore, in major existing historic communities, such as Bugaoli and Hehefang, district-level government took the responsibility to renovate and restore architectural facilities, improving living qualities⁸. Nevertheless, including demolition, commercial redevelopment and housing renovation, this paper argues that local authorities have maintained to own and manage the construction or transaction of most Lilong houses. Considering the adding character of Lilong housing as heritage in contemporary era and their location advantages, housing policy reform after 1978 yet cannot bring these remaining urban community heritage to an open, free and fair market, in which all residents (if being householders) should take their own responsibilities and obligations for the conservation of historic architecture and urban landscape. Under the circumstances, in order to engage native residents in urban transformation of historic communities that they are living in, the intangible significance of residents' existence should be emphasized by themselves and the public simultaneously. This paper also argues that historic communities, under the long-lasting government-dominated housing market, residents could not clarify their role by living in urban heritage. These residents can neither obtain house-ownership to define their position nor be treated as one important intangible component of urban heritage.

Urban transformation has become one of the most distinct characteristics in contemporary Chinese metropolises. About 7.3 million square meters of Lilong houses in downtown area of Shanghai need to be protected and renovated⁹. In the following content, firstly, through literature review, this paper elaborates that within a short term of socio-economic development, a status of Lilong housing as state-owned property will not change; regardless of a small portion houses for commercial redevelopment, Lilong housing will continuously be a non-productive sector in most senses; therefore, local government cannot provide sustainable and sufficient funding supply for architectural renovation project with low rental income from residents¹⁰. Varied stakeholders had interpreted, implemented, appropriated and justified the concept of modern heritage and their values in the movement of urban transformation of historic Lilong communities. Under the contemporary heritage discipline within which intangible significance of heritage is repeatedly emphasized, spirit of place and native residents' memories as an important component of history have become a more attractive feature of a historic site to



investigate. Secondly, by analysing three different cases located in Taipingqiao (Xintiandi), Taikang Road (Tianzifang) and Chunyangli, this paper thus further explores that in the scope of government capabilities that cannot be reached, from what perspectives for native residents to enhance, expressing their role as one intangible component of urban heritage.

Housing Policy and Lilong Houses

Throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century, privatization of public property have obtained political inclination and increasing emphasis in many advanced societies of the world¹¹. In the United Kingdom and eastern Europe, government promoted the strategy of house ownership, to strengthen the influence of private sector in housing market; under such circumstances, a hint of the ideology of socialism in housing system faced collapse in these societies as well¹². As a socialist country, practices and political reform of housing property should launch with its speciality. Normal compounds built in the late twentieth century for working class and newly-built commercial residence in flexible housing market have completed their ownership-attribute shift from state-owned dwellings to private estate. However, despite the cancellation of the welfare housing allocation system, most Lilong houses have been owned by the state and rented at a low price. According to historical events and a regime change, Zhang Song indicates that the ownership of historic buildings is extremely complex, bringing difficulties to protection and management of Lilong houses¹³. This situation manifests that under the existing housing policy for historic urban communities in China, residents cannot be property owners, but they can take occupancy as long-term tenure and users, largely benefiting from government subsidies and preferential policy for urban heritage. This paper thus argues that these residents should seek a way out by taking maximum advantage of their identity as intangible legacy and spiritual-cultural holders. Housing policy reform of historic urban communities forward a further stage seems to be a continuous and circuitous mechanism to follow, largely creating limitation of residents' involvement and dynamic roles in urban transformation of urban heritage. In the following three Lilong transforming cases for analysis, despite strong intervention made by capitalists and local authorities, this paper explores residents' mobility and behaviour within each urban transformation; regarding the chronological order of every single project, it further discusses the interaction between multiple groups of residents' behaviours, to elaborate.

Residents and the Significance of Urban Heritage

Lilong architecture was primitively built in the foreign settlements in the nineteenth century. Two rebellions, booming population and advanced industrial techniques of that time catalysed the germination of a real estate market in Shanghai. The word "Lilong" is the representation of two Chinese characters: Li (里) stands for the concept as a neighbourhood, a block of compounds; while Long (弄), which is also named as Longtang (弄堂), means alleyways or lanes, connecting and structuring each subdivided residential compounds. Lilong house is therefore also under the name of alleyway house in translation, referring likewise the urban community lifestyle in the historical Shanghai. Lilong were built between the 1870s and the 1940s; during the seventy years, these residential quarter progressively transformed into different forms to keep with the changing population.

One thing for certain is that after the reform and opening-up policy and land leasing policy, the society or more precisely the market in Shanghai has paid more attention to commercial values of Lilong; although, their heritage values have received more concentrate in the increasing strong voice of some experts and scholars¹⁴. Based on the criteria included in *Venice Charter* (1964), published literature reveals that Wang Shaozhou and Chen Zhimin indicate the combination characteristics of Lilong houses from both western and oriental architecture¹⁵; Lu Wenda and Zhu Jiancheng claims its social significance as the beginning of modern real estate in China¹⁶; Fan Wenbin indicates the importance of Lilong neighbourhoods as one distinctive character of urban landscape in Shanghai, while Li Yanbo points its social and cultural values¹⁷. Nevertheless, as a result of the lack of research on the spirit of Lilong communities, where residents gather and create a typical lifestyle of Shanghai, dynamic residents omitted the initiative consciousness of being part of the of the heritage itself, actively integrating into urban heritage.

Shifting Ownership-attribute of Lilong Housing

Ownership-attribute shifts of Lilong can be divided into three major historical stages, from foreign commercial housing development before the foundation of the PRC, to the rising welfare system under the planned economy between 1949 and the 1980s, and to the later state-controlled market economy of commercialization and monetization.



Lilong houses were as mentioned widely built as commodities in the foreign settlement era, to form a hitherto real estate market in China. Before 1949, most commercial housing for sale and rent were constructed and owned by foreign investors, such as Shanghai Land Investment Company, Sassoon Group and Hardoon Company. The early Shikumen Lilong built in the late nineteenth century maintained the Chinese traditional characteristics of *Shenzhai Dayuan* (深宅大院), a compound of connecting courtyards and surrounded by dwelling quarters¹⁸. Such expensive and upscale housing property were mostly owned by the transmigrating gentry and wealthy families in Shanghai; however, in the early twentieth century, with the decline of these powerful families, a Lilong house was usually divided into several households and becoming into a more civilian product under the circumstances. This division has raised a tremendous number of second and even third landlord of a single Shikumen Lilong property. In the continuous typological evolution, Lilong had transformed towards styles more of economization and popularization. This improvement made Lilong houses more affordable and accounting for more than three quarters of the whole residential buildings in the 1940s of Shanghai, reaching a number of two hundred thousand houses¹⁹. Lilong as commodity had been unequivocal with no doubt, establishing and accelerating Shanghai's urban transformation and capitalist accumulation.

After a recovery from Sino-Japan War in 1949, the national liberation raised an urgency for mass accommodative dwellings to shelter a burgeoning and broad working class. Meanwhile, there was no company able to manage the construction of Lilong housing. In addition, during the disorder time, a large number of local residents moved out of Shanghai and left their houses vacant or co-rent by more people; therefore, during the period of planned economy after 1949, a considerable number of Lilong houses were nationalized and offered to senior intellectuals, senior officials and returned overseas Chinese celebrities as reward. From that point on, historic residences have been state-owned property under control. Accompanied by continual housing shortage, situation had been even worse since the 1960s when the *Cultural Revolution* broke out. Encouraged by Mao's call for rebellion, temporal radical 'rebels', who contributed to abolish cultural traditions, pillaged houses from legal but persecuted residents who were defined as reactionaries in the turbulent time. Disorganized haphazard construction, deteriorating urban landscape and retrogressive lifestyle reconfigured Lilong architecture, which nature as a home was deprived and even lost, becoming conquest with no feelings of belongingness. It had been government property but without normative control. This historical production confused both the owners and users, laying complicated difficulties for the later urban transformation, especially in residents allocation and equity ownership. There was one thing for sure that Lilong's attribute as a commodity had no longer existed but been regarded as spoils or awards by the public instead.

As mentioned above, after 1988, when the central government admitted land leasing policy, foreign investment started to attach importance to the real estate market in Mainland China. This measure brought a dynamic environment in China. In the meantime, several Lilong neighbourhoods with distinctive features were initiatively listed as *officially protected monuments and sites* (文物保护单位) and *excellent historical buildings* (优秀历史建筑) of Shanghai, and besides, with an increasing number of Lilong in the list of cultural relics, the importance of such historic sites has been ever emphasized. Nevertheless, the situation that a minority of Lilong houses are private and a majority are state-owned have not changed.

Historic houses can become commodities easily due to the land leasing policy and it literally happened in 1997 within the Xintiandi Project; however, with the process of democratization and socialism and continue rising of land prices, Lilong's role as family home and government property are increasingly highlighted. In Lilong's attributive changing history of more than one hundred years, bargaining among capital, authorities and communal inhabitants are full of directivity, speculation and uncertainty. Stakeholder, who occupied more resources, usually dominated the values, functions, social roles, and even preservation status of these Lilong houses; however, and furthermore, whether it was the real estate market that was introduced during the Qing dynasty, or the Cultural Revolution that was experienced during the early days of the foundation of the People's Republic of China, or the concept of commodity economy and cultural relics conservation that have been re-emphasized since the 1980s, the contemporary Chinese society is unfamiliar with dealing with Lilong's complicated property-ownership and value scope as urban heritage. As its nature has changed from simple to multiple, from simple to complex, Lilong have been highly likely becoming an aggregate property with social and political status and value.

Whether it is a remediation of past errors or a cater to international trends, Lilong have obtained a new and additional identity as architectural heritage ever after. Among all the Chinese cities, Shanghai as a land formed by the accumulation of capital has observed an evolving process of stakeholders' heritage approaches towards Lilong architecture and neighbourhoods since 1988. The resulting production has been diverse as well; among them, the most representative cases are the commercial development Xintiandi and Jianyeli, renovated and preserved living neighbourhoods Bugaoli and Chunyangli and, the very specific bottom-up urban renewal of Tianzifang. In these urban transformation in urban historic areas of Shanghai, driven by interests or legislative



The transforming progress of this project has gone through four stages: the original stage (before 1998), the initial stage (between 1998 and 2004), the conflict stage (between 2005 and 2007), the free transformation stage (after 2008)²³. Within this urban transformation, with arrivals of artists, retailers, developers, the local government, professionals and other stakeholders, native residents' influence on decision making within this area has become gradually less important. Since Tianzifang gained social attention in the early Twenty-first century, the evolving orientation of urban neighborhood has been no longer controlled or led by the residents. In China, it remains to be seen whether government or capitalists can dominate the urban dynamics, since most of the residents do not own Lilong property, their contribution and group aspiration can easily be replaced by authorities for national strategic significance.

Chunyangli: Residents' Repulsion and Irresponsibility

Compared with Huangpu District, geographical factors did not bring Hongkou District advantages in economic competition, but serendipitously contributed to the retention of a large number of Lilong housing. Considering cost-effective conditions, Lilong neighbourhood in Hongkou District was selected for the first practice, under the guidance of reform policy of "preservation before renovation and demolition" (named as "留改拆" in mandarin)²⁴. Among all the residential relics, Chunyang Li which was built in 1930 by the Shanghai Land Investment Company, was distinguished by holding typical Shikumen architectural features. Due to the proximity of Hongkou Port, residents in this community were mostly urban migrants, working for port trade in north bund. In this political renovation project, observing propaganda slogans and banners (Figure 3), district government applied varied method to obtain native residents' coordination for short-term moving out. However, according to pilot interviews during site investigation in Chunyangli, residents were not willing to face inconvenience brought by urban transformation, which aimed to improve basic living facilities, such as sewer lines and window frames; moreover, some inhabitants even drew emotions of contradictory. However, four months later after author's oral interviews, according to media reports, 46 households included in the first renovation practice were approaching a better living environment and public health²⁵. Another 1,135 households are waiting for similar engineering. This paper is questioning who is responsible for such large amount cost. So far, government is still the biggest stakeholder in charge of the most financial expenses.



Figure 3: Author. One of the billboard on the photo on the left is about the warning on rejection of temporary relocation, while content of the other is about renovation details to avoid moisture inside houses; photo on the right is the encouragement and for a brighter future of better living conditions. [Shanghai, 2017]

In American sociologist Harvey Molotch's urban theory, a city, or any place, is the representation of interests of elites, which is also very much in line with Henri Lefebvre's discussion on space production²⁶. In such competition between varied elites, by utilizing local government and authorities, both sides strive to induce investment growth in their own fields, sacrificing profit of the other stakeholders. Nevertheless, in Chunyangli housing renovation project, with increasing investment from local government, relationship between elites and other stakeholders seems to be becoming simple and pure. However, considering the core principle of social justice, this paper questions where should funding supply from if local government dominates and takes the most responsibility within urban heritage transformation? If most of these funds are borne by the government and



come from national taxpayers, regarding such rented Lilong houses as a type of social housing, what action and efforts for native residents with low income can make for sustainable development of urban heritage.

Conclusion

To conclude, urban transformation in historic urban communities from within is therefore rare in China. Two aspects mainly predominate residents' habitual passive attitude within urban transformation or transition of historic communities, the absolute power of administrative authorities in China and an extent sense of disengagement from urban heritage as integration. Normal residents can neither be classified as ordinary owners and daily users, nor can be considered part of the intangible cultural heritage.

Under the contemporary housing policy of urban historic dwellings, district-level government and the state in China has been indeed the character who mediates between all stakeholders and bears the most burden in urban transformation of historic communities. Residents' participation in urban transformation of their living community has constantly been low. Native residents seem to have undergone a process of transition from not having the right to participate to being unwilling to express themselves. The reasons could be that residents' subjective initiative has been negatively depressing, although the present legislative framework and regulations can bring in limitation within residents' practices; furthermore, as a result of the residents' mistrust and resistance to the local authorities, cooperation between them has been increasingly complicated and challenging. As a principle group of integration in every specific historic neighbourhood, it is essential for residents to explore and promote their positive participation during urban transformation.

Urban heritage and intangible significance of cultural relics has been overlooked in the Chinese society and heritage practice environment. Internationally, the concept of intangible cultural heritage was proposed in 1970s, when the Chinese central government started to re-emphasize the importance of protection of relics and ancient buildings. Comparatively, such concept and mainstream has evolved in Europe for more two hundred years. This paper hence argues that the Chinese society has a consistent lag and prejudice on the values of urban heritage, whether people are the general public or residents, part of historic communities. With the enhancing of Lilong's cultural and intangible significance, public-private-partnerships may contribute to solve this multidisciplinary issue in a longer further by an accumulation of urban heritage practices, discussion and reflection, but to be demonstrated though²⁷.

Notes on contributor(s)

ZHU Kaiyi (1991), is a PhD candidate at TU Delft. Kaiyi obtained her Msc in Conservation of Historic Buildings at the department of Architecture and Civil Engineering of the Faculty of Engineering and Design in the University of Bath. Since October of 2016 when she started her first year of PhD studies at Chair History of Architecture and Urban Planning, Kaiyi's research and practice is related to the development of international conservation theories and urban heritage practice "in the name of conservation" located in historic residential areas of China's big cities.

Carola Hein is Professor and Head, Chair History of Architecture and Urban Planning at Delft University of Technology. She has published and lectured widely on topics in contemporary and historical architectural and urban planning—notably in Europe and Japan on capital city issues. With an Alexander von Humboldt fellowship she investigated large scale urban transformation in Hamburg in international context between 1842 and 2008. Her current interest is the study of international networks and the transmission of architectural and urban ideas along these networks, focusing specifically on port cities and the global architecture of oil.

Endnotes

¹ The word "Lilong" is directly derived from the Chinese Phonetic, in different literature, authors have their own preference to express; "alleyway" contains the meaning of Lilong as well.

² Zhang, Xing Quan. "Chinese Housing Policy 1949-1978: The Development of a Welfare System." *Planning Perspectives* 12, no. 4 (1997): 433-455.

³ *Ibid.*, 452.

⁴ Wang, Ya Ping, and Alan Murie. "Social and Spatial Implications of Housing Reform in China." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 2 (2000): 397-417.

⁵ Zhu, Xiaoming, and Xiaoying Gu. "Evaluation and Analysis on Four Kinds of Cases Concerning Protection and Renovation of Shikumen Lane in Shanghai (上海石库门里弄保护与更新的4类案例评析)." *Housing Science (住宅科技)* 30, no. 6 (2010): 25-29.



- ⁶ Zhong, Xiaohua, and Xiangming Chen. "Demolition, Rehabilitation, and Conservation: Heritage in Shanghai's Urban Regeneration, 1990–2015." *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 41, no. 2 (2017): 82-91.
- ⁷ He, Shenjing, and Fulong Wu. "Property-Led Redevelopment in Post-Reform China: A Case Study of Xintiandi Redevelopment Project in Shanghai." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2005): 1-23.
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- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Zhang, Song. "Conservation Strategy of Urban Heritage in Shanghai (上海城市遗产的保护策略)." *City Planning Review (城市规划)* 30, no. 2 (2006): 49-54.
- ¹⁴ Scholars such as Song Zhang, Yisan Ruan, Qing Chang, Shiling Zheng, Jiang Wu who are based in Shanghai have made a number of research regarding values of Lilong and existing heritage redevelopment modes.
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- ¹⁶ Lu, Wenda. *Shanghai Real Estate Annals (上海房地产志)*. Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press(上海社会科学院出版社), 1999; Zhu, Jiancheng. *The Real Estate Business of Old Shanghai (旧上海的房地产经营)*. Shanghai People Press (上海人民出版社), 1990, p 10.
- ¹⁷ Fan, Wenbin. Protection and Renewal of Lilong in Shanghai (上海里弄的保护与更新). Shanghai Scientific and Technical Publishers (上海科学技术出版社), 2004, pp 42-45; Li, Yanbo. Values of Shanghai Lilong Districts (上海里弄街区的价值). Tongji University Press (同济大学出版社), 2014.
- ¹⁸ Li, Yanbo. *Values of Shanghai Lilong Districts (上海里弄街区的价值)*. Tongji University Press (同济大学出版社), 2014.
- ¹⁹ Ji, Guoliang. "The Characteristics of Shikumen Residential Buildings in Shanghai under the Background of Urbanization (城市化背景下上海石库门里弄住宅的特质)." *China Folklore Network (民俗研究)*, no. 2 (2015): 155-60.
- ²⁰ In the word "Xintiandi", "Xin" means "new" in Chinese and "Tiandi" means "heaven and earth", standing for "world" in the traditional Chinese context and discourse. Thus, the name Xintiandi has the meaning of "new world".
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- ²³ Wang, Yaoshun, Huwen and Liuwen. "Game and Reconstruction in the Transformation of Old City: Taking Tianzifang of Shanghai as an Example (旧城改造中的博弈与重构——以上海田子坊□例)." *Architecture & Culture (建筑与文化)*, no. 11 (2016): 122-23.
- ²⁴ In this "preservation before renovation and demolition" ("留改拆") reform policy, administrative department requires that regarding 90 percent of existing Lilong houses, all stakeholders should preserve them first, and if they are not maintained in a good state, renovation is the next step of heritage approach that stakeholders can apply. Demolition should not be taken into consideration unless very specific damage may occur.
- ²⁵ Zhou Nan, "How can people live comfortably in unbreakable Lilong Houses? Hongkou ushered in the first batch of home residents in Hongkou, the first overall renovation project in Shanghai." *Shanghai Observer*, December 27, 2017, <http://www.jfdaily.com/news/detail?id=75190/>.
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Figure 1: *Chinese Miscellany: General Description of Shanghai and Its Environs, Extracted from Native Authorities*. Mission Press, 1850.

Figure 2: Xintiandi (上海新天地), http://studioshanghai.co/assets/xintiandi-site-sketch2_web-978x462.jpg. (Accessed June 8, 2018.)

Figure 3: Author. (August 29, 2017.)