

How to Keep the Atmosphere of the Past Jewish Noah's Ark in Shanghai

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Abstract. Hongkew-Ghetto, a warm word to about 40000 Jewish people who have safely lived in Shanghai during the tough days of World War II, nowadays has to deal with the matter that how to protect this district after the Jewish inhabitants left. To rightly protect the area of Tilanqiao, the Chinese name of this former Jewish Noah's Ark, the author, basing on five years' investigation and conservation project making, analyzed the intangible and tangible heritage of this district and suggested to keep the atmosphere of historic memories is the most important thing. Therefore, the author took the method of *Adaptive Re-Use* as the way to protect Tilanqiao, paying enough attention to keep the intangible aspects besides the care of tangible aspects, and tries to Use these old buildings as the living heritage for attracting the new Jewish involvement and make the memories reappearance.

1. Introduction: the Tilanqiao Area

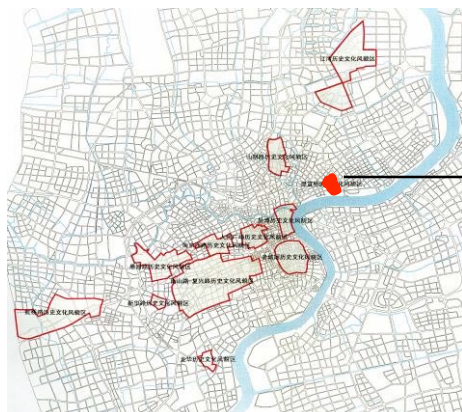


Figure 1: Location of Tilanqiao in 12 historical and cultural areas in Shanghai (2003)



Figure 2: Border of Tilanqiao area (2003). The coloured building group is a listed historic monument of Shanghai (Tilanqiao Prison)

The first settlement of the area is Xiahai Temple which was firstly built between 1736 and 1795. Between 1901 and 1903, Tilanqiao prison was built in the area, which was listed as a historic monument of Shanghai. Since 1899, the area was part of international settlement occupied by foreigners. In 1927, Ohel Moische Synagogue moved to this area which was listed as a historic monument in 2005. Since 1938, it became home of Jewish refugees until end of the Second World War. Except the Xiahai temple, Tilanqiao prison, most buildings in the area are residence. Besides, there is a primary school, some shops, a small factory, few warehouses and one public green open space.



Figure 3: Buildings in Zhoushan Road, where was used to be called „Little Vienna“. (Sept. 2007)



Figure 4: Door style
Photo © Bernd Seegers 2007

Buildings in Zhoushan Road were built by Jewish refugees. The architecture style is a mixture of western and Chinese. It is one type of Linong houses in Shanghai at that time. Victoria style was called for this type of architecture.¹

1.1 FORMER JEWISH NOAH’S ARK

The first group of 369 Jews arrived at Shanghai in July 1938 by ship. Until 1939 in one year, there were 14,500 Jews. Until 1941 about 160,000 more Jews came². Hongkou District was heavily damaged by wars. Most houses were destroyed. The rent was rather low. They got financial help from refugee foundations immediately after they arrived. Meanwhile, rich Jewish businessmen in Shanghai provided buildings for them to stay.³ After two years, Hongkou District was totally changed by Jewish. Streets were reconstructed; all kinds of shops were opened. Zhoushan Road became a business center. Original huts became houses. Jewish schools, hospitals, theaters, newspapers, libraries, orchestra were developed. Even 408



more Jewish babies were born. Due to its European lifestyle the area was called by westerners in Shanghai “Little Vienna”.⁴

The reason why Shanghai could shelter Jewish at that period was due to its unique political situation. Shanghai colonies were called

“country inside a country”. From 1937-1939, visa was not necessary to come to Shanghai. Shanghai was in the control of Japanese. Different from Germans, their attitude towards Jews was different. Jews were ordered to stay in Hongkou district. One important reason is the pressure from international level. Quite a number of Jews were rich and powerful in Shanghai. Besides, they try to relieve tense relationship with America and UK. Hongkou district was the main battlefield since Japanese invaded Shanghai in 1932 which is almost in ruins. Japanese wanted to make use of Jews to redevelop the area.⁵

After Second World War, Jews went away from Shanghai. Most of them went to America and Israel. Until 1958, only less than 100 Jews were in Shanghai.

1.2 VISIT OF FORMER REFUGEES



Figure 6: One former Jewish Refugee is talking with her old neighbour when she visited Tilanqiao in 2005
Source: Shanghai news,
<http://sh.eastday.com/eastday/node83953/node99098/userobject1ai1635470.html?index=3>

In many countries there are Shanghai Jews Groups. They organize annual meeting. The head quarter of all the groups is in Los Angeles with more than 1000 members⁶.

From 10 to 12 November 2005, the event “Jewish refugees in Shanghai” was organized by the Shanghai Municipal Government for commemorating 60th Anniversary of World’s Anti-fascist Victory⁷. Events include exhibitions, symposium about Jewish in Shanghai, visits and so on. Many former refugees came for the event from everywhere in the world. Famous former residents include former U.S. treasury secretary Werner Michael Blumenthal, movie mogul Michael Medavoy and “Far Eastern Economic Review” founder Eric

Halpern. Mr. Werner Michael Blumenthal, now Director of Jewish Museum Berlin, at an age of 79, visited his old home in Zhoushan Road 59, where he lived for 8 years in his childhood. “Shanghai saved us”, he told journalists.⁸ Some of them can still speak Shanghai dialect until today. Sixty years later they met their old Chinese neighbours emotionally.

In April 2006, more than 112 former refugees and their families met in Shanghai again. One of the participants, a former refugee is already 95 old. Among them there are many famous and outstanding people. They initiated a scholarship program to support the Center of Jewish Studies Shanghai. Besides, they signed to support nomination of Tilanqiao area as a war heritage.⁹

2. Existing situation of the area

Besides its historical Linong houses, unique Jewish culture and traditional temple, the area became not attractive for people to stay. People move out for better living conditions. Old

⁵ Wang Yanhong, 2006, p41

⁶ Maoqin, 2002, p 39

⁷ Center of Jewish Studies Shanghai, <http://www.cjss.org.cn/200601064.htm>

⁸ Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._Michael_Blumenthal

⁹ Center of Jewish Studies Shanghai, <http://www.cjss.org.cn/200605101.htm>

people stay. Problems such as decaying, poor infrastructures, low quality of shops with huge advertisement could be seen.

- Decay problem. Most buildings are older than fifty years without basic maintenance for years. Buildings are wooden structure and suffered from worms. Paintings are getting lost. Waters from upper floor flows to the ground floor. Electricity lines were covered by dusts and oil¹⁰. They are lack of basic modern facilities. Historical buildings were not equipped with modern kitchen and toilets when they were built. There was no further comprehensive reconstruction. Many residents built additionally kitchen in the courtyard, which has negative impact on historical environment.
- High population density. Due to rapid population increase, buildings became overcrowded. In the area there are 5365 households with population 15,000. Residential area is only 14 ha. Average population density is 1100 inhabitants/ha¹¹. In some quarters population density reaches 1416 inhabitants /ha, average apartment size for a household is only 10 m². Under such situation, residents built additional small corners for storage, kitchen and so on.
- Most inhabitants are old. “Young people and rich people moved away, only the old stay.....the old people are fast a quarter of the whole population”¹². It shall be noticed that the area is quite close to the Bund, almost city center of Shanghai.
- Unclear ownership. Ownership is complicated and unclear for most buildings. Residents who lived in the area were not owners themselves. One resident expressed his thought: “If it is my own house, for sure I will invest for repair.”
- Lack of open space. The only open space in the area is Huoshan Park. Huoshan Park is also used for Jewish cemetery. Trees were broadly planted and more than 100 old trees could be found in the area.



Figure 7: Interior



Figure 8: Semi-public space was used by private. (Lane 99 in Lintong

3. Conservation plan for Tilanqiao area (2005)

Conservation plan for the area was developed in 2005 by Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning and Design Institute. As required by the municipal government that all conservation plans shall follow the model of plan for Hengshan Road – Fuxing Road. Main content of the plan includes: height control, treatment of different types of buildings, land use plan, plan for

¹⁰ Shanghai Municipal Government,
<http://www.shanghai.gov.cn/shanghai/node2314/node2315/node4411/userobject21ai231409.html>

¹¹ Zhang Yanhua, 2006, p83

¹² Zhang Yanhua, 2006, p91

green open space, plan for community facilities, zoning plan for every block. In the plan, its residential function is strengthened. A mixture land use of commerce and residence is planned. Conservation measures are strictly defined. Green open space is ensured and enlarged. In traffic system plan, lanes inside the area are planned for quiet traffic. It is strengthened that historical streets shall be kept as it is. Huiming Road and Huoshan Road are all 15.3m, which is the same as other roads in former colonies such as Hengshan Road and Fuxing Road. In Inch the width is exactly 50 inch. This is construction rule for street width during colonial period.¹³

4. Policies and activities related to Conservation

Although the area was enlisted as one historical and cultural area, comprehensive conservation activities have not been carried out except a small maintenance project.

4.1 LISTED AS A CONSERVATION AREA ADDITIONALLY (2003)

In 2003, Tilanqiao area was enlisted as a historical and cultural area, which is a supplement of existing 11 areas issued in 1996¹⁴. Does nostalgia of Jews play an important role in this supplement of list? It is not explained. However, it could have an impact.¹⁵ This situation is quite similar to the case of Jewish area in former eastern part of Berlin. The synagogue in Oranienburger Street was restored which tried to draw attention of rich Jews.

4.2 RESTORATION OF OHEL MOISHE SYNAGOGUE



Figure 9: Facade



Figure 10: Tour guide is telling the special story.

The earliest Ohel Moïse Synagogue located in a rented small place used by Russian Jews as memory of the earliest leader of Russian Jewish Community Moïshe in 1902. Due to enlargement of the religious community, a residential building in Changyang Road 62 of the Tilanqiao area was used for the synagogue since 1927. After 1949, the building was used by Hongkou District Mental Illness Prevention Station and later for other offices.¹⁶

¹³ Zhang Yanhua, 2006, p110

¹⁴ Wujiang, wanglin, 2006. 08 p8

¹⁵ “Does this mean that Shanghai’s notoriously inflexible urban planners were hit by wave of nostalgia? Not a chance. As explained by Dvir Bar-Gal, an Israeli photojournalist who gives tours of Tilanqiao, the major restoration of the old neighborhood is allowed by the government to take place because the mayor realized its value that it could bring in tourists and Jewish people are rich.”

Lisa Movius, Asian Wall Journal, 18-20 March, 2005, www.movius.us/articles/AWSJ-tilanqiao.html

¹⁶ Fang Jianchang, 1997, p88

Today it is called Jewish Refugee Memorial Hall of Shanghai and used for exhibition about this special history. Financed by a Russian Jew, it was built in 1927 with three storeys of 700m² floor spaces. In 2005 it was listed by Shanghai Municipal government as a cultural monument.

Former Israel Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was the first foreign leader to pay a visit to the Ohel Moishe Synagogue in Tilanqiao area. When he visited China in 1993, the building was used by other purpose. After Rabin expressed his interest, the building was immediately recovered to a synagogue¹⁷. After visit, he expressed his thanks and said: "Israel people, Israel government and I appreciate deeply for the help during that time"¹⁸.

5. Citizen participation

Surprisingly, in this area, citizens were greatly involved and respected. In a public survey about cultural needs in the area, number one need from residents is presentation about culture, especially culture in Tilanqiao area. More than 60% residents chose this topic¹⁹. Local residents have great interest for culture and conservation issues. On the other hand, their interest is respected by government.

There are many residents who used to live with Jewish and had a strong feeling towards that part of history. They try to make a contribution for keeping this history to the future. For example, Mr. Wang Faliang, born in 1919, used to work and live with Jewish refugees and hence learned English from his Jewish neighbours. After retirement, he works as a volunteer to guide international visitors of Jewish Refugee Memorial Hall and give them personal experience about historical situation in the area. Mr. Xue Shunsheng, with age of 74 in 2007, already spent 10 years collecting historical information of the area. He travels by bike and four bikes were worn out already. He planed to apply Ohel Moishe Synagogue for an officially designated site²⁰.

In April 2007, the Hongkou District Office establishes the first conservation volunteer team in Shanghai, which is good cooperation between authorities and local residents. Enthusiasm from citizens is huge. One person from Yuanyang Hotel came to register for him and his colleagues as a group, Mr Dai Jianhua, who knows Hebrew and used to work in Israel came to register from other district of Shanghai. University students were also attracted and came.²¹ On 18 April 2007, conservation volunteer team was announced to be established. The first group of 60 people was awarded with "cultural volunteer of historical and cultural area"²². Most of them are local residents. The first task they undertake is to work as tour guides in the area. Before they begin to work, they will get a special training program²³.

6. Finance for conservation

Basically, there is no funding program or special funds for regular maintenance and restoration. Ohel Moishe Synagogue, Every year 100,000 – 200,000 were used for maintenance²⁴.

Impressed by enthusiasm of volunteers, many Jews were impressed and gave donation. In June 2007, Israel consulate of Shanghai organized a campaign for donation.²⁵

¹⁷<http://paowang.com/news/3/2004-08-12/20040812121857.html>

¹⁸Maoqin, 2002, p34

¹⁹ Shanghai Municipal Government, 04.09.2007,

<http://www.shanghai.gov.cn/shanghai/node2314/node2315/node4411/userobject21ai231409.html>

²⁰ Hongkou District Office, 16.10.2007, http://www.shhk.gov.cn/WebFront/sub_newscontent.aspx?cid=328&id=305

²¹ Hongkou District Office, 04.09.2007, http://www.shhk.gov.cn/WebFront/sub_newscontent.aspx?cid=374&id=221

²² Hongkou District Office, 20.04.2007, http://hkq.sh.gov.cn/webfront/sub_newscontent.aspx?cid=14&id=7218

²³ Shanghai real estate, 11.04.2007, <http://sh.focus.cn/news/2007-04-11/301022.html>

²⁴ Qianxin, Jeifang Daily, Xinwen Chenbao, 19.08.2004 <http://www.ehomeday.com/NEWS/2004-8/200481983833.htm>

²⁵ Shanghai Municipal Government, 04.09.2007,

Altogether 0.66 Mio RMB (about 0.066 Mio €) was collected to the Hongkou District. Twenty six Israel companies made their contribution. The entire donation will be used for social welfare institution and Hongkou activity center for the old people²⁶.

7. Summary

The area of Tilanqiao has significant historic buildings such as Xiahai Temple and Tilanqiao Prison. However, what makes it famous is its history of hosting Jewish refugees during the Second World War. Hence it was added as amendment of conservation areas in Shanghai in 2003. Besides those significant public buildings, there are also characteristic residential buildings along Zhoushan Road with a mixture of western and Chinese style. The area presents an appearance of decaying. Buildings are lack of maintenance and young people continue to move out although it locates so close to the Bund area. Conservation plan and zoning plan were developed for the area in 2005. Until 2007 there are no further actions for comprehensive and scientific conservation. Except in 2006 there is a small maintenance project to repair the walls and broken storm lines in some parts of the area conducted by district government. Even this small project was criticized by professionals for its insufficient attention of conservation. Several investors try to carry out urban renewal project in the area. One of them was chosen by the Hongkou District Government. The future plan for the area by the company is still in the process of development. In the case of Tilanqiao, its special history brings a lot of attention and helps to keep its cultural significance. Jews provide donations to develop the area as well.

It is its special history connected with Jews which brings special cultural significance. Only by conserving its physical buildings could intangible aspects stay. Not only building conservation, but also in way of promotion, such as story telling to visitors are important methods to conserve its cultural significance. With involvement of the local residents the area could exist as a living heritage and memory of the past.



Figure 11: Areal view of the Tilanqiao area from roof of Yuanyang Hotel

Source: China urban planning information online, www.china-up.com/meeting00/070521/Jew/Jew.htm

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