

Transnational networks, cosmopolitan agents: a re-globalizing city center Shanghai 1992-2012

Ying Zhou

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Shanghai's urban development has come to represent China's rapid economic growth and global integration following the country's accelerated transition to a state-controlled market economy since the 1990s. In the centrally-located historic neighborhoods at the western end of the former French and International Concessions, socio-demographic, cultural, and economic changes is producing a new international trend quarter with a vibe and look echoing the likes of Berlin Prenzlauerberg or New York Williamsburg. What is the constellation of actors and agents who have activated the reuse of existing building typologies for the production and consumption of the new economy? And how do they relate a cosmopolitan history to the renaissance of Shanghai as a global city? And what could be learned from these specific and localized transformation processes for future developments?

This paper will try to unpack how Shanghai's transnational networks, cosmopolitan agents, and diasporic linkages, helped expedite the re-globalization of the city after 1992, especially in the reconfiguration of the former concession areas, both physically and socio-economically. Transformations to Shanghai's existing vibrant inner-city neighbourhoods is a specific example of how these until-now little-studied [1] and yet crucial 'centralities'—one of many in the polycentric urban system serving whole regions—spatially manifest the recalibration of drivers, agents, networks, urban forms responding to globalization's effects in local frameworks.

[1] Most researches and media reportage have focused on spectacular demolition and reconstruction of the 1990s, but little on the transformation processes in the vast swaths of the existing city has been studied relating the programmatic transformations re-formulating the role of the neighborhood as a centrality in the metropolitan area.

Ying Zhou, zhou@arch.ethz.ch (ETHZ, The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology), is an architect who is researching city-center transformation processes in Shanghai between 1992-2012 with focus on how the spatial production system has evolved between the aspiration to be global and the residual local frameworks. She has taught at the ETH Studio Basel on the research studios for Kolkata, Damascus and Cairo and published in *Critical Planning*, *Urban China*, *Monu* and other journals. Her work has exhibited at the Swiss Architecture Museum in Basel and the Haus der Kunst in Munich. She is trained at Princeton (B.S.E.) and Harvard (M.Arch) and was a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Stuttgart. She has practiced and taught in New York, Detroit, Boston and Basel.