

Where the Courtyard Meets the Street

Spatial Culture of the *Li* Neighborhoods,
Shanghai, 1870–1900

SAMUEL Y. LIANG
University of Manchester

In the wake of the First Opium War, the Treaty of Nanking (1843) designated Shanghai as a treaty port, and the British Settlement and the French Concession were established in 1845 and 1849, respectively (Figure 1).¹ In the next fifty years, the city developed rapidly from a frontier market town to the first modern metropolis in China, epitomized by the glamour of the Bund and Nanking Road. But the city was also a puzzling complex: old and new Chinese districts adjoined the porous borders of the British and French settlements, within which majestic mansions in Western architectural styles stood side by side with the dense sprawl of Chinese stores and dwellings.

Most Chinese residents in the settlements lived in housing compounds that were called *li* (and sometimes *fang*); alleys inside such compounds were called *long*. In the twentieth century, buildings in the *li* and aligned along the *long* were called *lilong* houses. However, the term *lilong* was never used in the late nineteenth century, and I will use the term “*li* house” for that period. Cultural and architectural historians have explored twentieth-century houses of this type, focusing on extant examples.² However, they have not paid adequate attention to the type’s genesis and patterns of use deriving from nineteenth-century *li* neighborhoods, for which the best sources are contemporary writings and drawings. This article examines the origin of *li* compounds, analyzes their spatial and functional innovations, and sketches a social landscape of the *li* world as seen by nineteenth-century residents and visitors. The *li*, I argue, entailed a radi-

cal reconfiguration of traditional residential and commercial spaces in which visibility and openness replaced walls and containment, the traditional spatial order and hierarchy were subverted, and the borderline between the elite and the lower class was transgressed as well as redefined. As Western colonial expansion battered down the walls of the Middle Kingdom, the social space of the *li* demonstrated an analogous transformation: the walls of self-contained residential space were similarly breached. Yet this spatial transformation within the city’s Chinese quarters was not a passive response to the impact of the West, but should be carefully examined in the hybrid environment of the foreign settlements.

Joint Production

The Land Regulations of 1845 allowed foreign merchants in Shanghai to lease land permanently in designated areas north of the walled city.³ Once foreign merchants acquired a piece of land, they could build houses for their own use or for sale or rent to other foreigners, but they were not allowed to let them to the Chinese, as the settlements were reserved for foreign residents only. This official stipulation was soon ignored. From September 1853 to July 1854 when the Small Sword rebels occupied the walled city, foreign landowners built about 800 simple wooden houses along Guangdong Road and Fujian Road in the British settlement and rented them to Chinese refugees for lucrative profits.⁴

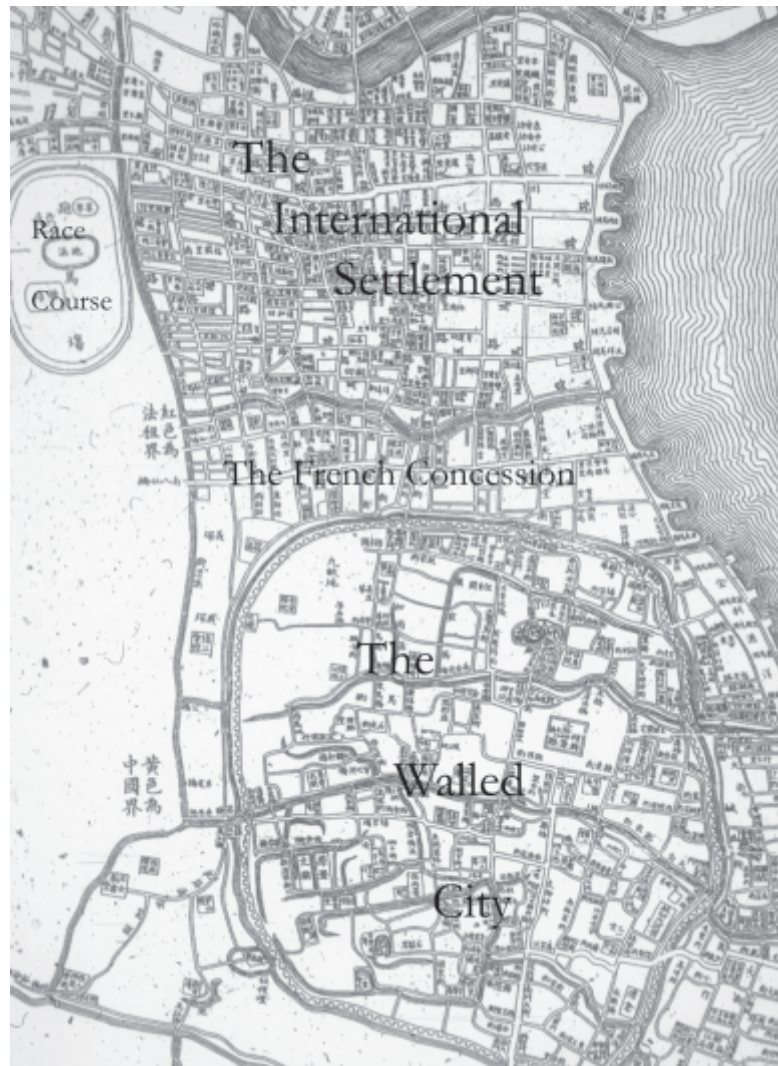


Figure 1 Map of Shanghai, ca. 1901

These hastily built houses formed the first Chinese residential compounds in the settlements. About 8,740 such houses were built in the early 1860s, when the advance of the Taiping rebels drove more refugees to Shanghai from surrounding hinterlands, and the Chinese population in the settlements reached 110,000.⁵ Introducing a speedy way of producing houses in mass quantities, many foreign landowners in Shanghai became the first modern real estate speculators in China.

The houses were of a temporary nature, used by Chinese refugees as makeshift shelters during the civil wars. After the Taiping Rebellion was suppressed in 1864, Shanghai experienced a brief real estate slump as many refugees returned home. However, in the 1870s trade in Shanghai

grew steadily, as did the Chinese population in the settlements and the demand for housing.⁶ The wooden shelters were replaced by brick and timber houses that were built to form *li* compounds. Most Chinese residents in the *li* now chose to live in the settlements for business reasons while still considering themselves as sojourners in the city. The flourishing real estate market demanded a new form of dwelling that could be built quickly, on a large scale, and easily transferred between foreign owners and Chinese tenants.

Traditional houses in old Shanghai had been built on a small scale by individual families who owned the land, followed the traditional house layout, and supervised and financed the construction. The most common house type in Shanghai and the surrounding rural area was called *sam-*



Figure 2 Wu Youru et al., houses in a village near Shanghai, 1890

heyuan. It was usually a one-story brick and timber structure of three or five *jian* (the space between two rows of columns), with main rooms facing south and the central *jian* as the reception hall, or *ketang*.⁷ Spacious yards enclosed by low walls were found at its front and back. As the family expanded, more structures would be built along its central axis, forming a set of two or three courtyards in which a family clan lived.⁸ Such spontaneous building activities slowly sprawled, sometimes layering upon former ones, and their accumulation often resulted in a picturesque townscape (Figure 2).

Throughout the dynasties of imperial China, this essentially laissez-faire pattern of construction was balanced by certain government controls, whose intensity corresponded to the city's administrative grade in the imperial system. In extreme cases, when new dynasties built new capitals, the centralized planning and construction of palaces, temples, and houses produced cities in a rigid chessboard layout, in which each rectangular block was a walled compound, such as the residential ward—or *fangli*—in the Tang capital Chang'an. The construction of individual houses in the *fangli* was tightly controlled to reflect the official rank of their owners.

The *li* compounds in nineteenth-century Shanghai, however, were built with little government control and in

accord with capitalist ways of production. The earliest foreign landowners usually acquired generous lots of land from local owners (with assistance from local authorities when needed), and during the civil wars, they quickly built rows of wooden houses and let them to Chinese refugees. These row houses were rationally organized like military camps with controlled access for better management, and this residential model was inherited by the later *li* compounds.⁹ With a rigid layout and uniform architectural features, the *li* looked more like a residential ward in the ancient capitals than a vernacular neighborhood. Moreover, the term *li* was apparently borrowed from the ancient title *fangli*. But the *li* never consciously copied the imperial past; it simply reflected a rational, machinelike form common to capitalist and imperial ways of construction, both being translocal in nature.¹⁰ The *li*'s rationalized layout embodied the efficiency of modern capital rather than the austerity of imperial power. Indeed, the mass production of such houses would have been impossible without the settlements' modern banks, which readily financed anyone with a land lease in hand.¹¹

The conservative English elite did not deign to build houses for the Chinese. They opposed Chinese residence in the settlement and complained that the cheap houses sheltering Chinese refugees had transformed the settlement into

“a native Alsatia, the southern portion being blocked with abominably overcrowded and filthy hovels, fraught with the danger of fire and pestilence, rife with brothels, opium shops, and gambling dens.”¹² The British Consul George Balfour and his successor Rutherford Alcock made efforts “to keep the ground within the limits of the Foreign Concession exclusively for foreigners, as better for the permanent interests of these, and the security of the settlement.”¹³

The foreign merchants who came to Shanghai in order to strike a fortune had a different view, which a merchant well explained in a conversation with Alcock:

You, as H. M.'s. Consul, are bound to look to national and permanent interests—that is your business. But it is my business to make a fortune with the least possible loss of time, by letting my land to Chinese, and building for them at thirty to forty per cent interest, if that is the best thing I can do with my money. In two or three years at farthest, I hope to realize a fortune and get away; what can it matter to me, if all Shanghai disappears afterwards, in fire or flood?¹⁴

Alcock was convinced that he “was losing time in any efforts to stem the tide of land-jobbing and house building for Chinese tenants, who could be found to repay the capital of land and house by a two or three years’ rent.”¹⁵ Thus he ended his “hopeless struggle,” and to the landowners’ satisfaction, in 1854 the consuls from Britain, America, and France revised the Land Regulations to legalize Chinese residence in the settlements.¹⁶

Chinese authorities were against the mixed residence of Chinese and foreigners and never officially endorsed the revised Land Regulations. The local gentry held a similar position on the issue, as Mao Xianglin wrote:

Western merchants know only short-term profits but not long-term harms. As prosperity and recession succeed one another in cycles, I think what is considered prosperity is also a decline. . . . As the [foreign] settlements expand, [local] people’s [farming] fields shrink, a little here and a little there, a little last year and a little this year. . . . To end this, the Chinese area and the settlements must be separated from one another and the latter are then unable to form a market. Where can they seek profits from then?¹⁷

Nevertheless, the power of capital broke down the invisible settlement walls that Chinese authorities originally wished to retain, and transformed Western and Chinese traditions by juxtaposing the one against the other.

The mixed residence of people from different areas of China and elsewhere in the world generated a commercial

culture of diversity and economic opportunity. The earliest Chinese residents were wealthy gentry who had fled from the civil wars, and the hovels, brothels, and opium dens so objectionable to the Western elite provided crucial business opportunities for foreign landowners, as wealth shifted from the declining and displaced landed gentry to new urban capitalists.

The earliest real estate developers in the foreign settlements were such firms as D. Sassoon & Co.; Jardine, Matheson & Co.; and Gibb, Livingston & Co., which had accumulated their initial capital mainly through the illegal opium trade.¹⁸ Many early developers, such as the American Edwin M. Smith, started as adventurers or smugglers who improved their situation by striking a fortune, while others built upon their associations with British colonial expansion. For example, Elias David Sassoon came from a Baghdadi Jewish family that, via a close connection with the British Empire, had built a mercantile network from Bombay to Shanghai. This illustrious family history began with Daud Pasha’s persecution of Jews in Ottoman Baghdad from 1817 to 1831 that drove Elias’s father, David Sassoon, the scion of the most eminent Jewish family in Baghdad, to Bombay. Gradually the Sassoons changed their identity from “Oriental” merchant princes to English gentlemen.¹⁹ This new status belied the fact that their commercial success in China was built upon a long tradition of cross-cultural experience in the East. Their identity as “Westerners” in Shanghai was a social construct for the sake of convenience. Many other adventurers and smugglers from obscure backgrounds now also joined the club of English gentlemen. The real estate market was the ideal field in which they could make such changes.

Foreign real estate owners never directly dealt with Chinese landowners, builders, and tenants. Their land purchases, or permanent leases, were assisted by local land officers and translators.²⁰ They did not hire Western-trained professionals, such as architects and engineers; instead they relied on Chinese compradors to supervise Chinese contractors and manage the construction and rental of their properties. Many of these compradors soon became real estate tycoons as well.

Smith, who started as a broker for merchants and banks, was among the first to earn a huge profit by building simple wooden houses; he relied on the expertise of Cheng Jinxuan, a Chinese carpenter and comprador of Smith’s real estate company before 1870.²¹ Later the Sassoons hired Cheng to manage house maintenance and rent collection. When Cheng saw that many of the Sassoons’ houses were in a dilapidated condition and had to be rebuilt, he proposed to rebuild them at his own cost, on the condition that he collect the rent for the next twenty-five years while paying

the Sassoons the equivalent of the old rent, and that the houses would be returned to the Sassoons at the end of that period. The Sassoons were happy with this deal. Cheng first rebuilt some *li* compounds near Peking Road where the rent of a house unit was only two to five yuan per month. Employing reusable materials from demolished houses, he built new houses at a cost less than one hundred yuan per unit. He doubled the rents of rebuilt houses and recovered the construction costs within two years. With the same method he rebuilt many other houses owned by the Sassoons.²² By 1890 he had become known as “the king of Chinese real estate.”

Few records of contractors such as Cheng have survived. They usually started as apprentices in construction guilds and were at the bottom of the Confucian social hierarchy, but they soon became very rich. A bamboo poem (*zhuzhici*) noted: “[The head of] every carpenter guild earns a great fortune,/ By building foreign style houses at huge costs,/ Traveling in carriages like rich magnates,/ Sometimes returning from work with an umbrella in hand.”²³ Even Huang Shiquan, an editor of the city’s most influential newspaper, *Shenbao*, admired them: “House construction is contracted by the head of artisans. He lives in a grand building, rides in carriages like a member of a prestigious family, and leads hundreds and thousands of artisans.”²⁴

Such Chinese contractors and compradors enjoyed luxurious lives that were impossible elsewhere. The rise of these nouveaux riches in Shanghai was epitomized by the careers of Cheng and Silas Aaron Hardoon, the real estate king of early twentieth-century Shanghai who started as a humble Baghdadi refugee employed by the Sassoons. The city was where the obscure became prominent and the traditional social hierarchy was reversed. This reversal should be seen as resulting not simply from the impact of the West on Chinese society, but from the erosion of the established orders of both Chinese and Western communities by new forces generated in the hybrid colonial environment.

Fluid Space

The Chinese compradors and contractors had a greater influence on the development of the *li* than their foreign bosses.²⁵ Their knowledge and experience of local building traditions informed the *li* houses, which looked similar to Jiangnan vernacular dwellings. Built with local materials and technology, the best of these houses retained the traditional courtyard layout and incorporated many local decorative motifs, such as the *matouqiang* (stepped gable), the *shikumen* (stone-framed entrance), and the uniform outlook marked by dark tiled roofs and white plastered walls (Fig-

ure 3). These vernacular motifs were adopted in a mass production of housing in standardized layouts.

The most common residential unit in the *li* compounds was three *jian* wide, with the middle *jian* as the courtyard and the hall, flanked by two wings (*xiangfang*; Figure 4). It was a compact version of *sanbeyuan*, consisting of timber structures and brick walls. Passing through the front entrance (*shikumen*) there was a small courtyard, or *tianjing* (literally “skywell,” referring to its well-like space), and next to it, the reception hall, or *ketang* (Figures 5, 6). The two wings were used for different purposes, such as studies or bedrooms. Steep stairs at the back of the hall led to second-floor rooms; bright and spacious ones faced south (to the courtyard), and less desirable ones, called *tingzijian*, faced north (to the back alley). Behind the main structure was the service area that included a kitchen, a small backyard, storage, and a back entrance. Several units were aligned along an alley, at whose end there was usually a larger unit, sometimes more than three *jian* wide and with a spacious courtyard. Such a unit could be reserved as the residence of the landowner who had built the whole compound.

These houses inherited the traditional layout of courtyard-hall centered dwellings. Each of their three *jian* was about 4 meters wide and up to 10 meters deep (the hall was 6 meters, the courtyard 4, and the wings 10), and the houses were spacious. Many tenants of late nineteenth-century *li* were wealthy merchants or gentry, and these houses basically met their need for a large, courtyard-style house. But whereas traditional courtyard houses were built individually and formed an organic sprawl of heterogeneous structures, the *li* houses replicated the same plan and were aligned in rigid rows. The alley (*longtang*) between two such rows was about 2.5 meters wide and led to a perpendicular main alleyway (*long*), 4 meters wide, that cut through the compound linking the streets at its ends (Figure 7).²⁶

The orderly layout of the *li* was consonant with the Confucian spatial order, as exemplified by the rigidly planned imperial capitals. *Li* is an ancient term. In the Han capital Chang’an, a residential area enclosed by walls was called *li*, its four entrances were called *lii*, and *liili* together indicated this gated residential compound or ward, within which “houses were arranged like combs, doors and alleys were straight.”²⁷ There seemed to be a rational row alignment of houses in the *liili*. The Tang Chang’an consisted of more orderly planned residential wards, or *fangli*, within whose walls residents were tightly controlled and whose four gates closed at night and opened at sunrise (Figure 8).²⁸

The development of the urban economy from the late Tang onward led to the abolition of the residential ward system in major cities during the Song and later dynasties; this



Figure 3 Yixing li, street view near Nanking Road, with the entrance sign first from left. Photographed ca. 1890–1910

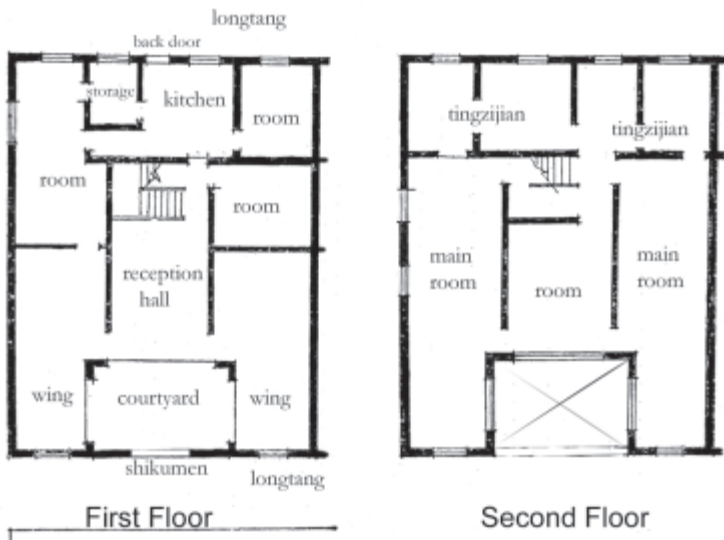


Figure 4 Plan of first and second floors of a typical *li* house in the foreign settlements of Shanghai, ca. 1910–30



Figure 5 *Li* house, Pingwang Street (near Fuzhou Road), Shanghai, ca. 1910–30. Photographed 2007



Figure 6 Small courtyard, seen through a *shikumen* on Pingwang Street, Shanghai. Photographed 2007

was an important component of what scholars consider the “medieval urban revolution” in China.²⁹ In the Song capital Bianliang, the doors of houses and shops opened directly onto the streets, while residential neighborhoods, lacking clear walled boundaries, were usually named after these streets. In other words, a location in the city was identified by the name of a street name rather than a walled block. In contrast to the Han and Tang capitals, however, this new, late imperial urban model generated lively urban scenes of commercial and leisure activities, fully liberated from the rigid ward system (Figure 9).

But walls did not disappear from cities in late imperial China; they still enclosed cities and the compounds that housed the imperial and local authorities. Individual residences were also walled complexes. In the meantime, the street was filled with shops and businesses, and often assumed an organic, meandering form in vernacular towns. Important as it was to the booming urban economy, the street was considered indecorous, dangerous, and morally inferior to walled domains. This spatial hierarchy corre-

sponded to the Confucian social ladder, on which merchants were assigned to a very low rung.

While the ancient capitals represented a unitary urban model of walled compounds, the new urban model in the late imperial period consisted of walled Confucian spaces and open commercial streets, which were crucial to everyday life yet marginalized in mainstream discourse. The uniqueness of the *li* in the foreign settlements of Shanghai lay in its synthesis of some features from these two urban models: on the one hand the mass production of *li* houses was to some extent comparable to the imperial planning of the residential wards; on the other hand the joint commercial production of the *li* by foreign landowners and local craftsmen, besides adding vernacular motifs to the rational layout, gave a new meaning to the amorphous street—its meandering form already straightened. By integrating the enclosed compound with surrounding streets and shops, the *li* erased the borderline between orderly walled spaces and promiscuous streets, to the extent that the walls’ functions of enclosure and protection were weakened.

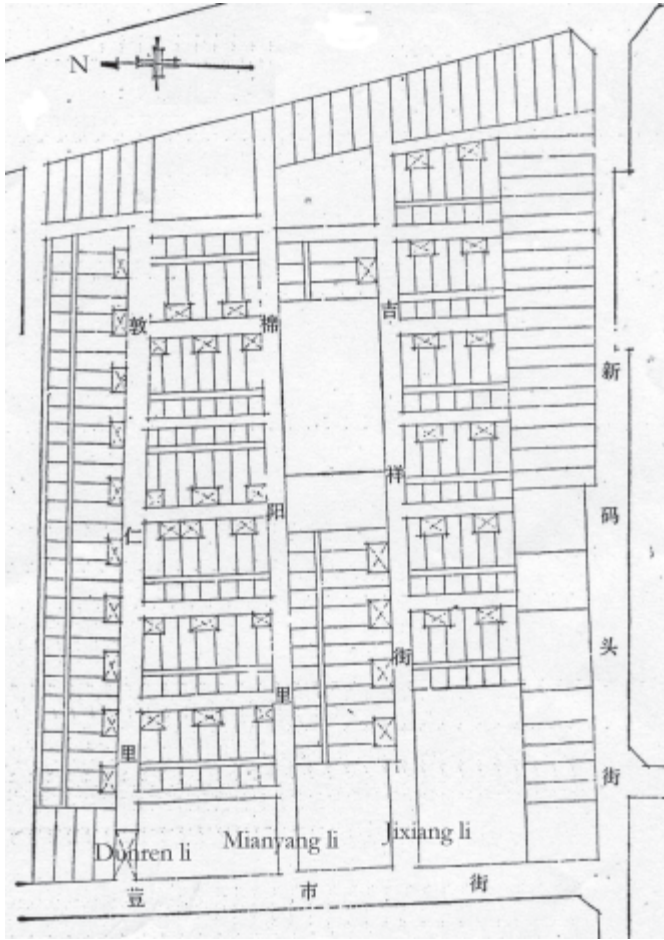


Figure 7 Site plan of Dunren li, Mianyang li, and Jixiang li, Shanghai, 1980s

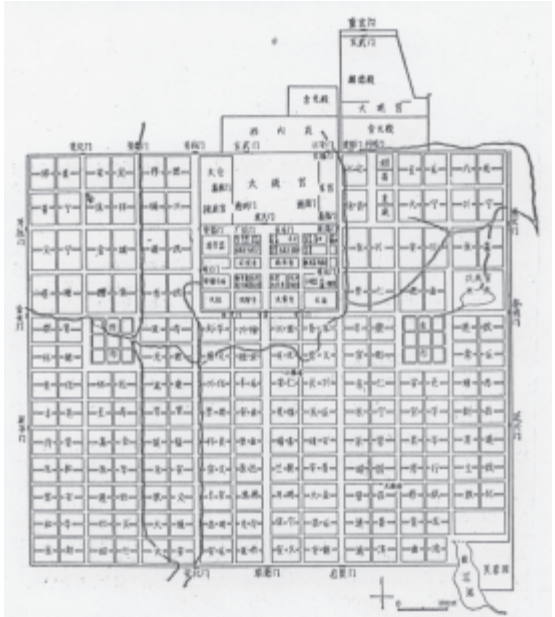


Figure 8 Plan of the Tang capital Chang'an and its residential wards, eighth century



Figure 9 Zhang Zeduan, *Qingmin shanghe tu*, eleventh-twelfth century, detail of a house and shops in the Song dynasty capital Bianliang



Figure 10 Wu Youru et al, entrance to Puqing li between shops, showing the names of seven courtesans posted at the entrance (four to the left and three to the right), 1884

A *li* compound was bounded by rows of shops facing busy streets. At the back of the shops was a wall enclosing the residential area. As seen in contemporary sketches and photographs, the shops were usually two-story structures with the ground floor open to the street. This uniform, continuous architectural front displayed diverse shop signs and merchandise. Amidst the shop entrances was an opening not so different from the others, except that it featured a distinct stone portal and three characters inscribed above: the first two formed an auspicious word and the last was “*li*” or sometimes “*fang*.” It was a *shikumen* leading into the *li* compound (Figure 10; see Figure 3).

As Wang Tao noted, the street names in the settlements were innovations, departing from the traditional practice of naming a street after a historical figure from the neighborhood or a local business feature, such as Color Clothes Street. Wang’s sketch of the walled city mentioned Tang Family Street named after Tang Yu and Mei Family Street after Mei Xuanshi, both of whom were famous figures in local history.³⁰ The *li* and the settlements, however, were not rooted in any such local tradition, but were built almost overnight on deserted land: “Neglected tombs were leveled and foreign houses were built.”³¹ Naming the *li* with auspicious words was probably a measure to improve the feng-

shui of that inauspicious land, and characters such as “peace,” “everlasting,” and “happiness” echoed terms used in the wards of the Han or Tang capital (see Figure 8). But unlike the didactic moral terms also adopted in the capital, the *li* names were usually about wealth and prosperity, such as Zhaorong li, Zhaohua li, Zhaofu li, and Zhaogui li—*zbao* meaning prospective, and *rong-bua-fu-gui* together as one word meaning glory, prosperity, wealth, and elite. This nomenclature fit well into the settlements’ commercial milieu.

Comparable to the gateways (*lü* or *fang*) of the ancient residential wards, two or three *shikumen* were the only unguarded points of entry to the *li*. A nineteenth-century *shikumen* had a decorative architrave and a curving eave in the traditional style. This architectural motif appeared in many vernacular dwellings of Jiangnan (Figure 11). The *shikumen* could also be seen as a less monumental version of the *paifang*, which probably developed from the *lü* and *fang* in the Han and Tang. As the traditional gateway to a village or urban neighborhood, the *paifang* was often an honorific monument dedicated to a distinguished ancestor of the local clan, bearing a name that defined both the location and that clan. The *shikumen* of the *li*, however, displayed innovative names without any roots in local history and was less conspicuous and monumental than the free-standing *paifang*. Underneath a second-story room, the *shikumen* looked like a shop entrance, especially when it was decorated with business signs, such as those of courtesan houses (see Figure 10). This blatant commercial use of a monumental entrance in a residential compound testified to the fact that the traditional borderline between residences and commercial streets was melting away.

Shikumen also appeared inside the *li* compound; they led from the main alleyway (*long*) into the branch alleys (*longtang*) and into individual houses. Without these entrances, the *long* leading to the streets would be a throughway and the dead-end *longtang* would also cease to function like a court (*tang*) shared by the residents as a communal space. *Shikumen* not only defined spaces of varying degrees of privacy (street–*long*–*longtang*–house) but also transformed the traffic routes into courtyardlike spaces. This arrangement in fact reflected the traditional layout of a building complex as a series of entrances, courtyards, and halls aligned along the main path. But whereas the traditional layout reflected a strict demarcation of privacy, gender, and social hierarchy, the *li* layout was more fluid and brought together residential and commercial spaces, or courtyards, streets, and alleyways.

In later imperial China the courtyard and the street were antithetical spaces separated by walls: the one repre-



Figure 11 Stone portal, Shen Family House, Zhouzhuang (near Shanghai). Photographed 2007

sented the elite order and the other the amorphous and vulgar; the one was the center and the other always was marginalized in Confucian ideology. Thus, the house-mansion-palace centered on the courtyard and the shop-along-the-street were two contrasting architectural types assigned to the central and marginal positions in the traditional urban geography.

In the settlements this spatial hierarchy was reversed: the street became an infinitely extending space central to everyday life, while the house had to open itself in order to be a sustainable unit in the city. Though the *shikumen* made the *long(tang)* look somewhat like a courtyard, they did not separate it from the street. Commercial activities in streets and domestic lives in houses tended to overflow from these gateways and meet each other in the *long(tang)*. The shops around the *li* were usually very small, every inch of their space fully utilized; so too were the houses in the *li*. Though retaining many traditional features, these houses became more compact and their courtyards were too small to be outdoor living spaces, which were so central to traditional

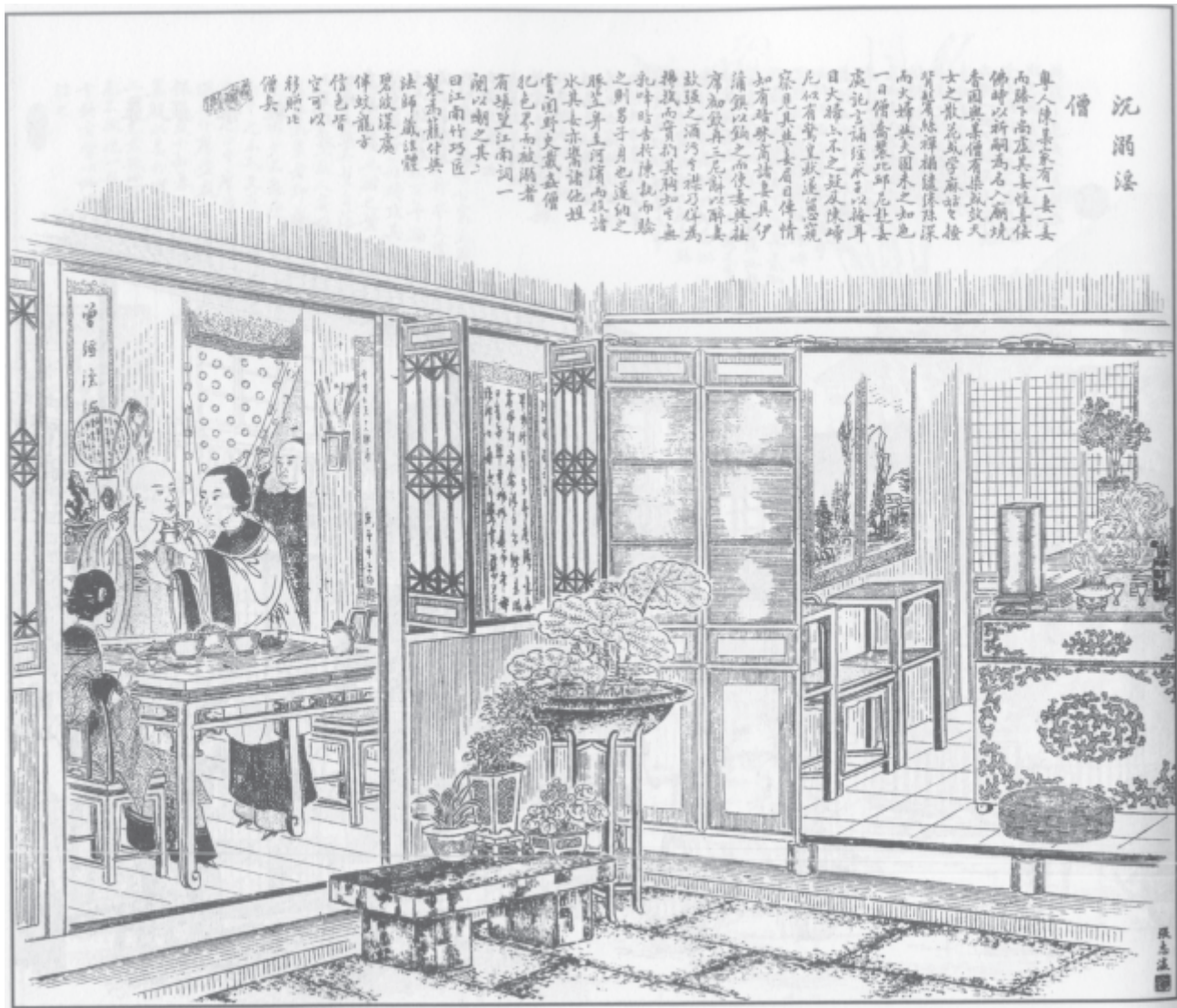


Figure 12 Wu Youru et al., small courtyard of a Cantonese merchant's residence, Shanghai, 1890

domestic life. In comparison, the *longtang* was wider and straighter than a vernacular alleyway.

To make the courtyard appear larger, the house did not have any second-story structure above the *shikumen*, which along with a thin wall separated the courtyard from the *longtang*. This provided an important opening for the well-like space. Through this opening, the second-story windows now looked beyond the wall to the *longtang*. Such an outward-looking feature was more commonly found in roadside shops. Traditional architecture always combined timber frames and solid walls; the openness of the timber structure was more visible in roadside shops than in houses enclosed by solid walls, within which this openness was only found in

the rooms facing the courtyard. The *li* house retained this open feature: its reception hall opened to the courtyard via removable door panels, which covered the hall's entire front; wooden walls and large windows filled the rest of the courtyard façades (Figure 12; see Figure 6) As the second-floor spaces rose above the *shikumen* and the wall, this fluidity between interior and courtyard carried beyond the traditional boundary. This to some extent turned a traditional house inside out. The overflowing of interior space onto the *longtang* also resulted from the fragmentation of walls, as the gables of the two wings flanking the *shikumen* were now pierced by large windows. This contradicted the gables' traditional function of containing the fire (*fenghuo*



Figure 13 Wu Youru et al., alley view in Zhaofu li, showing house with traditional stepped gable, 1886

shanqiang; Figure 13; see Figure 5). Some elaborate, pavilion-like balconies opened directly to the alleyway or street (Figure 14). The integrity and safety of the walled courtyard were sacrificed for the sake of spatial interconnectedness between houses, streets, and the city. Every one could see and be seen by others, as if the city were one busy street.

Diverse Functions

With the spatial innovations discussed above, the *li* houses were used very differently from traditional ones. They became transferable “commodities” rather than permanent homes to which generations of residents had a strong sense

of belonging. As temporary lodgings in the foreign settlements, they could easily be purchased and resold, rented and sublet, and their rents were extremely high according to contemporary living standards. The first guidebook to the settlements, *Huyou zaji* (1876), stated:

Letting houses in Shanghai can bring the greatest profits. In the settlements six or seven out of ten foreign merchants are doing this business. A house unit, locally called a *zhuang*, has a room upstairs, one downstairs, and an attached kitchen to the back. A street-facing unit costs five or six taels a month; even the cheapest unit in a remote alley costs three yuan. The ancients said that living in Chang’an was very costly; now living in Shanghai is more costly.³²



Figure 14 Banquet scene viewed through the balcony windows of a courtesan house in Gonghe li

However costly it was to live in Shanghai, more and more immigrants chose it as their new home. The city provided more business opportunities, and high housing values generated income for landowners as well as property agents, wholesale renters, and even individual renters, who resided in one room and sublet the rest of the house to other tenants. Moreover, the *li* house was also a working space where business was conducted and wealth produced, where domestic life and commerce were combined.³³

The combination of domestic and business functions was common in traditional houses. The home(land) was always the most important resource of traditional life: a gentry house was where the head of the family managed his businesses; the yard of a peasant house was a working field; and the houses of the *jihu* in Suzhou were small textile factories. But such work involved people within or related to the household and was carried out in a self-contained, family-based network. Only in roadside shop houses were there

direct commercial exchanges; they were dormitories at night and had no domestic space in daytime when they merged with the bustling street. The *li* house seemed to be an intermediate between those two kinds of mixed dwelling-work space. The alleyways in the *li* were wide enough for some commercial activities, and the *shikumen* did not separate the residential compound from the street but instead defined different commercial spaces.

The *li* houses were not permanent homes; they were provisional lodgings centering on business activities, and the sojourners' concept of home had to be reinvented. To pay high rents and sustain an expensive urban life, a house was used not only as a home, but as a space that facilitated the constant flow of capital. Merchant residences were used for many different purposes as the sojourners sought every means to maintain their lifestyle or strike a fortune. Thus, extremely diverse functions—residential and commercial, private and public—were found in the *li* compounds. Among businesses listed in the 1876 guide, there were three silk wholesale stores and four retail stores in Qingyuan li, three tea wholesale stores in Zao'an li, two commercial guilds in Nanzhoujin li, and thirty-six banks in Xingren li and Tonghe li.³⁴ By the early twentieth century businesses ranging from press houses to factories to neighborhood stores were all found in the *li* of the foreign settlements.³⁵

Pleasure Houses

The most celebrated as well as most condemned businesses in the *li* were courtesan houses and other forms of the sex trade.³⁶ The relatively abundant descriptions of these entertainment and sex establishments in popular literature—including guides, pictorials, and fiction—offer views of the social space of the *li*. In the nineteenth century, the most well-known *li* were the locales of elite courtesan houses near Simalu (Fuzhou Road), the city's busiest street, and according to the 1876 guide, one of the city's ten grand scenes was "Visiting Beauties in Guixin [li]."³⁷

The Confucian ideology of a social continuum from the state to the family was embodied in a universal architectural layout so that buildings with different social functions had similar physical forms: a palace, temple, or house was always a walled complex composed of a series of entrances, courtyards, and halls. In this context, it was natural that the *li* houses were adapted to many different uses, including courtesan businesses.

As always, the different purposes of buildings were expressed through conspicuous entrance signs. This traditional practice became more popular in Shanghai where a basic building type served multiple purposes. Streets in the

settlements were filled with forests of signs, including those bearing names of the *li*. Not associated with any local tradition, these auspicious words absorbed new meanings derived from the social contents located behind the signs. When some courtesans posted their names on the *shikumen* next to the *li* signs, the latter's new connotation was blatant (see Figure 10); a bamboo poem said: "Raising [my] head [to look], all the pleasure houses are known;/ The names of the beauties are posted on the wall next to the entrance;/ Like looking at a list of myriad beauties,/ Thousands of famous flowers labeled in detail."³⁸ Such signs were also posted at the entrances to individual courtesan houses.

Inside the *li*, the architectural features also helped to make the courtesan businesses more noticeable and facilitated their flexible use of space. A typical courtesan house was shared by three or more courtesans and often managed by a madam or landlord. An independent courtesan could rent a room from a large establishment to run her own business. In such a collective house, regular business activities such as banquets and tea parties were held in the courtesans' private upstairs rooms, but occasionally some important events were observed in the courtyard-hall.

For lively descriptions and images of such events we have to look at an alternative historical source, the illustrated novel *Haishang hua liezhuan*, or *Flowers of Shanghai*. Its 128 illustrations are lithographed ink drawings by the Dianshizhai studio (affiliated with the *Shenbao* press) and contain schematic but realistic renderings of the courtesan houses and their architectural space.³⁹ Figure 15 shows the celebration of a rich merchant's birthday at a Western-style banquet in the reception hall of a famous courtesan house. The wooden wall at the back of the hall has been removed and a little stage set up for an operatic performance.⁴⁰ This transformation of the traditional *ketang* into a combination of a small opera house and a Western-style dining room demonstrates the extent to which things Chinese and Western, traditional and modern, elite and popular, had intermingled in the *li* house.

Another illustration shows a band of musicians performing in a courtyard to celebrate the arrival of a new courtesan, who rents a room in this collective house. While she celebrates the occasion with customers in an upstairs room, the performance downstairs provides background music (Figure 16).⁴¹ This event honoring the independent courtesan takes place in the communal courtyard as if the unrelated courtesans formed a family. As the music spreads to the neighborhood, the domain of this communal family is further extended.

The courtesan houses also celebrated many traditional events in the courtyard-hall. Prior to the three major festi-



Figure 15 Banquet party with Western-style dining and traditional opera performance in a courtesan house

vals of New Year, Dragon Boat, and Mid-Autumn when the customers' payments for the courtesans' outcall services in the previous four months were due, the courtesan houses observed *shaolutou*, a ritual to honor the god of wealth, and held banquet parties (hosted by their primary patron). Another religious event popular in the courtesan houses was the *xuanjuan*, during which Taoist priests were called in to sing stories about local deities (Figure 17).

Serving to hold together the establishment and promote its business, such communal events observed in the courtyard-hall demonstrated that this traditional center still retained its communal function and could be adapted for different uses as it had always been. But in other times, the courtyard-hall was often a neglected space by comparison to the second-floor rooms with better ventilation and views. The latter were even more flexibly arranged to accommodate many functions ranging from private romantic liaisons to banquet parties of up to fifty attendants. That such a pri-



Figure 16 Courtesan house with a band of junior opera singers performing in the courtyard and a banquet party in a second-floor room



Figure 17 Four Taoist priests observing the *xuanjuan* ritual in a courtesan house

vate room above the ground level became the most important business space of a public nature subverted the courtyard-hall's central position. This reconfiguration of traditional space was also apparent in that the formerly invisible, secluded female quarter now proudly looked out to the *long(tang)*, and in some houses directly to the street. The vantage point from the second floor of this open-style architecture helped the courtesans and their patrons interact with one another and the larger urban environment (see Figure 13). In the mean time, activities in the courtesan room were also visible from the *long(tang)*, as a bamboo poem said: "Zhoujin li has two streets to the east and to the west,/ Where red buildings hide beauties vaguely seen."⁴²

As the second-floor space became the center of activities, the courtyard-hall for most of the time functioned as a working space where the servants did various household cores. They usually kept the *shikumen* open for better ventilation and the courtyard was then visible to passersby, forming a continuum with the *long(tang)*. This

courtyard-*longtang* continuum was mainly an obscure space where servants from the courtesan houses and merchant residences constantly ran errands, and tailors, small vendors, and restaurant or theater messengers regularly visited. The *long(tang)* could also be a place where people engaged in public brawls, and where hoodlums harassed the maids escorting the courtesan sedans. A report from *Dianshizhai buabao* (Dianshizhai pictorial; May 1887) commented on this issue: "To see the violation of etiquette and order, the loss of righteous men, and the filthiest, unheard-of conduct in the world, you must visit [the *li* compounds in] the middle section of Simalu."⁴³

Elite merchants often avoided such spaces by taking sedans or rickshaws. Like the Confucians in earlier times, they considered the street and alley a subaltern space fraught with chaos and danger. While they took advantage of the extension of prosperous streets, their leisurely "stroll" always took place inside the courtesan boudoir, which gave them an illusion of a homelike space, and from which they could see the

street while remaining above and apart from it. This visual advantage compensated for the loss of the spacious courtyard, and the elite space was now defined by the high level as the courtyard-hall had lost its central standing. But in the end this final retreat was also full of danger and deception and became part of the street, where personal romances and loves were just like business transactions. The courtesan house was indeed a residence as well as a commercial establishment—the resting place of the courtesans and their servants and managers, as well as a “home” purchased by the sojourners.⁴⁴ This ambiguous space anticipated a new kind of urban residence, whose free access to public spaces and business opportunities eclipsed the centralized spatial order and rigid boundary of the traditional residence.

Distinct Neighborhoods

All nineteenth-century Chinese neighborhoods clustered in the western sections of the then modestly sized settlements of Shanghai. The *li* houses near Peking Road, in the northern part of the British Settlement, were used for merchant residences and commercial establishments such as those listed in the 1876 guide. About four or five blocks south of this business area was the entertainment district, located in the middle section of Simalu and close to the Race Course, the French Concession, and the walled city.

Even though different business and residential communities were very close to one another, each *li*, or at least each *longtang*, usually acquired a distinct character by accommodating similar businesses or residences within its *shikumen*, which, like the entrance of a former grand household, gave a shared identity to a community of sojourners. Residences and courtesan houses rarely shared a *shikumen*. Most sojourners were acutely aware of the social character of every neighborhood. In *Flowers of Shanghai*, when the storekeeper Hong Shanqing knows that his sister, nephew, and niece have moved into Qinghe fang, he becomes very upset and storms into their house: “This is Qinghe fang; do you know what kind of place it is?”⁴⁵ Because his niece is soon to open her courtesan business, he feels that his own reputation is being tarnished. As the distinction between domestic women and courtesans was so much tied to the different neighborhoods they resided in, the complicated categories of courtesans and sex workers were translated into a diversified urban geography of fin-de-siècle Shanghai.

Most of the first-class courtesans (*shuyu* and *changsan*) resided in the *li* near the middle section of Simalu, while many second-class *yao'er* establishments were large Western-style mansions on Qipan Street near the border of the French Concession. Lower-class sex workers also gathered

around those areas, although in more obscure neighborhoods consisting of houses different from the typical unit, which consisted of three *jian* and a small courtyard. The only nineteenth-century *li* to survive in the late twentieth century, such as Xingren *li* that stood from 1872 until the 1980s, consisted of courtyard houses that were probably used by banks and wholesale stores.⁴⁶ Based on such extant examples, scholars conclude that the *shikumen* house evolved from the nineteenth-century multi-*jian* courtyard house to the smaller single-*jian* house in the twentieth century, implying that the latter did not appear earlier.⁴⁷ But many contemporary drawings recorded a wide range of building types and neighborhoods in the nineteenth century, and the single-*jian* unit seemed to be more common than other types since it was the only one mentioned in the 1876 guide. Such single-*jian* houses without a courtyard looked like roadside shops and were aligned in rows. Between two such rows was a *long(tang)* leading to a *shikumen* that defined the neighborhood.

The *huayanjian* (flower opium house), a kind of cheap brothel that also served opium, could be found in neighborhoods of single-*jian* houses. An illustration from *Flowers of Shanghai* shows a *huayanjian*: it is a two-story house at the end of Xinjie (New Street) in the French Concession, its stairs opening directly onto an alley and a dim glass lamp hanging at the entrance; the customers pass the entrance, step right onto the stairs, and enter the small upstairs room, which is only a half *jian* wide (Figure 18).⁴⁸ Another example from this area is shown in a sketch in *Dianshizhai buabao* (November 1890): the Second Long of Xinjie, a neighborhood of lower class residents (Figure 19). Similar single-*jian* houses were also found near Damalu (Nanking Road) and in Lanfang *li* (Figures 20, 21). A different kind of lower-class sex worker, *yeji* (streetwalkers), who solicited customers from the street, also gathered in some *li* neighborhoods, such as Xingyongqing *li*, which consisted of simple houses equipped with fine *shikumen* but apparently without any courtyards (Figure 22).

The sojourners' social status was tied to the kind of social space in which they dwelled. For rich merchants or officials, both their residences and the courtesan houses they visited represented their wealth and elite status. As their friends or acquaintances, the less wealthy merchants and storekeepers also tried to maintain a similar lifestyle. Just as residing in a distinct neighborhood would improve a resident's social status, patronizing a first-class courtesan helped a customer join the club of the elite. Thus visiting courtesan houses was part of the sojourners' conscious identity construction. Nineteenth-century guidebooks ranked various courtesans (in the order of *shuyu*, *changsan*, and



Figure 18 Flower opium house in the French Concession, Shanghai



Figure 19 Wu Youru et al., street view of Xixin li (near Xinjie), the French Concession, Shanghai, 1890

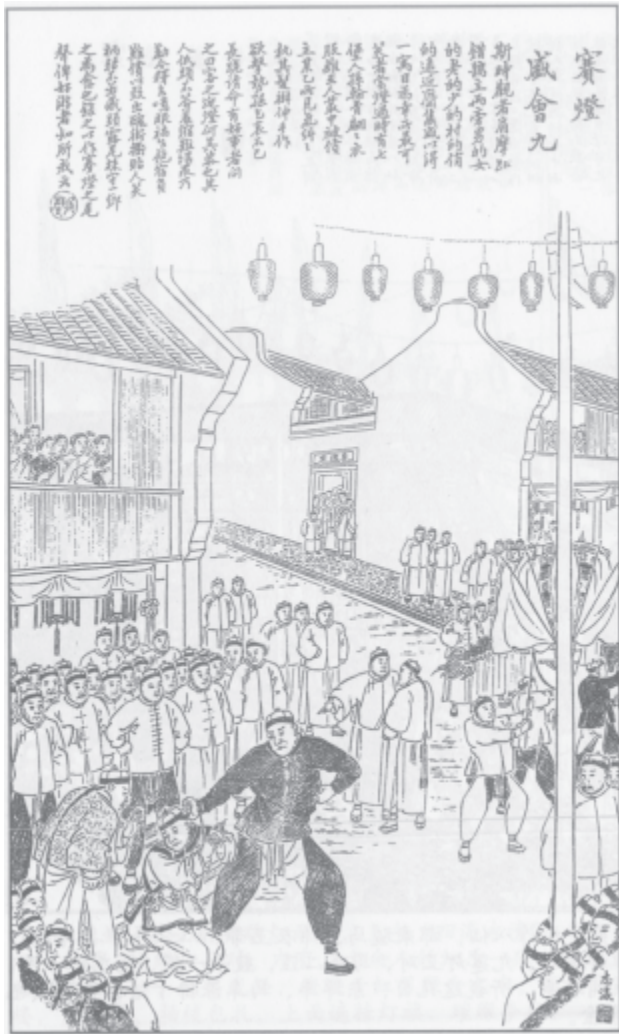


Figure 20 Wu Youru et al., *li* neighborhood with simple row houses near Damalu (Naking Road), Shanghai, 1893

yao'er) and sex workers, and seemingly continued the Confucian tradition of structuring the society in a hierarchical order. But this effort was never very successful, since the new urban society was no longer as integrated as the Confucian one. As the market fluctuated, a courtesan's status changed from time to time. Many courtesan biographies in the guidebooks recorded such changes; for example: "Wang Guixiang, from Suzhou, nineteen years old, residing in Zhaogui li, has an elegant posture, a respectable manner, and a different flavor among the courtesans. She started as a *yao'er* at Qipan Street; in 1889 she became very famous and moved her residence and became a *sbuyu*."⁴⁹

The distinction between courtesan houses and cheap brothels, like that between merchants and their servants,

was much more strictly observed. But even this boundary between the elite and the lower class was sometimes overstepped. *Flowers of Shanghai* gives a vivid example of such transgression. In a teahouse, the merchant Li Shifu is attracted to the *yeji* Zhu Shiquan, who is there looking for customers, and then visits her house regularly but secretly. Later his servant Kuang'er discovers this secret:

[In running an errand for their masters, Kuang'er and Changfu walked to the end of Stone Road, and saw Shifu walking alone toward the west. Kuang'er was surprised: "Why is he going there?" Changfu said: "Maybe seeing a friend." Kuang'er said: "It doesn't look like so." Changfu said: "Let's go there and have a look." They followed him at a distance and saw he entered Daxing li. They stopped at the entrance and looked into the alley where Shifu stopped and knocked at a *shikumun* door. A smiling old woman brought him in and then shut the door. Kuang'er and Changfu then walked into the alley but had no idea of what kind of house that was. . . . When they were wondering, a *yeji* in red face and green hair opened the upstairs window and appeared to be speaking to someone below. Shifu was right behind her. While the servants were running away from Shifu, the old woman came out. Changfu boldly asked her: "What is the name of the 'girl' (*xiaojie*) in your house?" She looked at them and changed her face: "What girl? No nonsense!" She then left them. Kuang'er said: "Perhaps it is a family." Changfu said: "Must be a *yeji* house; if it were a family, she would have yelled at us more angrily."

Later that night, Kuang'er visits another *yeji* but his romance is ruined by a hoodlum; this makes him very jealous of his master's "cheap deal." The next day, he breaks into that *yeji* house in Daxing li, with the excuse of delivering a message to Shifu, and embarrasses him. But after his secret is discovered, Shifu visits the *yeji* more frequently.⁵⁰ The novel also provides many scenes of some customers visiting both the *yao'er* houses and the *huayanjian*. These fictional episodes realistically reveal the sojourners' uncertain social status as well as their acute class awareness. The borderline between the elite and the lower class was indeed vigilantly patrolled, but it hardly prohibited transgressive behavior in the fluid space of the *li* neighborhoods.

Conclusion

As traditional bonds and boundaries had to a great extent dissolved among the displaced sojourners, the *li* and the city as a whole became an encompassing street, a fluid world with a floating population and enchanting views. As the literati poet Yuan Zuzhi said:

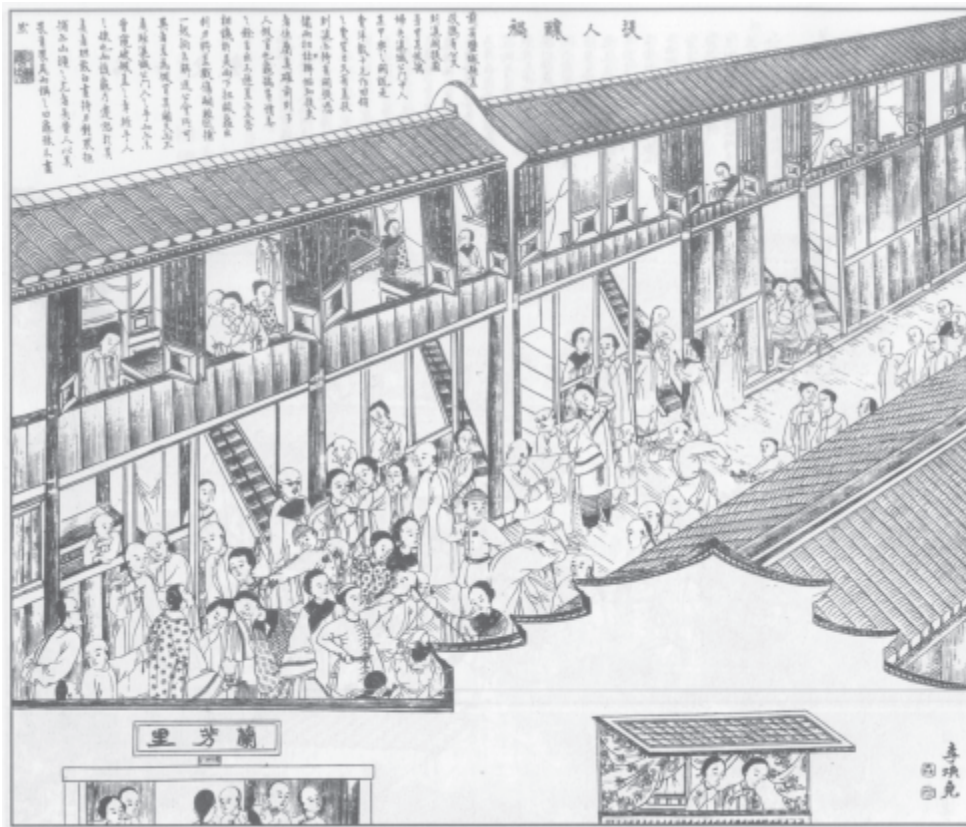


Figure 21 Wu Youru et al., flower opium houses in Langfang li, Shanghai, 1884



Figure 22 Wu Youru et al., alley view of Xingyongqing li near Simalu (Fuzhou Road), with many yeji soliciting customers, Shanghai, 1885

Wonderful Shanghai!

Wide avenues tell of the foreign settlements;
Thousands of houses and doors are all open paths;
Leading to every direction are broad and smooth streets.
This instructs me to sing of an all-around tour.⁵¹

Enjoying this freedom from the self-contained household and rigid social hierarchy, the sojourners were increasingly submerged in the city's sprawling commercial fabric and uneven geography. In contrast to traditional homeowners residing in a set of courtyard spaces, they were mere passersby with uncertain identities and fortunes on the city's promiscuous streets, where the Confucian ideal of social order and hierarchy had always been compromised. This is the true image of the social space in the *li*, where the courtyard adjoined the street.

Somewhere between enclosed compounds and open streets/alleys, the *li* neighborhoods were an ambiguous space, a hybrid product in semicolonial Shanghai. Jointly produced by foreign landowners and Chinese builders, the *li* combined the vernacular and the translocal (or the colonial), incorporated residential and commercial functions, and accommodated elite and lower-class residents.

Because of this spatial ambiguity, the *li* seemed to be a transitional type distinct from both traditional and modern urban spaces, one that was soon to be modernized in the next century. Indeed, most nineteenth-century *li* were rebuilt in the next decades, and the new neighborhoods were often more compact in layout and decorated with Western rather than indigenous motifs. Yet the *li* compound as a distinct spatial type has persisted in the city up to today, retaining the hybrid spatial features we have discussed.⁵² Moreover, the *li* architecture and social space has become a crucial mark of Shanghai identity, which gradually took shape as more permanent residents replaced nineteenth-century sojourners.

Instead of seeing the *li* as a transitional type in a linear historical process, we should consider it as a distinct space, embodying a Shanghai or Chinese modernity, one full of complexities and hybridities and in sharp contrast to the modern marked by purist designs and functionalist planning.

Notes

I thank Hilary Ballon and the two anonymous reviewers of *JSAH* for their constructive comments on the earlier versions of this article. I am also grateful to Tom McDonough, Ronald Knapp, Anthony King, Dorothy Ko, John Chaffee, Ian Reader, and Cary Liu for their helpful and encouraging feedback about my earlier writings and presentations on Shanghai's *li* neighborhoods. A British Academy small research grant (SG-46135) allowed me to

travel to Shanghai and collect more visual evidences for this article in summer 2007. All translations of the Chinese sources in this article are mine.

1. In 1865 the British Settlement merged with the American Settlement to form the International Settlement.
2. Important studies of the *lilong* in Mainland China include Wang Shaozhou and Chen Zhimin, *Lilong jianzhu* (Lilong architecture; Shanghai, 1987); Luo Suwen, *Shikumen. Xunchang renjia* (*Shikumen: Ordinary homes*; Shanghai, 1991); and Luo Xiaowei and Wu Jiang, *Shanghai Longtang* (Shanghai alleyways; Shanghai, 1997). For studies in Western languages, see Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, 1999); Chunlan Zhao, "From *Shikumen* to New-Style: A Rereading of *Lilong* Housing in Modern Shanghai," *Journal of Architecture* 9, no. 1 (2004), 49–76; Francoise Ged, "Les Lilong de Shanghai. Declin ou Renouveau de l'Habitat Traditionnel," in *Shanghai dans les Années 1980. Études Urbaines*, ed. Christian Henriot (Lyon, 1989), 55–73; and Ged, "Le Devenir des Lilong de Shanghai, Métropole de Forte Densité," in *Le Défi du Logement Urbain en Chine*, ed. Marc-H. Choko and Chen Guangting (Laval, Quebec, 1994), 173–92. For a sketch of nineteenth-century architecture in the walled city and the settlements, see Jonathan Hay, "Painting and the Built Environment in Late Nineteenth-Century Shanghai," in *Chinese Art: Modern Expressions*, ed. Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith G. Smith (New York, 2001), 60–101; Hay, however, does not mention the *li* in that article.
3. The document was a joint product of the British Consul George Balfour and Shanghai Daotai; for its English and Chinese versions, see Lu Wenda and Xu Baorun, eds., *Shanghai fangdichan zhi* (History of Shanghai real estate development; Shanghai, 1999), 543–50.
4. *Ibid.*, 91.
5. Zou Yiren, *Jiu Shanghai renkou bianqian de yanjiu* (Research on population change in old Shanghai; Shanghai, 1980), 3–4, 90–91. A different figure, 500,000 to 600,000, is given in Lu and Xu, *Shanghai fangdichan zhi*, 91. Official estimate of the population of the settlements and Chinese city combined was 1 to 1.5 million around that time; see C. A. Montalto De Jesus, *Historical Shanghai* (Shanghai, 1909), 233.
6. According to the censuses of the International Settlement, its population, mostly Chinese, was 92,884 in 1865, 110,009 in 1880, and 245,679 in 1895; see Lu and Xu, *Shanghai fangdichan zhi*, 119. The figures of the 1865 census were 90,000 natives in the settlement, 50,000 in the (French) concession, and 5,589 foreigners; see De Jesus, *Historical Shanghai*, 233.
7. A *jian* constitutes the standard spatial unit in Chinese architecture; a building is usually a linear alignment of three, five, or seven *jian*.
8. Lu and Xu, *Shanghai fangdichan zhi*, 91; for a recent study of China's vernacular residences, see Ronald Knapp, *Chinese Houses: The Architectural Heritage of a Nation* (Boston, 2005).
9. Luo Xiaowei, ed., *Shanghai Xintiandi. Jiu qu gai zao de jian zhu li shi, ren wen li shi yu kai fa mo shi de yan jiu* (Shanghai Xintiandi: Research on architectural history, humanity history, and development model of district renovation; Nanjing, 2002), 30; see also Luo Xiaowei and Wu Jiang, *Shanghai Longtang*.
10. Some scholars suggest that the row layout of the *li* was an imitation of terrace houses in England; see Luo Xiaowei, *Shanghai Xintiandi*, 30–31. But no historical record indicates any conscious copy of that model in Shanghai.
11. Lu and Xu, *Shanghai fangdichan zhi*, 132. For more discussion on Shanghai banks, see Zhaojin Ji, *A History of Modern Shanghai Banking: The Rise and Decline of China's Finance Capitalism* (Armonk, N.Y., 2003); Andrea McElderry, *Shanghai Old-Style Banks (Ch'ien-Chuang) 1800–1935* (Ann Arbor, 1976); and Wen-hsin Yeh, "Corporate Space, Communal Time:

- Everyday Life in Shanghai's Bank of China," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (1995), 97–122.
12. De Jesus, *Historical Shanghai*, 98.
 13. Sir Rutherford Alcock, *Capital of the Tycoon: A Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in Japan* (London, 1863), 36.
 14. *Ibid.*, 37–38.
 15. *Ibid.*, 38.
 16. The revision deleted the stipulations in the original Land Regulation that prohibited the landowners to let houses to Chinese tenants, to acquire a lot of land larger than 10 *mu*, to acquire land for pure speculation instead of building houses, and to arbitrarily determine the rents of their properties; see Lu and Xu, *Shanghai fangdichan zhi*, 551–52.
 17. Mao Xianglin, *Mo yu lu* (Records of leftover ink; 1870; rpt. Shanghai, 1985), 131.
 18. For a study of real estate companies in Shanghai from the late Qing to Republican periods, see Jeffrey Cody, "Minguo shiqi Shanghai de zhuzai fangdi chanye" (Housing real estate businesses in Republican Shanghai), in *Chengshi jinbu, qiye fazhan he zhongguo xiandaihua, 1840–1949* (Urban Progress, Business Development, and China's Modernization, 1840–1949), ed. Zhang Zhongli (Shanghai, 1994), 263–74.
 19. See Chiara Betta, "Marginal Westerners in Shanghai: The Baghdadi Jewish Community, 1845–1931," in *New Frontiers: Imperialism's New Communities in East Asia, 1842–1952*, ed. Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot (Manchester, 2000), 38–54.
 20. See Mao, *Mo yu lu*, 131.
 21. Lu and Xu, *Shanghai fangdichan zhi*, 451.
 22. *Ibid.*, 189.
 23. Yi'an zhuren, *Hujiang shangye shijing ci* (Poems about Shanghai commerce and markets; Shanghai, 1906); rpt. in Gu Bingquan, ed., *Shanghai yangchang zhuzhici* (Bamboo poems of Shanghai; Shanghai, 1996), 158. Three other poems in this volume are about the works of the water, stone, and paint guilds.
 24. Ge Yuanxu, Huang Shiquan, and Chi Zhicheng, *Huyou zaji, Songnan mengying lu, Huyou mengying* (Miscellaneous notes on visiting Shanghai, Record of dream images of Shanghai, Dream images of touring Shanghai; Shanghai, 1989), 111. Huang also wrote: "There are distinct guilds among the artisans. Those who build Chinese houses are called *benbang* [native guilds] and those who build foreign houses are called *bongbang* [red guilds]. The line between them is clear and cannot be crossed. If a *bongbang* tries to take a Chinese business, all of the *benbang* will rise to attack it; the same will happen if a *benbang* tries at a foreign business. The worst of such conflicts bring gang fights, in which they see each other as enemies, and end up in the local court. This is a bad practice."
 25. The compradors were also responsible for building the earliest Western-style buildings on the Bund, as De Jesus wrote in *Historical Shanghai*: "the newly finished establishment . . . well built though sportively described as of the 'compradoric' style of architecture, from the designs of some being, it is said, left to the discretion of the compradors; and yet some were not altogether devoid of elegance, being in the Italian villa style orientalisised by the addition of verandahs, and generally with gardens, where amidst thriving home flowers, pheasants were to be seen sometimes," 46–47 (see n. 5). A bamboo poem depicted Chinese guilds that specialized in constructing Western-style buildings: "Among those who work as carpenters in Shanghai,/ The craft of the *bongbang* [red guilds] is superbly delicate;/ Imagining after the Western craft and imitating its method,/ They build high mansions and easily earn huge profit." Gu, *Shanghai yangchang zhuzhici*, 168.
 26. Luo Suwen, *Shikumen. Xunchang renjia*, 19 (see n. 2).
 27. "Shijuzhibi, menxiangxiuzhi," quoted in Dong Jianhong et al., *Zhongguo chengshi jianshe shi* (History of Chinese urban construction; Beijing, 1982),
 18. Wang Tao, a literatus working for English missionaries in the settlement and later a reformist thinker of China, once used "luli" to describe the *li* compounds in the settlements; see his "Haizou yeyou lu fulu" (Addendum to the record of visits to the distant corner at the sea [preface, 1878]), in *Xiang yan cong shu*, ed. Chongtianzi (Beijing, 1992), 20:5700.
 28. Dong et al., *Zhongguo chengshi jianshe shi*, 29. Though no visual records demonstrate the rational layout of houses inside these ancient wards, they might be similar to, but more strictly planned than, the *butong* neighborhoods in the last imperial capital Peking, where individual houses were aligned in a roughly rational pattern. In short, the rational alignment of houses in the *li* compounds of late nineteenth-century Shanghai was not totally unprecedented.
 29. See G. William Skinner, "Introduction: Urban Development in Imperial China," in *The Cities in Late Imperial China*, ed. Skinner (Stanford, 1977), 23–26; and Shiba Yoshinobu, *Commerce and Society in Sung China* (Ann Arbor, 1970).
 30. Wang Tao, "Haizou yeyou lu" (The record of visits to the distant corner at the sea [preface, 1860]) in Chongtianzi, *Xiang yan cong shu*, 20:5641–42.
 31. Gu, *Shanghai yangchang zhuzhici*, 48.
 32. Ge Yuanxu, *Huyou zaji* (Miscellaneous notes on visiting Shanghai; 1876; rpt. Yangzhou, 2003), 86–87. A tael is the traditional unit of silver, valued slightly more than a silver dollar (yuan), introduced to Shanghai from the West.
 33. For studies on modern, commercial culture in Shanghai, see Sherman Cochran, ed., *Inventing Nanjing Road: Commercial Culture in Shanghai, 1900–1945* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1999); and Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1949* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).
 34. Ge, *Huyou zaji*, 343, 357–68, 369–71, 373–91.
 35. Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights*, 138–88 (see n. 2).
 36. For the *lilong* and prostitution, see Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History, 1849–1949* (Cambridge, England, 2001), 220–25.
 37. Ge, *Huyou zaji*, 232.
 38. Gu, *Shanghai yangchang zhuzhici*, 89.
 39. Han Bangqing, *Haishang hua liezhuan* (*Flowers of Shanghai*), in Muzhen Shanren and Han Bangqing, *Qinglou baojian* (The precious mirror of pleasure quarters; Beijing, 1998), 267–619. The novel was first serialized in Han Bangqing's own literary journal in 1892 and was published as a book two years later. It depicts life in the pleasure quarters of nineteenth-century Shanghai and is now considered a literary masterpiece. For recent studies of the novel, see Alexander Des Forges, "Building Shanghai, One Page at a Time: The Aesthetics of Installment Fiction at the Turn of the Century," *Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 3 (2003), 781–810; Samuel Y. Liang, "Ephemeral Households, Marvelous Things: Business, Gender, and Material Culture in *Flowers of Shanghai*," *Modern China* 33, no. 3 (2007), 377–418; Keith McMahon, "Fleecing the Male Customer in Shanghai Brothels of the 1890s," *Later Imperial China* 23, no. 2 (2002), 1–32; and David Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911*, (Stanford, 1997), 89–101.
 40. Han, *Haishang hua liezhuan*, 378.
 41. *Ibid.*, 312.
 42. Gu, *Shanghai yangchang zhuzhici*, 56.
 43. Wu Youru, et al., *Dianshizhai buobao. Daketang ban* (Dianshizhai pictorial: Daketang edition), ed. Zhang Qiming (Shanghai, 2001), 4:42. The pictorial was originally published by the Dianshizhai studio from 1884 to 1898, and circulated as a supplement to the *Shenbao*; for a recent study of this pictorial and Shanghai urban culture, see Ye Xiaoping, *The Dianshizhai Picto-*

rial: *Shanghai Urban Life, 1884–1898* (Ann Arbor, 2003).

44. For discussions of the social space and material culture inside the courtesan boudoirs, see Liang, “Ephemeral Households, Marvelous Things.”

45. Han, *Haisbang hua liezhuan*, 444–45.

46. Wang Shaozhou, *Shanghai jindai chengshi jianzhu* (Shanghai modern architecture; Nanjing, 1989), 75.

47. Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights* (see n. 2); and Luo Xiaowei and Wu Jiang, *Shanghai longtang* (see n. 2).

48. Han, *Haisbang hua liezhuan*, 287–88.

49. Huayu xiaozhu zhuren, *Xinji haisbang qinglou tuji* (Illustrated record of Shanghai courtesan houses, the new edition; Shanghai, 1895), 3:21.

50. Han, *Haisbang hua liezhuan*, 361–66, 418–19.

51. Quoted in Ge, Huang, and Chi, *Huyou zaji*, 142 (see n. 24).

52. After years of overuse and neglect, most surviving alleyway houses are in dilapidated condition. In fact, many alleyway neighborhoods have been demolished and redeveloped into commercial complexes and residential high-rises since the early 1990s. See Samuel Y. Liang, “Amnesiac Monu-

ment, Nostalgic Fashion: Shanghai’s New Heaven and Earth,” *Wasafiri* 23, no. 3 (2008), 47–55.

Illustration Credits

Figures 1, 3, 4, 7. Shanghai Municipal Library

Figures 2, 10, 12, 13, 19–22. Daketang Culture, Ltd. (Shanghai). From Wu Youru, et al., *Dianshizhai buabao. Daketang ban* (Dianshizhai pictorial: Daketang edition), ed. Zhang Qiming (Shanghai, 2001), 7:255; 1:29; 7:88; 2:260; 7:284; 10:288; 1:140; 2:151

Figures 5, 6, 11. Samuel Y. Liang

Figure 8. Dong Jianhong et al., *Zhongguo chengshi jianshe shi* (History of Chinese urban construction; Beijing, 1982), 28

Figure 9. Liu Dunzheng, *Zhongguo gudai jianzhu shi* (History of ancient Chinese architecture, Beijing, 1984), 184

Figures 14–18. Han Bangqing, *Haisbang hua liezhuan* (Shanghai, 1894), illustrations for chaps. 15, 19, 5, 21, 2