

MUTATION OF TIANZIFANG, TAIKANG ROAD, SHANGHAI

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ABSTRACT: Tianzifang on Taikang Road, an area known as a place of artists within the remaining Old Shanghai setting, is recently being further renovated, and the traditional residential buildings are converted into stores and restaurants while local residents still keep their everyday life there. Without having a typical gentrification process by a large-scale redevelopment project, this old neighborhood located in the center of the city is transforming itself. The neighborhood is getting functionally more mixed, socially inclusive and economically uplifting as the renovation of existing traditional buildings proceeds. In this paper, I will discuss and examine the transformation of Tianzifang as a model of self-organized urban regeneration that leads to more inclusive urban community.

KEYWORDS: Urban Transformation; Self-organization; Bottom-up process; Mixed use

1 BACKGROUND

Tianzifang on Taikang Road is a traditional neighborhood with the one of the most well-in-shape remaining community structures in the central area in Shanghai. It contains two to three-story traditional Shikumen Linong housings¹ from around French concession period and six traditional Linong factories from different time (Fig. 1-3). By 1990s, through the process of industrial restructuring, the value of the factories at Tianzifang went down, and vacant factories were lent out to small street businesses. As a result, the area was fragmented and the neighborhood became poor.



Figure 1 Areal view of Tianzifang, Taikang Road view



Figure 2 Factory view



Figure 3 Residential view

2 REGENERATION BY SELF-ORGANIZATION

Without introducing a large-scale redevelopment project, which is usually imposed from above and accompanies a relocation of the original inhabitants, Tianzifang has transformed gradually as old buildings

¹ Clustered traditional local houses were often named *li*, while the regular corridors between the rows of housing blocks were called *nong* meaning “alley.” Houses with a gate named Shikumen is called Shikumen Linong housing.

get renovated one after another. Regeneration of Tianzifang was achieved by a self-organizational process that is described as the status changes of entire Tianzifang caused by the aggregation of individual building renovation within a restricting original neighborhood community structure.

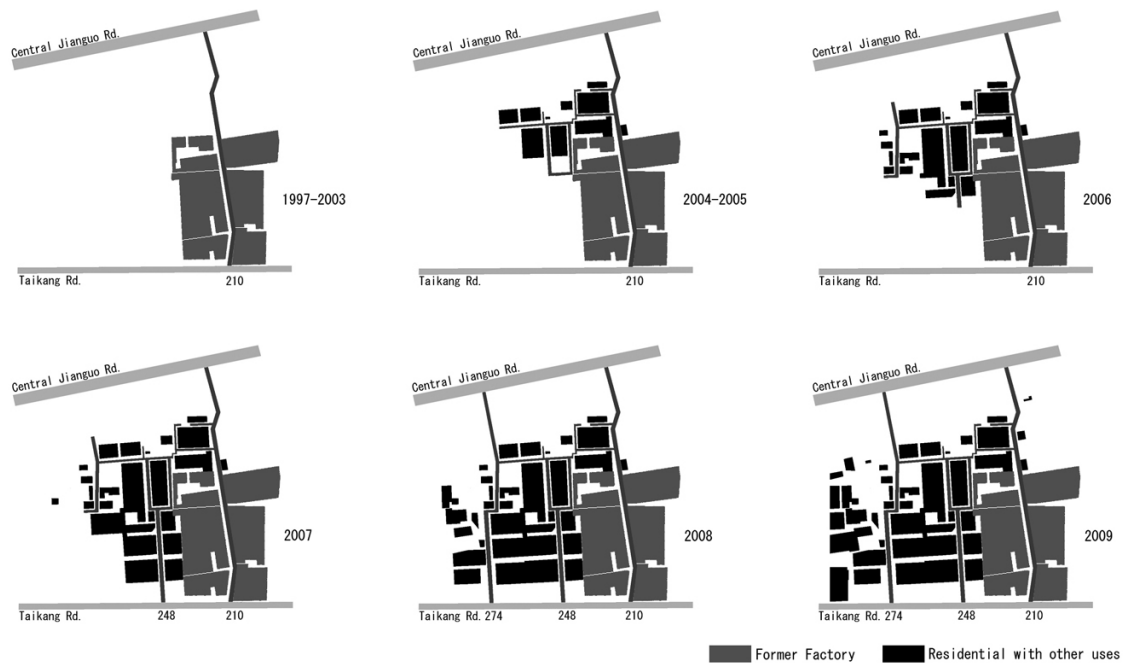


Figure 4 Proliferation of non residential uses into Shikumen Linong housing area

2.1 Spontaneous proliferation

A noticeable change to the inactivated community since industrial decline began to take place in 1998 when Chen Yifei, a well-recognized Chinese painter, moved into a simply renovated factory space as his art studio. Areas around Taikang Road had been recognized by artists by then, and especially those old factories attracted foreign artists because of the spacious high ceilings and aesthetics of the buildings from the industrial era. It was a strategy by Wu Meisen, a producer of the Taikan Road Art Street, who brought the famous artist to make the place better known. The attracted artists both foreign and domestic gradually started moving into the old factories and Tianzifang has come to be known as Shanghai's SOHO.

The spatial capacity of the six former factories was not enough to accommodate more artists willing to come. In November 2004, a Shikumen Linong residential house to the north of the old factories was lent out to a fashion designer as his gallery space by the hands of an original inhabitant. From that point, the expansion into the residential area progressed beyond factory boundaries, and spaces for creative industry gradually grew into smaller alleys perpendicular to the factory lane on No. 210 (Fig. 4). With the expansion, the artistic atmosphere infiltrated into the Shikumen residential area and changed pure residential characters. The artists and designers settled renovated old houses by themselves and updated the function of the buildings. Interior spaces have been converted into unique spaces for creativity industry, and newly added signs and door fittings on façade interplay with old building structures underlain, and narrow old alleys are visually animated.

The areal expansion of non-residential use continued and had reached to the next lane when municipal government claimed Tianzifang as a creative industry accumulated district of Shanghai in April 2005. The expansion further proceeded to the south along No. 248 as well as to the west towards lane No. 274. During the expansion in 2007 and 2008, kinds of non-residential use were extended to more commercial ones such as bars, restaurants, retails and added more contemporary fashionable atmosphere. By the beginning of 2009, the expansion reached to the lane No. 274, and former residential back arrays were connected back to Taikang Road as mixed-use commercial streets. Tianzifang became a multiform place with a fusion of history, culture and the living environment. Tianzifang was originally not included in one of the eight important urban redevelopment areas of central Shanghai. However, it has become a place of cultural importance in

Shanghai as municipal government appointed Tianzifang as Shanghai Culture Industry Park in March 2009. The expansion of non-residential uses added new values to the existing residential buildings and transformed the status of the devastated industrial community.

2.2 Integrated neighborhood

Tianzifang has become functionally mixed, and the life in the community is socially, economically and culturally intensified through the transformation. With the local economic uplift as shown in the annual tax report of 1.38million per year, the local resident life standard is improved. Real estate value is increased in the area and the annual rent for residential buildings is increasing by 10%. Residents have apartments around using the rent income. Even job opportunity such as a guard for the lent room is created and generates income for local people.

While original inhabitants still live there, it accomplishes a predominantly socially mixed international environment. As of July 2009, 350 out of 641 houses on about 2.5 hectares land are lent out to enterprises engaged in the field of artistic creation and other commercial tenants, and the international enterprises from more than 18 countries and regions including France, Denmark, Britain, Canada, Singapore, Japan, Ireland, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan reside there now.

The half of the residents is still original inhabitants. Most of original inhabitants are old now and prefer to live in the familiar place where they grew up so that they can maintain their own community network. There are cases that some of original residents on first floor who can gain higher rent lend out their houses and relocate to cheaper upper levels within the community.

Recently as shown in the many tourist guide books and websites, tourist industry invites more visitors both international and domestic to this area and Tianzifang is becoming more diversified.

3 MUTATION MECHANISM : OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT

Tianzifang's expansion to the Shikumen residential area was a spontaneous act of the original inhabitants. Regeneration of Tianzifang is due to operation by self-organized development subjects and its bottom-up process.

3.1 Bottom-up process

In the initial phase of the factory renovation, the government and the developers was not involved in its operation. There are no master planners or architects behind this regeneration of Tianzifang. The first development force was the artists who found the value of the old factories as a space of creation and Wu Meisen, a producer who found a potential market value of the old factory. Having realized the potential characteristic development of Taikang Road, Luwan district government supported Taikang Road to be a street of arts and crafts; however, government did not participated in any specific renovation projects. A government funded financial resource for the development was absent, and initial rehabilitation of the factories including the infrastructural maintenance and re-paving was conducted by Wu, using the prior investment of 200,000 rmb funded by the future rent of the factories. The conversion of the old factories into unique creative spaces was done by artists themselves using their own creativity and expressions.

For the expansion phase to the residential area, old Linong residents themselves lent out their houses directly to artists and entrepreneurs. It was illegal to make changes to the residential converting into other uses; there was a black market for the rent of Shikumen residential buildings. As the expansion progressed residents set up a self-organized management committee for the coordination of lets and the protection of the Shikumen Linong housings of which renovation and functional update were done by who settled. Residents even jointly self-financed for the refurbishment of pavement and the maintenance of public facilities such as street lighting, additional tables, chairs and parasols for public on allays. Thus, the transformation of Tianzifang was largely depended on the bottom-up process by the artists, residents, and those resided there.

3.2 Governance; operation and management

There were three main regulatory actors operating the development of Tianzifang during the process; government set-up organization of Administrative Committee of Taikanglu Art Street (1999-present), non-government organization of Shikumen Owners Management Committee (2004-present), and individual of residents, artists, and tenants.

The Administrative Committee of Taikanglu Art Street is responsible for the management of the factories; leasing of the factories, assessing tenants and business investment, and monitoring and regulating their market. They are more service-oriented and do not directly get involved in the operation of specific activities.

The Shikumen Owners Management Committee is responsible for the management for Linong housings. They organize the lets together and bridge between property owners and tenants. For the protection of Shikumen residential buildings, they made a preservation guideline and make agreements with tenants, and supervise renovation work. They made strict requirements on tenants not to undermine the old buildings, and signage and decoration not to destroy the original architectural features in the agreement. Yet, it is a voluntary act of the residents and there is no legitimate legal power. They also set an inquiry office for residents, visitors and tenants, and support daily matters related to Tianzifang.

Individual of residents and located artist and tenants also take important roles for the governance of the community. During the process of expansion, local government proposed a redevelopment plan for Taikang Road area that demolishes old residence and replace by new high-end residential towers that accommodates 1200 people in 400 units. Residents and tenants firmly opposed to the removal of this 'cultural treasure,' submitted a jointly signed letter to government, and refused the removal.

3.3 Government

During the transformation, government involvement was limited. In 2008, local government set up Tianzifang Management Committee for managing issues related to the development of Linong housings, at the same time, re-zoned land uses and assigned a legal mixed use area for the development of Tianzifang. It is an appropriate act by government not only for government to ensure legitimate tax gain to the city but also for residents and tenants to get a legal land use right, legitimate supports and protection².

4.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Mutation of Tianzifang is resulted from a spontaneous act of non-governmental forces. Its process demonstrates an indicative way of regenerating existing urban fabric alternative to the large-scale subsidized relocation model typical in the central districts of Chinese cities. It is an organic and gradual process of preserving as well as improving the traditional neighborhood community, continues history of old Shanghai, and improves living standard of residents. Its functional radiation and accumulation are intense, and its environment is socially and culturally diversified. In its governance, government is "small," and seemingly the different community members' interests are reflected in the process of transformation. Flexibility and freedom was definitely the key behind this mutation, however, as market pays more attention to this area, what might be crucial for this place is selectivity and control to ensure its future diversity and integrity.

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² In the new land use plan, the area in the north-west part of Tianzifang in which most of residents act against the commercial invasion and insist their privacy is excluded from the mixed use area.