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快速城镇化背景下的住宅与人居环境建设
SUSTAINABLE AND HARMONIOUS
— DEVELOPMENT OF ECO AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABLE HOUSING AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS UNDER RAPID URBANIZATION PROCESS

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Towards Shanghai’s Urban Housing: 
Re-Defining Shanghai’s Lilong

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Abstract: This paper exemplifies both the traditional and the modern aspects of the lilong neighborhood housing, aiming to re-define the abstract concept of the lilong, arguing for their potential to be re-thought as a typology of Low-Medium Rise High Density (LMRHD) housing today. In particular, this paper delivers a practical answer to a conceptual question: how does lilong provide the dwelling identity of Shanghai, taking into account its form, meaning, and culture? The emergence of both lilong and Western modern housing is rooted in a crisis of space and the economic drive of modern cities. Lilong architecture and the normative living program embedded in the typology of modern housing has been proper development housing strategies in modern Shanghai. By closely examining both physical and community aspects that make lilong a mediating agency between Chinese locality and Western modernity, the paper presents the assumption that architecture of lilong does not confine itself to certain forms or physical configurations; instead it is an “abstract concept” of an urban neighborhood; the spatial organization, the architectural practicality, the casual formation of semi-private space, and the community lane-life - the concept that should be taken into account for the design of urban housing today. The re-definition of lilong is a conceptual idea that will serve as a point of departure for the last part: a discussion of the possibility to develop this housing strategy for today’s situation. This paper also presents the preliminary strategies for the designing of the new LMRHD housing

Keywords: Lilong, Shanghai Urban Housing, Housing Development, Community Planning, Social Sustainable Housing

Introduction

If one is to define the dominant characteristic of urban pattern in the hyper-growth city of Shanghai, apart from the contemporary high-rise buildings of the sterile development in the past two decades, it is the lilong, the low-rise neighborhood housing crisscrossing large urban blocks. Shanghai is a city where two distinctive urban characteristics - the contemporary high-rise and the traditional low-rise buildings - create a paradoxical pattern of unevenly developed urban fabric. This pattern continually raises tremendous concerns not only on a macro-structural level of the city, e.g. urban land-use and expansion, but also street life and the living environment. It is understandable that
high-rise development is unavoidable due to the massive demand and exorbitant land value. We have learned and experienced from the unsuccessful precedents in the West and the extensive literature that criticizes the impact of a city without diversity. In other words, although high-rise development might logically and efficiently solve the problem of accommodating large numbers of people, it will cause problems such as a diminished sense of community. I agree that the traditional lilong house is no longer the most appropriate urban housing for Shanghai. However, I propose that a viable solution is low-/medium-rise high-density, multi-functional, community-oriented urban housing that will preserve the unique nature of individual vibrant neighborhoods. Shanghai’s lilong is chosen as a typological precedent for this study not only because it reflects a clever overarching housing and landuse economy, but also because it provides the linkage to an urban setting and public realm (accessibility and connectivity); the consolidation of the sense of security (in other words, neighborhood watch); interior openness; diverse dwelling environment; and perhaps the most salient quality, “lanes” living style. Lilong’s uniqueness lies in the combination of these vibrant qualities, and the “order and efficiency,” which are the principles of modern housing.

I will exemplify both the traditional and the modern aspects of lilong neighborhood housing, aiming to re-define the abstract concept of the lilong, arguing for its potential to be re-thought as a typology of high density housing today. In particular, this paper seeks to deliver a practical answer to a conceptual question: how does lilong provide the dwelling identity of Shanghai, taking into account its form, meaning, and culture? The emergence of both lilong and Western modern housing is rooted in a crisis of space and the economic drive of modern cities. Lilong architecture was a convincing housing development strategy in modern Shanghai. I seek to examine in what way the lilong is a mediating agency between Chinese locality and Western modernity? My hypothesis is that the architecture of lilong does not confine itself to certain forms or physical configurations; instead it is an “abstract concept” of an urban neighborhood. This dynamic concept addresses the spatial organization, the architectural practicality, the casual formation of semi-private space, and the community lane-

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1. This paper is a partial result of a year-long collaborative research with the School of Architecture and Planning’s Tongji University, Shanghai, on the current issues of infrastructural development driven by the rapid urbanization, the hybrid urban transformation, and urban housing vis-à-vis urban environment in Shanghai. The original title of this paper is “The Concept of Neighborhood Life: Re-Defining Shanghai’s Lilong.” The author would like to particularly thank Professor Stanford Anderson, a Professor of History and Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for his timely and generous support, constructive criticism, constant encouragement, and helpful commentary, without which, this paper would never have come to fruition. Additionally the author remains grateful to Dr. Li Xianing and Professor Huang Yiru, Dr. Robert Cowherd, Dr. Peeradorn Kaewlai, and Winnie Wong, who acted as responsible sounding boards for many formed ideas and work in progress. The author’s thanks also goes to Victor Wong for his splendid assistance in editing this paper. Finally, the author also wishes to thank the MIT Writing and Communication Center for its substantial help in the writing of this paper.

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2. One of which is of course Jane Jacob’s The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961).

3. Population of Shanghai in 2005 is 17,780,000.
life. I am convinced that we must understand this concept and use it as a point of departure for the design of urban housing today.

This essay embraces four main parts concerning the critical understanding of lilong vis-à-vis opportunities to develop the new Low and Medium Rise High Density (LMRHD) housing in Shanghai. The first part is the analysis of lilong’s modernity, its representational issues with an emphasis on how the modern housing programs are adapted for the lilong and how the lilong-its users and its condition respond to those programs. The second part concerns lilong history, from which I seek to clarify the developmental process of lilong from its emergence to its demise, emphasizing the pattern of growth, the factors that had caused the shift in style and orientation, and the causes of decline; drawing upon some exhaustive accounts on the history of lilong that are written in English, this part will succinctly paint the picture of its historical lineage, placing lilong in the context of capitalist Shanghai. Then in the third part, I will re-define the abstract concept of lilong; in other words, what makes lilong a physical mediating agency between the form of Western modern housing and traditional Chinese dwelling culture. Broadly speaking, the hypothesis is that the success of the lilong as a Chinese modern culture is not so much because of its physical style but because of its idea of “neighborhood,” which is grounded on local and traditional building practices. The re-definition of lilong as a conceptual idea will serve as a point of departure for the last part; a discussion of the possibility to develop this housing strategy for contemporary application, in which I will also present my preliminary proposal for The New Lilong.

Rationale: Lilong and Modernity

Minimal maintenance and maximum use of the land were the two considerations of the foreign developers when lilong were originally built. Like many other modern housing precedents in Europe and America, lilong has a systematic structure conforming to the programmatic, functional, and economical needs of a city. Shanghai’s abrupt leap from “rural” to “urban” was expeditious because of the rapid increase of foreign investment. The emergence of this particular type of housing is analogous to that of the West; mainly, the need for collective housing for the masses. It was the condition of modernity — the change from an agricultural to an industrial society under capitalist impulses — that gave birth to this housing type. The normative program for living was then shifted from an aim to sustain a communal life — represented in the clustered inward opening style of the traditional Chinese courtyard house — to an individual life, an economical life of a modern worker whose need was an adequate living space, and convenience to work. This was, at the time, unprecedented in China, a country known for its abundant land resources. To a degree, the designing of lilong can be seen as no more than just an assimilation of a typical European row house building type. Notable common aspects are single-family houses with party walls, private entrances, and the system of spatial hierarchy from public to private. Moreover, it is also in the extreme efficiency and functionality of lilong that modernity is reflected. The unit plan had become smaller over time, according to Zhao, “from clan/family-based courtyard-centered living to the community-based alley-centered [lane-centered] living, from a self-conditioned traditional living style towards a more open, more in-

dependent modern urban living style, reflecting a shift from a metaphoric to a more functional layout." The layout of the lilong neighborhood was by all means the most efficient layout for the highest density, the main lane running all the way or half way across the block as well as branch lanes connected perpendicularly to the main lane. Dwellers had basically been forced to spend more time outside because of the tightness and less sanitary conditions of the interior space, resulting from the condensation of the unit for economic purpose. Relating to the traditional Chinese house, floor plans were systematically compromised; at the entrance was a courtyard, then the living room, and finally a kitchen and a bath room in the back of the house (back-to-back in order to share wet-walls), all the private areas such as bed rooms were on the second floor. Similarly, the stylistic representation of the house diminished due to the increased emphasis on efficiency; a cleaner and cleaner facade became typical in the later generations of lilong. Nevertheless, with a certain cultural resistance, abstraction never moved to the truly modern, such as that of the famous Weissenhofsiedlung. The modernity of lilong was also compromised by the users who were able to adjust the newly built environment to fit their own long-held traditions of cherishing their living space.

However, situating lilong in the Shanghai context, the important factor of its success was also the unique "Chinese dwelling culture," which, from within, re-defined the meaning of the modern elements borrowed from the west by the understanding of space and its possible usage. It had not only vitalized the dullness of the repetitiveness, but had also actively expanded the possibility of activating space within the given constraints. For instance, common activities that were taking place in the lanes - initially designed for people and vehicular circulation - transformed this internal road to a dynamic communal space for dwellers, recalling the internal space in the traditional Chinese courtyard. Furthermore, lanes also provide for the sense of "open space," as Chinese prefer a small space with shading for activities. Lanes perfectly serve that purpose and soon became imbedded in the dwellers' way of life. That is to say, the emergence of lilong and its success lie in two factors; its programmatic flexibility, and the plasticity of local culture. The morphological structure of lilong varies little from site to site, but rather transforms over time. The structure validates a physical agency that processes the transition from traditional towards modernity resulting in the diverse urban social life. Each neighborhood is able to utilize and incorporate own cultural norms.

To give a precise, several recent studies on lilong demonstrate that scholars now pay more attention to its preservation and present possible strategies to revitalize and re-use lilong in order to counteract the one-sided growth of high-rise urban housing and commercial complexes that are gradually

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3 Normally, there are two main lanes and a series of side lanes. See Qian Guan. Lilong Housing: A Traditional Settlement Form. M. Arch Thesis. McGill University, Canada. 1996. 25.
5 Not only Shanghai, but also China as a whole had never been part of Modern discourses, since most of the foreign architects who worked in Shanghai had been trained in a Beaux-Art tradition, such as British Hong Kong-based architectural firm Palmer and Turner, Spence Robinson and Partners. Atkinson and Dallas. Also, the first generation of Chinese architects educated abroad from the Boxer Rebellion funds, despite the fact that none of them was trained in a Modern school had not return to until late 1920s and mostly worked in the northern part of China, which includes Zhang Bo, Wu Liangying, Chen Dengao, Zhang Kaixi, Dai Nianzi, and Xinning Ming. In addition, most of the Western-educated architects went to University of Pennsylvania, a school which, at the time, was led by the famous Beaux-Art architect Paul Philippe Cret. See Peter G. Rowe and Song Kuan. Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 2003). 19.
and monotonously engulfing Shanghai. Nevertheless, there are also other issues that concern both Chinese and international scholars, the nostalgia for an emotional beauty of the lilong - the beauty that lies in the memory and reminiscences of people who have lived in lilong. It is the economy that celebrates the sustainable and communal life of the working class. What was once seen as truly modern has become a traditional heritage. Today, due to the profusion of the population in Shanghai resulting from industrialization and urbanization, the demand for housing has become one of the city’s great planning issues. The plan focuses on maximizing density and financial return because of the potential for increasing land value. The decision that has been made by the local government is basically no less than the idea of razing the less viable lilong to the ground and building high-rise apartments, which could result in a negative social impact. Despite a truly modern aspect that was widely discussed in the West, I am convinced that the factor that makes lilong successful in Shanghai is the flexibility of Chinese dwelling culture. It was the dwellers who saw the constraints more as a challenge to be met than as a problem, and thus they were not bothered by the given structure of the neighborhood. However, the situation today is more complicated than in the past. The survival of the low and medium-rise cannot solely rely on the users, but also on how much the developer can compromise to meet the explosive demand of the market.

Lilong: A Critical History

The history of urban housing in Shanghai is not complicated. Urban housing is the most significant component of Shanghai’s modernization, industrialization, and urbanization which had not begun until the late nineteenth century with the opening of the Treaty Port and the various foreign settlements. The consequence of the process of becoming a port was the proliferation of commercial activity, leading to dramatic population growth - exponential increase of the workforce (and also refugees). Urban housing was initially built to house foreign industry workers and their families frugally and economically. Shanghai’s “modern urban housing,” lilong, was the solution the foreign factories and enterprises used for economical real-estate development. Thus, the initial idea was no more than the economy of construction; “buildings that can be constructed with wooden boards, built in row like army camps, accessed by some internal paths joined with one general path that connected to the public street.” Although lilong was initially meant to be built with wood, the municipal government’s larger concern about the safety issues in the late nineteenth century led to new housing regulations, including the prohibition of wood frame structure. The major materials were

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1. Louis D. Morris, Community or Commodity?: A Study of Lilong Housing in Shanghai (Vancouver: Center of Human Settlements, 1994), 8-12. Also, Some authors note that there was a vacuum moment in the development of lilong, between 1941-1949, the period when China was under the control of the Japanese. However, since the houses were being occupied by the same group of people, it is assumable that there must be an internal development - the organic improvement from within. See Guan, Lilong Housing, 29

2. Around the 1860s, not only political upheaval, but also better job opportunities that attracted an increasing numbers of migrants from the hinterland to Shanghai - the number of Chinese inhabitants in the International Settlement rose from 75,000 to half a million within less than three decades later. See Huang, Housing Development, 5-8

3. The emergence of lilong relates directly with the vicissitudes of the Western architectural development. Trading and commercial activities and the establishment of restricted settlements - concessions - areas provided a unique set of circumstances for the development of pattern of occupation. See Lei Huang, Housing Development in the Context of Modernization. Urbanization and Conservation of Chinese Traditional Cities: Beijing, Shanghai and Suzhou. D. Des dissertation. Harvard University, 2000, 5-2

4. Zhao, From Shikumen, 57
those that could be supplied locally: brick bearing walls and wood beams. Lilong was modeled after Western row houses with the Chinese characteristic "lanes and courtyards." According to Zhang Shouyi and Tan Ying, houses are clustered to resemble the basic traditional Chinese houses, allowing many families to live together in the same compound. Although I was not completely convinced that these characteristics were seriously taken into account by the developers - since the distinctive notion of internal semi-private space in lilong can be just ad-hoc - it is compelling to see how the Chinese users naturally adapted their lifestyle to the constraint of space and the structure of the neighborhood. It was around 1870s that the first lilong was introduced and it was also the first time the "facilities" such as shared bathroom and kitchen were added to Chinese dwelling culture. Xing Ruan says that lilong is more a "middle ground" between the English terrace house, and the southern Chinese courtyard house. I agree with Ruan architecturally and stylistically, but not as concerns planning - lilong is tightly structured to service the needs of people in Shanghai.

The authentic Shikumen Lilong, named after the "eye-catching" decorated gateway to the neighborhood, was built during this period and became the most popular lilong for the first decade of the twentieth century. Built to host members of a working-class family, the size and organization of a Shikumen lilong house was adequate. A courtyard was the highlight of this lilong, providing not only good ventilation, southern exposure to sunlight, and communal space, but also a distinctive solid-oid fabric that systematically constructed a viable form of urban neighborhood. There was also extensive use of foreign motifs; traditional European, Western classical, Russian, or even Japanese styles of decoration were added to the façade of the house to reflect the splendor of the community. In addition, integration of commercial and residential components was the distinctive characteristic of the Shikumen style because it did not only vitalize the neighborhood, but it also financially sustained the community by feeding back the profit from the commercial component to the overall system. The New Shikumen Lilong was later introduced as a result of the first stage of Shanghai's population growth - the first stage of an over-congested urban population. The three-bay unit of the Shikumen was reduced to one with a smaller courtyard - arguably just a small space to symbolize courtyard. Also, the spatial emphasis was shifted from the interior (house) to the exterior (lane) - lanes were widened to accommodate vehicles, resulting in a more spacious community space outside the house.

The New Style lilong came in the late 1910s due to the critical need for higher density housing. Thus, the courtyard was defeated by the need for interior space; it was significantly reduced, if not completely filled. The New Style was the compact version of the Shikumen: the floor height and building width were decreased to the minimum, the number of floors increased, and the interior space of each unit was clearly partitioned for different activities. This New Style was preferred by

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2. Xing Ruan, New China Architecture (Hong Kong: Periplus, 2006), 163
3. The "hybridity" of lilong is expressed through the combination of a Western terrace house tradition with the Chinese courtyard house in a manner that perpetuated the narrow lanes of earlier Chinese settlement. See Rowe, Architectural Encounters, 40–1.
5. Lu, Modern Urban Housing, 57.
6. A study shows that the depth of most lilong houses built after World War II (1945) was reduced by 20% (from 10-14 to 8-12 meters) See Huang, Housing Development, 5–29
the developers as more economical than the Shikumen. Occasionally, during the same time, the Garden Lilong, a semi-detached house with a garden in the front, was built for a purpose that was totally different from other types of lilong; it served the elegant taste of the rich community.

Then, the development of lilong ended around the mid-twentieth century when the economy took complete control with the Apartment Lilong, a five to seven-story concrete frame structure, a Western-style apartment with shared-facilities. With this birth of this soon become general high-rise apartment-type housing, the name “lilong” no longer resonated with the celebration of Chinese communal life on the ground. After the Apartment Lilong, developers shifted their interest to the notion of an extremely efficient housing type, rather than the community-based housing type. Thus, at the termination of lilong, there was the beginning of the development of the slab block and modern high-rise tower.

To sum up, a series of lilong were constructed in the inner part of the city as neighborhood units fitted into a city block. Changes include the use of material (from wood to brick, and from brick to concrete), and the typology of the basic unit (smaller and more defined over time). The success of the first series contributed to the demand for the next, and thus, not so long after the first building stage, within less than a hundred years, more than 200,000 lilong dwelling units (of approximately 60—150 square meters per unit) became the dominating characteristic of Shanghai’s urban fabric. The major change emerged from the inflexible control of the district housing bureaus, as the central government guaranteed housing for every worker and limited the right of citizens to own property. Developers then had to make the existing and the continually built lilong houses economically feasible. The notion of affordability – it was a rental affordability – was emphasized, as it was one of the socialist tenets. Each row house was often leased by one family and then subleased to many. The result was the change of the social structure both in the single unit and the neighborhood – each unit was sub-divided to house more families, and commercial activity was widely decreased due to the demand for residential programs.

In the situation of urban housing in Shanghai today, lilong no longer provide enough density to be economically self-sustained. The change of life-style and the inadequate maintenance resulted in deterioration of many of them. In addition, since lilong were built as housing for workers, it was not initially built to be permanent. Most of them, particularly those that were built in the early twentieth century are in severe need of total upgrading, which is very unprofitable from the point of view of a developer, who prefers to demolish and rebuild with, at least, ten times higher density. The preservation of the lilong in Shanghai is doomed in light of the decay of existing structures and the fact that modern standard high-rise can accommodate more people.

Re-Defining Lilong: The Concept of Neighborhood Life

[For lilong,] the physical condition of the house was secondary. It was the uniformity in neighborhood structure that constitutes the embryo of lilong. Literally, the meaning of lilong is “neighborhood lanes” as li is for neighborhood and long is for

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lane - an abstract concept of space making use of public realm to reinforce the sense of the community. Properly, lilong is a noun, but an adjective; thus, "lilong housing" is a form of dwelling in a lane-structured neighborhood - to the extent that neighborhood means more than just an area, but a community where members interact with each other on a regular basis. It is this distinctive concept of formation of locality that is prominently imbedded in many Asian cultures. One can recognize similarities to lilong in the cho of Toyko, the hanok of Seoul, the hutong of Beijing, and the soi of Bangkok, to name a few. These concepts of East Asian neighborhood influence the everyday life of inhabitants. These concepts appeal to local government for the neighborhood and its culture as a collective force, and serve individuals in providing for their safety and amenity as a group.

For lilong in particular, the distinctive style of spatial occupation comes out of the constraints of space. Every living function is condensed in a small and compact box-shaped row house for the Shikumen Style, and a narrow strip for the New Style. Because each unit does not have much living space, and the lilong rows are laid out parallel to each other in a close proximity, lanes are used by lilong inhabitants as a living space, which is common to the Chinese who see outdoor activities as prominent to communal life. These activities that take place in the lanes range from exercises - particularly Tai-Chi - to commercial activities, hawker business, barbers; to recreational activities as well as service, mahjong, cooking, laundry drying, outdoor eating, sewing, food preparation.

1. "Lilong" (sometimes called "li-nong") is the Shanghai dialect for nongtang (弄堂) - nong means "alley way," and tang stands for the front room of Chinese courtyard houses - in other words, a space in front of the courtyard house which is the "lane." There are some changes in the meaning for "li-long" - it refers to the basic urban neighborhoods, which varied in size from 25 to 100 households. It was commonly used for naming alleyway-house compounds that, by the twentieth century, became equivalent to "alleyway house." Also, according to the Great Chinese Vocabulary Dictionary, li is a word that has been always associated with human settlements in different way, such as a place where people live, a hometown, dwellings in a neighborhood, and a basic organizational unit in residential management in ancient China (the same meaning that Lu refers to); for long, also according to the same dictionary, it literally means "small street" in a basic sense. See Hanchao Lu. Beyond the Neon Light: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century (Berkeley, London, Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1999); 143-5. And Guan. Lilong Housing, 1-2, and Jianxiang Huang. email message to the author; 20 December 2006

2. Although "lilong" is an adjective, it is often used as abbreviation of "lilong housing neighborhood." According to Zhao, it refers less to the materiality of this dwelling form, but more to the vivid social life within and around it. The term can be pronounced as li-long, in the Shanghai dialect, or li-nong, in Mandarin. So, what Leo Lee calls linong is the lilong houses. Rowe. Architectural, 238. Zhao. From Shihumen. 50. and Leo Ou-fan Lee. Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China. 1930-45 (Cambridge, MA: London: Harvard University Press. 1999); 32-3.

3. I used the term cho, an adjective, as abbreviation of a noun "chokai." According to Hiroto Kobayashi, it means; "a unit of neighborhood organization in Japanese cities that has influenced everyday life of inhabitants in urban history." Nevertheless, it is also referable to Theodore C. Bestor's larger definition: "the term chokai and chonai (literally, "town association" and "within town association") are used most interchangeably. There is no scholarly consensus on preferred usage or any standard translation of these terms referring to the units of local government and community structure. Therefore, I translate both terms as "neighborhood association."" See Hiroto Kobayashi. Cho: A Persistent Neighborhood Unity Maintaining in Microculture in Japanese Cities. D. Des dissertation. Harvard University. 2003; iv. And Theodore C. Bestor. Neighborhood Tokyo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 1989); 289

4. These concepts are described in Rowe's East Asia Modern. "Soi" literally means "small branch streets" is a noun used to describe residential neighborhood that is formatted around the small branch street. It is where I have been living for more than twenty years.

5. The structures of these East Asian neighborhoods are similar: situating in a city block, most of the shop houses are located the sides that are close to the main roads, and narrow interior lanes porously go through the block of residential units.

6. "No place can one get a better image of daily life in Shanghai than in the alleyway-house neighborhoods that spread across the city." For them, these back alleys were not only where they lived but also where they worked, entertained, socialized, and conducted most of their daily transaction - in short, the neighborhood was the city to these people." Hanchao Lu. Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century (Berkeley, University of California Press. 1999); 189.

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main lane is utilized predominantly for circulation and delivery (Huang categorized it as a semi-public area as the roads that surround the lilong block are public\(^2\)) and the branch lanes are for individual activities. The entire ground floor is only semi-private space. Although there is the division of plan, separating the living space from the kitchen and bathroom, both functions always associate with activities that take place in the lanes. For instance, people usually cook their food outside their houses to accommodate the smoke; so, the lane at the back of the house naturally becomes an outdoor kitchen. And since cooking is usually a communal activity, it draws people from houses nearby to come, exchange, and discuss everyday life’s news and so on, forming a small neighborhood forum. Also, because each house has a small courtyard as a transitional space between the house and the lane, the dwellers tend to expand their usage to the lane, sharing their private space to the public realms. In other words, they interiorize the lane and exteriorize their private space, disguising the distinction between public/private space, interiority/exteriority, and most importantly, private/communal life. Therefore, not only the lanes themselves become public realm, but also the entire ground floor of the lilong neighborhood. Qian Guan presumes: “by allocating at least one courtyard and a portion of usable open space for each family, and by allowing a spatial fluidity through them, the daily communication can be conducted while doing housework, and socializing pleasure can take place in an elastic way everywhere and enjoyed by all.”\(^3\) According to interviews conducted by Morris, he claims; “lilong provides an intimate environment where one is not alone”\(^4\), the human scale and the arrangement of the several row houses in the lilong block allow people to both physically interact with each other, at the same time, provide a “neighborhood watch” sense of security that is conducive to the development of social networks. All of which was not the intention of lilong; it is a result of their intensive use, as Louisa Lim narrates; “the warren of alleys and the layout of traditional houses - with their communal kitchens - all created a unique sense of community.”\(^5\)

Furthermore, this sense of security is reinforced by the protective wall of shop houses that are located around the block: access by the gateways to the internal part of the block is taken care of by at least one shop house on each side. Assuming that everyone in the neighborhood knows each other, it is nearly impossible for strangers to go into the area without being noticed. Nevertheless this does not necessitate the notion of a complete gated community, the porosity given by the typical linear arrangement of row houses permits lanes to be partially seen from the outside, which visually links the interior of the neighborhood to pedestrians and the exterior streets. This porosity gives “a sense of a whole” to the entire lilong district. Zhao considers “lane-living style” the essence of lilong dwelling.\(^6\) From informal neighborhood cohesion, the form of community organization develops further to formal organizations such as residents committee, neighborhood co-op, community awareness team, and so on.\(^7\) Although these organizations do not have power to negotiate with the municipal government, they support the sustainable growth of the community. They respond to dwellers’

\(^{1}\) Huang, Housing Development. 5-23


\(^{3}\) Morris, Commodity. 20


\(^{5}\) He uses the term “alley-living style” which I am not convinced that it is what he means since the term carries a negative connotation. Ibid., 68.

\(^{6}\) Morris, Commodity. 22-26.
needs to solve common problems and address common goals in their local lanes.  

A redefinition of lilong would not be confined to its physical aspect but to the notion of “neighborhood life.” This paves the way to deal with urban housing development today - since it recognizes a condition that is not achieved on any other of today’s housing types. The term lilong, although associated with the row house that constitutes the primary living space in Shanghai, entails - in a deeper sense - the “abstract concept of space” that provides close proximity to the dwellers with mixed-use programs and transparency of public and private realms. This proximity encourages dwellers to communicate with each other dynamically, connecting them to the outside and the urban environment. The notion of urban dwelling form lies in the strength of the bonded community. It is not the physicality of building that is the meaning of housing to the dwellers; instead, it is the intangible notion of “belonging,” the public space is as important as one’s own house; to use an old Chinese saying - the sense of belonging possesses inherent qualities of lilong.  

It is this “neighborhood life” that makes lilong a physical mediating agency between the form of Western modern housing and traditional Chinese dwelling culture. This social support community is what I think Kevin Lynch means by; “a legitimate feature of good settlements, within which one can organize politically when the need for control arises... apart from that, the fact of being in an identifiable settlement which has quiet, safe internal lanes, easily accessible daily services and vital street-life in close proximity, has made the living so pleasurable. Every one is aware of the diversity around him or her, and is in visual contact with other ways of life.” For Lynch, this is visually the quality of a “good city form.”

Conclusion: The New Lilong

As pointed out in the beginning, I seek to derive a way to rethink LMRHD housing in Shanghai through the concept of neighborhood - the essence of lilong housing. Although the concept is not being seriously taken into consideration by the residential developers, it has been proven to have potential by the successful Xintiandi (2001), a series of renovated original Shikumten lilong houses that is now a bustling retail-shopping district. The architect Ben Wood took nostalgia for the traditional Shanghainese lilong house as the selling point and re-designed it for a sole commercial purpose.  

Xintiandi’s developer and the designer spurred us along with the example of the creative approach to reuse the form of lilong neighborhood, showing us the way to rethink the real estate economy of the low-rise. Greg Yager and Scott Kilhourn attest to its success; “[i]t works because it has a design that is geared to the appropriate human scale and texture. The master plan responds to the context of Shanghai’s streets, providing open space in additional streetscape. The district as a whole is dy-

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1. Ibid., 21. The change of unit type has been indeed the factor that determines the size of the lanes - the smaller the unit type (private) is, the larger the required space for lanes (public). In other words, the transformation of unit type constitutes the structural change of the neighborhood, moving towards a collective life of the people of urbanized Shanghai.
2. “In lilong community, there is such close contact between people. everyone helps each other,” says Shanghainese filmmaker Shu Haulun. See Lin, A Cinematic.
4. Xintiandi is not considered an appropriate model for the development of a new LMRHD because it neither provides a way to re-approach housing design with the economy of residential program nor to challenge the high-rise housing with the innovative low- and medium-rise strategy.
5. Nevertheless, if every lilong is renovated to serve a sole commercial purpose like Xintiandi, the city will soon become lifeless because of the diminishing of mix-used program and diversity of urban activities.
dynamic and well landscaped, and well managed - all elements of good design. Xintaindi’s take on the concept of lilong’s “neighborhood life” and the structure of lilong that gives close proximity and coziness of the entire area, are what constitutes the project’s astronomical success - they are the qualities, the “fine grain” of the old lilong pedestrian neighborhood that fulfill the need of the people of Shanghai. There have been some experimental projects to renovate old - particularly the Shikummen and the New Shikummen types - lilong neighborhoods for residential purposes such as Lane 252 and Futian Terrace. The result of both projects does not demonstrate a convincing potential for the renovation to be a strategy to revitalize lilong. In particular, both projects fail to generate enough funding to subsidize the houses’ rent. The unfortunate result is the inclination toward less-affordable housing. The constraint of renovating lilong is that the structure and orientation of the existing lilong houses in Shanghai are not supportive to either horizontal or vertical expansion, thus the only renovation that can be made is the condition improvement, which gives no profit to the current development since it will not increase the density.

Therefore, for the new LMRHD, we must return to the very basic concept of neighborhood life and take it as a point of departure. I, nonetheless, argue for the viability of the “spine and ribs” structure of lilong neighborhood since it gives strong social control to the area and helps maintain the system of neighborhood organization. It is defensible because this structure has proven to be conducive to the urban life of the Shanghaiese for more than one century. However, it needs to be adjusted in order to accommodate higher density and better sanitary condition. I propose to re-orient it by changing the row orientation from having the front of the rows facing the back of the previous row, to having their backs facing each other so that dwellers can share their service areas. In this case, not only will this organization optimize the service area of the entire site, but it will make the sanitary control less problematic. This service corridor will still be a communal space for people, at the same time providing an easier control of garbage, plumbing system, fire escape, as well as safety. Moreover, this corridor will serve as a light well that provides southern exposure to the internal units. Density can be increased by a greater number of floors. Since, structurally we can reduce the depth of beams with modern construction technique and material, the building then can accommodate more floors with the same or slightly greater height. It may be possible to increase the height to four or five stories. Also, the front of each row house - living area - will then face each other, making the entire lanes a living area for the neighborhood. Since a small courtyard in the front of the house (for instance, that of the Shikummen) is not used for individual purposes but is utilized as another semi-public space, this will then minimize unnecessary individual open space, and maximize space for public activity, encouraging a community sense. This structure also allows areas along the main internal spines, along the main external road, and the lower floor of the mixed-use building to be used for commercial activities like the traditional lilong. This will provide adequate employment opportunities to the members of the community, balance incomes/revenues, initiate long-term investment plan, encourage entrepreneurship, and strategically plan a community-based - domestic- tourism.

For the unit type, it is a top-priority need for a self-contained - studio type - unit due to the change of life-style during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Therefore, lilong’s single-family housing unit then has to be modified to a smaller unit with individual facilities, which must also be

modularly flexible for prospective modifications. However, it is reasonable to acknowledge some needs of the single-family housing, so types of housing should still be mixed. A single-family house might occupy the unit on the ground level and other self-contained unit can stack on top of it. I suggest "elevated corridors" on each floor providing an access to each unit, to which open spaces - small garden, common area - can be attached, serving not only as a community area, but also a transition space from public (corridor) to private (room) so that moving from public to private area will not be too sudden. Also, to efficiently make use of the space on the upper levels, each unit can still share an exterior wall in a row-house style. As long as there is open space attached to at least one side of the shared wall, natural lighting and ventilation are accessible. In addition, to reinforce residents' community sense and liveliness, building blocks must be de-solidified; in other words, made porous. Porosity of the rows allows natural lighting and ventilation into the dense block. This will give residences a semi-enclosed sense allowing them to visually interact with activities and services conducted at the other side of the lanes, as well as give them a sense of security by the neighborhood watch.

To sum up, I am convinced there are physical aspects of lilong that are still valid for today's housing situation in Shanghai derived from the understanding of the most basic concept of this form of settlements, "neighborhood sense." More than a hundred years of lilong history has made it a culture of "modern Shanghai." My proposal to rethink this modern urban housing lies in the neighborhood concept as well as the functionality based on requirements of the modern life-style. Lilong houses have to be rethought in order to cope with the demand of an individual life, at the same time provide the dynamic communal life. The balance of commercial and residential programs can sustain the economy of the New Lilong.

Although I have never lived there, I have been to one of the original Shikumen lilong neighborhoods, in which I enthusiastically felt the sense of dynamic community. Everyone knows and cares about each other. I thought it was my imagination that I felt I heard constant greetings in Chinese when I walked through that neighborhood. I am aware that this research might not completely fill the noticeable void in contemporary thinking on architecture and urban housing in Shanghai, but it will serve to denote the existence of that void, and thus make a contribution to the development of a theory of urban housing in China, which I hope will revitalize the lilong houses by which I am enthralled.

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