Urban Development and Historic Heritage Protection in Shanghai

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Abstract

Sviluppo urbano e protezione del patrimonio storico in Shanghai. Negli ultimi 10-15 anni, la città di Shanghai ha realizzato trasformazioni urbane profonde, tradotte nel largissimo abbattimento di alloggi fatiscenti, nella costruzione di edifici grattacieli post-moderni ma anche nella distruzione del suo patrimonio storico-culturale. Infatti, sta diventando sempre più difficile considerare Shanghai una ‘città storica’, dal momento che della vecchia Shanghai restano ormai solo sporadiche tracce. Eppure, i tecnici cominciano a dedicare crescente attenzione alla preservazione del patrimonio storico-culturale della città, in particolare degli edifici coloniali più prestigiosi allineati sul lungofiume (il Bund), con l’obiettivo di promuovere Shanghai a centro culturale di livello mondiale. Tuttavia, la responsabilità della gestione del patrimonio storico-culturale continua ad essere ripartita fra numerosi dipartimenti ed uffici amministrativi nonché ad essere penalizzata dalla carenza di risorse finanziarie ed umane.

1. Recent urban development**

During the last 10-15 years, Shanghai has witnessed drastic urban transformations. The development of Pudong New Area (announced by the Chinese government in April 1990), the emerging Chinese urban land market in 1992 and the housing system reform launched in 1998 propelled the real estate sector so much that during the first quarter of 2004 commercial residential housing in Shanghai registered an increase of about 30%, the highest growth rate among the country’s 35 major cities, despite the nearly 2 million sq. m of unfinished building sites mostly concentrated in its central districts of Putuo, Nanshi, and Yangpu.\(^1\) And data from the National Bureau of Statistics (reported in China Daily on August 25, 2004) revealed that average housing and land prices in Shanghai have exceeded 20%, giving rise to an emerging speculative phenomenon and increasing protests by homeowners.\(^2\)

As Shanghai has been recently voted China’s city with the most overall real estate investment potential,\(^3\) foreign developers have entered the local property market,

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\(^1\) Xinzhen 2004.
\(^2\) In 2003, the oversupply of luxury buildings (against a shortage of low and mid-priced housing) and the dramatic increase of investment in the sector (jumped to USD 5.1 billion between January-June 2003) gave rise to an emerging bubble phenomenon, as attested by the reported so-called ‘Shanghai scandal’ involving local property developers and state-owned banks. In the previous four years more than 20 Shanghai-based property developers were put under investigation for financial misconduct and on July 13 (2003) the People’s Bank of China issued the Circular on Further Strengthening the Management of Real Estate Credit in order to tighten up controls over loans, prevent overheated investment in the real estate market and allocate bank loans in supporting ordinary housing instead of luxury apartments and villas (Lague 2003, Jianhua 2003).
\(^3\) The list of the top 10 cities was published on September 10, 2003, by the China Real Estate Top 10 Research Group established by the Enterprise Research Institution under the Development Research Center of the State Council, the Real Estate Research Institution of Tsinghua University and Sou Fun Academy (Xinzhen 2003).
especially since China’s 2002 WTO commitment to relax restrictions on foreign investment and the new regulations that have recently replaced the former practice of agreement by auction with a public tendering procedure resulting in a tangible step toward the establishment of a transparent and regular real estate market. And over the last few years, the construction process has been further implemented after the successful bid for the 2010 World Expo with the launching of the so-called ‘century project’ for the development of the Huangpu riverbanks, especially through the beautification of the four key areas of Yangpu Bridge, Shanghai Dockyard (North Bund, Shillupu Dock), Dongchang, and Nangpu Bridge, thus integrating urban development and natural ecology.4

The pursued high-rise redevelopment approach has brought in Shanghai large-scale clearance of slum housing and obsolete industrial buildings, but also the conversion of residential and industrial urban land uses into more commercial high-residential and office ones. Of this process, one of the most visible aspects is the vertical dimension that gives the city the new image similar to many western metropolises as well as the Asian ‘global’ cities of Tokyo and Singapore. Among the Chinese large cities, Shanghai has the highest skyline (perhaps second only to Hong Kong) as skyscrapers punctuate the whole central area situated within the inner Ring Road. Higher concentrations are in the Hongqiao development zone and along the elevated highway linking the old city airport to downtown Puxi, but the most impressive cluster of glittering high-rise buildings is in Pudong New Area, on the western bank of the Huangpu river. There, in only 15 years the scarcely inhabited rural flatland has been completely converted into a concentration of glass and steel skyscrapers dominated by the Oriental Pearl TV Tower and the Jinmao Mansion, the new symbols of Shanghai. And also the 4.4 Km long and 100 m wide Century Avenue, which crosses the Lujiiazui Financial District from the Financial Centre to the Civic Centre, is lined with an endless row of residential and office towers. On the whole, Shanghai has already more than 3,000 skyscrapers (often culminating with a faked Chinese

4 The winning concept was designed by the French Architecture Studio as an oval canal and a botanical corridor according to ecological guidelines, although requiring the displacement of some 25,000 people and the demolition of several metal-work companies, harbour facilities and warehouses. With a total investment of more than USD 3 billion, the Shanghai Municipality plans to redevelop the 20-km zone stretching along both the banks of the river between Lupu and Nanpu bridges, once jammed with junks, steamers and passenger liners, as well as derelict factories, warehouses and docks. An exposition area (consisting of a fairground covering 400 ha, 310 ha of pavilions, 60 ha of parking lots and a 30-ha Expo-Village) will be developed with extensive parks, cultural and entertainment facilities, shops and restaurants while former warehouses along Suzhou Creek will be converted into artists’ studios and art galleries. After the Expo, many pavilions will be transformed into permanent exhibition halls (thus realizing the idea of an everlasting Expo) while in the accommodation sector the number of luxury rooms and that of the underdeveloped mid-range level are expected to increase by 30% and over 1000%, respectively (Murray 2003; Grabow 2004).
roof, like the golden crown of the Bund Center or the flashing magnolia of the Min-sheng Tower) and some more hundreds are under construction, since the city is fully engaged in promoting its role as a ‘world’ city.5

2. Historic heritage protection in Shanghai

Today, new post-modern architectural giants built by commercial and financial actors are replacing the old impressive public buildings created by the autocratic and centralized State6 as well as by Western powers, thus altering so much the city’s land use pattern and the local social communities to become an increasing menace to its historic heritage, since concern for the urban past in China is a recent phenomenon. The skyline of Shanghai has become so increasingly dominated by modern highrise residential complexes, hotels, commercial and office towers rather than by temples, pagodas and old traditional buildings that it is becoming difficult to consider Shanghai a ‘historic city’.7

5 The recent developments and the newly planned city expansions are a wonderful opportunity to promote the ‘global’ role of Shanghai that has become a ‘laboratory’ and a field text for foreign architects, who can carry out all their creative ideas although some have aroused strong criticism on their security, fantastical aesthetic, and on the lack of embeddedness in Chinese culture. Foreign architects have designed all the city’s landmark buildings including the main public buildings in People’s Square, the Jinmao Tower and most of the numerous financial and commercial headquarters (Wu 2000; Diglio 2005).

6 This process is evident from the comparison between the collection of the old photos of the city recently shown in Paris at Musée Carnavalet (Hu 2003) and the illustrated collection book published by Shanghai Society of Urban Studies (SSUS 2000).

7 It is well-known that Shanghai was officially recognized as a “national historic city” in December 1986.
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Only a few relics still remain of the old Shanghai, since the traditional Chinese-style gray-tile roofs and courtyard gardens and dooryards have mostly disappeared in the skyline of the modern city. By the end of 2001, Shanghai had recognized 16 key state protective relics, 110 key city protection relics, 21 historic memorial spots and 15 protective sites\(^8\) and currently the city lists only some 400 ‘authorized’ buildings of historical value.\(^9\)

Among these are the well preserved Yuyuan Garden (built in the Ming dynasty and recently renovated for tourist aims together with the red wooden traditional Chinese-style buildings of the Chinatown) in the district of Nanshi,\(^10\) the famous colonial buildings along the Bund (on the Huangpu waterfront), some temples and shrines (including the 1000-year-old Longhua Temple and the Jing’an Temple), as well as

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\(^8\) Liping 2002.

\(^9\) However, in late 2003 Tongji University estimated from 10,000 to 20,000 BC the city’s sites of historic value, whereas the local Urban Planning Administration Bureau and the Commission of Cultural Relics Management announced the intentions of monitoring the city’s ‘unrecognised’ historic buildings, as reported in China Daily (October 29, 2003). In fact, Shanghai can boast a very long history, since new archaeological evidence suggests that the region could already have been a magnet for people from other parts of China thousands of years ago. In fact, Fuquanshan in Quingpu, a historic water town in Shanghai’s southwestern suburb, confirms that civilization in the municipality dates back to the Majiabang (4000-2685 BC) and Songze (3900-3200 BC) periods (Shanghai Daily, April 26, 2004).

\(^10\) There, the renovation of the traditional Chinese-style gray-tile buildings with red columns and whitewashed wall (completed by 1995) has re-opened to flows of domestic and foreign tourists the HuXi Ting Pavilion, the oldest teahouse in Shanghai built around the mid-XIX century, and the famous Nine-Curve Bridge across the small lake. This renovation project has been seen as a typical exotic example of combining different architectural features, partly derived from the Chinese tradition, but improperly put together (Salviati 2004).
the Jiading Confucian Temple, the Songjiang Square Pagoda, and the Songjiang Zuibai. In this list we can lastly include the world-famous Jade Buddha Temple, although wholly boxed in by modern concrete high blocks that threaten it so much that we can foresee its future removal on a new site to make way for luxury residential towers, as has recently happened to Baiyunguan Temple.\(^{11}\)

Of the foreign architecture styles and the widely used traditional *longtang* (or *lilong*) houses and *huiguan* buildings,\(^{12}\) established in the ‘concession zones’ of Puxi, giving rise to what has been called an ‘exotic city’,\(^{13}\) as well as of the ancient city wall, originally built in 1553, only traces can be still found there. Over the past 10-15 years, Shanghai skyscrapers have largely replaced the 2-storey residential blocks, once dominating the inner districts of the old Shanghai, after the large-scale demolition and redevelopment projects completed since the early 1990s by the Municipal Authorities with the goal to restructure the land use pattern in the downtown area and reduce population pressure in the central districts of Nanshi and Huangpu, where the density was over 60,000, where the density was over 60,000 persons/sq. Km.\(^{14}\) Scholars do agree that these

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11 On April 27, 2004, Shanghai Daily reported that this famous Taoist building was rebuilt 2 Km north from its original site on Xilinhou Road, in the district of Nanshi.

12 They indicate some architectural forms built within the foreign zones in Shanghai denoting the mixture of Chinese and western styles. The first term refers to the two-storey courtyards, which remind us of Southern China’s traditional houses, while the latter one indicates the foreign commercial companies’ residences with whitewashed walls and a wide, highly decorated wooden or brick portal.


14 By 1995, in only five years a total of 2 million people had moved from the city center to the outskirts and outer suburbs, reducing the number of registered permanent residents of the city proper by nearly 1 million (Bian 1997).
initiatives were largely a failure, causing the demolition of many historic buildings and the relocation of old residents often to remote suburban areas without an adequate compensation, aroused strong public protest because in Shanghai the predominant trend was the removal of all residents involving the conversion from low residential land use into more profitable and commercial ones and the destruction of the social and cultural identity of local communities. The pace of demolition in Shanghai was so destructive and rapid that the original residents were required to vacate their old housing before the new high-rise residential buildings on the distant outskirts of the city were completed.

The redevelopment of the old pre-European town of Shanghai has largely demolished the Southern China’s traditional houses lined along lanes and alleys winding behind the crowded 5-6 storey brick houses. In the late 1990s, in order to relocate more than 1 million people from downtown Puxi, some 200 redevelopment projects were underway and the current urban renewal projects will further reduce the city’s historic buildings and the traditional courtyards.

Local planners have paid attention to the preservation of Shanghai’s historic heritage only since the late 1990s, when an ambitious city ‘facelift’ project was launched in order to impress visitors coming for the APEC meeting in 2001. In May of that year, the city Authority approved the Comprehensive Plan of Shanghai (1999-2020) in order to pursue a ‘multi-level, multi-center, multi-axis’ urban sprawl system that gives priority to the preservation and the improvement of traditional buildings, according to the ‘sustainable’ development strategy. And two years later (2003), it launched the renovation project of the old residential buildings in Xinmei Taigu City, situated in the district of Zhabei,
scheduled to be completed by 2010 with the beautification of the northern gate of Shanghai.\footnote{This project will turn the 4 Km long riverbank section of Suzhou Creek into a green and environmentally protected area while the ‘dilapidated’ old houses (under the level two ‘Jiuli’, the traditional residence of Shanghai) in the area of Ever Bright City will be dismantled promoting a more rational land use pattern of downtown Shanghai, the redevelopment of large old residential neighbourhoods within the jurisdiction of Baoshan Road, and the renovation of some old residential districts.}

With the redevelopment of the city ‘waterfront’, the local government has decided to pursue a policy of preserving its colonial heritage, by paying increasing attention to the renovation of traditional courtyards lined along lanes and alleys and implementing the preservation of 12 historic and cultural areas in the downtown, where they cover approximately 27 sq. Km, and another 7 suburban areas are expected to be added to the list soon. Finally, some 230 old structures accounting for 1.3 million sq. metres were recognized as historic buildings to be protected, and last September 2004 a committee was envisaged to coordinate efforts by the Housing and Land Bureau, the Urban Planning Bureau and the Committee of Cultural Heritage. In addition, following the examples of ‘waterfront’ redevelopment, which first appeared in Europe and the United States in the late 1980s and some years later in Tokyo and Singapore, the Shanghai government is currently embarked on the already mentioned ‘century project’ for the development of the Huangpu riverbanks, which will be the focus for the development of Shanghai over the next decade.
The growing interest of the Municipal government in its colonial heritage protection is also attested by the international competition announced in the early 2000s to construct 9 ‘new towns’, as well as the launching in early 2004 of a renovation project for the seven most prominent buildings along the Bund, including ‘Three on the Bund’ which will be restored by a joint venture between GI TI Group Singapore and the private businessman Handle Lee. Last September 2004, it was announced the implementation of regulations to protect these colonial buildings and the almost 400 historic ones, mostly built during the early decades of the XX century by European and US traders. And it was also decided to preserve the remaining traditional brick courtyards (shikumen in Chinese), which escaped demolition to make way for modern steel-and-concrete towers.

As a result, after the intense processes of ‘coomodification’ and ‘gentrification’ of the latest decades overcrowding, poverty, derelict industrial land, dirty lanes and ‘dilapidated’ housing still characterize large areas of the city’s inner core districts, where there are also a number of interesting buildings to be preserved along Huaihai, Ximing and Huanshan roads, in addi-

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16 Among the proposed 9 ‘new towns’, each of them to be built in accordance with a typical foreign style, is also Pujian, which is now under construction 25 Km south of Shanghai on the Huangpu riverbank by Italian Gregotti & Associates. The new town is planned for some 100,000 residents to be housed in a settlement built in the Italian architectural style but in accordance with Chinese Feng Shui. And at the Sino-German Cultural Week of late September 2004, it has been co-launched by Chinese and German partners the project to build a small German town in the district of Jiading, while Holland Village in Gaoqiao Town is being built as “a modern town with a Dutch character” (Shanghai Daily, April 28, 2004, pp. 29-32). And of great relevance is also the scientific contribution to the renewal and restoration of dilapidated buildings given by foreign experts.

17 Of these, 52 buildings are concentrated along the Bund, the parade of buildings constructed by Western interests in the first three decades of the XX century.
tion to the magnificent foreign shipping companies and financial institutions head-quad-ers lines along the Bund. And if the quarter set up by Russian people since the 1917 Revolution was already disappeared by the end of the Second World War, more visible traces of colonial heritage only remain in the newly renovated Western buildings along the Bund, including the Palace Hotel, the Shanghai Customs House towering with a big white clock, the Shanghai Pudong Development Bank (formerly Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation Building, built of crude granite in the XVII century European architectural classicism and topped with a cupola), and some foreign consulates and exclusive clubs. In the French Quarter, shops, restaurants and some well preserved ‘villas’ form a distinct colonial Western area. There, along Huaihai Road Central adjacent to the Shanghai Metro Station, Hong Kong developers have built a number of malls (such as Lippo Plaza, Central Plaza, and Hong Kong New World Tower) merging the French architecture of the early XX century with modern construction technology.18

Among the more successfully renovated projects in Shanghai is People’s Square, once the race-course in the British Concession, where three well-known public buildings were erected in the 1990s to create a cultural district integrating modernity and historic and cultural heritage. Of these, the first one is the National Museum that, opened in 1996, is housed in a building designed by the architect Xing Tonghe to resemble the profile of an antique ritual bronze though expressing an unconscious acceptance of the socialist architecture that has influenced many contemporary Chinese architects. The Shanghai Grand Theatre, just behind the Museum, is another shining example of modern Chinese architecture designed by the French architect Jean Marie Carpentier in collaboration with the East China Architectural Design Institute. This largely glass building has a concave roof with corners going upwards so as to closely resemble southern China’s traditional courtyards. And other classical Chinese architectural features are its basement as well as the roof pillars, while the glass walls do

not perform any supporting function. The last building situated on People’s Square is the Urban Planning Exhibition Centre, completed in 1999, where visitors can follow the historical expansion of Shanghai and the future metropolis envisaged by local planners that is shown on an impressive relief map. Of course, all these public buildings are oriented with the main entrance on the south side, in accordance with Chinese geomancy.

The renovation project of People’s Square can be seen as a policy approach based on the concept of ‘district’ protection rather than of the prevailing individual building preservation one. And of this strategy, other important achievements are the renovation of the already mentioned Chinatown and that of Xintiandi which is situated in the central ward of Luwan and is officially presented as one of the few most successful projects in creating a new vitality while preserving the historical heritage. There, from 1998 to 2002 the Hong Kong developer Vincent Lo’s private group (Shui On Holding) has converted the historic but ‘dilapidated’ French build-

12. Shanghai. People’s Square before and after the renovation.

19 Salviati 2004.
ings into a popular shopping and restaurant district.\textsuperscript{20}

With an investment of over USD 170 million, where once some 200 households lived in old gray-brick and red-tile roof row of shikumen built in the 1930s, now there are 132 shops, restaurants and small coffee-bars creating in the heart of Shanghai a top-profile entertainment and nightlife spot for tourists and rich Chinese people.\textsuperscript{21} The surrounding 52 hectares of land have been cleared to be converted into one of the most expensive housing complexes in Shanghai with high-rise office towers, luxury residences and first class hotels built around an artificial lake.\textsuperscript{22}

Since the restoration can help Shanghai to develop as a cosmopolitan business and cultural hub, more recently there is emerging the new trend to bring back to their original use some historic buildings, that have escaped the destruction of the rapid modernization period, and refurbish them to perform new commercial and cultural functions. So far, nearly all the residential renovations are situated in the French Quarter and have been carried out by the original owners themselves who had lost their homes in the 1960s but were allowed to reclaim title for their confiscated properties in 1979. They are now recovering and converting their properties into some of the region’s priciest real estate and after the 2001 law that allows foreigners to purchase houses for the first time, restorations are being undertaken by wealthy

\textsuperscript{20} Projects like these allow us to plainly understand how China is able not only 'to copy' but also to elaborate a typically Chinese experience. In fact this original renovation project, designed by the American architects Wood-Zapata, was entrusted to a joint venture between a Hong Kong developer and the Communist Party aimed at transforming it into a cultural and entertainment complex suitable for making profits by the demolition of old and dilapidated buildings and the redevelopment of luxury malls.

\textsuperscript{21} On an area of about 30,000 sq. metres there has been created Shanghai’s top-profile restaurant and nightlife spot, concentrating luxury apartments, cinemas and galleries, as well as the city’s most famous restaurants (including the Brazilian ‘Latina’, the Italian ‘Luna’ or the ‘Baci Restaurant’, as well as the most attractive ‘DR Bar’, housed in the headquarters of the Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution).

\textsuperscript{22} Dolven 2002.
foreigners too. Several colonial-era villas have already been turned into hotels, maintaining their original architecture and atmosphere of pre-war Shanghai. Of these good examples are the Tai Yuan Villa (a charming three-storey manor built by a French lawyer in the 1920s), the Heng Shan Moller Villa, (built between 1936 and 1949 by a Swedish shipping tycoon and racehorse owner), the Swire Mansion (now part of the Xing Guo Hotel complex), and the former estate of the English Morris family, built in 1920 and now transformed into the Rui Jin Hotel. In the French Quarter Yuyuang Alley, the two-story western style shikumen house located on downtown Huaihai Road that was the former office site of the Chinese Youth League, and the typical 'stone-arched gate' site (characterized by brick outer wall, arched gate with red decorations and glittering copper hoops on a black lacquered door building) where the Communist Party held its first meeting in July 1921, have been recently opened to the public as educational museums. Besides, the historical Shanghai’s station, built some hundred years ago, will be converted into a Post Museum, while in July 1998 the Ohel Rachel synagogue, one of the two that escaped demolition of the city’s seven synagogues, was re-opened in the inner district of Hongkou. Finally, we can also remember the ambitious five-year project of restoring the windows of Shanghai’s French Gothic-style cathedral that suffered neglect and vandalism culminating in the destruction of its more than 900 stained-glass panels designed and manufactured in the early 1900s by two Spanish Jesuits. With the financial and institutional support from Roman Catholic religious orders, the windows of China’s largest cathedral are now being restored with Chinese characteristics, filled with imagery drawn from traditional paper cut-outs, block seals and Chinese iconography performed by the Beijing native female designer Wo Ye, who spent many years abroad studying church art in Catholic schools and universities. Ancient and modern do co-exist in Shanghai where Chinese and Western architectures are inextricably intermingled in the city’s dual skyline of Puxi and Pudong.

21 Wah 2003.

24 The site was then listed as one of the national cultural relics by the State Council in 1961 and last year the League invested more than 16 million yuan (USD 1.95 million) to renovate the building and convert it into a museum with five display halls.

25 The Ohel Moshe synagogue, located in the heart of the old Jewish ghetto, was closed down with the top floor turned into a small, threadbare museum on Jewish life in Shanghai. Now, responding to appeals from overseas Jewish investors and realizing that the Jewish ghetto could be a tourist attraction, Shanghai officials plan to preserve part of Hongkou and restore it as it looked 70 years ago. The City government has charged a professor of Tongji University to propose a plan to preserve parts of the old ghetto while several Jewish developers have already discussed proposals for the area with Shanghai officials. And a Canadian investor has also submitted a project to revitalize that old quarter (Kaufman 2004).

New Area. Both domestic and western architects do maintain that the layout of the new Shanghai is deeply embedded in Chinese culture, although it appears as a ‘global’ and trans-modern skyline. The well-known public buildings in Peoples’ Square and many more recent skyscrapers add a fascinating modern scenery to Shanghai but also preserve some traditional Chinese cultural features like the Jinmao Mansion, the 90-storey skyscraper dominating Pudong New Area that was designed by American architects in the form of a Chinese pagoda. But the City has no close ties with its historical past; indeed only recently historic heritage concern has become an important task for the city government. In fact, it is apparent that modern Shanghai is much more preoccupied with its future than with the preservation of its past, although the Municipal Government is currently intensifying its efforts to protect the city’s historic heritage, especially the most prominent buildings along the Bund and the remaining colonial quarters.

3. Some concluding remarks
The analysis has reaffirmed that due to rapid urbanization Shanghai faces the same challenges of other large cities all over the world, including the difficult task to harmonize the conflicting goals of old courtyards preservation with the improvement of the city residents’ living conditions. The urban renewal programmes are the most relevant force in destroying the traditional courtyards which are mostly dilapidated and too congested, since about 1/3 of the population of downtown Shanghai share a courtyard or is concentrated in dangerous ‘longtang’ lined with terraced row-houses built between the 1890s and 1920s. Therefore, demolition and redevelopment of the worst slum areas is unavoidable for raising residents’ living conditions. But, slum clearance and redevelopment should provide for the on-site re-housing of all the original residents, in order to retain social communities rather than their simple
original architecture as well as to reduce the ‘commodification’ and ‘gentrification’ processes and the destruction of the social communities while respecting residents’ wishes and property rights.

Shanghai is an evident example of how China is more committed to economic growth than to preserving its historic and cultural heritage. However the city is experiencing great policy dynamism, although it is still mainly based on an approach concerning the protection of major historic sites rather than area (or district) conservation, a concept that in China doesn’t seem to be yet fully conceived. Besides, the current planning process doesn’t lead to a community based historic heritage protection policy able to dismantle the long-established connections of the Administrative Authorities with ordinary people. The involvement of the other actors, sectorially engaged in historic heritage protection, is neglected and the relations between relevant planning organizations are fairly weak too.27

Thus, more careful measures are needed to preserve older and newer buildings of both Western and Chinese styles. And even after the new ‘Law on Cultural Relics Protection of the PRC’, revised in October 2002, the responsibility continues to be fragmented among a great number of administrative bodies and local organizations and doesn’t lead to a coherent comprehensive protection policy. Capital and human resources, as well as the consideration for the willingness and self-determination of the local residents, are lacking.

In conclusion, the City seems to have no close ties with its historical past, probably because historic heritage for some citizens still reminds them of humiliation and shame. But only a society that prizes its historic and cultural heritage is a real advanced society, since the knowledge of the past helps us to better understand the present time, to protect the ‘old city’ and to fully develop the vision of the ‘sustainable city’ of the XXI century. In this perspective, it seems that ‘mala tempora currunt’ for Shanghai’s historic heritage as well as for a large part of its residents.

27 Despite widespread public awareness and legislative action, reviews of the historical preservation movement indicate a lack of a theoretical framework, since only recently academics, urban planners, government officials, and cultural heritage specialists and experts have begun to discuss the crucial challenge facing China, that is how to balance economic growth and cultural heritage preservation. And also in the preservation movement the perception of older buildings by the residents of a city has received limited consideration. Therefore, Shanghai is constantly changing, but ordinary residents don’t contribute to its evolution.
References


