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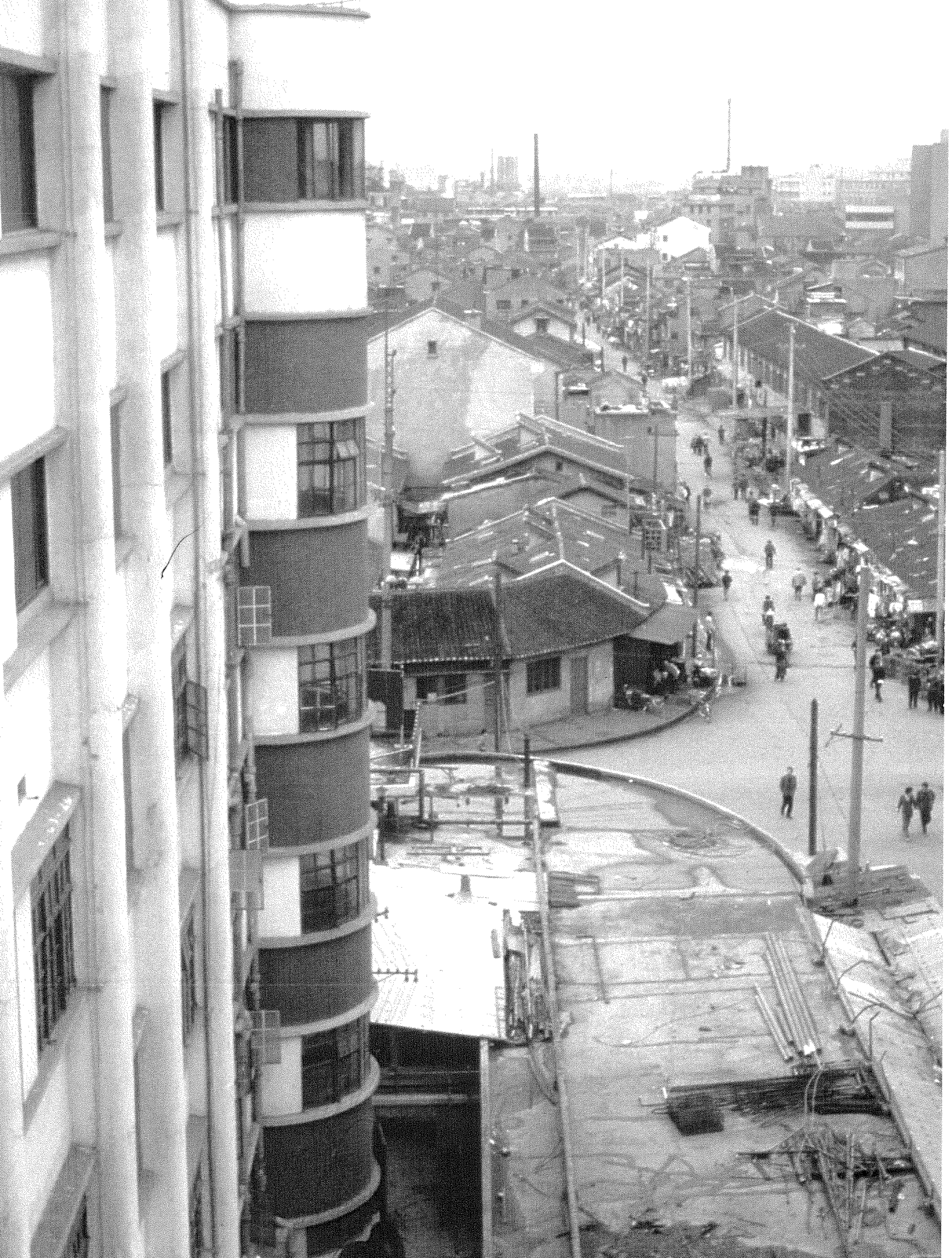
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Preservation and Progress in China's Largest Port

From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Shanghai was known as a place where new buildings were erected, not as a place where old buildings were saved. From 1842 to 1949 Shanghai was one of the few places in China where foreign companies could conduct business, and it developed a reputation as the “Paris of the Orient,” suggesting a city in vogue, a rough-and-tumble haven for entrepreneurs, swindlers, roustabouts, gangsters and refugees. Its unique blend of East and West so captured the imagination that between 1927 and 1933 Hollywood produced seven movies with “Shanghai” in their titles.

Shanghai's prosperity, which peaked between 1919 and 1927, was coupled with a complete transformation of its urban and architectural form. Whereas Shanghai had been a spread-out settlement of low-rise buildings at the opening of the twentieth century, by the 1930s its main streets were lined with tall, Western-style buildings. The city had put on a new architectural face, one associated with capitalism.

Today Shanghai faces a unique preservation dilemma: How should the city's history, which is intimately and uniquely bound up with capitalist activities, be treated by a Communist society? Should the remnants of Shanghai's days as an international trade zone be used as object lessons for the future? Should they trumpet the presence of foreigners during the years of open trade? Or should that presence be wiped away? Shanghai's administrators and citizens have only begun to grapple with the dilemma of how to face up to the uniqueness of the city's past.

**Western architectural styles influenced the design of buildings in Shanghai's “Concessions” district. This modern building, originally a hospital and now a hotel, stands over a street of *lilong* (lane houses).
Photos by Jeffrey W. Cody.**

Shanghai Opens to the World

Shanghai dates from at least the late thirteenth century. For nearly 600 years it was an oval-shaped settlement, characterized by winding streets lined with one- or two-story wooden buildings (often grouped together according to the occupation of the residents) and surrounded by a defensive wall. The city prospered because of cotton production and trading advantages associated with its proximity to the mouth of the Yangzi River; still, its population numbered only several hundred residents until the mid-nineteenth century. Although few buildings date back that far, the street plan survives.

Starting in the mid-nineteenth century the city saw dramatic change. The Treaty of Nanjing (1842) designated it one of five ports opened for Western trade, and the city grew in both extent and population. Foreigners, mostly British and French, built warehouses ("godowns"), offices and residences in the areas they were permitted to lease, known as "the Concessions."

Shanghai's Chinese population skyrocketed during the 1850s as internal wars of rebellion forced many Chinese to take refuge in cities. Eventually, there were approximately 500,000 Chinese living and working in the Concessions, compared to a few thousand foreigners.¹ The chief incentives for Chinese to settle in the

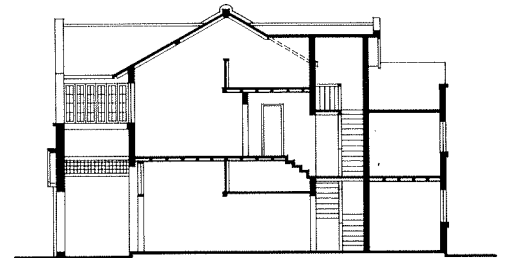
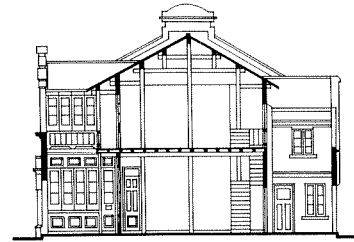
Concessions were the privileges and legal protection they enjoyed there. *Compradors*, or commercial middlemen, worked for Western businesses, aped the style of their employers and often lived in Western-style residences.

After World War I, the city's economy boomed, and its architecture became a mosaic of imported and indigenous influence. The Concessions were characterized by spaces that looked and felt European, inside and out. Many of the structures on the Bund (the commercial core for foreigners) incorporated Art Deco, Beaux Arts, or Modern detailing and date from the 1920s.² Some buildings exhibit combined architectural influences in unique ways: A nineteenth-century soy-sauce factory included sculpted brick characters and a doorway that represents an amalgamation of western and Chinese stylistic features, and an early-twentieth-century slaughterhouse incorporated both Indian and Modernist features.

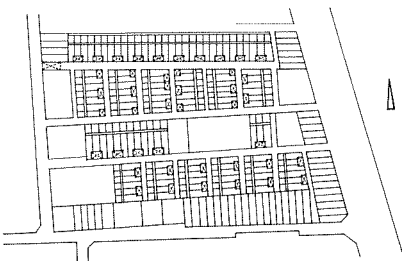
These buildings also looked different because they imported Western technologies. The multi-storied, steel-frame, reinforced-concrete commercial blocks were able to rise higher than local traditional buildings, and innovative concrete raft foundations enabled them to overcome difficulties posed by Shanghai's spongy soil. Finally, the

Elevation and sections of typical *lilong* housing.

Drawings redrawn by Fan Sizheng from Pierre Clément, Françoise Ged and Qi Wan, eds., *Transformation de l'habitat à Shanghai*. Used by permission.



Lilong housing. Some are being replaced by newer, larger infill housing projects, others are being demolished to make way for public works projects.



Plan showing configuration of *lilong* housing.



appearance of buildings reflected the activities inside them: Foreigners also built churches, a Catholic cathedral, hospitals and schools in the Concessions; just as these institutions functioned differently from their Chinese counterparts, the form of their buildings was visually distinct.

Westerners and well-to-do Chinese lived throughout the Concessions in detached residences with picturesque massing and eclectic stylistic flourishes. These areas were similar to middle-class garden suburbs emerging in the West, with houses placed on spacious lots and surrounded by gardens and lawns. Many houses borrowed their architectural details from contemporary European stylistic trends: Beaux-Arts in the French Concession, arts and crafts or Queen Anne in the British settlement. By the 1930s several Modern and Art Deco apartment houses had been constructed.

Most other Chinese residents lived in *lilong*, *shikumen* and *longtang* (generally translated as “lane houses”). These were usually dense blocks of two- or three-story connected residences of varying configurations, set off from a principal street by a covered entry that lead to a three-meter-wide lane. Lane houses were found behind the buildings facing main streets, within and beyond the limits of the Concessions.

The layout, style and structural nature of lane houses varied enormously. Their origin remains unclear, although recent research suggests that the morphology of the buildings was the result of a speculative real estate market (land values increased more than ten-fold in the 1860s), a concern for fire prevention (which called for using stone construction, brick, or cement in conjunction with wood) and a desire to retain at least a modicum of traditional design, which is reflected in



the construction technology (traditional joining of wooden members) and the massing of the house.³

By the 1930s, the traditional Chinese city had been supplanted by the Concessions and the newer Chinese settlements that surrounded them. Shanghai was viewed by many foreigners as a “Europetown” surrounded by a Chinese city kept at bay, but it was truly a mix of both Western and Chinese influence, exclusively of neither one culture nor another. Part of Shanghai’s charm, lure and identity ever since has been due to this unique distinction.

Liberation and Revolution

In 1949, after years of internal struggle and civil war, the Communist Party came to power, assuming control of Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities. The new Shanghai Municipal Government claimed as its headquarters the most monumental foreign building on the Bund: the domed central office of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (designed by the British firm of Palmer &

In recent years, the facades of many buildings in the Concessions have been cleaned and repainted to put on a better face for tourists. This was formerly a warehouse.

Turner in 1923). By occupying the place that most vividly represented capitalist might, the Communists acted in the tradition of Emperors who established a new dynasty by occupying capitals like Xian, Luoyang and Beijing. This tradition derived from the geomantic practice of *feng shui*, which holds that a site itself is just as important as the building on it.

In the 1950s, all real estate passed into public ownership and hundreds of buildings occupied by foreigners and Chinese were claimed by the People's Republic. *Danwei* (work units), created to replace the companies and bureaucracies that had existed before the revolution, assumed control of buildings and land, as if they owned them outright. *Danwei* found new uses for

buildings and often put added pressure on them by accommodating more people in the same building.

In Shanghai, most buildings were left intact because the government and *danwei* found ways to use them, not because anybody encouraged salvaging historic sites. A racecourse building put up by foreigners about a mile from the Bund was appropriated to serve as the headquarters of the Shanghai library; the YMCA was turned into a hotel. However, the walls surrounding the traditional city were demolished to make way for a road, street names were changed and the markers indicating the boundaries between the Concessions and the rest of the city were removed. Those growing up in the 1950s forgot where the Concessions ended and the Chinese city began.

The first significant Chinese preservation policy, the "Provisional Regulations on the Protection and Administration of Cultural Relics"⁴ (1960), set three general criteria for identifying historic resources ("historic, artistic, or scientific value"), designated 179 sites as "protected" and implied that administrative mechanisms would preserve them. The six categories of historic sites listed in the regulations — revolutionary sites and memorial buildings, caves, ancient architecture and historic memorial buildings, stone inscriptions and carvings, archaeological sites and tombs — have provided the framework for protecting, and pigeonholing, Chinese historic sites ever since.

The criteria excluded most of Shanghai's built environment from consideration by the Bureau of Cultural Relics Protection. Only three sites were designated, all "revolutionary sites and memorial buildings": the residence of Dr. Sun Zhongshan, the meeting place of the First National



During the Cultural Revolution, many Western-style buildings, such as godowns and churches, were ransacked. The Church of Our Lady, built in 1926, was demolished in 1988.

Not all historically important buildings are receiving facade improvements. This nineteenth-century soy sauce factory has been overlooked.



Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and the tomb of Lu Xun, Mao Zedong's favorite fiction writer.

Between 1966 and 1976 the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution wrought more significant changes in China's built environment. Mao led an effort to revitalize Communism by attacking bourgeois elements in society, including buildings that were symbols of capitalism and Western influence. Some of the buildings that in 1949 had been re-occupied, not demolished, were now attacked as evil reminders of cultural oppression that needed to be erased. Temples, schools and many other historic buildings were seized, looted, appropriated for new purposes, or left to languish.

In Shanghai a cathedral was looted, the Church of Our Lady (1926) was transformed into an auto mechanic's shop and Yuyuan, the city's main garden, which dated from the Ming dynasty was defeated. Godowns like the headquarters of the China Import and Export Lumber Company were ransacked and abandoned. However, despite the vindictiveness of the Red Guards, many older buildings survived the Cultural Revolution unscathed.

Reform and Preservation

In the late 1970s, after Mao's death, China embarked on reforms in many areas, including renewed attention to its architectural heritage. In 1982, the Fifth National People's Congress formulated China's second significant preservation policy, which was both an expanded version of, and a departure from, the 1960 regulations. Seventy more historic sites were designated, two of them in Shanghai: the grave of revolutionary hero Song Qingling and Yuyuan.⁵

The new policy also broadened the definition of what constituted an "historic area," for several reasons. First, the public consensus for preservation began to build. The fervent pleas of Chinese architectural experts — concerned that the Beijing wall and other important structures had been ravaged during the Cultural Revolution⁶ — were increasingly convincing. Professional architectural journals began to publish articles sympathetic to historic preservation.⁷ And reformers began to recognize that because of the "excesses of the Cultural Revolution, people have at last begun to take a new attitude towards relics."⁸



The former headquarters of the China Import and Export Company was abandoned during the Cultural Revolution.

Second, as foreign tourists began to visit China in greater numbers after 1980, and as it became apparent that those tourists flocked to historic sites, like the Great Wall, reformers were able to make a stronger case for investing in preservation. China's Vice Premier Wan Li was particularly sympathetic and willing to consider preservation reform. Finally, an atmosphere of relative openness allowed for cogent suggestions to be made by foreign professionals from the West. Many of these foreigners both lamented the recent desecrations and shared their experiences with preservation issues, practices and policies.

Three kinds of initiatives resulted from this reform. First, the State Council began designating "historic-cultural cities," Shanghai among them, in an attempt to apply loosely the notion of an historic district to Chinese cities.⁹ Within the greater Shanghai administrative region, Jiading established a historic district around a thirteenth-century pagoda (the enforcement of this regulation has been difficult because of the clout of local *danwei*).

The second thrust of the post-1982 initiatives was the renovation of older buildings in keeping with socialist ideals to "help the people"¹⁰ by educating them about the historic relics in their midst. This has yielded mixed results. Some monuments that attest to pre-Communist governments in twentieth-century have been rehabilitated, and a few non-governmental, grass roots preservation organizations have emerged, focusing their attention on specific sites. On the other hand, many Chinese still see little connection between their lives and the historic places or objects around them, an attitude expressed by a contractor in an encounter with a preservation offi-

cial: "We don't know about any law on cultural relics protection. That is your business, not ours."¹¹

The third initiative urged the recreation of historic streetscapes, most notably Beijing's Liulichang, as tourist attractions. Shanghai administrators opted not to follow Beijing's lead, possibly because the area near Yuyuan served as a historic streetscape. But as Shanghai's reformers noted the increased revenues that accrued to cities that promoted historic sites to foreign tour groups, they provided money to restore demolished sites or to maintain existing ones, both within and outside the Concessions.

One result of this effort has been the cleaning of the facades of many foreign-style office blocks along the Bund. Through these face-lifting campaigns, some of which were initiated by individual *danwei* following the city's lead, many of Shanghai's remarkable Art Deco, Beaux-Arts and Modern-style buildings have been resurrected from the dirt-encrusted shadows of their former selves. By 1987,

the scrubbing and repainting of the city's historic buildings was rampant.

However, these well-intentioned and sporadic efforts have yielded both positive and negative results. Whereas some buildings that attest to the activities of foreign capitalists have been washed and re-colored, many places related to Chinese capitalism, such as factories or cotton mills, have not. Nor has the work been done in accordance with any clear standards.

Vernacular buildings like *lilong* houses also have been ignored, partly because of an assumption by city housing officials that new housing is inherently better than old. By the late '80s, though, this assumption was increasingly called into question. Problems with newer construction began to surface publicly, and cities throughout China, prompted by university experts (most notably Qinghua University Professor Wu Liangyong) began to consider more seriously how to retain older buildings, which by far comprise the majority of housing stock.¹²

In Shanghai, some foreign preservationists have collaborated on proposals to redesign *lilong* housing.¹³ The exterior of Puyu Li, built in 1925 as a residential block, was cleaned and repaired, and its original interior was gutted and reconfigured to accommodate a third story, which increased the number of living units at a cost lower than what would have been expended for new construction.

Facade improvements are often made without regard to historic architectural texture. This was formerly a godown.

Prospects for the Future

The extent to which buildings in the Concessions have survived has less to do with concerted preservation efforts than it does with the realities of urban investment; buildings represented capital investment that, for many years, authorities could not afford to waste. That the Concessions have been bypassed by most official preservation efforts has less to do with official attitudes towards capitalism than it does with China's desire to focus on other aspects of its history, and the unsophisticated approaches it uses to create historic districts.

Since the 1980s, foreigners have been able to invest capital in Shanghai and today the Concessions face a new threat: accelerating redevelopment of the city. Demolitions still occur as city officials are constructing highway tunnels under the Huangpu River, putting in place new infrastructure, reallocating land for new high-rise construction, widening roads and considering to what extent, how and where they want to retain architectural aspects of Shanghai tradition.

Also plaguing the effort to save old buildings is the lack of effective enforcement of preservation regulations, weak coordination of efforts between local and national officials, the absence of criteria for determining a site's significance, the poor recognition of the implications of new development projects on historic areas, and the lack of money targeted to the rehabilitation of historic sites.¹⁴

Shanghai's Concessions are adrift on the sea of progress. Once part of a world renowned, unique architectural and urban composition, the historic places comprising the Concessions are too often ignored, cast off, or branded as outdated symbols of an antiquated past. Recently, one foreign reporter



asserted that “Shanghai’s pre-revolutionary buildings charm visitors, but they are hell to work in.”¹⁵ Another journalist wrote of a conversation with a young Chinese who, told that “at least Shanghai can be proud of its architecture,” responded, disbelievingly, “Those buildings? They’re old. We need more of those,” pointing to a new skyscraper.¹⁶ Shanghai residents probably will continue to grapple with ways to charm visitors with both new architectural razzle-dazzle and the creative places they have inhabited.

Notes

1. Betty Peh-T’i Wei, *Shanghai: Crucible of Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 66-68.
2. Jon W. Huebner, “Architecture on the Shanghai Bund,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 39 (March, 1989): 127-65.
3. Wang Shaozhou, *Lilong Jianzhu* (Shanghai: Kexue Chubanshe, 1987); Pierre Clément, Françoise Ged and Qi Wan, eds., *Transformations de l’habitat à Shanghai* (Paris: Institut Français d’Architecture, 1988); Françoise Ged, “Les Lilong de Shanghai,” in Christian Henriot, ed. *Shanghai dans les années 1980* (Lyon: Université Jean Moulin, 1989), 54-72; Wu Changfu, “Shikumen: eine traditionelle städtische Wohnform in Shanghai,” *Detail* 27 (September-October, 1987): 454-59; and Max Bacher, Emil Hadler and Yu Lin, “Das Lilong-Haus, Traditioneller high density low rise, Massenwohnungsbau in Shanghai,” *Baumeister* 86 (August, 1989): 44-49.
4. For an English translation of these regulations, see Janet A. Cady, ed., *Historic Preservation in the People’s Republic of China* (New York: National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, 1982).
5. For a full list of sites designated in 1961 and 1982, and for a view of the 1982 regulations by an American group of preservation professionals consulted by the Chinese, see Cady, *Historic Preservation*.
6. A number of these experts were professors who had been trained to be more sensitive to historic architecture by Liang Sicheng, a University of Pennsylvania graduate who devoted his career to researching and teaching about China’s historic buildings.
7. See, for example, the architectural publications *Jianzhusi* and *Jianzhu Xuebao*.
8. An unnamed Chinese preservation official quoted by Chang Wen-ying, in “Saving Old Peking: The Past Recaptured,” *Arts of Asia* 13 (September-October 1983): 91.
9. *China Daily*, 19 April 1990, p. 3. The number of these cities was increased to 62 in 1990.
10. On the second and third reform initiatives, see Adele Chatfield-Taylor, “Restoring and Rehabilitation: The Imperial Palace,” and Marjorie Hoog and Marie Kennedy, “Urban Neighborhoods: Socialist Renovation,” *Progressive Architecture* 60 (November 1979): 74-79.
11. *China Daily*, 30 October 1991, p. 4c.
12. Qin Zheng, “Renovation of Old City and Construction of New Housing District in Shanghai,” *Time and Architecture* (November, 1987): 46-51 (published in Shanghai by Tongji University); Wang Zhihui, “Utilization of Shanghai’s Old Residential Buildings,” *Building in China* 2 (1987): 35-7; Wu Zhengtong, “Alleviation of Extreme Housing Shortage in Shanghai: Schemes and Measures,” *Building in China* 2 (1987): 38-41; Yu Yi, “Residential Redevelopment in Beijing,” *Open House International* 14 (1989): 9-14; Hong Xia, “New Life Built into Old Houses,” *China Daily*, 30 May 1991, p. 3; Kou Zhengling, “Housing Reform Offers Two Rooms with a View,” *China Daily*, 6 June 1991, p. 5; and “New Rule to Smooth Updating of Housing,” *China Daily*, 19 June 1991, p. 3.
13. Pierre Clément, Françoise Ged and Qi Wan, *Transformations*; and “Shanghai: Deux Français à Huaihai, un concours franco-chinois pour un quartier de Shanghai,” *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* 263 (June 1989): 108-9.
14. Cheng Jingqi, “Protection of Historic Architecture in China,” *Building in China* 1 (1985): 3-11.
15. *The Economist*, 11 April 1992, p. 32.
16. *Business Week*, 4 May 1992, p. 6B.