Narrative of Historic Block Renovation in Power and Concept Dimensions:

Case of Tiansizifang in Shanghai

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Abstract

Over the past twenty years, the renovation of Tiansizifang Historic Block has been one of the most famous cases of urban renewal in Shanghai. The Tiansizifang story goes vividly and dramatically but never smoothly: the area has met various threats of demolition throughout its history. Conflict in the Tiansizifang case is not only related to struggles for dominant power within different governmental departments, but also to arguments about methods of urban renewal and notions of urban development. The rough experiences are caused by inner-governmental challenges for the dominant ways of urban renewal, as well as the practices of urban-context appreciation, creative industry promotion, resident-interests and social justice involvements. Tiansizifang is a rare success story in the macro process of urban renewal; its experiences and principals should be affirmed and spread in the future.

1. The Tiansizifang Experiment: an attempt to break from the dominant mode of urban renewal within the system

Over the past two decades, Tiansizifang and Xintiandi have become two of the most renowned urban renewal projects in Shanghai. Both are now among the most attractive centres of fashion and creativity. Built in old Shanghai Shikumen (stone gate) alleys, both areas were thought to have a dim future in the very beginning. And both were developed by big names. When speaking of Xintiandi, people will naturally think of Vincent Lo⁹, the Hong Kong real estate tycoon of Shui On Group. Lo paid a renovation cost of more than 20,000CNY per square meter in order to preserve the outlines of Shikumen – with that price
he could buy the most upscale apartment in Shanghai at that time. It is no wonder that his staff claimed that they were “following a crazy general manager and doing crazy things”. It was even said that Lo were making a bet with Xintiandi. In any case, it was Shui On Group that made Xintiandi a success. When it comes to Tianzifang, it is more difficult to identify one individual actor similar to Vincent Lo. You might name Chen Yifei, who was the first to move his studio to Taikang Road, and who, with his own public appeal, transformed this unassuming lane into a much-sought-after one famous for creative industries. You might also mention Huang Yongyu, who gave a new name to Zhichengfang, an ordinary Shanghai lane, replacing the address of Lane 210 Taikang Road with Tianzifang. But there are a lot more people who have heard of Tianzifang than those who know that Huang Yongyu invented the name Tianzifang. Certainly many people have contributed to change in Tianzifang, but without Mr. Z, the experiment of Tianzifang would have been aborted half way. While Vincent Lo succeeded in Xintiandi with full support from the government, Z made his way by challenging the government’s relocation and reconstruction project to protect Tianzifang. Tianzifang’s success did not come unintentionally, but rather was a result of people’s initiative, creativity and courage. The Tianzifang outcome was not inevitable, as there was always been the possibility of failure, and its final success seemed highly unusual. The rough experiences are caused by inner-governmental challenges for the dominant ways of urban renewal, as well as the practices of urban-context appreciation, creative industry promotion, resident-interests and social justice involvements.

In fact, the government-led demolition and construction of old areas of the city has always been highly controversial. Architects and urban planners are critical in their observations that the entire reconstruction of the city destroys the fabrics of urban space, with historical blocks vanishing in the roar of bulldozers. Sociologists concerned about social justice in the urban redevelopment process suggest that the relocation projects drive away not only people, but also their social relationships, i.e., “the organic nature of relocated residents’ life structure, the legitimacy of their wish for personal, family and neighborhood life, as well as the importance of identities, all of which were not endowed with sufficient righteous value and meanings”. As the ordinary residents migrate from downtown areas to suburbs and far-away places out of the city, they leave inner city space to wealthy classes, resulting in gentrification and luxurization of downtown areas. Many critics point out that this has resulted in new stratification and polarization of the urban social space on the one hand, and on the other hand, reduced diversity of urban communities and populations, thereby diminishing the appeal of the downtown areas. Some treatises by overseas scholars have defined the urban renewal of Shanghai since the 1990s as on a market-oriented neo-liberalism and gentrification
path; both are causes for the rise of Shanghai and act as foundations for criticisms of its lack in sociality and humanity.

Questions about the dominant methods of urban renewal mainly come from academia and media; different views or schemes within the government are hardly heard of. One reason might be that there was no dissidence within the government officials, since large-scale demolition and construction has become the widely accepted and dominant mode of urban renewal (as witnessed in all cities across China and in Shanghai itself). Statistics show that, from the early 1990s, when Shanghai started its large-scale urban redevelopment by pulling down 3.65 million square meters of shaky shacks, till 2008, Shanghai has dismantled 100 million square meters of old buildings, with the total area of new buildings several times more. In 2010, China’s total revenue from land leasing fee amounted to 3 trillion CNY, equivalent to one third of the total national revenue of the year. In Beijing and Shanghai, revenue from land transfer accounted for half of the local revenue. Large-scale demolition and construction can attain several objectives at the same time, including infrastructure growth, urbanization, government achievement and good image, as well as improvement of urban residents’ housing conditions; this mode has therefore been well recognized within the government system. Speaking highly of the way to develop cities by land leasing system, Zhang Wuchang even attributed the current achievements in China’s economic reforms to the brilliant use of land. “Without land auctions that enable foreign investors who know how to construct buildings to make a profit, there would never be enough money to develop the city. Input from Beijing is by far sufficient. Since it auctioned off the first piece of land on December 1, 1987, today Shenzhen has become a cosmopolitan with a population of 140 million. Had not the money from land sales, you would never find a place called Shenzhen on the world map.”

There might be a second reason. In their regular encounters and disposals of social conflicts caused by the large-scale demolition and construction mode, grassroots government officials have recognized the unsustainable nature of the mode of urban development, which intensified the conflicts between government and residents, and fell short of the central government’s guideline of building a harmonious society. In light of this reality, these government officials hoped to implement urban renewal and renovation in a gradual way and small scale which would show respect for history and care for people’s well being. As a result, there have been different views within the government system. However, as the ideal mode proposed by the grassroots government officials could hardly bring any scale merit or spatial change, it had little chance to be put into serious practice, giving way to the dominant mode to march on in triumph. Xintiandi was neither a large-scale demolition and construction project in general, nor preservation of a historical block according to the standards of
architecture protection experts. Therefore, its strongest opposition came from architecture protection experts. Nevertheless, this disapproval could not change the fact that this was a dominant mode of urban reconstruction, a government-led mode of government-business cooperation. The government supports the development of historical blocks in a commercialist way and provides investment in infrastructures for new projects. The Taipingqiao Greenbelt project and the mobilization of government manpower to relocate residents are two good examples. As He pointed out, this is a typical way of government-led gentrification of the old city\(^1\)^.

Therefore, it’s almost impossible for a different plan that is proposed by the subordinate — if ever there is one — to replace a dominant one by the superior, even if the former contains much better notions and values. Tianzifang seems to provide an example of the impossible being made possible. Although Tianzifang is an official business card for Luwan District now, there has been heated controversy over the need to continue the Tianzifang experiment since 2002. According to the official program in 2004\(^1\)^, today’s hottest commercial neighborhood in the old Shikumen lanes would have been entirely torn down for the purpose of Taiwan ASE Group’s real estate project. Without the persistence and endeavors of the pro-Tianzifang force represented by Mr.Z, Tianzifang would have already stepped off the stage of the history. The final survival of Tianzifang was of course a result of the government decision. This is quite intriguing, because it is difficult to know whether the officials made the decision in reluctance, or simply took the advantage of right time and situation. From the logic of officialdom, it is extremely unusual for a plan submitted by the subordinate to replace its superior’s, not to mention that it was an unplanned project submitted by the subordinate that replaced an officially approved one by superior officials. This reversal was indeed unique; that the district government changed its own planning in tune with the times and made a reversal in terms of legitimacy also deserves to be recorded in letters of gold. The case of Tianzifang highlights a dimension of power, but the keys to the debate between different renewal modes are the concept, mode and values. What concept, mode and values have made Tianzifang? “There was no state funding, but cultural input; no development of the land value, but exploitation of cultural resources; no relocation of residents, but renewal in the urban form and enhancement of urban functions.”\(^1\)^ This mode was called “the Shanghai version of SOHO”\(^1\) by Ruan Yisan, a national-wide well known expert on traditional architecture protection. Whether we can find another copy or a more advanced version, the Tianzifang case alone has provided abundant experiences and lessons for us to ponder over and learn from.
2. From the symbolic power of cultural industries to the discourse power of urban renewal

Tianzifang's renewal started with the transformation of inactive neighbourhood factories for the use of developing cultural industries in 1995. Although this was a small development, it had important implications for the area, as it provoked further stories. On the one hand, the urban renewal of Shanghai was not only required by the national strategy, but also a result of district-level competition, as Shanghai went all out in the process of reconstructing the old city, sub-district level governments became active economic agents. On the other hand, due to the Asian financial crisis, the real estate industry encountered a downturn, with 14 inactive plots of land "exposed to sunshine" in Luwan District. Hence, the district government warmly welcomed the sub-district's suggestion to transform the old factories for use by cultural industries. In this sense, Tianzifang found its opportunity both from Shanghai's great leap forward and the financial crisis, which is completely different from the Xintiandi process. It was uncertain what Tianzifang, or more exactly Taikang Road Art Street\textsuperscript{(40)}, would become. Xintiandi clearly knew its goal from the very beginning, with a group of world-leading planners, designers and architects joining hands to build a world-class business community, another CBD in Shanghai, which turned real after ten years. But Tianzifang, with no clear picture of the future, was only regarded as a trial to break through the development bottleneck and to explore a new way of urban renewal. Since it was just an experiment, it would be quite natural if it failed. Even for Mr.Z, he had no ambition to build Tianzifang into a new landmark of Luwan District, let alone that of Shanghai. Instead, his ambition did not arise until Tianzifang attracted famous artists, which enabled him to see a light.

With the arrival of Chen Yifei and Mr.W\textsuperscript{(40)}, Tianzifang began to seek a more aggressive, ideal and unique way of development. With Chen as a master of art and W as a business expert, their coalition made a breakthrough for the art street. Their capabilities represented the spontaneous creativity of the society. Chen Yifei's reputation and influence were recognized by both society and government. Government recognizes external heroes, and appreciates heroes and capitals in the market, in additional to art and professional heroes as well as cultural capitals. Chen's presence brought more opportunities for survival and development to Tianzifang than other development experiments. The strength of Tianzifang came from both the legitimate power of the sub-district government and the spontaneous creativity of the society, making it a different way of urban renewal and development from the dominant one. The dominant way here refers to the capital-intensive development mode.
that is led by authority, in which urban land usage, spatial pattern and demographic composition are determined by capital, in accordance with its desire for increment. Compared with the dominant mode of urban renewal, Tianzifang was more cultural creativity intensive, advanced ideas intensive and historical information intensive than capital intensive. The initiators of Tianzifang created cultural capital by developing cultural industries in neighborhood factories in the absence of financial capital. When it finally successfully transformed the abandoned factors into an industrial space rich in cultural meanings, Tianzifang had not only created cultural and symbolic capitals, but also obtained the discourse power in its conversations with power capitals, a type of power that is expressed through cultural capital.

Tianzifang also had a name change from Taikang Road to Tianzifang, which was an extraordinary experience of social naming, social classification, and sanctification. Since Tian Zifang (田子方) was the first documented painter in history, the naming of Tianzifang (田子坊) successfully changed something “worldly” into “sacred”. According to Bourdieu’s theory, this naming did not only indicate a cultural naming, but also the production of symbolic capitals. Note that it was not Huang Yongyu’s job to give a naming or classification with state authority. A state naming is a kind of symbolic capital allocated by the governmental institution and plays the role of sanctification within the institution. Taking the National Teaching Achievement Award conferred by the Ministry of Education as an example, since the Chinese teaching institutions belong to the system, state naming equals to reputation capital and symbolic power. But the fame of the art market, creative industries and fashion culture, or cultural influence, cultural capital and symbolic capitals, etc., are usually named by socially well-recognized artists. In other words, social naming is more valuable and is much easier to be recognized by the society. Never neglect the naming by Huang Yongyu. Such a social naming would not be acknowledged or tolerated by the opposing side, as to acknowledge the name of Tianzifang was to acknowledge the cultural and symbolic powers of the naming. Before 2008, all official files concerning Tianzifang used Taikang Road as the official name instead of Tianzifang, therefore when debating whether to retain the Tianzifang project, leaders who were against the project rebuked Tianzifang for being fake and fictitious, which implied that there was no Tianzifang but only Taikang Road. Mr.Z retaliated that “if Tianzifang were fake, so is Xintiandi. There has only been Taipingqiao¹⁶ and no Xintiandi¹⁷ at all.” The debate over the authenticity of the name is, in essence, a fight over symbolic power, cultural power, as well as the economic power behind it. Xintiandi represents not only a development mode, but also a new and recognized urban cultural space and a new landmark of the city. What it has approved is not only the
legitimacy of the developer’s concept, but also the legitimacy of the government’s schemes and policies of urban renewal. Besides a cultural success, Xintiandi is more a business and economic success. Before Tianzifang was legitimized, Luwan District took its utmost pride in Xintiandi. Hence, both sides threw themselves into the fight without any hesitation. Was it just for a name? Certainly not. But it must appear as a battle for names, because the social world is a world formed through naming. It is through the creation of a new name that people create what in their mind is a new social world and social space.  

3. Main points of the Chinese model of urban renewal

The above story derived from the debate over the name of Tianzifang, as earlier mentioned, was the boycotting of Tianzifang. The turning point of its development came with the real estate fever in the 21st century, when Luwan District settled on developing Tianzifang and its adjacent plot into a new business centre. The previous spontaneous development of Tianzifang must be discontinued and replaced with large-scale demolition and construction within the plot, hence kicking off the conflicts over Tianzifang’s survival. A number of issues were highlighted in the conflicts. First of all, mega-development through demolition and construction continues to be led by the government; and in this government-led mode, the goal of government’s protection is to ensure the success of commercialism rather than protection in the real sense or protection for the sake of residents’ benefits. Secondly, although the dominant way is liberal and market-oriented, it is not yet market fundamentalism. Instead of pure liberalism, the Chinese way is more aimed at government performance, which is measured either by GDP alone or by urban beautification and afforestation, with the latter usually of no economic output. Shanghai government removed buildings, bought trees to create green areas and woods. As a result, the total area of green space in Shanghai has increased several-fold in the past two decades at a fastest speed among world metropolises. Choosing landscaping as a city’s strategy is rather rare in world metropolises, which seems contradicted with the sheer pursuit of GDP but is essentially consistent with it, as both are aimed at government performances. Both supremacy of economic performance and developing landscapes regardless of cost are typical Chinese experiences, and their resulting performances certainly include the goal of improving people’s livelihoods. In the 1980s, urban reconstruction did not include marketization, nor was it oriented towards GDP growth. It was a substantial effort of the municipal government to improve the residential housing conditions, which was entailed in the political monopoly system: responsibility was also monopolized and could not be transferred to others. In the 1990s, urban reconstruction derived not only resources but also impetus from the
marketization process, with which social values and the goal of people's livelihood clashed. Economic development and capital interests outweighed residents' interests. Such a social geographic policy of large-scale demolition and construction, as well as massive migration from downtown areas to suburbs and far-away places out of the city, somewhat deviated from the goal for people's livelihood and justice. Nevertheless, it was still partly in line with people's livelihood, as in reality the government improved the housing conditions of local residents, and created property right for the residents. The municipal government and its officials attributed the improvement to their achievements and recognized its social and moral values. But they failed to take full account of losses of the residents in other values caused by the overall relocation process to suburbs, such as inconveniences of public transportation, public services and job opportunities, positive individual experiences and collective memories of the neighborhood life and the right to live in downtown, along with the ruin of urban space structure and social fabric, as well as the disappearance of historical blocks and local contexts. Most officials put material and physical improvement as the first consideration, without considering the overall values. More importantly, such a mode of land sale and capital-led downtown development could solve the long-plagued major problem of shortage of funds, which the government confronted in meeting the needs of people's livelihood and building infrastructures. Therefore, it became a dominant mode, and was internalized as the faith of the officials. As a result, all the urban local governments across China have embarked on this snobbish urban renewal cause, of which the main driving forces are local revenue and local development. Consequently, a shift in the urban development emerged from equality to efficiency in terms of value orientation, and from "people-oriented" to "capital-oriented", with the latter rarely receiving effective check and balance. Since the government is the major beneficiary and operator of this mode, there is slim possibility to engender truly powerful opposition within the government system. Thirdly, although power capital may favor cultural capital, this will not alter the status of cultural elites as the ruled of the ruling class. This was suggested by Bourdieu, and fits very well with this case. Hence, when the authority is determined to cave out of its way, it can say no to the cultural elites, though it may be a bit offensive. In 2004, Chen Yifei launched a campaign for Tianzifang's survival. With his broad political contacts and social influence, his voice was naturally much greater than those of the small and medium owners in Tianzifang. However, it was not him who achieved the ultimate reversal. From the very beginning, Tianzifang was some kind of "freak": it was taken charge by government officials and had the legitimacy of state power, but its concept and strength to depend on mainly came from the society, i.e., the professional, international and marketable. This was a combination of politics, business and
society, but different from the mainstreaming combination of politics and business. The latter
one is an alliance of powerful authority and powerful capital, with little or no spontaneous
social forces, not to mention reflecting the wills of ordinary people. But the former one is
featured with both “mainstreams” and spontaneous social forces. It is generally recognized
that, without spontaneous social forces, Tianzifang would not have been so creative and
enchanting; but without local sub-district government officials in charge of the project and at
disposal of a group of artists or market artists, Tianzifang would have been lacking in
institutional resources for political legitimacy, and the government could have stopped the
experiment at any time – in case it did impede the government’s local development plan.
This happened to prove that no matter how much the authority favors culture and specialty,
the Chinese way of authority-led urban development would not like nor accept other forces
to be its equal partners and participants. This is the reason for Tianzifang’s survival. Most
Chinese officials would neither “indulge” spontaneous social forces as Mr. Z did, nor be as
brave and persevering as Z to challenge superiors and insist when his superiors called for
stop. This is why Tianzifang succeed, and survived despite so much difficulty. It is perhaps
the only one reason – if it has to be confined to only one reason.

4. The core discourse of “Tianzifang”: bringing social principles back to
urban renewal

As a friend of Mr. Z commented, “in Tianzifang’s past and present, the past is strived,
and the present is forced. It’s like playing contract bridge. The initial card points cannot call
to game, but with several rounds of competitive bidding by opponents, a game is made
finally. The Tianzifang game was indeed achieved in the process of demolition and anti-
demolition.”20 It is very incisive and witty to use the metaphor of “bidding to game”, which
pinpointed out the essence of the battle of removal vs. anti-removal, the key to Tianzifang’s
success. The essence of the battle was an argument of concepts, which will be discussed in
the next part.

The following stories seldom occurred in government-supported projects, and were even
less likely to last for up to four to five years. All the most exciting, intriguing and instructive
stories happened during the struggle for the survival of Tianzifang, which was not only a
battle between different powers, but also one between different concepts and modes.

It was a battle between different powers, yet not merely within the government itself; but
also between government and society. Seeing from within the system only, Mr. Z held almost
no legitimacy at all. Whether Tianzifang should remain was a battle between a legitimate
plan brought up by superior official and in line with the overall development blueprint of
Luwan District, and an unplanned, spontaneous experiment from a lower official. Insisting on the Tianzifang project would not only be incompatible with the entire plan, but also impede the development of Luwan District. If only for the disagreement between different levels of government officials, it would be reasonable, legitimate and unlabor to stop the Tianzifang project. But disagreements existed even among the superior officials, which were intertwined with the struggle for power between these officials and were translated into forces of support or at least sympathy for Tianzifang. Several times, Tianzifang faced the threats of being demolished, but every time it managed to head off the danger eventually. Except for Mr. Z’s persistence, forces of support as well as check and balance from within the government should not be overlooked either. However, the struggle for power also has another political and societal side. Though supporting forces for demolition and construction of Tianzifang prevailed within the government, on the social side the voices against demolition and for Tianzifang predominated. These voices did not come from ordinary people, but from leading academic scholars like Ruan Yisan, Zheng Shiling, Li Wuwei and others, and from party newspapers on both central and local levels including People’s Daily, Jiefang Daily. The government could neither ignore the voices of the cultural and academic elites, nor neglect those of the mainstream media, which better represented the symbolic power of the institution. Since the government has no advantage in knowledge, concept or discourse, this struggle for power, according to Bourdieu, was somewhat equivalent to the conflict between public power represented by the government on one side, vs. cultural power represented by elites and public opinion power represented by the media on the other side. If there were more than one voice within the government, it would be hopeless for government to win the debate over Tianzifang project.

It was a dispute of concepts. Either side might criticize the other for being less conceptual, which also proved that concept was the very agitating, disturbing and inspiring drive in this dispute. The real invention in Mr. Z’s story was to have constructed a “Tianzifang discourse” – actually, Mr. Z himself did not have the ability to construct such a discourse. As early as when Tianzifang was still in its infancy, Zhang Jianjun who was in charge of the renewal project of Huaihai Road contributed a concept of “neighborhood economy” to the Tianzifang project, and later another one of “soft renewal” when striving for the government’s support to change its plan and give up hard renewal plan (i.e., demolition and construction) of Tianzifang. A really impressive discourse and concept campaign kicked off when Z’s team invited a group of architects, urban planners and economists to Tianzifang for fieldwork and case study, and ended when Ruan Yisan and Li Wuwei introduced and promoted Tianzifang to the public in academic language. Ruan Yisan recognized Tianzifang’s renewal plan to
preserve the old architectures and the historical block, and highly praised the artists for reinventing them and making Tianzifang a place “with rich local features, highlighting the fresh characters of the age and showcasing the genuine life of Shanghaiese people”. Ruan Yisan knew well of Tianzifang’s situation and had his reasons to worry. “As land interests, previous commitments and worldly biases will all hinder the emergence of SOHO in Shanghai, it’s quite possible for Tianzifang to die on the vine as well.” Ruan used the title of “Protecting SOHO in Shanghai”, which expressed the common wish of all the experts that like and recognize the concept of Tianzifang. This was a crucial step in Z’s efforts to gain support from the society so as to protect Tianzifang. As he wrote in a letter to the author, “with directions from Academicians Zheng Shiling, Prof. Ruan Yisan and others, I realized the physical space of Tianzifang and the value of urban development mode; while with advices from Li Wuwei, Chen Yifei and others, I realized the value of cultural industries in Tianzifang.” Making use of the discourse of academic elites, Z constructed a meaningful narrative for Tianzifang, a narrative of its legitimacy: the legitimacy of protecting historical blocks and the advanced nature of cultural industry development.

Z’s efforts in getting discourse support indicated his political approach and concerns, with value concern being the very core of his Tianzifang project. He was encouraged and inspired by General Secretary Hu Jintao’s instruction in the 17th Congress Report to “create conditions so that more common people can gain property income”, and translated the central government’s discourse into political legitimacy of the Tianzifang mode that encouraged direct participation of residents. Tianzifang’s expansion from “neighborhood factories” to the “neighborhood for residents” took place under such a notion. For the sake of the welfare of residents, Z supported the original inhabitants to lease their houses for business use in order to increase income and create welfare value. By this, he generated an interest pattern, and caused a political trouble that compulsory demolishing was believed to lead to instability and disharmony, a most powerful and dangerous buzz that an official of lower level in hierarchy could create. This was also another effort that Z strived for support from the society, but this time he aimed at the bottom of the society instead of social elites, and hence had entirely different political implications. The dominant ideology always claims to adhere to the interests of the masses and follow the mass line, but specific interests of the masses are defined by the CPC and its government. Any definition, if not in accord with the superior authorities, is doomed to be unbearable by the party disciplines and politically incorrect. There was no fault in terms of abstract concept and reason for Z to allow residents to participate directly in the urban development project, but when it came to the detailed implementation, policy and law, it was neither appropriate nor legal (eg., the issue of
changing residential housing to non-residential use). What he took on was not only the responsibility for decision-making, but also political and legal responsibilities, and all these serious consequences were like the Sword of Damocles hanging above him. Very few officials would have held their noses and take the plunge for a project that would bring them no economic benefits. However, for such unflinching government officials, who bear much strength of advanced discourses and uphold the moral principle, to bring benefits to people as well as enthusiasm to explore sustainable ways of urban renewal, very few institutional opponents with equivalent sentimental, conceptual and moral energy could compete with them, except for threatening with authority. Therefore, the final success of Z did not occur because of his luck, but was actually a way chosen by the history. At stake were not only concept and moral principles, but also sentiment and will. Z could have failed at any moment, since power was not on his side, and the dominant mode was still very sturdy and popular among government officials. But if Z would win, it must be the result of laws of Nature: that of CPC’s serving the people and of the human scale in urban development.

Back to the topic of power. In the Chinese context, ultimate legitimacy must come from organizational powers. Therefore, to clear Tianzifang’s name, arguments of Ruan Yisan, Zheng Shiling, Li Wuwei and other scholars were far from enough, and government’s recognition was needed. People who loved the idea of Tianzifang went beyond the cultural elites, as in fact more officials of much higher positions also liked it. They liked it for many reasons, either to satisfy their own nostalgic feelings, or to acknowledge the renewal mode that brings people benefits but no disturbance. Even simply for personal appreciation and preference, this would also be translated into hints and reminders from superior officials to subordinates, thereby affecting the policy approach of the subordinate officials in charge of the project. Besides, increasing awareness of historical block preservation, along with the international trend of SOHO concept and the successful demonstration of Xintiandi, all led to a swing to preserve Tianzifang. In this case, the district authority had to consider the appreciation of higher authorities for Tianzifang, concern about the authority and public impact of academic elites’ discourses, and realize the new fashion in Shanghai, such as the renaissance of Shikumen that had softened and changed the existing standpoint. The mixed use of historical blocks and the perception of historical, commercial and tourist values could be easily understood by officials who aimed at development as the first principle. Although the Chinese government authority has its own opinions and logics, and will not yield to foreign intervention in or influence on China’s core political principles, it is very sensitive to international trends, not only because its urban development follows international trends, but also because such conformity is crucial for the validity and legitimacy of its power. In fact
over the past three decades of reform and opening-up, it has always been the source of Chinese local government’s drive and legitimacy to keep pace with international trends. Due to all the above-mentioned reasons, the real turning point finally came. Most people held oppositions before because they didn’t see the catch of Tianzifang clearly or farsightedly. In their eyes, there were only the discount value of large-scale demolition and construction and the results of the ASE real estate project. Not until in 2006 did it become obvious that Tianzifang could be made a highlight in the performances of the government leadership and a glorified business card of Luwan District. So what was the big deal if we had to lose several buildings of ASE? In this way the dominant development concept and the alternative renovation concept finally converged. As a result, Tianzifang, the wild child, eventually returned to the embraces of the Party and government. Tianzifang was posted on the official website of Luwan District and presented to the world as “the business card of Luwan”.

This is not a narration of one individual, but a story of one person and one place, which reveals the most creative and dramatic experiences and lessons in the urban renewal of Shanghai in the past twenty years. The stories of conflicts mentioned in this paper is invisible on site, just as the hardship and efforts invested to preserve the historical lanes with the characteristics of leisure and fun of the old Shanghai style street life are neither ordinary nor leisurable. The rough experiences of Tianzifang may keep its followers coming back. Quite a number of projects have been under preparation by other districts in order to create their own Tianzifang, but I can hardly be optimistic, because the success of Tianzifang counted on not only Shikumen and Deke Erh, but also a good leader and enthusiast like Mr. Z. As said by Z, “with explicit guidance from Prof. Zhu Ronglin, Zhang Jianjun and some municipal government officials, and in virtue of my intensive interactions with the residents during the development of Tianzifang, I came to establish a deep understanding of the value goals of a government administration should pursue.” I believe there are many government officials who share the same concept and values as Z in Shanghai, but unless they could also take the plunge and get ready to pay any price like Z, it’s impossible to make another Tianzifang. However, it is exorbitant to demand that bureaucratic officials take the plunge easily, and no one has the right to request so. It is by no means Z’s wish to make Tianzifang a solitary case, neither is it a blessing for Luwan District and the city of Shanghai. It is the major concern and real purpose of this paper by its narration of the creators of Tianzifang to discuss whether the spontaneity and creativity of the society and the political and social benefits of residents’ participation could inspire us to reflect on the gains and losses of the city-led development mode and soften the stand of GDP orientation.
Notes

1) Vincent Lo is the Chairman of Hong Kong Shui On Group. He invested extensively in mainland China from the late 1980s, mainly developing building materials, real estates and other businesses in western, southern and eastern China. From 1990, Shui On Group started the development of Xintiandi Project in downtown Shanghai. Completed in 2001, Xintiandi is a leisure pedestrian area of food, business, entertainment and culture built on reconstituted traditional Shikumen architectures with unique Shanghainese style. It is also a tourist site displaying the historical and cultural look of Shanghai.

2) Tianzifang is located in the historical block in downtown Shanghai. Its renewal project started from wiping out the street market in 1998, and later leased inactive neighborhood factories to establish art studios. With the expansion of business to neighboring residential areas, it gradually formed a mixed community pattern of residence, cultural industries and service industries, and became a base for creative works of many artists as well as a landmark habitat of fashion and creative industries in Shanghai.

3) Chen Yifei, a famous Chinese painter. In August 1999, Chen Yifei Art Studio moved to Taikang Road.

4) In 2001, after Huang Yongyu, an outstanding artist, visited Chen Yifei Art Studio, he named the place Tianzifang. The name is originated from Records of the Grand Historian, which recorded the most longeuous painter in China’s history called Tian Zifang (田子方). Huang used the similar pronunciation, but changed the last character by adding a part of “earth” (土), meaning a piece of land that gathers literators, artists and designers.

5) Mr. Z was Party Secretary and Director of Dapuqiao Sub-district of Luwan District from 1997 to 2004. Taikang Road Culture Street was created during his term under with initiation and leadership, and later developed into Tianzifang which gathers cultural and creative industries. Since 2002, Tianzifang faced the threat of being demolished all the time. Z went all out in persuading the government to change its plan and keep the Tianzifang project. In 2008, the originally planned real estate project was eventually cancelled in the adjusted plan.


9) http://blog.sina.com.cn/zhangwuchang

11) In 2004, A Detailed Plan for Xinxinli Area was brought up, which proposed to develop the neighborhood where Tianzifang is located in to a district centre of business and office buildings. A land leasehold agreement was also signed with a Taiwanese real estate company.


14) Tianzifang is located on Taikang Road. At the beginning of its renovation, it was officially called Taikang Road Art Street instead of Tianzifang, and established administrative committee, sodality and other organizations.

15) Mr. W once worked in the government culture section, later quitted to do business. He was introduced to Mr. Z through friends and joined him in the renovation project of Tianzifang. He has invited a number of famous artists to be stationed in Tianzifang including Chen Yifei and Deke Erh, and established Tianzifang Investment Co., Ltd., with himself as legal representative and chief designer.

16) The Xintiandi project was located in Taipingqiao Area in Shanghai, with the full name of “the reconstruction plan of Taipingqiao Area”. Xintiandi was a new name for the entertainment, shopping and leisure area after renovation.

17) See interview with Z, Mar. 12, 2011.


19) As Bourdieu pointed out, “more generally, intellectuals all belong to ‘the ruled group of the ruling class’.” See Bourdieu and Wacquant: An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology (Chinese translation), p143, Central Compilation &Translation Press, 1998.


21) Between 2003 and 2005, famous architects, urban heritage preservation experts and economic sociologists all wrote articles to dwell on from perspective of heritage preservation, special aesthetics, creative industries and others in support of the Tianzaifang project.


23) See Zhang Jianjun’s article on his blog: Tianzifang – Lao Zheng.