ABSTRACT

Influenced by the ideas of Richard Florida and other Western theorists, China has recently been enthusiastically establishing creative districts in response to its booming, creative economy. Tianzifang, a 70-year-old Shikumen neighborhood and factory area located in downtown Shanghai, is such a creative district. However, because the contemporary ideas of creative milieux, creative cities, and the creative class have been primarily derived from the West, how do they apply in an Asian Communist society? How do they differ from the West? Do Western theories hold true for Shanghai? Through participant observation and in-depth interviews with over 40 participants from the creative class, administrators, and local residents, I investigate Tianzifang by exploring its development through history, the sense of space/place, the attraction for the creative class, and the dominant creativity production systems. I argue that China has developed new adaptations based on its unique cultural and political environment that makes it differ from Western theories in three ways. First, creativity is usually viewed as a personal endeavor rather than a social interactive production. Creative people in Tianzifang remain in minimal contact with others, which makes its production systems independent and irrelevant. Second, job and business opportunities such as the Chen Yifei Effect are the major drivers for the creative class when making a location decision. This challenges Florida’s idea that creative people decide where they would like to live before considering jobs. Third, due to its limited freedom of expression and censorship, the creative class tends to avoid sensitive social issues and instead strives to pursue harmony and inner peace in their works. Lastly, I raise issues pertaining to Tianzifang that need serious attention in order to establish future creative districts: without a well-considered plan, the high-sounding talk of establishing creative districts can cause social downsides such as inequality to be ignored and disguised; and over-promoted tourism can cause commercialization and gentrification, changes that would threaten the artists and lead to the expulsion of the creative talent.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

We are so proud of China’s four great inventions: the compass, papermaking, printing, and gunpowder. But in the following centuries we did not keep up that pace of invention. Those inventions fully prove what the Chinese people are capable of doing—so why not now? We need to get back to that nature.

- Qidi Wu (the ex-vice minister of education of China) (as cited in Friedman, 2006, p. 352)

From “Made in China” to “Created in China”

Standing on the manufacturing end of the global chains, China’s economic development has been remarkable over the past 20 years. It has been recognized as the world’s factory due to the large population of manufacturing laborers and the low costs. However, with the emerging of a “creative economy,” Chinese leaders are thinking of reforming the economic structure to gain more profits in global markets. They want to transform China’s image of Made-in-China to Created-in-China or Designed-in-China (Friedman, 2006; Keane, 2011; Li, 2011), meaning that they want to turn from the traditional low cost manufacturing toward high profit creative sectors. A recent research illustrates the reason. Kraemer, Linden, and Dedrick (2011) reports that in 2010 Apple sold iPhones made in China but the labor cost in China amounted to only 1.8 %, or nearly US $10, of the US $549 retail price. Although most of the components are manufactured and assembled in China, most of the value goes back to Apple in the U.S., because Apple keeps the most high-wage work in-house, such as product design, software development, product management, and marketing. A Chinese scholar said, “They eat the meat and we have the bone; they eat the rice and we have the husk” (Li, 2011, p. xiii). To remedy the disadvantage, Chinese leaders decided to foster creativity, and believe that investing in creative industries is one of the keys. The ex-vice minister of education of China, Qidi Wu (2006) says: “The development of
creative industries is an important opportunity in the process of China’s modernization and development” (p. 264).

In order to raise China’s economic competitiveness and add value to products and services, policies have been launched recently to incorporate creative industries into the national long-term economic development. In fact, the term creative industries did not appear in government rhetoric until the Eleventh Five-Year-Plan launched in 2005 (Zheng, 2010). From then on, the publications on creative class and creative economy of Western theorists, such as Richard Florida, John Howkins, and John Eger, were introduced by influential Chinese scholars to construct a theoretical framework for these policies, and the Chinese government started to differentiate categories of creative industries and analyze statistical data for building a creative country. According to a cultural development report (Kuai, 2012), the population in creative occupations and the total profits in creative industries have been increasing annually. In 2010, the revenue of creative industries reached around 3% of gross domestic product (GDP) and China’s the next goal, listed in Twelfth Five-Year-Plan, is to endow the cultural and creative industries with pillar industry status, meaning they will contribute 5% of the country’s GDP by 2015 (Hong, 2011). This shows the central government’s determination to motivate a creative China.

**Creative Districts in Shanghai**

Creative districts are understood as a basic way to foster creativity and Shanghai, among all the first-tier cities in China, is probably the most enthusiastic to develop them. According to Kuai (2012), Shanghai has established 86 creative districts in a very short time; this is reported as the highest density of creative districts in the world (Cheng, 2009) and the number is still
growing. Moreover, 1.09 million people were working in creative industries (nearly 5% of the whole Shanghai population) and have created 88.45 billion US dollars of output in 2010; the revenue is expected to increase to 12% of Shanghai’s GDP by 2015 (Kuai, 2012).

Beyond the city’s enthusiasm, Shanghai seems to have some potential to cultivate the creative environment: it has been and still is the most international city in China. Shanghai has gathered a diverse population since 1942 when it became one of several treaty ports that allow foreign trade. Immigrants from other countries or other places in China shaped Shanghai’s diverse cultures. Today Shanghai has about 40% foreign populations (including non-Shanghai and overseas population) (Wang, 2011), and they continue to sustain Shanghai’s diversity. In addition, Shanghai also demonstrates a great ambition to be a cosmopolitan creative city. International exhibitions such as the Shanghai Biennial have been consistently held from 1996: this is one of the most important contemporary art events in Asia and is recognized as the “gateway to the west” (Biennial Foundation, 2013, para. 1). In 2010, the World Expo was held in Shanghai; furthermore, Shanghai joined the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] Creative City Network in 2010 and was named as the City of Design (UNESCO, n.d.). More and more international events are held in Shanghai and make it a door for foreigners to access China and a door for Chinese citizens to connect to the World.

**Current Issues and Research Questions**

The main concern of this study involves four issues to examine how a creative district functions in the context of China. Through exploring the relationship that exists between the people and spaces in the creative district, and the creative class and their production system, I attempt to outline a rough model of “Tianzifang,” a creative district known as the “Chinese
SoHo.” I hope this way to develop a cross-cultural dialogue between Western theories and how they are practiced in China.

The first issue relates to the formation and development of creative districts. These districts may develop organically because they possess certain conditions and features that attract creative people or they may develop because of planned urban development projects created by the municipal government. In both cases, most creative districts are alternative uses of abandoned factories and warehouses. The spacious rooms and cheap rents these former industrial spaces offer are attractive to many creative people who need big spaces as studios. This condition in creative/culture districts is known as low barriers to entry, which means “the only requirement to participate in the culture economy is being creative” (Currid, 2007, p. 12). However, in both bottom-up and top-down cases, gentrification seems to be inevitable: as the district become popular, the neighborhood shifts from being a poor community and moves toward becoming a wealthier neighborhood that welcomes the middle class, while those unable to afford the increased rents get priced out of the local housing market. During this process, the real estate companies are usually described as beneficiaries in the rent-seeking game. In this study, I wonder whether Tianzifang is undergoing a pattern similar to what has happened in other creative districts in the West. Is gentrification an issue in a Communist country? Given that most creative districts in Shanghai have low barriers to entry to creative people (Hui, 2006), does success tend to change these beginning conditions?

The second issue is the space/places and how people sense the spaces/places in the creative district. When creative districts became a hot topic in China, numerous studies and reports were conducted about introducing and differentiating the various types of creative industries, and quantitative assessments of their economic performance were conducted case by
case. However, the “insiders’ views” were often neglected (Jiang, 2011). Insiders include the creative class as the main users, and also include other user groups and stakeholders such as residents and tourists who are present in the same area. What is the space distribution? How do people interact with physical spaces/places? How do people interact with each other in such spaces/places? What is the meaning of place (Tianzifang) among different user groups? In addition, since Tianzifang is largely located within in a long-living Shikumen community, does this particular historic site influence the creative class?1

The third issue is the attractions of creative districts for creative class and whether Western theories hold true for Shanghai. Florida has asserted that creative people possess creative capital, so where they stay decides where the economy will grow. In other words, in order to promote a given place’s economy (no matter what type of economy it might be), the initial steps are to preserve a “creative community” that satisfies the needs of creative people (Li, 2009, p. 14; Ruan, 2004). This leads to the next question: what the particular attractions are for creative people, other than the condition of a low barrier to entry in the form of low rent. One of Florida’s (2008) influential assumptions is that creative people are attracted to places they like rather than where they can find jobs. According to Western scholars, their beloved preconditions may include better quality of life, the physical beauty of a place, cultural facilities, openness and a tolerant atmosphere, a welcoming attitude to diversity, and proximity to a university, which functions as a talent magnet (Florida, 2002, 2005, 2008; Landry, 2000; Hall, 1998, 2000). I narrowed this list down in chapter 2 to amenity, diversity (as well as tolerance and openness), and university. My questions are: do these conditions exist in Tianzifang? Does Tianzifang

1 Shikumen is the characteristic residential architecture of Shanghai, and mostly established during 1920s. It features a combination of southern Chinese dwellings and the Western row houses.
attract creative people for the same reasons that creative districts in the U.S. and other Western societies do, or are other factors in play? How do Chinese creative people make location decisions? What sustains Tianzifang’s attraction for creative people?

These Western theories of the attractions between the place and creative people are built on the assumption that creative people have a high degree of geographic mobility that allows them to move wherever they wish (Florida, 2002, 2008; Landry, 2000; Currid, 2006, 2007; Hall, 1998, 2000). However, some scholars suggest that Chinese creative people are less mobile than Westerners (Keane, 2012; Florida, Mellander & Qian, 2008) due to the national hukou policy (inhabitant-registration system), which has placed many constraints on mobility. In China, mobility and residency are under the control of the Communist party. This study examined this limitation and the degree to which the hukou system hinders creative people.

The last issue focuses on the creative class and their production system of creativity: how it operates to generate, exchange, and merchandize ideas and products in creative industries. Contemporary creativity is often understood as an effect of social interactions within small groups rather than as an indicator of individual ability (Fischer, Giaccardi, Eden, Sugimoto, & Ye, 2005; Parsons, 2010a, 2010b; Efland, 2010). This characteristic of intensive face-to-face interactions also makes geographical agglomeration necessary for creative industries (Scott, 1999b; Caves, 2003). Living in a creative community is the desired lifestyle of the creative class because they like to have opportunities to bump into artists or other types of creative people in their everyday lives (Florida, 2002); Currid (2007) states that the “walkability” (p. 9) of streets and neighborhood makes meetings between creative providers and buyers possible. Tianzifang is a living community which has narrow lanes, which may enhance opportunities for social interaction. In addition, those places that promote and allow informal communications, such as
coffee shops, galleries, restaurants and bars, are considered important “third places” (Oldenburg, 1989); they are important for nurturing interactive ideas in a creative community. Therefore, in the case of Tianzifang, I wonder whether face-to-face experiences matter to members of the Chinese creative class. Do the many coffee houses and bars surrounded in Tianzifang tend to support the creative spirit? How do creative Chinese people differ from the Western creative class?

Deriving from these four issues, I constructed four specific research questions for the case Tianzifang and list them below. The questions will be discussed in chapter 5, 6, 7, and 8:

(1) How has Tianzifang emerged and matured as a creative district?
(2) How have the infrastructure and physical spaces of Tianzifang been used as a creative district?
(3) What are the attractions of Tianzifang for the creative class?
(4) How does the creative production system in Tianzifang?

Definitions of Terms

Creative Class

The concept of a creative class is mainly derived from Florida (2002). It indicates people who earn a living using their personal creativity. They are not defined by how much they earn but rather by their economic functions, which involve contributing their creative capital. The super-creative core of the creative class includes people in art, design, and architecture who produce products and services that are “readily transferable and broadly useful” (Florida, 2005, p. 34). In addition, they share similar lifestyle choices and social and cultural preferences, and these characteristics are part of their social identities. In this study, the creative class is defined as
people who contribute through their creativity to the production or marketing of creative products or services, mainly in art and design. They are artists, photographers, graphic designers, gallery owners, art agents, and art business entrepreneurs.

**Creative District**

I define a creative district as a neighborhood that nurtures creative industries within a residential area. A district can range over a number of blocks, including the workshops and studios of creative industries, as well as the infrastructure of neighborhood dwellings, markets, and public spaces. Although the terms “creative industries cluster” (chungyi changyei jiju qu) and “creative park” (chungyi changyei yuan) are more frequently used than “creative district” in China, I use ‘creative district’ to highlight a place that mixes industrial and residential areas, rather than a place which is purely industrial agglomeration. In this case study, Tianzifang is the an account of a creative district situated between Taikang Road, Shinan Road, Rejin Second Road, and Jiangquo Mid Road.

**Significance of the Study**

The study is of a Chinese version of a creative district. Western creative districts have been well studied and documented, but the craze of establishing creative districts for pursuing a creative economy is just emerging in China and has yet to be thoroughly studied. By applying theories and experiences developed in the West, this study details how the Chinese are adapting the Western model and developing their own model. It is also a unique case of a creative district developed in a Communist country, whereas other successful cases noted in the literature were almost exclusively in capitalist societies. This study therefore projects a view different than the Western mainstream discourse about creative districts, creative class and creativity, and starts a
dialogue by scrutinizing the similarities and differences across cultures.

In addition, this study identifies some research topics that have yet to attract much attention in the parts of academia that study mainland China. For example, the issues include gentrification of creative districts in China, the Chinese creative class of the post-80s generation, and the production system(s) in creative industries in China. Besides, as Jiang (2011) argues, most studies conducted in China provide either a general introduction to policies or a focus on quantitative data, but lack detailed empirical references. This study uses ethnographic methods to understand the life within, and the multiple meanings of, a creative district from the insiders’ perspectives.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study does not attempt to generate results that can be generalized to other creative districts in China or the world at large. In addition, it is concerned with the people who work and live in the creative district rather than with its industrial and economic growth. Analysis of quantitative economic data is not included.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the dominant description of creativity in the contemporary context: creative economy, creative class, creative industries, and how creativity has been generated—primarily by individual or by socially inspired. The sections of creative milieux and the meaning of spaces/places discuss how places matter and their attraction to creative talent. Finally, the last section focuses on the related literatures and studies on Shanghai’s creative districts.

Creativity in Contemporary Context

Creativity: Individual versus Social

Individual Creativity. Creativity was traditionally assumed to be an individual property. Some psychologists believed that creativity is a measurable human trait that everyone possessed to some degree (Guilford, 1950, 1967; Torrance, 1962a, 1962b). The most significant individual characteristic is recognized as divergent thinking (Plucker & Renzulli, 1999; Runco, 2007; Sternberg & O’Hara, 1999), which involves “a broad search for information and the generation of numerous novel answers to problems” (Sternberg & O’ Hara, 1999, p. 252). Some argue that creativity is a thinking process involving problem solving (Baird, 1983; Wallas, 1926; Isaksen, 1988). A problem is usually “a situation with a goal and obstacle” (Runco, 2007, p. 14), and the individual requires a delicate and flexible mind to deal with the obstacle and find solutions.

Creativity as Social. Going beyond individual properties, more and more contemporary scholars tend to consider creativity as the product of social interactions with other individuals within a domain or across domains.
Creativity as a human trait is socially influenced. As with human intelligence, scholars believe that certain social factors, such as education level, cultural context, interpersonal relationships, may affect an individual’s creative production in a life-long scale (Cox, 1926; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Feldman, 1980; Freeman, 2010; Gardner, 1993). For example, Freeman (2010) indicates that Einstein might not have invented the theory of relativity if he had not lived in a culture that was open to the idea of space travel and had not interacted with other physicists, and Picasso similarly might not have drawn Guernica without being a part of the culture in which he lived.

Creativity is socially constructed: collaboration within a domain. Another view sees creativity as a process and result of social interaction within an academic domain. Csikszentmihalyi (1999) claims that creativity is recognized only within a system, where the domain and field has already been established to judge individual’s product as creative or not. An idea isn’t creative by itself but must be recognized by the public. In this sense, Van Gogh would be seen today as a neurotic who made strange paintings rather than as a creative artist if he had not been accepted by the system—the domain of art and the field of art historians and critics.

Creativity is enhanced by social interactions within a group. The last view, probably the majority opinion today, is that creativity is a result of social interaction with other individuals. Parsons (2010a) says “[creativity] is a product of their exchange of knowledge, ideas and points of view as much as of their individual abilities” (p. 545). Fischer and his colleagues (2005) identify two types of interactions, either domain-oriented or cross-domain oriented. Domain-oriented interaction is similar to Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of a group of people who deal with problems in the same domain. On the other hand, cross-domain oriented interaction emphasizes interdisciplinary dialogues, which are particularly valuable today. One reason is that human
beings face more difficult and complicated problems than ever: global climate change, the crash of the world economy, controlling infectious diseases, designing software programs, etc. These problems are thought to be too complex for any one individual to deal with; they require many types of knowledge and thus they call for combinations of experts in different disciplines (Fischer et al., 2005; Parsons, 2010a, 2010b, Efland, 2010). As Parsons (2010b) says: “Creativity today...lies in the conceptual interaction of ideas from different disciplines, in overlaying one conceptual scheme on another, in developing new procedures or applying old ones to new areas” (p. 35). In this sense, creative people use their old knowledge and skills in different disciplines to create new uses.

According to some theorists, creative people prefer living in an environment where they can encounter other creative individuals. Florida (2002) indicates, “[artistic, scientific, and technological creativity] reinforce each other through cross-fertilization and mutual stimulation. And so through history practitioners of the different forms of creativity have tended to congregate and feed off one another in teeming, multifaceted creative centers” (p. 4). Such social interaction may not be intentionally problem-solving oriented but is rather a way of generating and exchanging ideas in everyday life. The importance of social interaction to the creative class will be elaborated later.

The Creative Economy

In the business context, creativity traditionally refers to innovation in aspects that enhance business performance (KEA European Affairs, 2006; Department of Trade and Industry, 2005; Boston Redevelopment Authority, 2006). These aspects, as economist Schumpeter (1950) suggests, include new products, raw materials, processes, management methods and marketing. However, what people around the world are more recently excited by is not economic creativity
but a creative economy—a rising model of the economy on a global platform. The dominant economic model has shifted from the traditional industrial economy to a knowledge economy and finally to the creative economy (Peters & Araya, 2010). In 2005, Business Week claimed that the knowledge economy has ended and we are entering the age of the creative economy. Pink (2005) also declared the birth of the creative economy, saying: “We are embarking on an age of pervasive creativity that permeates all sectors of the economy and society…We are truly in the midst of a creative transformation with the onset of a Creative Economy” (p. 56).

**Descriptions of the Creative Economy.** The term creative economy first appeared in Howkins’ (2001) book: *The Creative Economy: How People make Money from Ideas*, which discussed the relationship between creativity and economics. According to Howkins, creativity and economy are not new ideas but what is significant is how they work hand in hand to generate extraordinary value and wealth. The UNCTAD (2008) indicates, “Creativity’ in this context refers to the formulation of new ideas and to the application of these ideas to produce original works of art and cultural products, functional creations, scientific inventions and technological innovations” (p. 3). UNCTAD (2010) defines the creative economy as “an evolving concept based on creative assets potentially generating economic growth and development” (p. 10). In other words, the creative economy is a model of an economy that uses human creativity to generate cultural, scientific, and technological products and thus creates considerable value.

**The Economic Potential.** According to UNCTAD (2010), the creative economy has been recognized as the most dynamic sector of the economy in the world. Many economists are optimistic about the profits the creative economy will bring. In Howkins’ estimate (2001), the world creative economy was worth 2.2 trillion in 2000 and is growing at 5% annually. The UNCTAD report (2010) shows that worldwide exports of creative products and services continue
to grow. In spite of the economic crisis of 2008, they have grown at an annual growth rate at 14% since 2002. Because of the economic potential, many countries are investing in creativity and developing appropriate policies. Developing countries whose economy is primarily supported by providing low-cost labor in the global production chain are eager to change.

**Creative Industries**

The core of creative economy is creative industries (Howkins, 2001). UNCTAD defines creative industries as “the cycles of creation, production and distribution of goods and services that use creativity and intellectual capital as primary inputs” (2008, p. 4). Broadly speaking, people who engage in the production line of creative goods or services are categorized as in the population of creative industries. Newspaper printing workers and journalists are both members of publishing, which is usually categorized as a creative industry.

In general, what are classified as creative industries? The usages vary. Some emphasize the arts and cultural productions as the main components (Howkins, 2001; UNCTAD, 2004). For example, UNCTAD (2004) claims that creative industry “relies on enlarging the concept of ‘creativity’ from activities having a strong artistic component to ‘any economic activity producing symbolic products with a heavy reliance on intellectual property and for as wide a market as possible” (p. 4), and comprises four large groups, which are heritage, arts, media, and functional creations. However, recently, more and more scholars or institutions extend the range to scientific and technological industries (Florida, 2002; Hollanders & Cruyksen, 2009; KEA European Affairs, 2006; UNCTAD, 2008, 2010). They believe that creativity in scientific creations is similar to the creativity in artistic creations (UNCTAD, 2010), and they are interrelated. Florida (2002) explains, “Not only do [artistic, scientific, and technological
creativity] share a common thought process, they reinforce each other through cross-fertilization and mutual stimulation” (p. 4).

The Creative Class

Theories

Creative people are the main driving force in the creative economy. Florida (2002) terms this new emerging group the creative class and defines them as people who use their creativity to add economic value to products. It may worth noting that the term creative class is different from the traditional usage of social-economic class. The word “class” to Marxists refers to the relation of people to the means of production—who owns and who does not own the cows, machines, factories and tools that help to gain wealth. However, in Florida’s view, the creative class possesses intangible creative capital rather than actual property. Furthermore, the creative class is defined by its economic function of “creating new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content” (p. 8). In this sense, factory laborers and low-end service workers can both be creative by devoting their knowledge, skill, and experience to providing novel solutions rather than merely offering physical labor.

According to Florida (2002), there are two groups underpinning the structure of the creative class: the super-creative core and the creative professionals. The core includes people in arts, design, music, education, science, architecture, and engineering, who “produce new forms or designs that are readily transferable and broadly useful—such as designing a product that can be widely made, sold and used” (Florida, 2002b, p. 11). The other group is creative professionals, who deal with knowledge-intensive industries. It includes workers in business, law, and health, in which people “engage in complex problem solving that involves a great deal of independent
judgment and requires high levels of education or human capital” (p. 8). The size of the Creative Class is gradually increasing in the U.S. population. In Florida’s (2002) calculation, 30 percent of Americans today fit under the big umbrella of the creative class and it is replacing the old middle class as the economic foundation of the US.

**The Lives of the Creative Class**

The creative class is formed by social change, not by formally being established. Around 2000, pioneer journalists, sociologies, and economists noticed these transformations. David Brooks (2000) described the street scenery he saw in districts in the United States:

WASPy upscale suburbs were suddenly dotted with arty coffeehouses where people drank little European coffees and listened to alternative music. Meanwhile, the bohemian downtown neighborhoods were packed with multimillion-dollar lofts and those upscale gardening stores where you can buy a faux-authentic trowel for $35.99. Suddenly massive corporations like Microsoft and the Gap were on the scene, citing Gandhi and Jack Kerouac in their advertisements. And the status rules seemed to be turned upside down. Hip lawyers were wearing those teeny tiny steel-framed glasses because now it was apparently more prestigious to look like Franz Kafka than Paul Newman. (p. 9)

Brooks (2000) names these people *Bobos*—a mixed culture of bourgeois and bohemian values. Although he does not emphasize the economic function of these people as Florida does, Brooks indicates a new and growing lifestyle and points out that the previous social-economic status rules do not apply to it.

These creative people have similar ways of living. “It [is] now impossible to tell an espresso-sipping artist from a cappuccino-gulping banker. And this wasn’t just a matter of

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2 WASP stands for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant
fashion accessories” (p. 10), says Brooks (2000), and he states that the creative class, or in his words the Bobos, share similar attitudes toward sex, morality, leisure time, and work. Florida (2002) argues that the members of the creative class share similar tastes, desires and preferences because of their similar economic function and indicates four aspects of human existence that have fundamentally changed: work, lifestyle, time, and community.

**No-collar Workplace.** The first transformation is the preference for a no-collar environment. Florida (2002) says the traditional hierarchical workplace is replaced by free, artistic-style work atmospheres. He calls it *soft control*, meaning a workplace celebrating self-management, inner motivation, and peer recognition. “Artists, musicians, professors and scientists have always set their own hours, dressed in relaxed and casual clothes and worked in stimulating environments. They could never be forced to work, yet they were never truly not at work” (Florida, 2002, p. 12). The free working style may refer to SOHO (Small Office/Home Office), a similar idea indicating people who work individually or in a small group at home instead of at an office.

The release from physical workplaces is actually an assertion of globalization. The prevalence of personal computers with fiber-optic cable and workflow software together has flattened the world, (Friedman, 2006; Pink, 2005), and thus made the no-collar workplace possible. Meanwhile, more and more labor-intensive jobs have outsourced to developing countries

**Multidimensional Lifestyle.** Second is the desire for a diversity of experiences. Florida (2002) says that creative people pursue multidimensional lifestyles and are eager to construct identities as creative. They give themselves labels such as jazz lover, rock climber, or wine enthusiast, rather than labels such as manager or lawyer. One of the examples of an experiential
lifestyle is LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability), described by Ray and Anderson (2000) in his The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People are Changing the World. The LOHAS represents a particular interest in sustainable and green life, and is believed to be attractive to well-educated creatives. Multiple identities empower the creative class; they are no longer merely identified by their occupation or employment status, but by their connections to creative activities.

**Wrapped Time.** Third, people wrap up their work time and play time together. “The core issue is not when we work or the number of hours we put in,” says Florida (2002), “but that our use of time has intensified. We pack every second—whether at work or leisure—full of creative stimuli and experiences.” (p. 14). The new concept of time usage merges with the changes of workplace. People are working when they are supposed to be playing, and playing when they should be working, and they want a place that allows work and play to happen simultaneously.

**Creative Community.** Fourth, creative people tend to live in creative communities, because they are “A place that enables us to reflect and reinforce our identities as creative people, pursuing the kind of work we choose, and having ready access to a wide range of lifestyle amenities” (Florida, 2002, p. 15). The desire to cluster with other creative people is an important concept in Florida’s theory and it is also important for my research to further understand Tianzefang.

**Creative Class and Economic Growth**

Another significant assertion that Florida (2002) makes is about the correlation between the creative class and economic growth. Florida believes that regional economic growth is driven
by the location decisions of creative people rather than by large enterprises. Creative people have high mobility to move to somewhere they like. Since creative people possess creative capital, where they stay decides where the economy grows. Therefore, following Florida’s logic, the more creative people gather in a place, the better business performance it has. In short, to attract creative people, create a desirable living environment first rather than an investment environment for enterprises, and economic growth will follow. This formula has made Florida’s theory popular worldwide, especially at the managerial level.

Florida (2002, 2005, 2008) applied several indicators to predict a region’s creativity or economic potential, and the most commonly used indexes are Bohemian Index, Gay Index, and Melting Pot Index. The “Bohemian index” is based on the population of bohemians in a region. He defines bohemian by occupations, including authors, designers, musicians and composers, actors and directors, craft-artists, painters, sculptors, and artist printmakers, photographers, dancers, and artists, performers, and so on. He finds that bohemians function as a talent magnet to attract hi-tech workers, so the more bohemians cluster, the better creative economy it becomes. Florida (2005) explains: “the presence and concentration of bohemians in an area creates an environment or milieu that attracts other types of talented or high human-capital individuals. The presence of such human capital concentrations in a region in turn attracts and generates innovative technology-based industries” (p. 114).

The “Gay index” is another indicator of Florida’s that can successfully predict the economy, because gays are a strong sign of a diverse and progressive environment. Florida and his colleagues utilize US Census data to calculate gay population of certain area and find that the concentration of gay people has a high correlation with creative economy. However, Florida (2002, 2005) explains, this doesn’t mean that the creative class is constituted of bohemians or
gay people; it indicates an environment or atmosphere of openness and diversity that is popular with bohemians, gay people, and members of the creative class in general.

**Criticisms**

The causal relationship between creative class and economic growth is somewhat controversial. Some critics attack Florida’s statistics and question his data (Clark, 2004; Glaeser, 2005; Malanga, 2004; Kotkin & Siegel, 2004). Glaeser (2005) ran regression analyses of Florida’s data and reports that there is very little independent effect of the concentration of bohemians, and he argues that the gay index is also problematic because of its high correlation with educational attainment. Kotkin & Siegel (2004) point out that the historical economic growth in 1990—during which Florida gathered his initial database—shifted to “less fashionable but livable locales” (p. 16) in the aftermath of the dot.com bubble. Others also indicate that the assertion of a causal link between these indicators and economic growth is problematic. Peck (2005) compresses Florida’s idea:

…growth derives from creativity and therefore it is creatives that make growth; growth can only occur if the creatives come, and the creatives will only come if they get what they want; what the creatives want is tolerance and openness, and if they find it, they will come; and if they come, growth will follow (p. 757).

This simplified formula represents the essence of Florida’s idea and suggests that the causal mechanisms may be circular (Marcuse, 2003; Houston, 2011; Pratt, 2008). The causality could even go in the opposite direction: The clustering of creative people could be an effect of economic growth, rather than a cause (Malizia & Feser, 2005; Malanga, 2004). Still others consider alternative possible influences in the causal link. Maliszewski (2004) argues that the side effects of an informal economy, such as coffee shops, restaurants, and music scenes around
the district, are what stimulate the economy. Markusen (2006) argues that the creative class gathers merely because of educational attainment, occupations, and political proclivities and not because of creativity.

The theory of creative class neglects the problems of the working poor, and creative districts may exacerbate intra-urban inequality. Florida argues for an unrestrained workforce, the free-agent economy, the flexible lifestyles, and the new freedom that no-collar workplaces generate, but he pays no attention to the divisions of labor within such mechanisms and does not mention the possible social downsides (Baris, 2003; Peck, 2005; Maliszewski, 2004). Peck (2005) argues, “A swelling contingent economy of under laborers may, in fact, be a necessary side-effect of the creatives’ lust for self validation, 24/7 engagement, and designer coffee” (p. 756). Furthermore, the rise of the creative class accelerates the process of gentrification of districts and sometimes serves as an agent to facilitate real estate development (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007; Peck, 2005).

Some claim that Florida disregards the attractions of job offers and the production system itself to sustaining creative industries (Markusen, 2006; Scott, 2005). Scott (2005) argues that the existence of creative people is not enough to sustain a creative economy for a long period; the key is an established local production system. He asserts: “Any city that lacks a system of employment able to provide these individuals with appropriate and durable means of earning a living is scarcely in a position to induce significance numbers of them to take up permanent residence there…” (p. 23). Moreover, different occupations may affect the location decision of individuals (Marcuzen, 2006). For example, engineers may be inclined to move to Silicon Valley while artists may prefer New York City, because of the job markets. Florida neither takes a
closer look at the demand and supply of job markets nor does he inspect the inner operation system within designated industries.

Although Florida’s theories face many challenges, the act of fostering and attracting the creative class has been discussed world-wide. He made people notice that the creative class emerges with global economic change and it has formed certain creative lifestyles. He also reveals the economic function of the creative class and points out strategies to improve economic growth at the managerial level. His theory also firmly ties creative people to locations, and together they generate the power of creative economy.

**Creative Milieux**

**The Geography of Creativity**

The connection of creativity with location had not been much addressed until the 1990s. Csiksentmihalyi (1996) states that learning and commercial centers have always acted as magnets to attract creative minds: “[e]ven Leonardo, that paragon of creativity, kept serving one master after another, depending on which duke, pope, or king could best finance his dreams” (p. 128). Being in the right place and highly mobile are survival features of creatives. Gardner’s (1993) research shows that most creative people, what he calls exemplary creators, move to an urban cultural center during or after adolescence. He studied the life patterns of seven exemplary creators from different domains and found that they came from somewhere removed from centers of influence, and then found an interest group when they moved to a bigger city.³

³The chosen subjects were: Albert Einstein in logical-mathematical intelligence; Picasso in visual-spatial intelligence; Igor Stravinsky in music intelligence; Martha Graham bodily-kinesthetic intelligence; Mahatma Gandhi in interpersonal intelligence; Sigmund Freud in intrapersonal intelligence; and T. S. Eliot in language intelligence.
Flat v.s. Spiky World. The importance of location faces challenges when the digital age emerges. *The Economist* (1995) claims “the death of distance”: “Thanks to technology and competition in telecoms, distance will soon be no object…” (Cairncross, 1995, p. 16). In *The World is Flat*, Friedman (2006) declared that the world has shrunk to a tiny size and the playing field is flattened, and technological inventions “…enabled individuals all over the world to collaborate on that same digital content from anywhere, regardless of the distances between them” (p. 11). Once one gets a digital device with high-speed Internet and the workflow software, one can run the business and fairly compete with others around the world.

The idea of the death of distance seems right if we neglect some facts. The population and economic activities are both increasing in certain urban areas. Florida et al. (2008) illustrate the global population and economy on a world map to demonstrate the dramatic differences between places and state: “Today’s global economy is powered by a surprisingly small number of places…The tallest spikes—the cities and regions that drive the world economy—are growing ever higher, while the valleys—places that boast little, economic activity—mostly languish” (p. 19). Locations do matter (Florida, 2008; Leamer, 2007; Porter, 2006). Csiksentmihalyi (1996) asserts that information is not evenly distributed but is gathered in certain geographical nodes. “Even with our dazzling electronic means for exchanging information”, he explains, “New York is still the best place for an aspiring artists to find out firsthand what’s happening in the art world, what future trends other artists are talking about now” (p. 128). The advanced technology somehow conquers the physical distance and makes the world flat, but location decisions still matter.
Theories of Creative Milieux

As discussed in the former paragraph, Csiksentmihalyi (1996) and Gardner (1993) both mention the influences of places in shaping creative individuals. However, today’s dominant theories focus not merely on how places stimulate human creativity but on the interaction between creative people and places within the creative economy. The interest in creativity increased among researchers of urban planning and economic geography around 2000 (Krueger & Buckingham, 2009). There are a number of well-known publications that deal with creative places, such as Peter Hall’s Cities in civilization in 1998, Charles Landry’s The creative city: A toolkit for urban innovators in 2000, and a series of influential works of Richard Florida (2002, 2005, 2008).4

As an historian and urban planner, Hall (1998) describes how cities became creative centers in different times. He reviewed fifteen cities, including Athens, Florence, Berlin, Tokyo, and London, and categorizes them into cultural, commercial, and technological centers. For instance, London in Shakespeare’s time was recognized as a cultural crucible. Hall (1998) says there was:

… a mere fifty-year span, from 1570 to 1620, where a golden stream of poetry and drama poured forth from Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Once again, it emerges, this was the world’s great merchant city of its day, exploring the limits of the world and drawing bounty from it; once again, there was an eruption of wealth creation and of conspicuous consumption; once again, talent was drawn in, from Oxford and Cambridge and Midlands grammar schools; most notable of all, like both Athens and Florence, this was an

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4 The series of Richard Florida’s works include: The rise of the creative class: And how it’s transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life in 2000; Cities and the creative class in 2005; Who’s your city? in 2008.
economy and a society in the throes of transformation, from a traditional aristocratic order to a new system based on merit and enterprise, and the resulting tensions powerfully expressed themselves in the art itself. (p. 22)

In this case, from Hall’s perspective London was a city vibrant with business activity, high-rank universities were close to cultivating future talents, and the city itself was transforming from the traditional to the new. In a similar way, Landry (2000) studies several cases of modern cities and concludes that to flourish they require cultural facilities, urban buzz, a good quality of life, and face-to-face communications, rather than just the venture capital and distribution chains that featured as supportive elements in the industrial age.

Landry also applies the theory of creative milieux onto small scale regions. For Landry (2000), a creative milieu can be a city as a whole, a region, or a district of a few blocks that possesses certain infrastructures to generate ideas and inventions. Most importantly, a creative milieu is a physical setting where “entrepreneurs, intellectuals, social activists, artists, administrators, power brokers or students can operate in an open-minded, cosmopolitan context and where face to face interaction creates new ideas, artifacts, products, services and institutions and as a consequence contributes to economic success” (p. 133). Diverse creative people cluster in a district where ideas are generated and exchanges are frequent and where the interwoven activities benefit a creative economy.

Florida (2000) particularly points out that seeking and living in creative communities is one of the dominant features of the lifestyle of the creative class—no matter in what form of creativity. He talks of “a place that enables us to reflect and reinforce our identities as creative people, pursuing the kind of work we choose, and having ready access to a wide range of
lifestyle amenities” (p. 15). In this sense, a creative milieu is a field for creative people to share beliefs, and also an eco-system or habitat that satisfies diverse creative people’s physical needs.

**Preconditions of Creative Milieux**

It is obvious that certain milieux are more creative than others, but it is a question what makes these districts attractive to creative people? What are the critical preconditions of creative districts?

**Amenities.** Amenities are hard or soft infrastructures that maintain a good quality of life and have been recognized as crucial to creative people and thus enhance economic growth (Clark, 2004; Florida, 2002, 2008; Glaeser, 2005; Landry, 2000). In general, amenities include the beauty of a city, parks, museums, cleanliness and shopping facilities. According to Clark’s (2004) research, a majority of people would move toward such amenities, which in his words include “lakes, opera, and juice bars” (p. 103). Clark’s interpretation indicates some types of amenities: physically beauty, cultural facilities, and public meeting spaces, as discussed below.

**Physical beauty.** Physical beauty can be natural or constructed. Living alongside a beautiful lakeside or surrounded by clean urban parks is attractive to most people.

Although Maslow claimed that people start to seek other levels of satisfaction only when they have fulfilled their more basic needs, Florida (2008) believes a region’s physical beauty plays the same role as basic urban services. He indicates the view of traditional urban planners: “The key to a great community, they contend, lies in good schools, safe streets, and up-to-date infrastructure. Anything else—parks, trails, museums, or other amenities—is a luxury, aimed at the affluent, yuppies, and the privileged classes” (Florida, 2008, p. 162). The conservative perspective still locates beauty and the aesthetic at the top of the hierarchy of human needs and
therefore tend to associate them with rich people. However, Postrel argues (2003) that “people enrich the look and feel of their lives through ritual, personal adornment, and decorated objects” (p. 44) and the desire to make things special is not only “emotionally and sensorily gratifying” but also innate in all human beings. Heskett (2002) also states, “design, stripped to its essence, can be defined as the human capacity to shape and make our environment in ways without precedent in nature, to serve our needs and give meaning to our lives” (p. 7). Physical beauty, which can be extended to cultural offerings, acts in the same role as human basic services.

**Cultural facilities.** Cultural facilities are catalysts to creativity, creating working opportunities and thus attracting creative populations (Currid, 2007; Florida, 2002; Landry, 2000). According to Florida’s (2005) statistics, creative people are more likely to be attracted by cultural facilities than by recreational amenities or climate. The correlation between talent and cultural facilities is positive and significant. Cultural facilities such as museums, historical heritage and theaters help to form an environment where creative workers in different fields like to be. Florida (2002) states, “supporting lifestyle and cultural institutions, like a cutting-edge music scene or a vibrant artistic community, for instance, helps to attract and stimulate those who create in business and technology” (p. 55). Similarly, Currid (2007) interviewed a hundred creative workers in New York City and found that they are not just looking for jobs or business but were also attracted by the city’s cultural creativity. She says,

> While culture does generate employment and revenue, it also acts in an intangible way, operating as an attractor of diverse people and firms that are drawn to New York not just for business but also for its energy and creativity. Culture is often treated as an amenity and thus a lure for professionals and workers in other industries who want to love and work in a culturally vibrant place. (Currid, 2007, p. 46)
Public meeting spaces. Public meeting spaces offer face-to-face communication, in which creative ideas are generated and exchanges take place (Currid, 2007; Landry, 2000; Florida, 2002). As discussed in the first section of this chapter, social interaction is a major way to generate creativity in a contemporary context; therefore an environment that allows creative people to gather and maintain a social network is significant. Florida (2008) notes, “The physical proximity inherent in clustering provides ample face-to-face communication, information-sharing, and teaming required to innovate and improve productivity” (p. 120). In addition, public spaces offer a chance for people to go beyond their comfort zone and family circle to meet and experience unexpected surprises, discoveries, and adventures (Landry, 2000).

Coffee shops may be the item most frequently associated with creative meeting spots. Artists, journalists, poets, scientists and businessmen meet there daily to exchange news, gossip, and ideas (Landry, 2000). In other places, night clubs may play a similar role (Currid, 2007). Rather than limiting them to indoor spaces, Florida (2002) and Currid (2006, 2007) extend the category to include outdoor public spaces (such as streets or community). Florida (2002) explains:

You may not paint, write or play music, yet if you are at an art-show opening or in a nightspot where you can mingle and talk with artists and aficionados, you might be more creatively stimulated than if you merely walked into a museum or concert hall, were handed a program, and proceeded to spectate. The people in my focus groups and interviews say they like street-level culture partly because it gives them a chance to experience the creators along with their creations (p. 183)

Similarly, Currid (2006, 2007) highlights the “walkability” of a creative district on a community scale. She says, “The ‘walkability’ of New York’s streets and neighborhoods makes run-ins
possible between those offering artistic skill sets and those needing them” (p. 9). As such, creativity comes to life and embeds in neighborhoods, and interaction with creative people becomes a desired lifestyle.

**Universities.** Universities may sometimes be categorized as amenities, because a college town usually provides multiple ways of living at a decent standard. A gym, a library, convenient transportation system, and a safer environment all go together with universities. In fact, a university itself serves like a talent magnet and represents research capacity. Some scholars note the role of universities in attracting creative people (Hall, 1998; Florida, 2002). For example, Florida (2002) reports that Champaign-Urbana, although located in a cornfield area in central Illinois, has a very high density of creative people (mainly high-tech) because of the high-ranking university. But how to retain these creative assets after they graduate? Some claim that a university and its partnership with nearby industries is important to a flourishing regional creative economy. Landry (2000) notes the key is “…transferring theoretical knowledge into practical applications…” (p. 122). The nearby industries also provide an opportunity for further careers. Saxenian (1994) states that, in Boston, the collaboration between high-tech industries and local universities (mainly MIT and Harvard) make Boston a successful innovation center. On the west coast of United States, UC-Berkeley and Stanford have mutual beneficial relationships with companies by sharing research, laboratories, and professional training. In the latter case, these universities serve as talent banks nurturing Silicon Valley’s prospective engineers, and the linkage between universities and the job market strengthens the attraction.

**Diversity/Tolerance/Openness.** An open society that celebrates a diversity of ethnicities, races, and lifestyles is considered as a key factor in attracting a creative population. From historical case studies, Hall (2000) finds that great creative cities are all “cosmopolitan” (p. 646);
they continuously recruit the creative bloodstream by pulling talent from far corners around the world. A low entry barrier is crucial to outsiders and immigrants. Landry (2000) indicates, “In an environment where their contribution is allowed to flourish, rather than be feared, their different skills, talents, and cultural values lead to new ideas and opportunities” (p. 111).

Florida (2002, 2005) invents some indexes to gauge a place’s openness and diversity, and the most famous are Bohemian Index, Gay Index, and the Melting Pot Index. The former two indexes have been discussed in the previous section; the last one is the Melting Pot Index, which indicates the percentage of foreign-born people. His findings suggest that the concentration of these people signals an open and attractive environment to creative human capital, because “artists, musicians, gay people, and members of the creative class in general prefer places that are open and diverse” (2002, p. 10).

On the other hand, openness may result in conflict, instability, and even fear. Hall (2000) states that “…creative urban milieux are places of great social and intellectual turbulence: not comfortable places at all” (p. 646), and newcomers may feel themselves outsiders and feel a certain state of disjuncture and ambiguity because of not belonging to the established order. Furthermore, Hall (2002) believes that creative places must have their own established heritage but be open to challenges and revolution at the same time. He illustrates the claim with Vienna in 1900, London in 1600, or Paris in 1860: they were in highly unstable political situations but nurtured highly creative productions.
The Meaning of Spaces and Places

Ideological Perspective

Space and place are currently research themes in the humanities and social sciences. This began in 1960, when French theorists began to view space as a socially produced product rather than seeing space as being merely an index of physical nature. Sinha and Ito (1998) designated the social-oriented spatial interpretation as the *ideological* perspective, noting that space can be manipulated by Marxism, fascism, or capitalism in order to generate symbolic value to represent authority. Foucault believes that space implies knowledge and power, the relationship of space-knowledge-power dominates the order of where we exist, and socially indicates who we are (Goldberg, 1996). Lefebvre (1974) states that space is a social product that underlies social relationships, and every society produces its own space. Space produces social relationships and is reproduced by social relationships as well.

American scholar Soja (1996) employs Lefebvre’s concepts to develop his “thirdspace” theory. This indicates a social, lived spatiality that merges with the real (first) and imagined (second) spaces. The imagined space is mentally ordered. In Lefebvre’s words, it is socially “conceived” and only exists in the minds of people, but it can project its ideologies into the real “perceived” space. We human beings act in the third space which contains our bodily experiences and simultaneously mediates the invisible power in everyday life.

Some scholars note that space reflects the social, while activity constructs the social (Massey, 2005; Laguerre, 1999). Space in this sense is not neutral or empty, but may be a means of minoritizing people who reside within it. Laguerre (1999) argues that minoritized spaces are “the myriad forms of positionality that generate social distance and that maintain and reproduced social hierarchy, oppression, and discrimination in society (p. 5),” and that the minoritized
positions are spatialized and respatialized by the mainstream, in Laguerre’s case, white population.

**Psychological Perspective**

Another perspective was categorized by Sinha and Ito (1998) as *psychological*, which interferes with one’s emotions, memories and experiences within spaces and places. Scholars of human geography emphasize personal experiences regarding places. Relph (1976) notes: “To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place” (p. 1). The meaning of places is significant only to those who make it meaningful. This is the distinction between “spaces” and “places”: once meaning is given, spaces become places (Cresswell, 2004; Tuan, 1977; 1979). Tuan (1977) says: “Spaces are marked off and defended against intruders. Places are centers of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied” (p. 4).

What makes a place meaningful, and how does it happen? Places that trigger one’s emotions do this. Agnew (1987) identifies the sense of place as one aspect of a meaningful location, referring to one’s subjective and emotional attachment to place. Tuan (1979) sees a place as being meaningful when people express as being more likely to offer an “emotional charge” as opposed to its functional use. My bedroom is significant to me and is not simply a room; a neighborhood park is valuable to local residents rather than being just any public space; Chicago is meaningful to citizens and cannot be reduced to being merely the name of a city on the map.

One thought considers that spatial meaning is imbued with bodily experience. For instance, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of body discusses the constitutive relationship
between bodies and spaces. For Merleau-Ponty, one understands the world through his or her bodily situatedness; one’s body is not just an object in space. Merleau-Ponty (1945) explains:

It is of the essence of space to be always ‘already constituted’, and we shall never come to understand it by withdrawing into a worldless perception. We must not wonder why being is oriented, why existence is spatial, why…our body is not geared to the world in all its positions, and why its co-existence with the world magnetizes experience and induces a direction in it. (p. 293)

Again, space is not experienced as neutral, but is instead magnetized or constituted with particular meanings by race, gender, sexuality, class, nation of origin, and other characteristics of human existence (Sullivan, 2001).

Creative Districts in Shanghai

China has promoted creative industries and districts in Shanghai since 2006 in order to increase a creative economy and at the same time to facilitate urban and industrial reforms (Keane, 2009, 2011; Zheng, 2010).

Creative Clusters and Creative Districts

In Shanghai, all creative districts are creative clusters but not all creative clusters are creative districts. To identify the differences, I will elaborate the concept of creative clusters. The term “creative cluster” usually refers to a physical agglomeration of creative industries. Porter (1998) explains: “Today’s economic map of the world is dominated by what I call clusters: critical masses—in one place—of unusual competitive success in particular fields” (p. 78). Creative clusters (chung yi chang yei ji ju) are becoming popular in China due to their effects.
The geographic proximity promotes economic, social, and cultural interactions between firms, and is essential to their survival and growth (UNCTAD, 2010). Scott (2005) argues,

By clustering together, firms are able to economize on their spatial inter-linkages, to reap the multiple advantages of a spatially concentrated labour market, to tap into the abundant information flows and innovative potentials that are present wherever many different specialized but complementary producers are congregated, and so on. (p. 7)

Keane (2009) says that clusters are “…methods for assembling and managing creative labour” (p. 225). He cites Ryan’s (1992) statement that the idea of clustering creative labour can be traced back to the nineteenth century as a way to manage and enhance artistic production. In addition Keane argues that creative industrial clustering provides opportunities for emerging business practices or, in economic terms, rent-seeking. He uses Songzhuang Village as an example:

Here, more than 2000 artists produce original work. Many of these paintings make their way into the thousands of contemporary art galleries in China’s big cities. In addition, tax is levied on paintings sold in exhibitions and auctions, which adds kudos to the career trajectories of local officials, even if the tax revenue goes directly to the national and the city government. (p. 225-226)

In most cases, creative clusters in China reuse abandoned warehouses or factories that either have shut down or have moved to other spaces (Hui, 2006). Shanghai, as a traditional industrial city, has many old building built around 1930 and thus offers spaces for refilling with creative industries. After renewal, these spaces develop into various types of clusters: precincts (yuanqu), theme parks (zhuti gonyuan), culture streets (wenhua jie), film, TV and animation bases (yingshi jidi) and multimedia corridors (duo meiti zoulang) (Keane, 2011). These creative clusters are sometimes translated as Creative Parks in Shanghai’s official website.
However, the term “creative district” applies to a zone that combines industrial and residential areas; it enlarges the creative production region from a workplace to a living environment. In most cases, creative clusters in Shanghai refer to one or two office buildings; only few of them have extended to include the neighborhood as creative districts.

There seems a trend in China to encourage the development of creative districts. According to Keane’s (2009) article, China has categorized three stages in establishing creative clusters and districts. The first stage is simply reusing old workplaces for new industries without considering the market, and the clustering is usually an agglomeration of the same industry. At the second stage, some types of clusters develop tourism and customer services. These offer a place where creative people can “enjoy a greater sense of freedom to express themselves” (p. 227) and they sometimes attract international creative workers to live. An informal economy such as coffee shops and restaurants also blooms in them. The final stage is the “related variety” (p. 227) model. This model is similar to the first stage but this is a mix of small enterprises selling graphic design, photography, and painting and fashion products. And in the second and third stages, creative districts are gradually extended from the industrial zone to living and commercial areas.

**Possible Issues**

Articles on creative districts indexed by the *China Academic Journals Full-Text Database* (CJFD) mainly discuss regional economic growth or serve as propaganda for government’s policies. Academic dissertations and theses also focus on the typology of creative industries in different regions (mainly the first-tier cities), the introduction of cultural and creative policies, and the development of creative intellectual property (Jiang, 2011).
However, some independent researchers point out some issues that should not be taken for granted. The first is the too great interference of government. As an Australian expert, Keane (2012) mentions “the ubiquitous hand of government” (p. 135) in controlling creative industries, although at a more remote distance than in the past. He argues that Shanghai’s capitalists who develop the creative industries are mostly “government agencies” (p. 136); they get official funding and somehow rely on local government rather than run their business independently. Yasheng Huang (2008), a Chinese professor who works at MIT Sloan School of Management in the US, notes that “Despite a rich history of business creation and risk-taking, entrepreneurship is almost completely missing in Shanghai” (Huang, 2008, p. 177). He argues that the relatively high governmental interference in Shanghai constrains the freedom of economic development. This statement seems to contradict the image of Shanghai as an open and international metropolis but it provides one perspective of the role of government in my research.

Secondly, the estate developers seem to play a more important role in forming creative districts. Western scholars have noticed this influence in establishing a creative district for attracting creative class and have argued that it may accelerate gentrification, the profit going mostly to the real estate developers (Grodach & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007; Peck, 2005). This situation appears to be severe in Shanghai. According to Jane Zheng (2010), a professor of the University of Hong Kong, many real estate companies participate in the creative districts developing projects, and sometimes even take the lead. Creative estates (chungyi dichang) is now an emerging industry with the fever of establishing creative districts, and the goal is to renew an area and thus increase the rents. The most well-known example is probably Xintiandi, which is one of Shanghai’s popular tourist destinations operated by Hong Kong’s Shui On Group. Shui On (a real estate company) spent 9 years (1999 to 2007) investing 150 million US dollars in
reconstructing old Shikumen buildings to a 29,500 square meter modern consumption area (Bai Du, 2013). By representing the 1930’s China image, the renewed Xintiandi district attracts entrepreneurs, bankers, artists, movie stars to live there, and also causes international enterprises to open shops there. Xintiandi today is one of the golden districts that require very high rent. Needless to say, the real estate company is one of the winners.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Getting Close to the Culture: A Case Study Inspired by Ethnography

The main purpose of this study was to explore Tianzifang and the people who live or work in this district. In order to depict the complexities of Tianzifang, I used the qualitative case study method that draws from ethnography. As Stake (1995) argues, a case study aims to “catch the complexity”, “special interest”, and “particularity” (p. xi) of a single case; while ethnography usually represents the meanings, beliefs, practices, artifacts, knowledge, and behaviors that the cultural participants take for granted (Bresler, 1995; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Both approaches emphasize the interpretations of the researched but an ethnographer is more likely to bring her own perceptions and perspectives into the field with the engagement of “non-attached connectedness” (Bresler, 2013, p.9). I used ethnographic methods to conduct data collection and analysis.

Ethnographic study is field-oriented and involves both emic and etic, aka insiders’ and outsiders'/researchers’ perspectives. On one hand, the researcher is usually an outsider of the observed culture, who is able to see things with fresh eyes as if they were unusual and unique, and is explicitly aware that the taken-for-granted or unacceptable elements in the observed culture (Erickson, 1973; Spindler & Spindler, 1992). On the other hand, the researcher is simultaneously an insider, who understands local cultural meanings and can translate the local cultural language. Finally, as Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) say, researchers have to act like members of the culture. The study is the process of making unfamiliar familiar and making the familiar unfamiliar. In my case study, the identification of outsider and insider were intrinsically set. As became an insider, my language and my cultural background were my strengths
to understand the observed culture. I am a native speaker and writer of Chinese who grew up in Taiwan, and this helped me get close to the culture without too much of as transition period. However, I was unfamiliar with both the culture and the people who live/work in Tianzifang’s Shikumen lilong (the traditional lanes in Shanghai, and the basic unit of the neighborhood), and the culture of contemporary China in general. Although we (meaning myself and most of my participants) shared the same language (Mandarin) and similar traditional cultural roots, we differed in terms of political status, beliefs, conventions, and values in many ways, which located me outside of the culture. Political opposition set us apart and sometimes even set us against each other for decades, and that made me know little about them. During the research process, I saw myself as a learner to learn the simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar culture from the mainland Chinese.

A researcher’s engagement in the study is important because an ethnographic study views the researcher as a research instrument, meaning that one’s subjectivity plays a significant role in interpretation as well. According to Peshkin (1988), the researcher’s emotions, biases, and prejudices can be useful to facilitate understanding; and the socially constructed knowledge is better understood by an interactional relationship between researchers and the researched, which mutually informs the “self” and the “other.” In my study, maintaining my subjectivity in the field notes was particularly crucial during the initial stage and especially helpful when I applied my emotions, senses, and bodily experiences to exploring the Tianzifang spaces and encountering the locale people.

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5 People of Taiwan (Republic of China, ROC) and people of China (People’s Republic of China, PRC) both use Mandarin as an official language. Although Taiwan uses traditional Chinese characters and China uses simplified Chinese characters, the difference is not remarkable.
However, in order to see things, establishing the right distance between subjectivity and objectivity is always needed. During the research process, there were several occasions that my “self” drove me away from my research focus. I remember one time when I was introduced by an informant to visit a resident’s Shikumen dwelling. I was asked to leave immediately due to the host’s hostile attitude toward my Taiwanese nationality. This was an embarrassing and humiliating moment which made me feel very upset. “What did I do?” I asked to myself. The issue of my national identity was always brought up no matter how much I wanted to temporarily ignore it. It was like an invisible wall between me and the participants. Although in most situations it did not cause troubles, and it sometimes even helped me get closer to those who were interested in, and curious about, Taiwan. I became prepared to handle this kind of conflict when meeting with unfamiliar participants, or simply wandering on the streets. To be a “tamed subject” (Peshkin, 1988), I trained myself to step back and to become fully a listener and leave my personal emotions inscribed in the field notes. I found that the more I learned from the culture/the participants, the more tolerant I became and the better I understood their side. The negative emotion of feeling oppressed went away and it did not bother me anymore.

Ethnographic study needs immersion in the culture, so prolonged engagement is required. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) state: “With immersion, the field researcher sees from the inside how people lead their lives, how they carry out their daily rounds of activities, what they find meaningful, and how they do so” (p. 2). However, due to limited time and financial support, I could not stay in the field for as long as needed. Instead, I became fully immersed and tried to make good use of my time in Tianzifang during the short period I was there. I visited Tianzifang in 2012 and had a week-long small scale pilot study (from October 22 to November 2), and then continued the study the next year for about three months (from April 16th to July 31st in 2013).
lived in Fudan University’s dormitory and spent 20 to 60 minutes commuting to Tianzifang nearly every day collecting data and analyzing data afterwards. The following paragraphs describe the research process and how I applied ethnographic methods in this case study.

**The Location**

**Selecting the Site**

Although the case study values the uniqueness of each single case and does not attempt to sample and generalize to other cases (Stake, 1995), I did have some criteria in mind when I selected the site in order for my inquiries. First of all, it had to be a bottom-up creative district, meaning that it had to some degree have been developed by local people rather than having been led and executed by the municipal government. Secondly, the district had to be mature enough to have formed its community, and people who live and work in that place had to have formed their own culture. Several creative districts in Shanghai were merely renovated industrial spaces that had been sublet to creativity-related industries for business purposes. Having these criteria in mind, and after receiving advice from some of Shanghai’s creative workers, I made a list of possible locations: Jinan Apartments, Wugiao Chung, Weihai Lu 696, Liyang Lu 111, and Tianzifang. Unfortunately, not every creative district can survive for as long as expected. Shanghai municipal government threw a handful of creativity seeds on the ground and some grew better, and lasted longer, than others. When I physically visited Shanghai, I found that Weihai Lu 596 had been pulled down; Wugiao Chung was dwindling and had only a few artists left; Jinan Apartments had almost shut down due to lack of support from surrounding residents and the local government; Liyang Lu 111 was a new emerging site and accommodated many artists who had moved from Weihai Lu 696 but was as yet too young to have developed a culture.
This selection process made me think about what conditions were sufficient for a creative district to flourish. As regards those who thrive for a period, could they continue during the next few years without surrendering to gentrification? These wonders later became a part of my research questions.

**Location Description**

Tianzifang is listed on all of the official tourist brochures as a must-see place and the best creative district (translated to creative and cultural park) in Shanghai. It is a 20,000 square-meters district consisting of Shikumen dwellings and factories situated between Taikang Road, Jianguo Mid Road, Shinan Road, and Reijing Second Road in downtown Shanghai (see Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1** The highly concentrated dark red roof tops in the middle area of the left-side picture are Shikumen dwellings; the grey area in the right-side picture is the rough boundary of Tianzifang (Map data ©2014 Google).

Tianzifang was once a mixed area with industrial and residential zones. The main residential architecture - Shikumen - was established from 1912 to 1936, and featured a combination of southern Chinese dwellings and Western row houses (Jiang & Xi, 2012) (see chapter 6 for Tianzifang’s geographical history). Today’s Tianzifang basically keeps an architectural outlook similar to that of decades ago, but the industrial spaces in the southeast side have been replaced
by creative industries (primarily art and design), and recent developments have made it a busy commercial area. As the most international metropolis in China, Shanghai is very busy. Tianzifang is surrounded by shopping malls, hotels, office buildings, and high-rise residential towers. However, inside Tianzifang, life is relatively slow and relaxed. The old low-rise Shikumen architecture makes Tianzifang seem to stay in the time of the 1930s.

The Participants

The Creative Class

As defined in chapter 1, the concept of creative class in this study refers to people who contribute their creativity to the production or marketing of creative products or services. They do not necessarily live in Tianzifang but all of them work there or collaborate with Tianzifang’s creative workers. Their ethnic backgrounds are diverse, including Chinese from the inland provinces and foreigners from overseas. According to the Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administration (2011), there are nearly 300 shops, 80 studios/galleries, and nearly a thousand people work in Tianzifang. Other than local laborers and restaurant waiters, the member of creative class include painters, photographers, graphic designers, fashion designers, advertisers, arts agents, and owners of creative stores. However, when I was in the field, I found that the Chinese creative workers could be further divided into pre-80s and post-80s, meaning those born before or after the year 1980. What distinguishes these two generations is a series of reforms in China that roughly took place in 1980 (see chapter 8). The new categorized participants were very helpful to help me understand the changes in the Chinese creative class over time, and I designed additional interview questions accordingly.
**The Residents and the Others**

The residents were another major user group in Tianzifang. They were mostly elderly people who had lived in Tianzifang prior to 1998—when Tianzifang was officially established. These residents have seen the complete process of transformation of their living spaces. Although they did not typically belong to the creative class, their lives were played out in this creative district. In addition, the administrators are people who had participated in Tianzifang’s early stages of development and some continue to contribute. They were not creative workers, but rather government officers, local residents, or entrepreneurs who helped to sustain Tianzifang’s prosperity. Tourists/customers and local laborers were not my major participants, but their present behaviors provided significant meanings. I obtained research data from tourists and local laborers primarily by participant observations and informal interviews.

**Data Collection**

**Participant Observations**

Participant observation is often said to characterize ethnographic studies, because the participatory process facilitates the researcher’s cultural interpretations and makes explicit the tacit, implicit knowledge embedded in daily life settings (Powell, 2006). This method primarily helped me generate data and understand how people sense and use Tianzifang’s spaces as a creative district.

One part of the observations took place in Tianzifang’s lilong. The people observed were mainly local residents and tourists. At the beginning, I went to Tianzifang to sense the place and note my fresh impressions. During the following several days, I was able to identify the local residents and their behavior patterns, and tried to develop relations with them. Establishing trust
between the residents and me was not easy, since they seemed a bit hostile to outsiders. As a result, I went to the meeting spot that I found from the pattern (see chapter 6), left my giant DSLR camera at home, and stayed at that spot at the same time of day, one to two hours every day for a week. I attempted to let the people become familiar with my face and my present. One day, Mrs. Zheng agreed to be my informant and introduced me to her neighbors as her “friend,” after which I was accepted and began to learn to be an insider. Her neighbors started to greet to me in the morning and sometimes they would switch their language from Shanghainese to Mandarin in order to allow me to understand them. Compared with the residents, the tourists were more active in the afternoons. I often sat at Tianzifang’s sidewalk coffee shops, watched what was happening, listened to what people were talking about, observed the tourists’ behaviors and took notes.

Another type of observation took place in Tianzifang’s half-public and private spaces, such as shops, studios, and galleries. The creative class did not present themselves in the public streets as did the residents, so indoor spaces were better to capture their life patterns. Some shops and galleries were open to public. For example, there were poetry recitals in Earl’s gallery; openings in Tianzifang Art Center; and interactions between the creative class and customers in shops and studios. However, most observations required prior arrangement. These occasions included being a one-day volunteer in Han’s studio/gallery; in a paper-cut workshop in a handcrafts art gallery; and many studio visits with artists.

In order to make effective observations, I kept some guidelines in mind. They included: Who the users were, what were their activities, how they interacted with others, the relationships that existed between them, how physical setting affected their activities, what were their patterns
of social networking and how it functioned. Observation times depended on the events; they usually lasted no longer than two hours.

During the participant observation, I used both the “participating-to-write style” and the “experiential style” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 18) to jot down notes. In most settings, participating-to-write, meaning that writing notes is done simultaneously with observing, was useful. I took a small notebook and a pencil with me, jotted down sentences, phrases, and keywords that mattered to me at the moment. In some situations, writing notes in front of people may be an issue. For example, when I took notes in a gallery, it caused a panic for the gallery assistant and he tried to grab my notes. When I was participating in a workshop, I couldn’t jot at the same time. On these occasions, I put down my notebook, fully concentrated on the event, and wrote my notes in a nearby coffee shop right afterwards. In both jotting styles, I transcribed the jotted notes into typed-up field notes aligned with my personal reflections for latter analysis.

Interviews

Interviewing is another method of obtaining perception. Kvale (1996) uses “a miner” and “a traveler” (p. 4) as metaphors for two types of interviews. In the miner metaphor, knowledge is already buried in the participants’ interior and awaits the miner/researcher to discover it. The traveler/researcher sees the research process as a journey that leads to an unknown story that will be told by the participants. In this study, I was both a miner and a traveler. On one hand, with research questions that seemed to me to have explicit answers, I dug them out. On the other hand, to some blurry and complicated questions, I led and listened to the participants tell their stories of their lived world and waited for the significant meanings to emerge.

The interview participants were with three types: (1) the creative class; (2) the residents; and (3) the administrators. Interviewing was the major method of gaining data resources from the
creative class. I designed semi-structured interview questions to obtain their basic background information and to understand their motivation for moving to Tianzifang, their usage of public and private spaces, their professional and social lives, and how they viewed creativity and their businesses. During the interview process, I found that several post-80 creative workers seemed to have very similar life patterns, so I designed another set of interview questions so as to further understand their preferences, values, and lifestyles and to contrast them with the pre-80s creative class (for sample interview questions, see Table 3.1; for the list of formal interviews, see Table 3.2).

With the residents, the interviews were brief, informal, and impromptu during the participant observations on the street, and were noted in my field notes. Formal interviews were arranged to answer questions about their lives in Tianzifang and how they used the public/private spaces. The interviews sometimes took place in their dwelling areas to weave their stories with personal memories of Tianzifang in the past and present.

When interviewing Tianzifang administrators who participated in the early development, I focused the questions on how Tianzifang emerged and matured as a creative district. Likewise, the history was told in the forms of many trivial stories and memories. Using the data source provided by local residents and historic documents, I mapped a rough contour of Tianzifang’s current history.
Table 3.1 Semi-structured interview questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Interview question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The creative class</td>
<td>1. The reasons why you moved to Tianzifang?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What motivates you to live in Tianzifang?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you make location decisions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How important to you is proximity to others within the same occupation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The creative class</td>
<td>2. How do you use the public spaces in Tianzifang?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The residents</td>
<td>• What aspects of Tianzigan inspire you?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you use particular venues for social or creative exchange? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What kinds of entertainment places/events are there in Tianzifang?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Which do you use?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What do you do in the evenings here?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Which places do you go often? Why?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Are there particular buildings or places you like in Tianzifang?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are there particular places you don’t like to go?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What kinds of people live in Tianzifang? Is it a diverse population? What kinds of diversity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is there a group here you feel you belong to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The creative class</td>
<td>3. How do you see people using your spaces?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What sorts of people come to your place?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you think your place is part of creative industries? How do you think your place impacts creative industries?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What types of events occur at your place?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you ever see business actually occurring at your place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you see creative industries interacting with each other?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What kinds of people live in Tianzifang? Is it a diverse population? What kinds of diversity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is there a group here you feel you belong to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The creative class</td>
<td>4. What about your occupation (or creative work)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Would you talk about your work? Is your work affected by your interactions within Tianzifang?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What do you think about creativity?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• How do you conduct your creative process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What forces do you believe impact your creativity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does government impact your work and creativity? Has it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you think your occupation is part of creative industries? How do you think your occupation impacts creative industries in Tianzifang?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 3.1 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Interview question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The creative class</td>
<td>5. How do you interact with others (the social network)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you interact with other industries and occupations (agents/galleries/ s financial resource people)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How have you gotten most of your jobs, both freelance and permanent?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How important has your social life been to your career? Has it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Where or what types of places do most of your career advances occur?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you engage with other creative producers? Where and how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you think that the social element of the creative economy is corrupting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The creative class</td>
<td>6. How do you see the transformation of Tianzifang?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The residents</td>
<td>• How long have you lived/ worked in Tianzifang? Do you see any transformation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The administrators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Has Tianzifang changed over time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are there more tourists? How do you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you like the changes? Why and why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does government support or limit Tianzifang?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voluntary participation was ensured by soliciting participants’ written or oral consent and they were informed of their right to stop the interviews in any moment they wished. Face-to-face interviews were the major form, and a few phone interviews were held after I left the field. Interviews usually lasted more than an hour, depending on the interviewee’s availability and their willingness to continue the conversation. The content of interviews was audio recorded (if allowed) and most were fully transcribed through typing, and the transcriptions were later confirmed by the interviewees. All of the research data was kept in a confidential manner and the participants’ names were pseudonyms, except a few participants who chose to maintain their actual names in chapter 5 to ensure historic authenticity.
Table 3.2 The list of formal interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>category</th>
<th>Interviewee (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Duration (min.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>06/12/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>06/28/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>06/10/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nini</td>
<td>06/03/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>06/20/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>06/24/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>110</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>04/03/2014</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yuta</td>
<td>06/24/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>170</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>04/03/2014</td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Creative class (the core)</td>
<td>Box</td>
<td>05/29/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
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<td></td>
<td>06/03/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>07/30/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Miao</td>
<td>06/14/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>117</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Qiaozhen</td>
<td>05/08/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Dong</td>
<td>05/20/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
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<td>Yue</td>
<td>05/17/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
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<td>Ailin</td>
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<td>Ashley</td>
<td>05/09/2013</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Catherine &amp; Kao</td>
<td>06/19/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>Han</td>
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<td>Face-to-face</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>04/02/2014</td>
<td>Phone</td>
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<td>Haihai</td>
<td>06/03/2013</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>Shawn</td>
<td>06/20/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>Kirk</td>
<td>05/30/2013</td>
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<td>Eros</td>
<td>06/22/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>Alex</td>
<td>06/13/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>05/26/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>Earl</td>
<td>10/30/2012</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>07/31/2013</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(continued)
Documents

Written historic documents were the other major sources for reviewing Tianzifang’s history and understanding how Tianzifang emerged and matured as a creative district. I collected documents regarding four types of data. First was news. For example, I used the Baidu News Database to search for the keywords “Tianzifang” and “Taikang Road” plus “art” in simplified Chinese. I found 599 and 178 news of such data during 2004 to 2013. These news stories had exact publication dates, and were good anchors for noting significant events. The second category was official documents published by the Luwan District Government. These records were basically administration reports of the local government which focused on how they
improved community hygiene or promoted tourism development. The third category was personal collected documents provided by Zheng. The last category was online social media, such as the Sina microblog (xinlung weibo). Although it did not achieve popularity until 2010, the artists and creative workers’ personal microblogs helped date some important events not listed on official documents or news, and also provided comments on specific events at that time. These different data sources represented Tianzifang’s history from multiple perspectives.

Data Analysis

The main data were field notes of participant observations and transcriptions of the interviews. Analysis was conducted during and after data collection, because it led the researcher to “cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new—often better quality—data” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 49).

Data Sorting and Initial Analysis.

After returned from the field, I typed up the jotted notes into readable field notes with my reflective remarks. The recorded interview contents were fully transcribed into Word format. As regards both data sources, I used a contact summary form, which was a one to two page paper attached to the top of each set of raw data, to summarize the key points by answering some questions myself. The questions and tasks included: What were the main issues or themes that struck me in this contact? Did anything else strike me as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact? What new (or remaining) target questions do I have in considering the next contact with this site? I summarized the information I got (or failed to get) for each target question I had for this contact. This summarization process was especially useful and important for early analysis of the interview data, since the intense fully transcribed works could not
always be done before I had another interview. The summary form gave me a general idea, and helped me prepare for upcoming field work, and was always open to modification when the full transcript was finished and coded.

Coding

For me, coding was a process of reducing data by clustering and conceptualizing, and involved cycling back and forth between coding and establishing the code list. In order to make the coding process more effective and reflective, I left a column of blank space in the left side of each page of my field notes and interview transcriptions, where I can right mark the code beside the lines and left mark my reflections to add meaning and clarity. The codes and notes were written in pencil at the beginning. When the codes and code list seemed to repeating in multiple sets of data, I used different colored markers and post-it stickers to mark different clusters of codes.

The data was coded using both top-down and bottom-up (grounded) approach. I used the top-down coding technique when looking for themes that were already developed from the literature review. For example, as regards the attractions of a creative place, I derived codes from the literature such as “physical beauty”, “diversity”, “university” to be the coding start-list, and then extended these to include more codes when I was doing the actual coding (see Table 3.3). Some of the new codes were extensions of the original codes, some were new emerging, and still others were cancelled because they seemed to not appear in the cases. On the other hand, I used the grounded approach to analyze massive amounts of raw data and looked for emerging themes, issues, and concepts. For example, when coding how people used Tianzifang’s spaces, I generated various codes such as “walking dogs”, “greeting each other”, “vendors hiding in the lane”, “sipping coffee”, “sun-drying the clothes”, “playing mahjong”, “taking pictures”, and
“biking”. I used componential analysis with user groups and specific spaces, and further developed the second-level codes (or so called meta-level codes) to identify the concept of the relationship between people’s behavior and the spaces, which were, for example, “to invade”, “transgression”, “home”, and “tourist destination”.

**Keeping Research Journal and Interim Summary**

During the coding and analysis process, I spent considerable time analysing the data and (re)thinking the subtle embedded meanings behind, and connected with, the codes. Especially in the three months in the field, I took notes on my reflections all of the time: when I finished the interviews, when I was on the subway traveling from the field to my dormitory, or when ideas emerged before I fell asleep. These reflections were usually written on random piece of papers, or recorded on my iphone when it was inconvenient to jot down notes, but all were transcribed into my research journal at the end of each day. The reflections were my temporary thoughts, questions, emotions that were triggered in the field, and my mind mapping of those emergent themes that were linked to the theoretical framework. I kept writing in the research journal for six months after I left the field, so as to keep the inner conversation going. In addition, in order to ensure that I was developing an overall understanding of the research questions, I wrote an interim summary every three weeks while in the field. The summary was a review of what I had learned during the past three weeks so as to see the degree to which I could answer each research question, and how much I had not yet gone deep. These summaries later became the main structure of my dissertation.
Table 3.3 An example of the coding startlist.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original codes (03/02/2013 edited)</th>
<th>Extended codes (02/14/2014 revised)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Motivation/attraction</td>
<td>I. Motivation/attraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. amenity-physical beauty</td>
<td>A. To Shanghai (city-level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. amenity-cultural facilities</td>
<td>1. amenity-better climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. amenity-public meeting space</td>
<td>2. amenity-convenient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. diversity</td>
<td>3. challenges (the adventures’ paradise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. tolerance</td>
<td>4. tolerance-has more freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. university</td>
<td>5. tolerance-fair chances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. job opportunities</td>
<td>6. job opportunity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. To Tianzifang (district-level)  
1. amenity-the old spectacle  
2. diversity- historical architectures  
3. big and old industrial space  
4. Chen Yifei  
5. cheap rent  
6. cheap labors  
7. location-downtown  
8. location-convenient  
9. location-close to the interviewees’ home  
10. close to local people  
11. people flow (enough clients)  
12. matured art market  
13. art/creative atmosphere

This research was a process of learning about another culture, and it was also a journey I have always craved as an ordinary Taiwanese, to discover the familiar and unfamiliar Chinese mainland. During the three months of interactions with my participants, I experienced conflicts due to mutual misunderstandings, but on most occasions they turned out to be good opportunities to learn about each other’s cultures. The more I learned, the more I understood and could tolerate the differences; I felt that the participants also learned about my culture in the same way. Finally, my relationship with some participants did not end up when I finished this research project. Rather, the cross-cultural dialogues continue via emails and online social media in a life-like daily context.
CHAPTER 4: A DAY OF TIANZIFANG

To give a first impression and an overview of Tianzifang, I narrate what I saw during a day, from the evening to the next afternoon. The description is derived from my field notes, which I think it conveys my fresh view as an outsider and also my own perspective as a researcher. Most of the details were originally trivial and random fragments jotted down in my notes and journal but I didn’t quite realize the subtle meanings. However, each moment that stopped me and attracted me to see, to listen, to smell, and to feel was a profound sign, which later guided me to learn the multiple realities and discover their meaning.

The Evening

6pm. I arrived in Shangahi Pudong Airport. Carrying a big suitcase with me, I stopped a taxi and asked the driver to take me to Tianzifang. “Tianzifang?” the driver replied with an unsure tone. “It is on Taikang Road”, I said. “Oh! Taikang Road, I got it…There are many restaurants and cute shops, young ladies like you would definitely love it! All the restaurants turn into bars in the evening, so it is just the right time to go there!” the driver said. Forty minutes later, he let me off on Taikang Road. The shops along the road looked not much different from those located in downtown Shanghai. Then I saw an entrance under a stone archway between a fashion costume store and a beverage shop. Would that lead to Tianzifang?

7 pm. I walked through the dark archway, and a fancy scene appeared to me. “Sawadika!” A Chinese lady dressed in traditional Thai costume with her palms together standing in front of a restaurant called “Thai Thai”. She said to me, “we have dinner special tonight. Would you like to try it? We have great seats on the roof top with the best view!” I lifted up my head and saw a few
people leaning on the fence that was twisted with twinkling Christmas lights. I kept walking ahead on the path that was covered by stone brick and I saw a line of round tables and chairs. These tables belonged to restaurants/bars/Cafés called “Bohemia”, “Mojo”, and “Asia Corner”. Each table had a lit candle, a tiny pot of flowers, and a bilingual menu. Some white people were scattered around these tables chatting and drinking beer, using a language I didn’t understand. I glanced at the menu; a cup of regular café latte was RMB$ 45 (US$ 7.5). I kept walking to the end of the lane, where there was a Japanese restaurant that I had seen on Shanghai’s tourist guide. I was originally planning to get a seat to order a sashimi for dinner, but RMB$ 1200 (US$ 200) for a meal seemed not a good deal.

8 pm. It was raining a little bit but it did not stop people from flowing over the wet and crowded lanes. No need to use my umbrella because it would easily poke people around me. Besides, some sidewalk cafes had giant rain shelters for passengers to jump from one to another. Puddles after rain reflected the light from the shops and neon signboards, which colored all Tianzifang in beautiful yellow! Each store looked like a little box shining in the dark and containing fancy things for exploration.

A bunch of Chinese men dressed in suits and ties were sitting cross-legged along an outdoor bar. They looked like they were just getting off work and wanted to spend some time hanging together. Some of them talked and laughed loudly. The glasses on the table were empty but the ashtrays were filled with cigarette butts. The mixture of the pungent smell of cigarettes and the strong smell generated from some restaurant kitchens became a scented impression of Tianzifang’s evening.

9 pm. I turned into another lane that had more little shops. I went in a store called “the new world gallery”. Big oil and acrylic paintings were hung on the wall; other smaller canvases
were piled on the shelf. Each was nicely packaged with thin clear plastic bags. I picked up one that had a familiar look to me. “Hmm…is it original?” I asked a young female clerk who had been watching me since I entered. I was pretty sure the piece was not a reproduction because I could see the handmade strokes, but I wasn’t sure that a work made by a famous contemporary Chinese artist would be for sale in a small gallery. “Of course not,” the young lady replied me with high pitch, “the original is much more expensive! Our gallery has several contracted young talented artists who have good techniques to produce works with a style similar to famous artists. Our artists are sophisticated with various styles but never reproduce the works exactly. Most people still cannot tell the differences….Whose works are you looking for? We have plenty of selections.” I flipped over the A4 size canvas in my hand; it said RMB$ 250 (US$ 42).

“Bridge” was another shop that sold Chinese designer products. The shop was about 100 square feet, had a big table in the center displaying things like notebooks or cell phone cases that had 1930’s Shanghai images. The wall around the table was covered by nicely framed artworks. According to the clerk, these were limited editions of prints made by young Chinese illustrators. A white woman in her mid-forties was talking to her partner: “Don’t you think this fits your apartment?” She pointed to a piece with an elegant white frame. The guy replied: “Yea, but I prefer that one…. I like the frame better….We can have these three pieces together… they look like a set…” The prices started from RMB$ 2500 (US$ 417). The clerk said that these works were sold with frame, and the shop offered delivery service that can send works to any country in the world.

10 pm, in Two Wells Lane. I got away from the bustling place and went into another square that seemed to have some shops that were open in the morning but had closed already in the evening. It was quite dark without any streetlight. Suddenly, I saw a topless guy standing on
the second floor looking out of his window, smoking, and staring at me. I guessed the wheels of my luggage dragging on the rugged road made an annoying noise that bothered him. From his window, I noticed other windows in higher stories that had weak yellow light coming out from them, and I could also hear feeble TV sounds from the Shanghai News Channel. It was 10pm in downtown Shanghai, but a part of Tianzifang had fallen asleep.

The Morning

6 am. The next day in the morning, I began to see Tianzifang’s other colors. I went into the entrance of Lane 274. A row of bicycles and electric bikes were parked along the lane neatly. Each bike was locked by two chain locks. How many people live in here? I wondered. Up the lanes there were red lanterns with long yellow fringes, bundles of black electric wires, and some bamboo poles hanging over the lane across the buildings. The three-story dwellings were old red brick buildings with wooden doors and windows, and the front door was large and framed by stones or concrete. An old resident later told me that’s why Shanghaiese people called such buildings Shi-ku-men—the doors hooped by stones.

The most bustling place in the morning in Tianzifang was the traditional food market. People who live around Tianzifang neighborhood dragged their carts, men and women wore pajamas and undershirts elegantly swimming to the market. The indoor market was located on Taikang road, at the edge of south Tianzifang, selling fresh fruits, veggies, seafood, and livestock. Along Taikang road, several vegetable venders loaded the packaged produce on the ground, so the sidewalk was almost covered by these colorful veggies and plastic bags. An old man put a basket of dark red dates on his bike and asked passengers to take a look. Next to the market, there were a chain convenience store and a breakfast store called “People’s Dim Sum”, where a
lot of people lined up to buy the RMB$ 0.7 (US$ 0.12) fresh bun from bamboo steamers and soybean milk. Cutting through the end of the market would lead to Lane 248, which was inside Tianzifang’s neighborhood and right next to a public toilet. The combination of toilet, livestock, and decayed food generated a strong smell and made me eager to pass through the area as soon as I could.

7 am. Walking along Lane 248, I saw a dama (old woman) sitting on a short bamboo chair shelling peas. I went to her trying to start a conversation, but her mandarin had a strong Shanghainese accent and I couldn’t understand her very well. A few more dama gathered around Shikumen’s intersection, talking about something in Shanghainese, and they sometimes burst out in exaggerated laughing. When observing them, I felt a few drops of water falling on my head but they were not raindrops. The water came out from the wet clothes hanging on the bamboo pole across the lane. A dama was moving the hangers to sunshine by using another pole with a metal hook on top while chatting with her neighbors, so that the clothes would dry out thoroughly.

In a corner of Lane 248, I heard a familiar sound like tons of dominos hitting and rubbing each other. That was a table game called mahjong, which my family would play on Chinese New Year. I found where the sound came from but I was stopped by a bike that blocked the entry of the house. However, through the crevice of the provisional curtain (just a piece of cloth), I could see four old men and women sitting around a folding table, picking up and throwing down mahjong behind the wooden window frame. It was not usual to see residents in the first floor, because most of the ground floor spaces seemed to be used for business. Later I learned that this place was about to rent out for a gift shop, and the neighbors just temporarily used the space as an amusement room before the construction began.
A few steps further I saw some giant stuffed plastic bags in front of a closed store called “Teddy Bear Café”. I thought they were garbage but in fact they were food ingredients delivered by food vendors. The vendor dragged a cart of packaged bags and each bag had an attached tag giving the details and the delivery address. The vendors unloaded them along the lane according to the address. It was simple to tell how these stores’ business went by standing on the lane and looking at how many bags they had. The noise made by the cart’s wheels rubbing the uneven bricks was probably the most annoying sound in the quiet morning.

In a sub-lane of Lane 274, a young guy was leaning on the wall selling fish. The fish were contained in two A3 size Styrofoam boxes with ice cubes. The sub-lane was narrow and could only allow one or two passengers to pass at once. I couldn’t understand why this guy wanted to do business in such an awkward space. Next to him, a dama sat on a bamboo stool waving her cattail leaf fan and complaining of the unexpected hot summer. I squatted down and asked her: “Hi, dama, may I ask where the Teddy Bear Café is?” I actually saw it on my way there but I just wanted to start a conversation. The dama replied: “You are too early! There is nothing fun here in the morning…the shops haven’t open yet!” The dama was Mrs. Zheng, who lived on the second floor Shikumen and later became my participant.

I noticed a number of dog walkers. They were in their sixties, wore slippers and light linen pajamas, mostly white, and walked down to the south market or just simply walked around. They seemed to prefer small size dogs with brown curly hair, which they called “Teddy Bears (toy Poodle)”. These “Bears” pee and poo wherever they like, but their hosts seemed never willing to stop them or to clean up after. A few minutes later, the sanitation workers came to clean it up. These sanitation workers were an identifiable group in Tianzifang’s early morning. They wore a grey uniforms with a yellow reflection sticker attached to it. About 10 of them
patrol back and forth on each lane. I even saw a resident throw a poisoned dead rat away from her window on the third-story; it landed right in front of me and the worker came collected it in 10 minutes.

8 am. Most stores were still not open. I walked into the north end of Lane 248, where the front doors on both sides of Shikumens were facing each other. Some of the original wooden doors had serious rot so they were protected by another layer of transparent glass; some were replaced by a glass door with a security service system. A shop owner told me he wanted the customers to see through the door from the outside, and at the same time he wanted to effectively use the air conditioning, so the clear glass door was the solution.

I realized this place was the restaurant area I saw last night, but the Thai ladies and the exotic music were gone, and all the round tables and chairs were moved away. An ayi (middle aged woman, younger than dama) in a black shirt walked into the Mojo Café. She unlocked the glass door, put on her red apron, started to wipe the furniture and move the tables and chairs out to the lane. What impressed me was her singing. This ayi had a small radio in her apron’s pocket playing at full volume and she was singing out loud with the high pitch melody while she was cleaning up. The song sounded like a folk melody of a certain ethnic group that lived far from Shanghai. I couldn’t recognize even a word from the song but I could feel the happiness it delivered. On my constant observation in the following days, she was always the first one to work in this area. The morning scene of Tianzifang was extremely different from the evening. Without fancy lights, tourists, and buzz, it is a slow and peaceful place.

When I was enjoying in the ayi’s singing, a slim white man in black suit, blue jeans, and Oxford shoes carrying a notebook passed by me quickly. The smell of his Eau de Cologne stayed around. I followed him to a little square near Lane 210, which I learned later used to be part of an
old needle factory but was now the Kommune Café. The Chinese waiter seemed to know him well and brought him a sandwich set with black coffee. Breakfast here started from RMB$ 70 (US$ 11.7). There were some other people in the outdoor seats, mostly white males. Some were having a meeting and the others were working individually using their Apple Airs.

9 am. Security guards wearing dark blue uniforms and hats walked out from the Tianzifang Administration office. Their job was taking turns standing in front of each entrance and walking around the lanes of Tianzifang, maintaining security from 9am to 9pm. They moved a standing board from the corner to the center of each entrance, which said: “Friendly reminder: No pets and bikes/vehicles allowed”.

It was the time when people started to flood in, mostly white-collar working class or sellers who worked in Tianzifang. They walked very fast, dressed neatly with not much facial expression. They carried a purse in one hand and a transparent plastic bag of breakfast in the other. Tourists from around the world came a little bit later, but they were easy to tell. They walked much slower, looking around, and usually had cameras and maps in hand.

10 am. In a sub-lane beside a Shikumen restaurant, two young Chinese men wore chef uniforms sitting on a parked motorbike, swiping their smartphones. I have been seeing this all the way. Young sellers and working labors were intensively using their phone devices while there were not many customers around.

A white family was passing by me. They wore t-shirts, short pants, sunglasses, running shoes, and had several shopping bags from scarf shops and photographic studios hung on their arms. “Look at this! Wow!” The mom pointed at the grey brick road they were walking on to her teenage son, “This must has been here for many, many years…” She then turned to her husband: “Honey, don’t you think we just walked here half an hour ago?” Her husband shrugged his
shoulders and tried to check up the map. They seemed couldn’t figure out where they were but
decided to take a rest in Bohemian café, with an order of sandwich and coke.

11 am. I went to Mojo Café and ordered a hot latte with cake, sat at the outdoor table to
observe people surrounding me. Two Chinese business guys sitting next to my table were
smoking and talking about the weather in English with two white men. The white men could
speak a little Chinese and were trying to use it in their dialogue.

At a corner, two young Chinese girls wearing straw hats and long skirts jumped out from
a creative shop called Nuezhi and said: “those (design products) are so adorable!” Both of them
carried giant Nikon DSLR cameras and took pictures all along. They took turn posing in front of
those Shikumen cafés, sometimes sitting at the outdoor table pretending they were drinking
coffee. They checked the pictures from the little camera screen after each shoot. One of the girls
seemed to be very satisfied with the photos and stretched her hand saying: “Go go go! Let’s go
find the Teddy Bear Café!” and they ran away.

Mojo Café was playing Carly Rae Jepsen’s popular song “Call me maybe” that I often
heard on the US radio. The ayi I met in the morning was still at work. She turned down the
volume of her radio in her pocket, humming the tune in a soft voice. The music style was quite
different to “Call me maybe”, and also discordant to the environment buzz, but together they
became a sound collage that seemed to make the place right. “Ca-bu-gi-no (Cappuccino)? One?
Two? Okay!” The ayi jotted down the order from a white lady with a beautiful smile.

The Afternoon

1 pm. Walking through Lane 155, I smelled a scent like washing powder but I wasn’t
quite sure. A month later I learned that it was Shanghai Yaozao (medicated soap) that all grocery
stores provided, and Shanghainese usually used it to bath. It was a recognizable scent to local people. The smell meant somebody was taking shower in the afternoon, and it was usual in such a hot summer. A group of ayi and dama was clustered in the north entrance near the end of Lane 155, sitting on fancy chairs (that they collected from shut down bars and restaurants for years) and chatting. Suddenly, a guy came close to them, squatting down and, using his Canon, aimed at the old house behind these silver haired madams. One of the dama was aware of his shooting, so she hunched to cover her face immediately and another dama stood up harshly yelling to him to put down his camera. The guy was upset and yelled back: “Come on, dama! I was not shooting at you!”

2 pm. “This way! Follow me!” A guy and a young woman who held a small red flag saying “Shanghai Travel” led a group of Chinese tourists to go through Lane 210 and enter the “Artists Café” in building no. 3. The man was explaining the history of Tianzifang and how the artists started to do residency. This area, located in the east side of Tianzifang, was clustered with more art studios and creative industries.

The tourists were a crowd of middle-aged men wearing dark or earth tone suits. A gallery assistant told me they were government officials, probably coming from the north, because she could tell by the way they dressed. I could only tell who they were by the intensive smell of hair cream they used for maintaining their side parting hair.

The no. 5 building had a big stainless steel sculpture in front of the entrance, and the yellow text “Artist Building” pasted on the glass door explained its capacity. It looked dark from the outside. The security guard told me that some artists only came in the afternoon. There were two artists sitting on a bench outside the building with their artworks demonstrated behind. One was about 50, wore a beard and pony hair, drawing comic style portraits for tourists. I visited his
studio inside the no. 5 building later and realized that he was actually a landscape artist. Another man of the same age was also a landscape artist but he just causally wore a t-shirt, short pants, and slippers. He showed me a pen he invented that can create both fountain and calligraphic texture. He used the pen to draw all his works; therefore he established a unique style. He learned that I was an art major, so he wanted to sell one of his pens to me at RMB$200 (US $33). They were both heavy smokers; they were smoking while they had no customers, so there were a lot cigarette butts under the bench.

3pm. In the other corner, a dressed up woman wearing short hair and black high-heels stood in front of a construction site. She looked confused and asked the foreman if this was Earl’s place. The man said: “Yes, it was. But Earl has moved out for a while” The woman looked disappointed and said: “How come?...I just read the news which said his studio will become a free open art center” The man sneered: “For free? There is nothing for free! My boss spent millions to rent this place, how would he open this place to public for free? He is not idiot!” He turned to his colleagues while he was saying this, which looked like he was sharing a ridiculous joke with them. He then pointed some little plates hung on the opposite building; “those are our advertisements, inviting investment in business…this old factory will be partitioned into 16 shops, and the monthly rent will start from RMB$ 6,000 according to the size…” The woman asked again, “All right…then where can I find Earl now?” The man replied: “Who knows!”

On the first floor of building no. 3, I saw a poster saying a young female artist moving back from Canada had a photography exhibition in studio 202, but I did not know the artist would later become my participant. I went up the entrance stairs, which were hidden behind the Artists Café. The studio area was far less touristy than the outside streets. It was divided as
several cells, like the building no. 5. The spaces were occupied by artist studios, advertisement companies, fashion design studios, and some little galleries.

5pm. I didn’t get to see the exhibition eventually, because the exhibition had been expired for a year, but I accidentally ran into another fascinating tiny shop called “Taste”, which sold miscellaneous fun goods that the owners found while they were traveling abroad. The shop had a white giant mountain goat cardboard bookshelf standing by the door welcoming the guests. The rest of the shop was settled like a 20th century exhibition room in a European museum, displaying stuff they bought, imported, or were produced by their friends. The shop owner introduced me to the details of each work, like who made it, when, and why, and then put them back in the case carefully. I felt a strong passion from the young man, which was a very different experience compared to other Tianzifang shops. It seemed that he did not care whether people purchased his stuff or not, he just wanted to share what he had, what he knew, and make some friends. He was a fashion designer, who later became my informant as well.

Tianzifang’s night and day represent distinct atmospheres: It was quiet and slow in the early morning, then became energetic during the daytime, and then went a bit crazy in the night. This multi-faceted character makes it so attractive.
CHAPTER 5: HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Shanghai Needs a SoHo

Tianzifang is one of the first places to be officially titled a “creative district” in China, and has been described as a “Chinese SoHo (Ruan, 2004)” and the “Silicon Valley of visual art (Zhang, 2003);” but its generation was actually an accidental experiment rather than a predictable plan. The opportunity emerged in 1992, when Deng Xiaoping made his famous Southern Tour in Shanghai and gave speeches to stress his economic and openness reforms. Deng’s statement later gained support from local officials and consequently pushed Shanghai to become the economic hub of China. The mainstream city policy corresponding to Deng’s claim was to rezone Shanghai, to tear down old dwellings and cover them with modern high-rises to get ready for economic growth. Tianzifang was located just in the core land reform area and was ready for urban renewal by a foreign real estate company.

However, due to an unexpected Asian financial crisis in 1997, the development project was forced to shut down. When the rezoning project was suspended, there was a chance to consider alternative uses of this area of the old town. Zheng, the leader of Dapuqiao Sub-district Government, planted the seed of Tianzifang. Zheng was the first wave of government officials sent to United States to investigate New York and Atlanta’s Olympics in 1996 after China’s Reform and Opening Up Policy. This trip had dramatically changed his view. He said: “That was my first time flying abroad. We have been educated that Chinese live in paradise, we are happiest and wealthiest, and our goal is to save people in the rest of the world who are still suffering” (IN-Zheng-06/13/2013). Zheng recalled his memory of his shock when he found the differences between his imagination and the reality in the US. The tour also brought them to arts
and cultural districts. He described the confusion when they were invited to SoHo: “We were all confused that those Americans brought us to see the dilapidated warehouses? Would they make fun of us because we were poor? We were expecting to see the modern high-rises!” (IN-Zheng-06/13/2013).

It took Zheng a while to see the value. In an art street in Atlanta, he saw young people sitting on the ground playing guitars to freely express their emotion, and sometimes the passengers would join them to sing songs together in a joyful atmosphere. These people were never in a rush; they were not just coming for shopping but also enjoying the lovely environment and the relaxing moment. These people had different lifestyles, and that was a scene that Zheng never saw before on Nanjing Road or Huaihai Road (Shanghai’s most popular shopping areas). Zheng believed that was a consequence when people were satisfied with material demands. “Shanghai will need a SoHo” (IN-Zheng-06/13/2013), he concluded.

A Brief History of Tianzifang

Zheng is definitely the first visionary of Tianzifang; his political background as a local government officer made the impossible possible. He took the first step by circling a land of redundant spaces for arts. Based on his early efforts, other important founders such as Chen YiFei, Er Dongqiang, Wu Meisen, Zhou Xinliang continued to join the development in the following 10 years. The history of Tianzifang can be divided into 5 stages: Early stage (1998-2002); formative stage (2002-2004); resistance stage (2004-2008); fully developed stage (2008-2012), and currently highly commercialized stage (2012-present).
Early Stage: Transforming the Outdoor Market to Tianzifang (1998-2002)

From an urban developer’s perspective, Zheng wanted to create a district that would cultivate and satisfy Shanghai’s future needs in arts and culture. To start his experiment, the first step he took was to find a place under his jurisdiction—the Taikang Road area (known as Taikang Lu), where the development plan had been suspended by financial crisis. The area was originally a filthy and stinky traditional outdoor market, but he cleaned up the street and moved the market indoors to release the public space. Second, to attract artists and industries, Zheng offered the old factory spaces on Taikang Road along Lane 210 with very low rents. Those warehouses were originally state-owned knitting, leather and MSG factories, so Zheng’s office provided help to connect the artists with the factory representatives and sign a 5 to 10 years contract. On December 28th, 1998, the first ceramic workshop was established under the support of sub-district government (Luwan District Government, 1999).

The artist Chen Yifei’s residency began around 2000 and was a milestone for the street. He was the most famous Chinese artist and film director around 1990. His foreign experience in New York for 12 years also made him well-known internationally. Zheng recalled Chen’s first visit in Taikang Road looking for his new studio:

“I showed Chen the new ceramic company on the factory site that was restored like Beijing’s traditional royal house, but he was not interested at all. He said, ‘that is not Shanghai’s lifestyle’! He then pointed to Shikumen and the old factory: ‘that is what I want’. (IN-Zheng-06/13/2013)

After Chen, a few more artists followed by 2001. These artists were sometimes called Tianzifang’s pioneers; the most famous ones included photographer Er Dongqiang, ceramics
artist Zheng Yi from Hong Kong, and abstract expressionist artist Wang Jieyin. In the early stage, the artists were countable and gathered only in the factory space in the southern part of Lane 210.

The area was first named “Taikang Lu Art Street”, after the name of the road. Around 2001, artist Huang Yongyu gave it another arty name, “Tianzifang” with double meanings. On one hand, it is named after the first Chinese artist Tian Zifang who was written about in the ancient book Zhuangzi around the 4th century BC. On the other hand, “fang” in Chinese means “place”, so it represents a place that would gather artists and creative people, like the scene Zheng saw in Atlanta’s art district and New York’s SoHo.

**Formative Sage: Becoming International Arts Factories (2002-2004)**

The number of the arts and design population increased dramatically in about 2002 when Building No. 3 was released. To welcome more artists, a British interior designer was invited to change the inner structure of the original food industry factory to allow spaces for individual studios. Wu Meisen, who was one of Tianzifang’s boosters, then held a party to invite all his foreign Western friends who worked in art and creative industries to see it and enjoy free food and wine in Tianzifang. According to Wu, his Western friends were fascinated by the old and slow lifestyle, so the studios in Building No. 3 were all sublet in that single night.

Tianzifang became a small multicultural art community including a pattern designer from Denmark, advertising people from Australia, a ceramicist from United States, fashion designer from France, photographer from Yugoslavia, and others. Building No. 3 was named “International Artist Factory”. Immediately, the surrounding industrial spaces were almost filled up with creative workers. Shanghai-based fashion designers Li Hongyan (Helen Lee) and Ji Cheng (Jenny Cheng) located their studios in an old paper cup factory when they were very young; interior designer Mei Ping reconstructed a rooftop into a “designer hotel” which offered
temporary studios for foreign creative workers; a Taiwanese architecture designer ran an office on the north part of Lane 210. In 2003, according to *Luwan District Almanac* (2003), all factories along Lane 210 had been rented out. In that year, *Wenhui News* reported 68 art and design studios had been established by people from 17 countries and regions with 650 employees involved. During the formative stage, Tianzifang had extended to the full length of Lane 210, roughly 430 meters.

At this time, Tianzifang was still hidden in a traditional and quiet Shikumen lilong; the artist studios and design companies were merely scattered along Lane 210. But the art activities in the daytime were quite vibrant. Er Dongqiang’s visual art studio periodically held contemporary art exhibitions and a monthly opera salon; Catherine’s pottery workshop was popular and was free to children with special needs; Chen’s studio was Tianzifang’s living room, accommodating artists, movie stars, government officials, and was always open for his neighbors running in and out.

**Resistance Stage: Preserve or Level Off? (2004-2008)**

Since the factory spaces no longer satisfied incoming artists, Tianzifang’s territory was enlarged to the nearby Shikumen residential area. The old resident Zhou Xinliang first sublet his Shikumen house on Two Wells Lane to a fashion designer in 2004. A year later, his neighbor opened the second shop.

In 2005, Tianzifang was one of the 18 districts officially authorized as “Creative Industries Cluster (or creative district)” by Shanghai city government. That was the first time the term creative industries been broadly used in China. In this period, Tianzifang became more well-known and even caused international media’s attention. *The New York Times* (2007) reported that 30 new shops were opened on Lane 248; In 2006, *Labour Daily* said that 87 foreign artists
and 132 art and cultural industries were there to run their business. In the resistance stage, Tianzifang extended to the Shikumen dwelling area, including the Two Well Lane and the rear part of Lane 248.

Although Tianzifang was growing well, there was a timebomb that was planted 2 years previously. In 2002, the Tianzifang area was again slated for demolition by Luwan District Government to make way for urban redevelopment. One reason for leveling, from an urban planner’s point of view, was that the 70 years old Shikumen architectures were unsafe and lacked the hygiene systems of modern life. The new proposed project of shopping malls and high-rise apartments would solve these problems, beautify the city, make better use of the land and eventually generate revenue. Some residents also advocated leveling because the considerable compensation for removal would help them greatly improve their quality of life.

The debate whether to preserve Tianzifang or not became a tangled warfare among local governments, residents, creative workers, and Shanghai’s scholars, and it lasted at least 4 years. Those in favor of preservation included artists, creative shop owners, the Sub-district Government, and some residents who had sublet their spaces. Protecting the arts and maintaining its business were the original goals. Later on, a couple of prestigious scholars in the field of architecture and economy joined the struggle, contributing their arguments. For example, Ruan Yisan, Professor of Tongji University, wrote “Protecting Shanghai’s SoHo” in People’s Daily (05/26/2004), pointing out that Tianzifang’s Shikumen were a cultural heritage with diverse architectural styles and historical value. Also, the dean of Shanghai Academy of Social Science, Li Wuwei, published “New creativity in old factories” in People’s Daily (07/22/2004) applying John Howkins’ theory to Tianzifang and indicated the global trend of developing creative industries in historic buildings. Li’s argument about promoting creative economy even impacted
Shanghai’s cultural policies around 2006. The high media exposure made Tianzifang a well-known example of promoting creative economy. These scholarly arguments were believed to be the strongest for Tianzifang’s survival.

**Fully Developed Stage: 2008-2012**

After years of resistance, Tianzifang gradually gained support and was eventually preserved. A new Management Committee Office was founded and directly affiliated to the Luwan District Government in 2008, which can be viewed as a landmark for the fully developed stage. The major task of this institution was to facilitate public infrastructures, such as constructing sewers, offering power supply and fire control, setting flush toilets in each resident unit, and enhanced security in the neighborhood.

At the same time, Shanghai was experiencing a high-speed international and urbanization process. Beijing Olympics in 2008, Shanghai Expo in 2010, and Shanghai Biennial in 2012 brought people from around the world to visit Shanghai and also Tianzifang. Tianzifang was then designated as one of the 5 theme parks of Shanghai Expo and officially appraised as a triple-A national tourist attraction. To promote Chinese culture, the Management Committee Office invited representative Shanghai artists and industries in residency, including He Youzhi (known for drawing Shikumen’s life in ink painting), Li Shoubai (famous paper cutting artist in Shanghai), Ren Weiyin’s Memorial Museum, and Liuli (Chinese colored glass) China Museum. In addition, the dense metro system and the booming shopping malls changed the scale and lifestyle of the city as well. In 2010, a Dapuquiao metro station and the Sun Moon Light mega-shopping mall were established right in front of Tianzifang, which delivered more Chinese and International tourists into the small creative tribe. In this period, Tianzifang had almost covered the whole Shikumen community and connected with the surrounding shopping malls.
The creative and playful atmosphere made Tianzifang very popular. The suddenly inflow of tourists created a giant commercial opportunity. Many people wanted to rent a small space for business and thus the rent went incredibly high. According to China News (2011), a tiny 13 meter square space rented for RMB $20,000 (US $3,333), which was almost as high as a shop on Nanjing Road. But the high rent did not stop the moving-in tempo. New shops kept opening. In this period, all spaces in Tianzifang seemed to be highly utilized. According to Tianzifang’s autonomy community office, by 2012, residents had left about 600 units, and only 80 units remained in residency (IN-Zhou-05/16/2013).

**Highly Commercialized Stage: 2012-Present**

The commercialized Tianzifang seemed to inevitably endanger the arts and creative habitat, and one of the most killing weapons was the increasing rent. Although it had been a problem to artists long ago, it did not bring really surface until around 2012—when the 10-year-contract between the state-owned factories and the pioneer artists ended.

Chen’s family lost a lawsuit to their lessor, a real estate company, and had to return the studio because they could not afford the increased rent. Chen’s studio memorial museum was forced to close. The same issue fell on Er in late 2012. The non negotiable rent forced him to give up his 12 years of effort and to find another shelter. Wang also left o his studio in early 2013; Catherine moved her ceramic studio to another place and only kept a small space in Tianzifang as her gallery and warehouse. As the first generation of Tianzifang’s pioneer landmark artists, their leaving gave notice of a new stage: a highly commercial area of fancy plazas that welcome money as much as art.

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6 Since Chen Yifei passed away in 2005, his family kept paying the rent and re-opened Chen’s studio (memorial museum) to public.
Gentrification and the Attitude of the Government

Unlike other creative districts in other parts of the world, the Chinese government’s attitude toward Tianzifang played an extremely significant role in both initiating and promoting the process of gentrification. Gentrification is a shift away from a shabby, poor community to a wealthier neighborhood with higher rents and property values. This is commonly occurs in creative districts in free market economies. In many cases in the West, such as SoHo, gentrification is the inevitable destiny promoted by commerce and real estate developers, and there is almost nothing the government can do about it. In top-down cases, the art and creative districts are established and planned by municipal government urban policies. Though the government can facilitate gentrification by beautifying the streets or improving public security, the process of gentrification still takes time and the government’s influence is not very strong.

In the case of Tianzifang, the government matters more. When the district government’s Management Committee Office settled in Tianzifang in 2008, it was nothing more than an official announcement that Tianzifang would be preserved and would not be demolished, or at least would be sustained for a while. This was a guarantee for residents who had already sublet their Shikumens to businesses to maintain their rental incomes; the thorny Ju-gai-fei problem was solved: the dwellings which had been illegally rented out for commercial uses were considered legal from that point on (this new rule was only valid specifically in the Tianzifang area)\(^7\). Artists or creative entrepreneurs who had already invested could keep their works. Most importantly, many people who were waiting to see the government’s attitude during the past years decided to jump into the rent-seeking game. The advantages and opportunities brought by

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\(^7\) It was originally an illegal situation when the people convert their resident houses for non-residential usage, such as opening a store. Ju-gai-fei is a special policy for Tianzifang to legalize this situation.
government attracted more business men and creative people came over to pan for gold. Tianzifang’s development was then pushed at a full speed and officially initiated gentrification.

However, ironically, the resistance stage (2004-2008), before the government had determined the fate of Tianzifang, was probably the most diverse and the most artist-friendly period. Before 2008, the artists occupied Lane 210. According to Zhou’s description and the People’s Daily (2006) report, there were only about 30 residents who sublet their Shikumen for artists’ studios, coffee shops, and creative stores. Tianzifang was a small and quiet creative tribe with little urban buzz. The improvements and changes after 2008 indirectly caused trouble for artists and creative workers. The popularity of Tianzifang’s spaces resulted in extreme rent escalation. The first to be affected were probably the non-local Chinese artists who could not afford the sudden increases in rent. Although there is a lack of official records, tracking the travel microblogs published online during 2005-2007 allowed me to find some young Chinese artist-owned galleries and studios in Shikumen’s dwelling area. These informal records (which were later confirmed by some local residents), show artists in folk art and from ethnic minority groups of Shan Xi province, Xi An province, and Tibet. However, their images disappeared after 2008, and their galleries were replaced by scarf and gift shops. The Ju-gai-fei policy encouraged the residents to sublease their residences for commercial use. Within a very short time, the entire Shikumen neighborhood was transformed into a recreational area full of restaurants, bars, and stores. This was criticized by many artists as being “too commercial” and thinned out the artistic and creative atmosphere.

Given that gentrification was triggered by the government’s attitude, this led to a question: should the government support creative districts? In the case of Tianzifang, it seems that supporting/preserving a creative district perversely results in rent escalation and threatens the
survival of the artists. One of my participants provided an interesting annotation: “Once the government claims to establish a ‘creative district’, the district becomes NOT creative at all” (IN-Jazz-07/30/2013), and the best policy for creative people is to allow them to group naturally. In the end, it depends on the degree to which the government values different aspects of Tianzifang: the human capital of art and creativity, the cultural value of the historic heritage and the living Shikumen community, or the revenue and GDP it brings to the government.

Gentrification, Land Ownership and Real Estate

Land ownership is a unique and tricky issue in the context of creative districts in socialist countries such as China. All of the land is state-owned, and the old factories were the property of state-owned enterprises under the management of district and sub-district governments. This is why Zheng was so important in Tianzifang’s early stages of development. He was the leader of a sub-district government and seized the power to use the abandoned spaces. In other words, artists in China usually have no way to rent stated-owned space for personal use. Zheng’s case was unusual and had no precedent. He was probably the first Chinese officer to mediate the leases between artists and state-owned enterprises. The famous case of Beijing 798 Art Zone started three years later.

Real estate developers are usually described by Western urban planners as evil manipulators who control gentrification and produce social exclusion (see Zukin, 1995; Peck, 2005). However, in Tianzifang’s case, the real estate companies did not stimulate gentrification until 2012. The reform of land property went on gradually and had yet to influence the Tianzifang area. The pursuit of urbanization started during Deng Xiaoping’s time in the 1990s, and the Chinese government proposed some alternative ways for national or foreign real estate
companies to invest in domestic urban construction. Instead of selling the land ownership rights, the most common way the Chinese government did business was to lease the property rights (chan quan) for 40-70 years, a sufficient length of time to allow for the development of business and land speculation.

The history of Tianzifang’s development also illustrates the trend of urbanization and the shift of owners of property rights in Shanghai. At the beginning, the industrial spaces along Lane 210 were almost all the properties of state-owned factories, and the artists who began to reside there early signed 5-to-10 year contracts with the representatives, who were usually laid-off former managers of the factories. The long-term contracts allowed most artists to thrive and survive without experiencing threats of unreasonable rent increases.

The artists who signed long term contracts with state-owned factories were not seriously affected during the full-development stage, but this did not last for very long. Around 2012, the original contracts ended and the property rights of the factory spaces were silently transferred to two large real estate companies; and the rules changed. The new lessors no longer provided cheap rents for artists. According to Er Dongqiang, who compared his new contract with the contract he signed in 2001, the renewal rent was nine times what the old rent was (Sun, 2010). As noted above, the pioneer artists were all affected. The second attack of gentrification by real estate developers priced out the creative community who had long been devoted to Tianzifang. Some of the artists’ studios were renovated and divided into numerous small store spaces that produced more rent. Although many creative people still hung in there, the creative climate had changed.

Tianzifang became a successful and well-known model that introduced real estate companies into creative districts in China. These companies did not have to develop new housing
projects and spent little money reconstructing and managing old buildings to gain rental income. This new method of real estate investing is quite popular and is known as “creative real estate” in China. In Shanghai and Beijing, there are numerous abandoned factories and warehouses which have been transformed into creative districts as a result of the national policy of promoting creative and cultural industries, and many such districts have actually been driven by real estate companies. Once the real estate companies began to officially participate, they played the same real estate game that is played in capitalist countries. Even worse, the gentrification process appears to have been manipulated systematically and has been “effectively” shortened.
CHAPTER 6: WHOSE CULTURE? WHOSE TIANZIFANG?

Introduction

Infusing creativity and the arts into dilapidated areas has become a popular strategy for urban renewal in inner cities. Many such areas are known as creative or arts districts, cultural quarters, and creative clusters. Sometimes an acronym is used for their identity, such as “Soho,” Lodo (Lower Downtown) and RiNo (River North). China is no exception to this. China’s 12th Five-Year-Plan (2011-2015) recently declared that it seeks to promote art, culture, and creativity as part of its urban development. Creative districts (sometimes translated as creative parks or creative clusters) have grown rapidly in large cities such as Shanghai and Beijing. Among these creative districts, Tianzifang in Shanghai is often viewed as the first and most successful case in China.

A study of Tianzifang in the Chinese context reveals at least two points which merit closer scrutiny from the spatial perspective. First, although there are numerous creative districts in cities around the world, probably none has as high a density in terms of both dwellings and population as Tianzifang. About 800 workers and 20,000 visitors can be found every day in an area of 20,000 square meters (roughly equal to 4 American football fields) - not including the residents. Secondly, Tianzifang is a symbiosis of a historic neighborhood with many long-term residents and a newly-developed creative district, which are tightly integrated with each other geographically. The Tianzifang “district” is quite crowded in comparison with art and creative districts in the West. It is embedded within one big city block and a dense grid of narrow old east-west and north-south lanes, and is also known by the traditional Shanghai neighborhood as “lilong.” The lanes are too narrow for automobiles, so only bicycles or motorcycles can make
their way through. Given this, conflicts between different types of users can be expected. As noted in chapter 4, at least three distinct worlds coexist with Tianzifang: the artistic and creative district; the exotic tourist destination; and the traditional lilong community.

In this study, I use both the terms space and place, because spaces/places can be sensed and interpreted in a variety of ways. This chapter focuses on the psychological perspective: how people sense Tianzifang as a place; to some it is a tourist destination, while to others it is home; to some it is a permanent stay with an engraved memory, while to some others it is a transitional pause. The narratives of my participants not only reveal their personal interactions with Tianzifang, but also the ideological aspects of the space, meaning the dominant order in Tianzifang.

The following section examines Tianzifang’s physical environment, including a brief historical account of its development during the 1930-1990 period and its boundaries, means of access, and pathways. The third section discusses the theory of the meaning of spaces and places. The fourth section uses this theory to describe how people, primarily visitors, conceptualize Tianzifang as a creative district and as an exotic spectacle which is also a commoditized locale. The final section analyzes the meaning of Tianzifang from the perspective of the residents: how they see their “place” and how they react to spatial segregation, transgression, and invasion.

Some Facts about Tianzifang

Tianzifang in the Past (1930-1990)

In 1930, Tianzifang was a vibrant area within Shanghai. It began in Jiayishi Road (later renamed as Taikang Road) near the bank of the Huangpu River, when manufacturing industries were the core of the Shanghai economy. A report noted that there were more than 30 small
factories in the Tianzifang area (Xu & Weng, 2011). In addition, it was located on the south edge of the French Concession and near the old Chinese Section (also known as Old City) (see Figure 6.1). The local residents described this area as “messy” and “turbulent.” It was a place that was both Western and Eastern, and a cosmopolitan place that welcomed both the rich and the poor (IN-Zheng-06/13/2013; IN-Yue-50/17/2013). The geographical proximity to both Western and Chinese territory also made this area multicultural. The predominant type of dwellings—Shikumen, were multicultural as well. Tianzifang’s Shikumen were built during the years from 1912 to 1936, and featured a combination of southern Chinese dwellings and Western row houses. Shikumen had classic Shanghainese residential architecture of a type which was prevalent from the late 19th century until the 1930s (Jiang & Xi, 2012).

Figure 6.1 The Map of the French Concession, International Settlement, Chinese Section, and Tianzifang (Map data ©2014 Google).
During the war years of 1937 to 1945, Tianzifang was a home for many Chinese creative minds. Many refugees, including a large number of writers, artists, and celebrities, squeezed into the French Concession in search of shelter. One famous artist teacher, Wang Yachen, together with his colleagues, moved from the Xin Hua Art School to north Tianzifang, and invited famous artists such as Qi Baishi and Xu Beihong to continue teaching (Shen, 2012; Luwan History, 2009). Although this went on for only a short period, it served to make Tianzifang historically a “creative district.” A 60-year-old contemporary resident told me that his grandfather was a friend of the artists who moved there in the 1930s, and was able to show me the exact sites of the artists’ original homes and the art school. I found a tiny board on one of the doors, saying: “Yang Du (a famous politician) lived here.” These places looked no different than the other dwellings and had already been occupied by several sets of residents over the years.

Before New China was established after 1949, Tianzifang was a community which consisted of a small number of landlords (who owned the houses before 1949) and numerous homeless and poor families. A series of political and policy revolutions changed the rules of ownership. The Shikumen dwellings were no longer individual property; they became government property and were shared by people who needed shelter. The southeastern side of Tianzifang became lilong factories which produced monosodium glutamate, bottle caps, paper cups, and needles for consumer needs (IN-Zheng-06/13/2013; IN-Shiu-07/19/2013).

Contemporary Tianzifang has been known as a creative district and a popular tourist destination since 1998. It generally retains the architectural features which were present 70 years ago. It is situated in downtown Shanghai and located on the block between Taikang Road and Jianguozhong Road (see the colored area in Figure 6.2). The old lilong factory spaces still occupy the southeast part (see the light grey area), but the factories have either closed or moved.
to the suburbs. The industrial spaces have become artists’ studios and designer shops. The remaining parts are Shikumen dwellings built around 1930. They were once fashionable and popular, but are now a symbol of dilapidation, and the nearby neighborhoods have been replaced by modern high-rise buildings and mega-shopping malls. However, the old Shikumen developed a new spirit after the local government decided to infuse the old community with a new spirit founded upon the arts and creativity. Galleries, coffee shops and restaurants arose after the artists rented spaces from the local residents. Modern Tianzifang combines commercial and residential areas, and has acquired a reputation for being a “Silicon Valley of visual art” (Zhang, 2003) and “Chinese Soho” (Ruan, 2004) (refer to Chapter 5 for the current history of the development of Tianzifang).

**Figure 6.2** The map of Tianzifang neighborhoods.
The Physical Boundaries, Access, and Paths

Tianzifang appears to be an open community which the public can access from the intricate lilong which surround it. However, the accessibility is not as good as it appears to be on a map. Tianzifang is actually a walled “territory.” The borders of the area are surrounded by buildings, fences and walls intentionally constructed to separate the area from other areas. Some of the partitions existed long ago. A resident told me that Tianzifang once consisted of several separate communities which have since been amalgamated into a single community, and some of the barriers were removed to improve the community’s capacity to absorb visitors.\footnote{These communities were known as Tiancheng Li, Pingyuan Fang, Jiancheng Fang, and Jianguo Fang. Li and fang are the smallest units of a community.}

There are designated “gates” as well (see Figure 3). Four entrances along Taikang Road can be found opposite the MRT station at Dapuqiao and the Sun Moon Light shopping mall. It is also close to the Taikang traditional market, so these four points of access are used extensively. Two northern entrances function as links to nearby neighborhoods but few tourists go that far. I observed that most of the tourists were usually aware of the “ends” and the “edge” before they saw the actual exits, because the scene changes from fancy to ordinary along the way. The west point of access is hidden on a tricky meandering pathway, and tourists who are not interested in Chinese tea and teapots would never find it.

Paths are walkable spaces between buildings. They are depicted using black dotted lines in Figure 6.3 and help make Tianzifang a maze for many newcomers. The Shikumen houses and the narrow lilong all look quite similar, so people can get lost after taking a few turns. Some pathways are the corridors inside buildings that link to different open spaces. The corridors themselves are either links that tunnel through designer shops, or paths that cut through stores. I associate these complicated paths with traditional Chinese gardens (aka yuanlin) and an old
poem that describes them: “Where hills bend, streams wind and the pathway seems to end, past dark willow and flowers in bloom, lies another village” (Lu, n.d.). When people walk through these dark crooked linkages in Tianzifang, they experience a state of anticipation about what they will encounter next.

Figure 6.3 Map of Tianzifang’s boundaries, points of access, and paths.

Counting Tianzifang’s Users

The most effective way to determine who are the users of Tianzifang is to stand inside and count visitor traffic. I chose Lane 248 as my traffic counting point because the maximum flow of people occurs between Lane 247 and Lane 210. My notes reflect that between 10:00 a.m. and 10:45a.m. on April 30th, 2013, 270 passengers entered Tianzifang through the Lane 248 entrance. Table 6.1 below shows that the total of 270 visitors consisted of 130 tourists (including
104 Chinese and 26 foreigners, 48% of the total), 91 blue-collar and white-collar Tianzifang employees (34%), 36 residents (13%), and 13 unidentified (5%). My personal observations provide a rough approximation of the types of people who visited.

Table 6.1 Tianzifang user count (during 10:00 a.m.-10:45 a.m., April 30th, 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourists</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>includes 104 domestic and 26 international</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The residents who lived in this area were elderly people mostly over the age of 50. They wore home dresses or pajamas and carried bags of food and vegetables purchased from the local traditional market. They walked rapidly, as if they wanted to go through Tianzifang as fast as possible. Some of them came to clean the chamber pots or use the public toilet inside the entrance. The white-collar workers were hired employees of the stores in Tianzifang. They walked even faster than the other people, dressed neatly, and did not exhibit any facial expressions. They wore earphones, carried purses in one hand and a transparent plastic bag of breakfast in the other hand. The tourists were the easiest to distinguish; they walked slowly, looked around, and sometimes stopped to take pictures. All of the tourists seemed to have cameras in hand. Some foreign tourists wore white masks to prevent H1N1.9

The Chinese who showed up in Tianzifang were diverse. Although they had the same skin tone, they could be distinguished by their distinctive accents, and they had an awareness of

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9 H1N1 is a swine flu that spread in South China in 2013.
the provinces or their ethnic groups of origin. When I talked to Shanghainese, most of them could tell that I am Taiwanese by my accent, or at least knew that I am from the south. I met an old man in Tianzifang who could imitate the accents of people from different provinces, a knack he had acquired from his customers.

The Meaning of Place: A Creative and Exotic Spectacle

Tianzifang as a Creative District

Tianzifang has been portrayed by newspapers, magazines, and tourist guides as a creative district. Tourists and art lovers come from around the world to step into Tianzifang through the archway with the carved Chinese characters “Tian-Zi-Fang,” read the brief introduction hanging on the wall, and grab a map or a guide to find the legendary artists’ studios. They wish to visit Chen Yifei’s memorial museum to yearn for that great and famous figure; they expect to watch the free opera salon that is periodically held in Earl’s art space; they anticipate joining the opening of the Beaugests Gallery in Building no. 3 which is recommended by the Shanghai Art Map, a monthly published brochure about Shanghai’s art news.

To some visitors, the creative district is more often seen as being connected to interesting shopping and food experiences involving creative products rather than only being connected to the artistic atmosphere. I got a list of “must-see” attractions in Tianzifang from random tourists. Except for the famous museums and galleries mentioned above, these attractions include the Scent Library, a store founded by several young Chinese people that sells unusual perfumes, such as scent of the sunshine, black pepper, and Tokyo romantic; the Enigma, a creepy European boutique which offers young Asian designers’ vintage accessories; the Teddy Bear Café and Workshop, a tiny museum owned by a Teddy Bear fan who offers DIY Teddy Bear workshops
and a lovely coffee with a 3D milk froth Teddy Bear on top; and the Kommune—a Western coffee house decorated by the theme of Chinese Communism, which visually represents the spirit of the propaganda art of Mao’s time.

**Tianzifang as a Chinese Landscape**

From Western tourists’ perspective, Tianzifang is an authentic Chinese landscape. The old Shikumen houses deliver a strong sense of the old China, and the people who still live in there continue to maintain the traditional life style of the old days. It was a usual scene: Western tourists grabbed a Stella Artois and had a bite of New York pizza while sitting at the “Asian Corner” and watching a Shanghainese dama collecting clothes from a string using a bamboo pole. The string of light linen pajamas, white underpants and bras, knock-off brand name handbags and clothes with all sorts of colors exhibited a part of the bottom of Shanghainese life. Some local Chinese businessmen had complained about the embarrassing scene and tried to remove it, but they found that this weird scene was attractive to foreign visitors: “They (foreign tourists) are not coming to Shanghai for shopping malls which they have tons of in their home countries. They want to see this, the authentic China!” (OB-05/25/2013). Foreign tourists were served familiar foods like beer, coffee, sandwiches and pizza, picked good seats with the best views, came to watch the live “real life” shows which took place on the stages of historic streets, and the strangers—men and women, Chinese and non-Chinese—were all actors in the show.

Another passion for Chinese spectacles among Western tourists seems to be a fascination with China’s Communist society and the legend of Mao Zedong. Mao’s portrait features a forceful red color and yellow stars, green military uniforms, and provocative political slogans which are icons of old times, as well as Tianzifang’s popular merchandise. An outdoor coffee shop “Kommune” (a mock name based on the word Commune) has been the most popular visitor
site among Western people for years. The Australian owner, who runs a design company in Tianzifang as well, is deeply attracted to Chinese culture. He uses specially designed white steel and red rimmed coffee mugs to mimic the cups of Mao’s era; he puts action figures of Maoish politicians and submerges them upside down in a glass aquarium as a decoration; he has hung several poster-like political propaganda artworks on the wall that have slogans like “Long live Chairman Mao!” and “Serve the People!” created by a Chinese artist. Westerners’ imagination of the old China has become a shopping experience linked to these icons, whether they like or dislike Communism.

The round red lanterns with yellow fringes hung across the lanes also manifest “Chinese” characteristics, and can be found in every “China Town” in the rest of the world. The lanterns do not really have candles or light bulbs inside. A resident told me that Tianzifang is bright enough in the evening to not really need lanterns to light up the lanes. The lanterns did not originally exist in the Tianzifang neighborhood. No one remembers when the red lanterns were first hung up there, but they do not appear in historic photos taken before 2010. They are symbols that attract foreigners rather than having any practical use. Commodities like silk scarves, bamboo folding fans, paper cutting art, cheongsam, are associated with Chinese culture in China Towns, and can also be found in Tianzifang.

**Tianzifang as a Desinicized Place**

On the other hand, from the Chinese tourists’ perspective, Tianzifang is a foreignized (desinicized) place. In addition to seeing dense crowds of Western tourists, the Chinese people perceive the exoticness of Tianzifang through the surrounding sounds and music. “Sawadika”, “irassyaime”, and “welcome” can be heard everywhere, a form of greeting extended by Chinese waiters and waitresses at many restaurants. Menus are bilingual or trilingual. The 40
year old waitress repeats “Ca-bu-gi-no (Cappuccino)” in a queer tone to her customers. Popular music of all kinds, different languages and dialects used by tourists around the world mesh together to form a public sound collage in one place.

Tianzifang is an international food court but does not sell any kinds of Chinese cuisine. Italian, American, French, Thai, Japanese, Korean, and Australian food is the mainstream, and Chinese customers come here when they want to “try something different” (IN-Sheng-06/08/2013). They order a cup of latte coffee (sometimes saying so in English), watch foreign tourists scattered around them and listen to unfamiliar languages. A young Chinese woman said: “If you dropped me from outer space into Tianzifang, I wouldn’t realize it is China” (IN-Mandy-05/08/2013)

Tianzifang possesses a Western atmosphere and life style with which many Chinese are unfamiliar. It is located in the historical French Concession, which visually implies a Western environment: and the cultural and entertainment infrastructures in Tianzifang, such as coffee shops, bars, and galleries, were introduced from the West, and did not become a trend in China until very recently. So it was not surprising that more than one Chinese told me they love Tianzifang because it looks like “Europe” or “the Western world”.

Tianzifang also celebrates Western culture and holidays. One day around 7.00 p.m., when I about to leave, a group of bizarrely dressed young people flowed into Tianzifang in front of me. They wore exaggerated make up or masks, wore fun costumes and some held hollow pumpkins with eyes and zigzag smiles. It was Halloween, which has been described by several of my research participants as the most interesting activity in Tianzifang. The former leader of the sub-district government proudly said that Tianzifang was probably the first place to celebrate Halloween in Shanghai. It was started by White families years ago, young Chinese later joined
in, and it became Tianzifang’s “tradition” after several years (IN-Zheng-06/13/2013).
Tianzifang seems to be the right place to celebrate and display the Western Halloween and
Christmas holidays, because those “weird people and things (IN-Zheng-06/13/2013)” are
considered normal in Tianzifang and the residents have gotten used to them.

Both domestic and foreign tourists see Tianzifang as a stage for exotic spectacles. The
half-Western/ half-Chinese Shikumen dwellings are the stage settings, and the people who are
present - tourists, sellers, and residents - are not only actors/actresses but also the audience.
When the White people watch the daily-life-like performances that take place in the Shikumen
lilong, they themselves—White people drinking beer at Shikumen sidewalk coffeehouses— also
become part of an exotic spectacle watched by other Chinese visitors. Foreign tourists and
Chinese tourists view each other as the exotic “Other” who function as actors/actress on the
stage.

Urry (1990) says that travel involves seeking difference and going to places which
separate travelers from their everyday lives. It is interesting that domestic Chinese people also
view Tianzifang as a distinctive place, which contradicts Bruner’s (2005) assumption that
domestic tourists are expected to seek similarities of culture and identity rather than differences.
Not only the young and non-Shanghainese tourists may find old Shikumen unfamiliar, but
even Shanghainese who have experienced Shikumen’s lilong life also find it unfamiliar
because the culture has changed. Tianzifang’s Shikumen seems only to be preserved by the
look of the old buildings, and the spirit and soul of the culture is disappearing.

In Tianzifang, culture includes many kinds of visual symbols which deliver the image of
China and of the West. Tourists see tourism as a journey for collecting signs (Urry, 1990)
through photographs, postcards, films, or “Check-ins” on Facebook or Instagram. Tianzifang is
a commoditized spectacle, a cluster which showcases these symbols for people who coming there to consume what they want. Sometimes these cultural symbols are wrongly positioned. For instance, I noticed that some shop owners replaced the old Shikumen doorknockers with lion doorknockers ring, which are supposed to have been used by royal families in old Beijing, because they are cheaper and can be readily found in antique markets. In another example, I saw a restored Shikumen with up-turned eaves and glazed tiles, which are a classic Chinese architectural style that has been popular since the Ming Dynasty, but which never appeared in Shanghai’s historic residential area. Besides, the string of red lanterns that are frequently seen in many China Towns is usually used for religious uses, and mostly is hung in Taoist temples rather than on the streets. Wrongly positioned cultural symbols eventually replace the true historical artifacts and finally became part of authentic Chinese culture. Moreover, the cultural symbols are reproduced to reinforce their cultural value and the sense of history. For instance, the old-looking ground stone bricks that surprised the White family were actually just laid three years ago; a factory space on the east side was painted and restored as traditional Shikumen.

However, wherever these symbols came from and whenever they were made, their authenticity does not seem to an important issue. These symbols are rootless, flat images viewed as representations of supposed historical images, regardless their historical background.

The Meaning of Place: Our Shikumen versus Their Tianzifang

The Residents and their Homes

Tianzifang was the first place in Shanghai to merge a residential area with a creative district. Although it has been praised by Chinese government as a successful case of a creative district, building a new creative district inside of a long-existing living community and locating
businesses within a residential area provokes some issues worthy of consideration. For example, how do the residents see outsiders? How do they see, and react to, the changes in their community? How do they see their own culture? The residents can be categorized into two kinds of people: the old Shanghainese (whose families moved there before 1949) and the new Shanghainese (whose families moved there after 1949). The following sections narrate five short stories about Xu, Zong, Lin, Jiajia and Liu, and the emotions they attach to their places, their homes.

The old Shanghainese. Mr. Xu is the third generation of the locals to live in the Two Wells Lane of Tianzifang and has been there for more than 60 years. He worked in a state-owned automobile factory enterprise and now lives on his pension. Like many traditional Chinese families, Xu has taken on the responsibility for caring for his 90-year-old mother and for his 30-year-old son. Every morning, after Xu finishes the laundry and has hung the clothes on the third-story balcony, he walks down to get on his bicycle. He returns around 8.00 a.m. with several bags of buns and vegetables. He told me that his son worked very hard and needed more sleep and he usually prepared breakfast for him and woke him up at the last minute.

Around 9.00 a.m., after Xu’s son went to work, he again walked down to work at his own “business.” This was a kind of a portable craft shop that used public space. He drilled six holes on the brick, poked six iron sticks into them and laid wooden shelves on top of each two sticks, so that he could display his tiny craft arts shop. The shop was portable. He could easily shut it down by putting and pulling down the shelves and sticks in seconds when the weather was too hot or when it was raining. His business began when Tianzifang began to attract tourists and his hand-made arts caught the eyes of tourists. He made clay figures of ancient Chinese shu, hua, (meaning playing instruments and chess, calligraphing, and painting) and aluminum
sculptures made from recycled zip-top cans. The price of these items ranged from RMB$ 50 (US$ 1.7 to 8.3). According to Xu, he could earn RMB$ 300 a day at best.

Xu was familiar to most of the people in Two Wells Lane, including both residents and the courtyard employees. He liked to stroll around and exchange gossip about the current rents. He was eager to rent his place out at a good price but never had the chance. One reason was that he lives on the third floor, which was not the best choice for business, and the other was that he lived with six other families in one Shikumen unit, and negotiating among so many people was not an easy job.

Xu’s life may not look much different from the lives of other residents except for his family’s historical roots in Tianzifang. Xu’s ancestors were among the first generation to develop and reside in Tianzifang around 1930. At that time, Shikumen’s builders were rich people who established the new, fashionable mixed Chinese and Western architecture styles of that time. Xu’s grandfather owned three blocks of Shikumen on the eastside of Tianzifang. Xu said:

> The houses around Two Wells Lane all belonged to my grandfather who lived in this section [before 1949]. A single Shikumen cost a “big golden fish!” How could an ordinary man afford it? Do you see the concrete building of the children’s garments shop over there? That was used to be my grandpa’s personal parking garage. He often drove in along the Lane 248, turned right, and then went straight to the garage. All of our neighbors knew it was him when he arrived home (from the noise of the engine). Having an automobile was so fashionable at that time!  

However, Tianzifang also experienced a period that people might want to forget. The

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10 The “golden fish” was a nickname of gold in Shanghai in 1930. A big golden fish equals to 10 Liang (a unit of weight) gold, and a small golden fish equals to 1 Liang gold.
good economic times did not last very long for Xu’s family. Their properties were confiscated after Mao took over the government in 1949, and his family was allowed to keep only a few rooms of their Shikumen. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Xu’s grandfather, a landlord, had to deal with a notorious “struggle session” conducted by the Red Guards in the courtyard. Xu recalled the scene of the struggle session that occurred when he was a little boy:

I saw my grandpa standing on a little wooden chair on the covered well (he pointed to the well directly in front of us). They hung a board onto his neck saying his name in an accusatory manner. At noontime, they beat a gong loudly to announce his crimes to everybody and humiliated him in public for hours until he confessed. This humiliation was inflicted on him many times, as well as to those who had been identified as “capitalists” or the “enemies of the people” among our neighbors. Some of them were too old to endure this torment and became seriously sick afterwards or even committed suicide…(IN-Xu-07/19/2013)

The older residents have deep memories of Tianzifang, and many are old women left by their husbands during the tough times. Zong (1899-2004), a local female artist, moved to Tianzifang during the war and lived there until she died. Her artist husband left her to go to the US before 1949. It was common practice for Chinese intellectuals and artists to flee to Hong Kong, Taiwan, the US, and other countries to escape political oppression during that period. In order to use expenses economically, their wives and children were usually left behind. However, the segregation was unexpectedly long. Some exiled Chinese formed new families in other countries, some revisited Shanghai, but many others never returned. Zong raised her children

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11 A struggle session was a public humiliation that often used by the Communist Party of China during Cultural Revolution. It aimed at shaping public opinion and to persecute political rivals and class enemies.
alone for decades, and was eventually reunited with her husband at the end of her life.

Mrs. Lin, a 93-year-old Shanghainese dama, was recognized as the oldest living resident of Tianzifang. She fed her son alone and sent him to study abroad in the US. Her son now works in Singapore with his family and they visit her once a year. I asked her why she did not move to Singapore with her son. She said that she is too old to move and she does not want to leave the familiar place where she has lived most of her life. Mrs. Lin is an elegant woman. She is much more polite and gentle than others when she speaks. One time I talked with her about Tianzifang’s past story, and she whispered to me: “the real Shanghainese have almost all moved out! All of these (she pointed to the other dama around me) are from the lower class!” (OB-05/20/2013). She shook her head with a scornful facial expression.

It took me a while to understand what she meant by the “real Shanghainese.” It is not just a term used to describe people who reside in Shanghai; it also describes a superior lifestyle that can be traced back to the golden era of the 1930s. Shanghainese use “lao ke la” to refer the classic Shanghainese. Ke-la is a direct translation from “class” in English, which means the lao-ke-la are upper-class people, mostly male, born into notable families, who experienced Western education, earned higher salaries, and were artistically and culturally literate.

The older Shanghainese believe that Tianzifang is a link to the splendid past of the 1930s and to the unforgettable stories which are tied to current Chinese history. Tianzifang is meaningful because it has homes which residents associate with lifelong memories, and these are also indicators of their social status: formerly rich, upper-class, western and fashionable. As time moved on, the old Shanghainese became a shrinking proportion of Tianzifang’s residents. The meaning of Tianzifang changed and increasingly fewer people remember the old stories.
The new Shanghainese. The new Shanghainese constitute the majority of Tianzifang’s current residents. They may have originally come from other provinces but eventually became Shanghainese after decades of residence. To them, the place does not carry the sort of historic connotations it carries for Xu, Zong, and Mrs. Lin, but the place and the Shikumen architecture have physically shaped their lives and helped make them Shanghainese.

Jiajia’s (female, age 20) family members are second generation new Shanghainese. Her grandparents moved to Tianzifang from Ningbo after New China was established. In order to support the national Down-to-the-countryside Movement (1960s-1970s), her father, the eldest son and an urbane, educated youth, was sent to Anhui’s rural areas to work with workers and farmers when he was 18. He and other 20 million other rusticated youths worked in the countryside for more than 20 years. He eventually returned to Shanghai to live with his grandmother. Jiajia was born in Anhui and moved to Tianzifang with her parents when she was age 7. She recalled her memories of her childhood:

When I was little, the place where we lived was very quiet in the evening. My grandma would get a little stool to sit in the lane and knit and chat with neighbors. There were many exuberant trees and dusky light along the lanes, and we loved to take walks…but these scenes do not exist anymore. (IN-Jiajia-06/13/2013)

As a 20 year-old young female, Jiajia’s lifestyle could not be expected to be like those of her old Shanghainese neighbors. The first time I met Jiajia was in Starbucks; she was drinking hot mocha and playing with her smart phone. She had light makeup, very short jeans, long hair which touched her waist, and sunglasses. Her Alexander McQueen-style high heels made her resemble cover girls who appear on fashion magazines. She graduated from a vocational high school two years ago and works in a local hotel near Tianzifang.
Jiajia’s home in Tianzifang represents the traditional lilong life. She brought me to her home, where she has spent 13 years with her parents. “Watch out! Slow down…” She walked in front of me when we went upstairs and she kept turning back to remind me to watch my step. “The staircase is 70 years old…we don’t know when it will collapse.” The wooden stairs indeed looked old but the style was neat. She found the key hidden under a pot and used it to open the door. “Come on in!” she said. Before I entered the door, I had fantasized about what a Shikumen interior might look like. The images in architecture books and the reproductions in Shikumen Museum do not indicate the actual situation of how people use such interiors today.

Jiajia’s home was occupied by her single bunk bed and her parents’ full sized bed in a ten square-meter size room (see Figure 6.4). She invited me to take a “seat,” but I was unable to find one, so I sat on her bed next to her. Her bed is actually a half single bed, because the other half space was occupied by a wooden shelf with miscellaneous items. Dolls, cosmetics, clothing, snacks, a dryer, a fan, and books were all squeezed onto the handmade wall shelves. This made me think of the capsule hotels in Tokyo, which gather all of one’s daily appliances inside the bedding area so that the space can be used effectively. Jiajia told me that most of her books had been thrown away by her mother to save space, but her mother had kept an English-Chinese dictionary for her (see Figure 6.5). Jiajia argued: “My mom said that the dictionary looks important and I might need it someday. But come on, I am a Japanese major!” (IN-Jiajia-06/13/2013).
In order to give Jiajia some private space, her mother used an old dress to make her a green girly curtain, so that she can pull it when she needs to change on the bed. But most of the time, according to Jiajia, she just locked her dad out. Another awkward moment occurs when using the toilet. The water supply pipe was not designed for Shikumen 70 years ago, so the residents do not have either toilets or bathrooms in their units. They used chamber pots instead. The chamber pot was a wooden bucket with a lid and was located next to the door. I was wondering how awkward it might be when Jiajia had to use the chamber pot while her parents were watching television (which was directly in front of the chamber). Jiajia said: “I’ll just watch TV with them. It’s not a big deal, and we were all used to it” (IN-Jiajia-06/13/2013). As regards bathing, the old Shanghainese went to public bathhouses but most of those bathhouses have been removed. The residents add hot water to small bathtubs using a thermos bottle. Again, in order to give Jiajia a private space, her mother built a temporary shower space with a lock on the first floor next to the shared parking space.

Another new residential group of Shanghainese is the migrant workers who have come from inland China. They arrived quite recently because the open-up policy abolished the
embargo on farmers, who had been required to remain in their villages instead of working in the cities. Migrant workers now are the workforce of the factories and support China’s economic growth. In the case of Tianzifang, the migrant workers were originally farmers from nearby provinces such as Anhui and Suzhou. They live there because the rent for the second and third floor apartments on the outskirts of Tianzifang is cheaper than in downtown Shanghai.

Liu Lei’s (male, age 19) family moved from Anhui to Tianzifang six years ago. Although the old Shikumen dwellings do not offer a better quality of life, they moved in to access the nearby facilities (markets, schools, and hospitals) and to save one or more hours of commuting time during the morning rush hour. After graduating from high school, Liu decided not to continue his education because his hukou issues make it difficult for him to study in Shanghai. He works at a drink stand in Tianzifang.¹²

Liu’s home is located on the west side of town in front of a large loquat tree.¹³ The entire Shikumen has not been rented out for business as yet, so they still have kitchen space on the first floor, which follows the classic Shikumen design. I visited them in the evening when Liu’s parents were finishing dinner. Liu’s mother was washing dishes in the kitchen at a stone sink that had four faucets. It was very dark and only one light bulb was hanging in the corner. I was unable to see clearly what was in there. Liu’s mother was chatting with me about her only son while she washed. When she finished washing, she took the handle off the faucet. She explained that four families shared one kitchen, and each family had their own faucet handles, which served as locks to prevent the theft of water.

¹² According to the current hukou policy in China, Liu and other non-Shanghainese students must achieve higher entrance exam scores than local students in order to continue studying in Shanghai. (Detail about the hukou restrictions will be discussed in Chapter 7)
¹³ While I writing this dissertation, Liu’s family had to move to other Shikumen spaces due to increased rent.
Liu’s mother led me to their place, which was beyond the kitchen on the second floor. The narrow staircase was dark. Liu and his mother walked upstairs rapidly and I was unable to see anything in front of me. Liu and his mother then opened their apartment door at the top of the stairs, and I could see a little bit of light coming from their room. They stood upstairs waiting for me and kept reminding me: “slow down, do not hurry, and be careful!” The wooden stairs were quite steep and the width of each stair was about 5 inches. I had to lean my body, hold the wooden handle tightly, and make my feet parallel to the stair in order to move on. I did not want to embarrass Liu, so I attempted to walk faster, but my high heels disabled me and made it hard to walk on the stairway.

Eventually I reached the room. I saw a man (age 40) wearing nothing above the waist who was sitting on his bed, having dinner at a table, and reading a newspaper, all at the same time. The man was Xue, a friend of Liu’s father, who was also from Anhei. Living together and sharing the rent is quite common among migrant workers. In this case, Xue and Liu’s family used the second floor as their living room, kitchenette, and Xue’s bedroom, while Liu and his parents slept in the other room next door.

I took a close look at the room arrangement. I noticed a new flush toilet with a closed lid in a corner. Liu’s father told me the sub-district government put in the toilet two years ago, but their space of about 15 square meters was too small to spare a separate room for it. Instead, they put a table on top of the toilet so that they can reuse the space. Next to the toilet was a food cabinet with a microwave. On the wall against the toilet was a do-it-yourself wooden shelf, where Liu’s mother had put some seasoning, bowls and dishes (see Figure 6.6). There were hardly any decorations on the wall, except for an 8 by 10 inch framed photograph of Xue’s family reunion.
Shikumen has multiple meanings among Tianzifang’s residents. To some, it reminds them of the glories and sorrows of the past which have been passed along through the generations; to some, it is a familiar place that houses one’s life-long memories; to others, it is nothing more than a place which offers a temporary shelter and an affordable home. These are usually of low social-economic status, because they must bear living in cramped and gloomy spaces with poor sanitary conditions. Their daily lives are a series of battles over spaces: they attempt to make good use of their own space to obtain as much shared/public space as possible. Given that the borders between residents are invisible, and sometimes overlap, it easily creates tension, and this tension became even more complicated when Tianzifang became a creative district that welcomed additional people.

**Segregation and the Psychological Distance**

Tianzifang’s boundaries are fluid rather than fixed. A previous section described the boundaries, points of access and paths that are officially shown on tourist guides and Tianzifang’s community bulletin boards, which claim that Tianzifang is a land where residents,
tourists, and business co-exist. However, for many of the people who live in Tianzifang’s Shikumen, the official world of Tianzifang is ironically distant from their real lives and for some it is never approachable. Their alienation has been shaped by temporal and spatial segregation and the psychological boundary between “We” and the “Other.”

First of all, there is a timeline which separates the world of Tianzifang and the world of Shikumen lilong life. The exotic spectacle recognized by tourists runs from 9.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. Tianzifang’s official hours are listed in front of each entrance. Before Tianzifang officially turns into the “exotic spectacle” at 9.00 a.m. each morning, it is a quiet neighborhood where the locals cross through, ride bicycles, exercise, chat, greet each other, empty the chamber pots, shell beans, wash vegetables, do the laundry, hang laundry outside, and walk dogs. This is an image of Shanghai’s daily lilong life and it has probably has changed little in the last 70 years. However, after 9.00 a.m., tourists with backpacks and cameras occupy Tianzifang and the residents disappear suddenly. Figures 6.7 and Figure 6.8 show the distinct scene of Lane 248 at different times of day: The picture on the left was taken at about 7.00 a.m., when the stores had not yet opened. Two Shanghai dama were returning from the local market and were greeting each other. The figure on the right was on the scene when the sidewalk café pulled out their tables and chairs to welcome customers from around the world to enter. Day after day, Tianzifang returns to its natural state of nocturnal peace around 10.00 p.m., assuming that the nightclubs and bars don’t have too many lingering drunks. Therefore, Tianzifang’s “official hour” becomes a temporal line of demarcation that segregates the residents from their neighborhood. Their vibrant lilong life runs in a manner that is completely contrary to Tianzifang: it essentially shuts down after 9.00 a.m., and is reborn after 9.00 p.m.
At certain times, Tianzifang is a circled enclave that plays its own games using its own rules. Some of the rules can be discovered by understanding the security guards’ duties and who they do not welcome. Lanes 274 and 248 have security stations because they have the largest volume of tourists and the other points of access have security guards who take turns patrolling. “Tianzifang has too many tourists, and thieves come with them, too. That is the reason why we need guards, to secure customers’ property” (IN-Zhou-05/16/2013), a volunteer from Tianzifang’s committee office told me. In addition to securing customer property, I noted that there was a board at each main entrance which specified categories of people and objects that were not allowed access. These include pets, vehicles (including bikes), and vendors. These can create chaos and mess and probably present a disorderly or uncivilized image. Ironically, dog-walkers, bike riders, and vendors are integral parts of the morning scenes of everyday Shikumen lilong life but have been harshly rejected by Tianzifang. On several occasions, I saw bike riders and vendors who wanted to get inside being stopped by the guards. A woman biker yelled: “I live in here! How dare you don’t let me in? Why can’t I ride to my home?...I would beat you if I were a man!” (OB-07/19/2013). The guard replied: “I would beat you first if I were not a man!” At this moment in time, the residents had temporarily become the “Other” who had been exiled
by the Tianzifang Kingdom. Such events occurred on a regular basis and sometimes turned into serious disputes and fights on the streets.

The segregation was also spatial. There is a line which horizontally separates most of the ground floors of buildings in Shikumen from the upper stories. The first floors (sometimes combined with second floors) have greater economic value and most have been rented out as shops and cafés, but the upper stories have not. This is the dividing line between business and residential activities, the dividing line between modern and out-of-date, and the dividing line between the wealthy and the poor. While the lanes and the first floors are covered by tourists and business, the residents’ nests atop Tianzifang look down upon a world that never welcomes them.

The temporal and spatial segregation expands the psychological distance between the residents of Tianzifang and the rest of the world. Tianzifang is a sacred place of art and creativity that sells a type of lifestyle: drinking coffee with colleagues and friends, meandering around creative and funky boutique shops, or participating in the openings of art galleries. However, this type of lifestyle is completely different from the residents’. Older residents said things such as: “I don’t drink coffee, and I don’t have time to do it, either. I spend 12 hours at work per day! (IN-Yue-05/17/2013)”; “We don’t understand arts (IN-Liu-05/19/2013)”. A young resident said: “I don’t know why this tattered place attracts people and makes them stay here the whole day! (IN-Liu-05/19/2013)”; “I know there are a couple of fun stores out there, but I haven’t take a look yet...”(IN-Qiaozhen-05/08/2013); “I seldom go to Lane 210, so I am not sure what it looks like now (IN-Jiajia-05/13/2013).” Although the residents are quite close to Tianzifang geographically, they are quite distant psychologically. They have no idea what these stores are exactly selling, and do not want to explore them. When I interviewed the residents, I sometimes asked them whether they could draw a map of Tianzifang. I found these maps show the correct site of their
homes and the shortest path from their home to points of access, but the other parts of Tianzifang were depicted in vague images. Most of the residents, including the younger ones, were even unsure exactly which shops were close to their homes.

The lifestyle sold in Tianzifang is high-priced for most of the residents and the issue of affordability sharpens the contrast between “our Shikumen” and “their Tianzifang.” Liu told me that a $6 RMB beer price increased to $100 RMB after it is poured into a nice-looking glass in Tianzifang. Jiajia said: “No sane man would shop here” (IN-Jiajia-06/13/2013); and an old vendor concluded: “Tianzifang is a lie! For richness, tourists, and people who don’t realize the real price” (OB-10/23/2012)! The residents and the visitors are not on the same economic level and this is reflected on the menus. A regular scrambled egg wrap costs $70 RMB in Kommune, but a bun sold in People’s Snack House costs $0.7 RMB. Most workers who are employed in the café could not afford the meals they delivered, and the residents seldom step into these shops, either.

Not surprisingly, economic status is a barrier among these people. Sometimes, economic status is linked to one’s English reading/speaking ability. People who can read or speak English are supposed to be better educated and to be of higher economic status, and they are welcomed by the businesses, particularly the arts-related enterprises. For example, one day I saw a wooden board in front of a shop, which advertised in English “Take one bouquet for free!” On the other side of the board, in Chinese was the statement: “One bouquet for $10. Please leave the vase and money on site.” This was a commercial promotion by a new flora shop which implicitly stated what sort of potential customers they preferred and targeted. I personally experienced how entrepreneurs go out of their way to attract Western people and those who speak English:
One afternoon I entered the gallery of a famous Shanghainese artist. I saw the seller was being friendly and zealous to a customer from Switzerland. The artist introduced him to the artworks and packaged a print that the customer picked, and said “Sorry about your waiting! This photo frame is a complimentary gift!” When the customer left, I stepped into the small exhibition room the Switzerland customer just exited. Suddenly, the light of that room was turned off. I turned to the guy; I was pretty sure that he knew I was there but he just lowered his head and pretended that he was busy at the cashier, where no one was around. It appeared that he did not welcome me and I felt a bit offended. I went to another exhibition room and hid myself in a corner to jot down my observations and thoughts. The seller found me and asked: “Hi, Miss. Are you interested in the artwork? May I see what you are writing about? ” He then tried to grab my notes. I closed my notebook immediately and said that they were just my trivial notes. He asked me whether I was a journalist and explained the reason he turned off the light when I was in the room was to save energy. Another gallery salesman once told me they were trained to identify potential buyers, and then decide whether they should or should not spend time on certain types of people. I wondered about the possibility that if Jiajia or Mrs. Zheng should enter the gallery, would they experience the same rude manners? Or would they experience even worse situations? Later, I noticed a poster about a free Chinese paper-cut workshop. I asked how I could go about joining it. The seller handed me a registration form with half page of description in English. I didn’t know how well an ordinary Chinese would understand this, since the man did not want to explain anything in Mandarin. I turned in the form, and he said: “we
will select the most appropriate participants!” “How”? I asked, but the man just smiled without saying any words. (OB-05/11/2013)

(Part 2)
Not surprisingly, I was not selected to be a participant but I went to the gallery later to see who had been selected. I saw a group of about 20 young people from foreign countries and a few Chinese women who were dressed nice and neat. The artist was stood in front, passing out golden scissors and red paper to everyone, and taught them how to paper-cut a panda. The entire teaching experience was translated into English. The man from the gallery recognized me. He gave me a chair so that I could join them in the corner. I was glad to learn how to make paper-cut patterns, but I felt sorry and depressed when I saw some Chinese children who wanted to join but were denied entry. These kids stepped around the workshop site, looked at us through transparent windows, and told their parents that they would try to perform panda paper cuts at home. (OB-05/19/2013)

Back to the residents’ living experience. The temporal and spatial segregation, the psychological distance created by an unfamiliar lifestyle, high-end consumption, fine art, and unfamiliar languages all differentiate the Shikumen residents from the world of Tianzifang, both as a tourist destination and as a creative district. The residents exhibit a strong sense of detachment from Tianzifang. The world of Shikumen and Tianzifang are like parallel universes, both of which share the same physical space while each has its own different and distinct way of life.
Spatial Transgression and Invasion

The official map of Tianzifang clearly delineates the boundaries and every single path like they would never let slip any opportunity to attract customers. However, the map does not indicate the private residential areas which tourists are not supposed to enter. Some visitors consider Tianzifang to be a vacuum community. They think that the clothing hanging on the streets is just decoration, and that the old men and women wandering around are just hired actors and actress (OB-05/25/2013). Indeed, the private and public areas of Tianzifang overlap substantially, and sometimes it is hard to tell whether a building is an actual old dwelling space, or just a store that maintains an old-looking front. For example, a few dwellings remain on the ground floor which sits on a narrow path between Lanes 274 and 155 (directly adjacent to the bustling bars area), and this is always confusing to tourists. “What will I find at the end of the little narrow lane?” “Will it be the home of an ordinary Shikumen family or a fancy vintage boutique?” These things occur when people decide where to go. Some claim that it is interesting to adventure around the old community, and encounter residents’ private realms. However, these sorts of discovery activities bother the local residents. Although the residents who cannot stand being continuously bothered by outsiders will hang cardboard signs with words such as “do not enter” and “no photos” (see Figure 6.9 and 6.10), this seldom stops curious tourists from exploring places where they want.
Another spatial transgression occurred when the residents themselves went against the rules of Tianzifang and utilized the spaces in unapproved manners and at unapproved times. Bicyclers, as mentioned above, who went in or out Tianzifang at the “wrong” time are examples. I noticed that some bikers violated the rule intentionally, because biking has been prohibited in official Tianzifang for years and all of the residents are supposed to know this rule. The residents bicycle into Tianzifang for the sake of convenience (sometimes the guards would turn a blind eye to them), or to declare their legitimate of using the lane as their home, like the woman said: “I live in here! How dare you don’t let me in? Why can’t I bike to my home” (OB-07/19/2013)?

Street vendors are prohibited as well, but some still flee and hide in the dark and narrow lanes to avoid patrolling security guards. Many such vendors are local residents who once worked in Tianzifang when it was an outdoor market. The trading has moved into another indoor market and the vendors are all refused by the guards. Their illegal status makes these vendors quite sensitive to strangers, particularly those with cameras. However, interestingly, it appears
that all of the residents know where to find the vendors and obtain the produce they want. The existence of the vendors is a local open secret.

Spatial transgression might be temporary, but spatial invasion is permanent and is in a continual process of extension in Tianzifang. The spatial invasion refers to businesses eclipsing the residential area and original living space yielding to business use. First of all, the boom in renting first floors to businesses shrinks the amount of square footage available to residents. Running off neighbors is one thing, reducing the amount of living space is much more serious. A classic Shikumen is designed for use by four families with a shared kitchen on the first floor on one side, and stairways, parking spaces, and sometimes shower rooms on the other side. Many of these shared spaces have been renovated and converted into attractive fancy business locations. The original windowless dark and humid kitchens have been changed into bright, warm spaces with large glass windows and doors. I call this “open windows competition,” which is a visual index for determining the degree to which the living spaces have been eclipsed by counting the number of windows. It appears that no one cares about the issue of how much conversion may harm old architectural structures. Given that the shared spaces have been taken, the residents must find alternative spaces. They have wound up parking outside at considerable distances, usually near the outskirts of Tianzifang; the kitchen and shower rooms have moved to rooftops and even between the stairs.

Developing Tianzifang has impacted local people, and has changed the function of their traditional community. Shikumen survived within the ecosystem of old Shanghai lilong. For example, although the traditional Shikumen community does not have hot water in its units, it has public bathhouses and local shops which provide hot water for the entire neighborhood. Mr. Yue, a 61 year-old resident, recalls his life before Tianzifang was named:
Living here was pretty convenient! Taikang Road was an outdoor market, and we had all kinds of grocery stores along both sides, like shops involved in cotton flufferring, briquettes, rice, soybean sauce, four guardian warriors, and Tiger stoves.\textsuperscript{14} Tiger stoves provide hot water, and were much cheaper than heating water at home. You could fill up a large thermos bottle for only 1 cent! The storeowner sets a few tables besides the stoves, and it becomes a teashop serving hot Chinese tea; put a piece of cloth to cover up a corner, and it then becomes a bathhouse! (IN-Yue-20130517)

This Shanghainese type of living did not disappear very long ago. In fact, the stores which supported the daily needs of local people were pressured to move out when Tianzifang became better known. Today, they have been replaced by fashion boutiques, beverage houses and gift shops. Once the local shops were replaced, living in Shikumen was less convenient than before. Yue complained and criticized the changes:

These shops have been gradually disappearing since 2000 because they (the local government) did not allow them to continue. They thought that these shops were low-brow and disgraceful, and these local businesses did not produce profits for rent and revenue… But, I really think these should be preserved because this is the unique Shanghainese culture, and this is our way of life! Did you notice that Tianzifang has all kinds of cuisines except for Shanghainese cuisine? They said that they want to promote culture, but they are actually ruining the local culture! What should be preserved has disappeared. Now those cheap little commodity shops are all over town. I cannot stand this! (IN-Yue-20130517)

\textsuperscript{14} “Four guardian warriors” is a special term which refers to four kinds of traditional Shanghainese breakfast, including large flat breads, deep-fried fluffy dough sticks, soybean milk, and sticky rice.
Official Tianzifang alters social patterns, and the changes can be observed before and after Tianzifang’s official hours. Every morning the Shanghai dama would gather together and gossip while doing housekeeping like preparing food and laundry. Sometimes they carry little bamboo stools and sit near the intersections of the lanes, knitting sweaters, and greeting to neighbors who come and go. “This is the norm of lilong life,” according to Jiajia, who told me:

When I was little, I knew everyone, and everyone knew me, too. All of the kids played together, running from one home to another. These dama are just like my grandmother, sitting by the lanes in the morning and afternoon every day, and coming inside when it rains or gets too hot… (IN-Jiajia-06/13/2013)

However, this group activity has gradually disappeared while the tourists get more. I originally thought that the residents just went home at 9.00 a.m. In fact, they move some distance away from the buzz. Figure 6.11 shows the specific places where the residents gathered together in the early morning (the small dots) and during Tianzifang’s rush hours (the large dots). These new gathering spots are close to the access points of Tianzifang, where tourists are unlikely to visit and security guards seldom patrol.
A group of dama meets at one of the blue dot locations every morning. They sit on benches to eat breakfast, chat with each other, or just watch people. Sometimes the benches are not enough, and they go home and bring back their fancy chairs, which have been mostly obtained from nearby cafés that have already shut down.

Another spot is the location of a vegetable stand hidden on a crooked path. Mrs. Liao, a woman about 40 years of age is the vendor. She works at this business from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Her son sometimes sits besides her doing his homework while sitting on a wooden stool. Although located on a corner, Liao’s business runs efficiently, and her little vegetable stand has become a place that continues the spirit of lilong life. Below are some fragments of the daily conversations that go on between Liao and her customers which I heard during a sunny afternoon (OB-05/20/2013):
Liao: Hey! Jiang-tai-tai (Mrs. Jiang)! Still want a daikon radish today? See? I saved a good one for you!

Jiang: Oh, thank you! Did you also get the cockroach chalks for me?

Liao: Sure! I almost would have forgotten if you hadn’t reminded me (turns around and checks a Styrofoam box). Here you are! 5 yuan (RMB). This works perfectly!

Lin: Can you also bring me some chalks next time? It is getting hot and the cockroaches are all coming out!

Jiang: This area is qiao-qiao-da-da (hammering, meaning restoration works) all day long recently, no wonder those creatures have become bothered as well.

Liao: It is okay to have some cockroaches at home, though.

Lin: I have tons of cockroaches in my home!

Liao: Zhong-shien-sheng (Mr. Zhong)? Where are you going? (Speaking to a man who was caring for a bicycle. A pink Disney backpack is set inside the bike’s basket)

Zhong: Hmmm (He knits his brows), I want to find a shifu (craftsman) to fix my daughter’s backpack, but I couldn’t find one…the one I used to visit has left.

A woman: I know one who is still patching up stuff (Stands up and point in the direction of Mr. Zhong). Go along this lane and make a turn at the first turn, just behind Huang’s home. It has a little sign on the window, I am sure you will find it.
Liao: Are you getting better now (waving her hand to an old man in his nineties who wears black rounded glasses and a white undershirt, standing 3 meters away)?

The old man: What?

Liao: Are you getting better now (spoken in an even louder voice)?

The old man: You knew it?

Liao: Ya, several days ago I saw an ambulance came, and you were carried on a stretcher!

The old man smile and knocking his head: My brains are not good.

Liao turns to me and explains: He has low blood sugar, so he feels dizzy all day long.

And he sometimes faints when his condition is serious.

These meeting spots are places where people purchase miscellaneous goods, exchange information, and offer support to each other. Some residents bring small stools and stay in one spot for hours. Such interaction and social activities used to take place inside Tianzifang, but the crowds and businesses have pushed them to the outskirts of the area.

**The Dilemma of Whether to Stay or Not Stay**

The tremendous impacts in the life of the residents cause drastic complaints. Phrases such as “Right to Subsistence!” “CCP (Chinese Communist Party) please save us!” and “Business is immoral” were written on posters or pieces of cloth hung in front of their residences and parking lots. Most of these protest signs did not last very long and were soon torn down. These controversial issues failed to capture the attention of the public. Newspaper reports mentioned the problems faced the residents far less often than Tianzifang as a creative and fun-filled destination.
The people who live in Tianzifang are mostly lower-income people. Their homes on the upper stories of buildings reflect that they do not have enough income to allow them to move to other residences. Many of them complain about the quality of life and are bothered by outsiders, but they have no realistic way to solve these problems. The economic issue is the main factor that has trapped some of them in this area. However, others have a different reason for remaining: affection for their old neighborhood. Mrs. Zheng (65 years old, no children, living alone) was quite agitated when she described why she remains here:

I won’t move out! Where could I move? I have lived here for years! All of my friends and neighbors are here, and we take care of each other. Where could I move? A few days ago I got a fever that went up to 39 degree Fahrenheit and couldn’t get up: Mrs. Wang took me to the nearby Ruijing Hospital. If I lived in an apartment in the Shanghai suburbs, who would care about a dying old woman like me? I won’t move out unless I get enough money to rent another space right beside Tianzifang! (OB-05/20/2013)

Renting a living space in suburban Shanghai may be affordable, but life would be more difficult for older people with no social network. In addition, some of the old Shanghainese believe that they would die if they left the places where they have lived for many years. There are whispers about neighbors who passed away immediately after moving elsewhere. Mrs. Jiang said: “Don’t judge us as being superstitious. Old people are less adaptable than younger people and it may not be easy for them to get used to living in new environments. They become fragile and vulnerable.” Older residents see the confrontation between themselves, creative entrepreneurs, and sometimes even the local government, as a holy war in which they face the possibility of death.
Discussion

Tianzifang is a creative district that tells a story about a spatial battle. It is a lovely tourism destination for customers and a creative market for artists and creative workers, while also being a nightmare for long-time older residents. Tourists consider Tianzifang to be attractive because they find surprises everywhere they go; but local residents can find it threatening when outsiders invade their habitat. How and when specific spaces are used, and how people sense those spaces, reveal the unspoken power and social relationships that are interm embedded in them. What is chosen for presentation, and what remains hidden or ignored, represents the preferences of unseen powers, be it the government, enterprises, or residents. The social hierarchy and the inequality it has created are often disguised under high-sounding rubrics such as “creative district.”

Tourist Gaze in an Exotic Spectacle

Tourist gaze in an exotic spectacle generates difference. Once Tianzifang became a sought-after tourist destination, it implied that there were two types of people: those who do the gazing and those who are gazed upon. Tourists view Tianzifang and the people they see there as a fancy exotic spectacle. The residents are the gazed-upon others who know that they are being watched by outsiders but cannot get rid of them. Urry (1990) argues that the gaze between tourists and non-tourists is built in certain social relationships that are constructed through differences in class, ethnicity, or taste. In the case of Tianzifang, the tourist gaze apparently exists in varieties of differences. What enlarges the gaze of difference is when the minoritized subjects are gazed upon as being others. In some cases, such as China Towns around the world, scholars find the residents re-confirm their status as minorities because they experience the tourist gaze on a daily basis (Laguerre, 1999; Fisher, 2002). Likewise, in the case of Tianzifang,
the native residents are mostly considered to be members of the lower social-economic classes. They experience bad living conditions because they cannot afford to move elsewhere. Living in a place where they are surrounded by wealthy tourists confirms their economically disadvantaged status, creates disaffection and resentments.

The visual images of Tianzifang are commoditized, exoticized and idealized, but may not reflect the reality of Tianzifang. They depict Tianzifang as a fun place, meaning a place where traditional Shikumen dwellings, creative shops and galleries, foreigners who hang out at bars, and old Chinese dama roam around, and these are elements of a collage of landmark scenery. These images can be found in magazines, international travel guides and tourist brochures, and are used to invite prospective tourists to visit and spend their disposable income in Tianzifang. Eventually, over a prolonged period of time, these images gradually replace authenticity. The local culture, place memory, and the residents are gradually removed. They are ignored, muted, and become invisible. Tianzifang becomes what people see (in the images) rather than what people know and feel.

**Gentrification Changes the Lilong Life, Social Relationships and Increases Inequality**

Developing Tianzifang threatens the traditional Shikumen habitat and local culture. Preserving the traditional Shikumen buildings was one major reason for sustaining Tianzifang (see chapter 5). However, the spirit of Shikumen lilong life cannot be nurtured without the participation of the native residents. Tianzifang in the early morning is a normal Shikumen neighborhood, but the residents have had to alter their daily routines in order to avoid the tourists who flood in later. Their living spaces have been eclipsed, and even the surrounding grocery stores that support their daily needs have moved elsewhere. Today’s Shikumen lilong life is a living social organism that is rapidly shrinking. No one can guarantee that a few years down the
road that Tianzifang will not have completely transformed into a hollow commercial district with only Shikumen buildings remaining.

Some studies have pointed out that local people accept changes that accompany tourism provided that they see those changes benefit themselves (Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Simmons & Fairweather, 1998). This may be correct but not all of the residents enjoy benefits. Many of those who live above the second floors find it difficult to rent their spaces, so they must remain and endure endless bothering and numerous inconveniences. Compared with neighbors who originally lived on the ground floors, they become jealous, and this is believed to be one reason for frequent conflicts with tourists and shop owners.

Secondly, developing Tianzifang has changed the community’s internal social relationships and the local power order. Changes in local social structures as a result of economic development have been noted elsewhere (Kousis, 1989, Brown, 1998; Fisher, 2002). Tianzifang’s speedy development has led to the composition of Tianzifang’s population becoming more complicated and hierarchical. Creative entrepreneurs (both Chinese and foreigners) run the shops and bars. They hire talented Chinese to be sales people, they hire migrant workers from inland China to work as service workers such as cooks, garbage collectors, waiters/waitresses to serve middle-class customers. Meanwhile, older residents have no place and no stake in this economic system. Moreover, the invisible social powers embedded in the spaces – the businesses, real estate developers and government on different levels - that have been involved in Tianzifang, have made the power structure more complicated.

Finally, developing Tianzifang has worsened intra-district inequality. The recent upsurge of global interest in establishing creative districts is motivated by the global desire for economic growth (see Florida, 2002; 2005; 2008; Landry, 2000). This research has been criticized by some
scholars for overlooking the possible social downsides of such growth (see Baris, 2003; Peck, 2005; Maliszewski, 2004). For example, that it worsens intra-district inequality. Tianzifang’s case exposes the problems of developing a creative district in a living community. Tianzifang’s spatial and temporal segregation creates separation among the residents and indirectly increases alienation, social conflicts, tension, and a sense of insecurity. People who live below the poverty line and those who can afford luxuries walk on the same streets, and the gap between them is clearly demarcated.

Tianzifang is an attractive and amazing place, but it is also a place of conflict and segregation. Creative districts are not often interpreted as sites of complex and ambivalent feelings. However, the different meanings of Tianzifang which were identified by the different user groups developed out of its history, the pursuit of urban development and economic growth, the increasing public awareness of the necessity of preserving China’s culture heritage, and the ambition that attracted art and creativity into old warehouses and streets.

Tianzifang is different from many creative districts in Western societies that were developed in a top down manner. It was not originally a run-down area with public safety problems that cried out for salvation through gentrification. Tianzifang combines a long-living, densely-populated community with post-industrial creative spaces. This unique situation has given Tianzifang different social problems not often found in Western creative districts: the dilemma of maintaining the native neighborhood; the segregation and conflicts that were triggered between residents and outsiders; and the acceleration of intra-district inequality. All of these issues could emerge in other creative districts, if the government continues to regard Tianzifang as a successful model while disregarding the feelings and needs of residents without consideration for what should be eliminated and what should be preserved.
CHAPTER 7: THE ATTRACTIONS OF PLACE FOR CREATIVE PEOPLE

Introduction

The first time I met Ailin (a 35-year-old ceramic artist), he was riding an old bicycle, stopped in front of Chen Yifei’s Memorial Studio. He wore a dark blue Mao suit and leather shoes, slowly used a key to unlock the wooden gate, and said to me: “Sorry, I am late!” Ailin’s strong accent drew my attention. Growing up in Jiang Xi Province’s countryside, Ailin was a skillful craftsman who matured and worked well in Jingdezhen—a town well-known for Chinese pottery. He moved to Shanghai and worked in Tianzifang to assist Chen Yifei in the ceramic studio 10 years ago and recently became the studio keeper after Chen passed away. He did not go back to Jingdezhen but stayed in Tianzifang to work for another studio; he went to Chen’s ceramic studio back and forth to continue his own creations after work. “What made you leave your hometown for an unfamiliar place?” I asked him. He answered me without thinking: “To see the world! Shanghai is a miracle, and it will turn me into a miracle too!” (IN-Ailin-07/18/2013).

There are many creative workers like Ailin who have flooded into Tianzifang or other creative districts in Shanghai from inland China and around the world. As a city that has kept its leading economic position, Shanghai claims to develop a creative economy and is adopting theories from the West. Florida is the most influential; his assumption of building an attractive living environment for creative people to enhance economic growth has made an impact (see Chapter 2). However, how do these assumptions fit Tianzifang? How do people understand Tianzifang’s tolerance and open climate—which are noted as important factors of creative milieu?
Although a few quantitative studies have been done in China, most of them have shortcomings because of methodical limitations or lack of further consideration of China’s condition in reality.

To elaborate the attractions of creative milieux, this chapter first reviews the related theory and concepts of place attraction. Secondly, since most of the participants decide which city they would like prior to which district they want to live in, this study will first address Tianzifang’s attractions on the city level before discussing the attractions on district level, although some of these attractions are on both levels. By interviewing Tianzifang’s creative people, I try to provide a perspective that is close to the reality of life of the creative people in Shahghai, and also compare it with other studies.

**Theory and Concepts of Place Attraction**

Traditionally, market factors (such as job opportunity and wage) are considered the key to attracting talent, but recently non-market factors have been considered significant, or even more important, than the market factors to today’s creative people when they make location decisions. Three main non-market factors are often discussed: amenity, diversity, and university. One line of research believes that creative people are attracted by amenity (Clark, 2004; Florida, 2002; 2008; Glaeser, 2005; Glaeser, Kolko, and Saiz, 2001; Landry, 2000; Lloyd & Clark, 2001); this refers to better quality of life, physical beauty of a place, comfortable temperature, and adequate cultural and entertainment facilities. Another line suggests that creative people prefer a place of high social tolerance (openness) and diversity (Florida, 2002; 2005; Glaeser et. al, 1992; Hall, 2000; Jacobs, 1969; Landry, 2000; Saxenian, 1994). Indicators of tolerance are usually a population of foreign workers, different ethnic groups, Bohemian and sometimes gay people. The rationale is that the more open a place is to outsiders, the more the place is accepting of
challenges and changes, and enhances social interaction and learning new ideas, which is crucial to a successful creative economy. The third factor, university, is understood as a talent magnet, which gains multiplied power when the surrounding companies and institutions form a job market for creative talent (Florida, 2002; Hall, 1998; Landry, 2000; Saxenian, 1994).

A few studies have been done in China of the correlation between talent, amenity, diversity (tolerance), university, technology, and economic performance. However, although these studies provide quantitative data to prove a positive correlation, the standards they used to measure the related variations are controversial and make their conclusion unconvincing. Dai, Zhou, Keane, and Huang (2013) questioned the tolerance index utilized by MPI research team: “How then China is ‘considered relatively tolerant’ (p. 653)?; and they argued the measurements the MPI used do not effectively represent a place’s tolerance in general.\footnote{The MPI (2011) utilized Open Door Policy Index to measure tolerance, which is the population who lived in Special Economic Zones recorded on a document in 1995. However, Dai and his colleagues (2013) argue today’s China has already open to foreign investment all over, so this index may consider “meaningless proxy” (p. 653).} Besides, many of these studies follow Florida’s research design; but since some statistical data is not available or has not been released officially in China, Florida’s model is hard to duplicate. For example, in Florida, Mellander, and Qian’s (2008) study, the Gay Index (the population of gay people) cannot be applied because of lack of relevant data. And the population of the creative class is gauged by an official count of “professional and technical workers”, which goes too far from Florida’s original definition.

Other studies challenge Florida’s fundamental assumption. One research group conducted a case study of Beijing and Shanghai’s animation workers; they concluded that what determines the job destination of creative people is merely their “personal trajectory”, meaning where they work is either their home town, place of residence, or university from which they graduated. So
creative people are far less mobile than they are in the Western society (Dai, Zhou, Keane, and Huang, 2013). However, in my opinion, this statement may also be vulnerable. It may look like people select a place because they happen to live or study there, but this seems to neglect the causality behind the location choices: why do these people decide to live and/or study in Shanghai, especially those who are not born in Shanghai? In fact, according to their research, Shanghai is hometown to only 37.6% animation workers, and it does not explain why 62.4% of non-Shanghainese animation workers move to Shanghai for higher education or living. These unexplained reasons may be the most significant clue to understand the creative Chinese’ motivation.

Some studies point out a different pattern than the Western model (see Li & Florida, 2006; Florida, Mellander, and Qian, 2008; MPI, 2011; Qian, 2010). For example, they conclude that a university greatly drives the distribution of Chinese talent but has little correlation to technology and economic growth. Besides, many studies indicate that China’s hukou policy has a big impact on the mobility of Chinese talent, which has restricted them from freely deciding to go where they like. This is a big difference and may challenge Florida and other Western theorists’ assumption.

**Tianzifang’s Attraction on the City Level**

**Shanghai’s Diversity**

Shanghai has a long and splendid history of representing diversity in culture, population, and architecture. Around 1930, Shanghai was China’s capital of finance and manufacture, controlling 51% of the nation’s gross industrial output value. The first modern factories, trams, stock market and department store were founded in Shanghai during this time. 90% of the national banks were settled along Shanghai’s Huangpu River, which controlled China’s
economic lifeblood. The strong economy supported Shanghai to establish the first movie industry and the biggest publishing company in China (Yu, 2013), and attracted a great number of famous artists, musicians, movie stars and writers from elsewhere. Shanghai became the biggest art and culture center in Asia.

*Haipai* (Shanghainese-style) was a term referring a unique style that was grounded in Shanghainese culture and affected by foreign cultures, which can be found in the fine art, literature, opera, movie and music of the time. Even during the later chaos of wartime in 1940s, haipai’s artists found shelter in the French Concession and the International Settlement. Today the remaining buildings in the French Concession and the International Settlement have become testimony to the past splendid history.

Shanghai was a migrant city with a diverse population. According to Yu (2013), from 1850-1950, Shanghai’s population had 80% of migrant and only 20% of native people; and the foreign population grew to 2% by 1930, mostly concentrated in the foreign-governed areas. Although later political changes closed Shanghai’s door to the world and the Cultural Revelation darkened Shanghai’s cultural and artistic achievement for almost 30 years (1949-1979), the Open Out Policy proposed by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 started to bring Shanghai back to the stage. The foreign banks that were once exiled during Mao’s socialist economy returned to Huangpu River, the economy blossomed, Chinese art galleries and the art market flourished, and Shanghai again approached to its old status as Asia’s financial and art metropolis. It grew in size at an incredibly high rate under the national urbanization movement. Consequently, Shanghai again attracted people around the world as it used to in 1930, and about 67% of its population migrated from inland China (Shanghai, n.d.). People who moved to Shanghai to work in art and design were called “haipiao”, meaning flowing to Shanghai. The haipiao and the native Shanghainese art
workers have nearly no connection with their predecessors who were active in 1930; they are a new generation, doing new types of art, and are gathered in different places.

Many times when I asked the participants what motivated them to come to Shanghai, their answer was: Because it is Shanghai! For many of them, “Shanghai” is a proxy for cool, fashionable, rich, vibrant, opportunities, westernized, commercialized, open, and modern. Shanghai is indeed a super metropolis full of skyscrapers and shopping malls, with busy commerce like many other big cities in the world; but it is unlike other big cities in China. A 30 year old creative director told me: “Shanghai is not representative of China; Shanghai is unique and it is just itself (IN-Eros-06/22/2013)”. According to him, Shanghai is inhabited by a number of rich people and foreign businessmen who can afford a higher living standard; the unique downtown street view of Westernized dwellings and architectures conserved from 1930 and the smaller lanes visually demonstrates its uniqueness. The people, lifestyle, and the street view can only be found in Shanghai; even the capital Beijing does not have similar conditions.

It may be easier to understand why Ailin, a young man from Anwhui province’s rural area, found Shanghai so attractive and saw it as a place that was closest to (the rest of) the world. When Ailin said he wanted to go Shanghai to see the world, he meant to see things and people that are different from his familiar China.

**Openness of Job Opportunities**

Openness/Tolerance is a subjective and complicated concept that can be understood from different perspectives, and each perspective may show distinct values. In current literature, as mentioned in previous paragraphs, the concept of tolerance in China is controversial, and the many invented quantitative indices are criticized as either unusable or unintelligible in China in reality (Dai, Zhou, Keane, and Huang, 2013). Discussing tolerance in Shanghai could be a
sensitive topic for some. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I found a few interviewers hesitant or even hostile to me when giving their opinion on tolerance. To reduce tension, I avoided directly asking the tolerance questions; instead I grounded my account in the transcripts that were transcribed from hours of interview.

One theme usually had associations with the concepts of tolerance, openness, or how much they feel welcomed: job opportunities (market). First of all, Shanghai is a bridge to the outer world and is particularly important to industries of art and design. As Ailin said: “if a Chinese artist wants to gain fame internationally, the first step is moving to Shanghai” (IN-Ailin-07/18/2013). He believes frequent exposure of his works in art gallery or shops will ultimately get acknowledgement by famous or international curators. And in fact, because of living in Shanghai, Ailin met some overseas collaborators to continue his business after his previous studio had shut down. For some young creative workers in advertisement, fashion, and design, it is very important to keep updating the new and coolest information in the world, and there is no place better in China than Shanghai. (In-Miao-06/14/2013). Especially in the recent decade, more and more important international exhibitions, concerts, and fashion shows take place in Shanghai, which makes it an open stage that is superior to many Asian cities. Shanghai’s youngsters feel the same pulse as other youngsters in the world.

Secondly, Shanghai has a relatively mature and open arts market. A 27-year-old couple told me: “we both specialized in ceramic design and making, but the village we lived in was too poor. Who came to buy our designs? The only thing we could do is farming…and that’s what the most of our same age neighbors do” (IN-Qiaozhen-05/08/2013). So they decided to come to Shanghai where they are in demand, where they can earn a living by their interests and professions. Besides, it is broadly believed that rich Chinese and a big number of Western
customers (tourists) are the pillars of the market. A Tianzifang’s artist said: “Only when people satisfy their basic needs, will start seeking arts for spiritual food...Chinese have been poor for so long, although our economy is getting much stronger now, the lack of art education in school and society makes people have no idea about art, how to appreciate art and understand its value, not to mention to buy art” (IN-Han-05/18/2013). He argued that appreciating art and further purchasing art is a “habit” of Western people, and this habit should be cultivated in China extensively but will not get instant results. Indeed, many gallery workers, artists, creative shop owners claimed that their main customers are Western people, but the number of Chinese buyers is also growing recently.

Thirdly, guanxi (human relationships) does not matter that much in Shanghai, which means Shanghai is more open and can provide fairer opportunities to job seekers. Guanxi is the system of social networking. Guanxi is invisible social resources that can be maintained and exchanged among stakeholders, and has traditionally been viewed as an essential and effective resource in job seeking in Chinese society. Moreover, guanxi is hereditary. One’s guanxi will continue to privilege one’s next generation if well maintained. In other words, people who cannot gain benefits from guanxi may find it hard to stand out. In industries of arts, interestingly, guanxi matters a lot. Since the value of art pretty much relies on one’s subjective opinion, guanxi then become a convenient standard to judge one’s value and to predict its potential. Good guanxi may be established through being educated by famous masters, graduating from top art schools, living in an art family, or having good relationships with celebrities and politicians. The 39-year-old Jilin artist recalled his memory when he showed his artworks to a gallery many years ago: “I showed my painting to galleries and expected them to sell my works or to exhibit them, but no way. When they realized that I was not a famous artist, that I never received any awards and do
not have significant guanxi, they rejected me immediately without taking a glance at my works” (IN-Han-05/18/2013).

Shanghai is a middle ground that does not look at guanxi that much, although it still matters. A few research participants told me that getting a good job in Beijing greatly relies on guanxi, while getting a good job in Shanghai is relatively fair and pretty much depends on how good you really are (IN-Box-06/03/2013; IN-Haihai & Paopao-06/03/2013; OB-06/12/2013). This may because the large and complicated migrant population and the overseas workers break up the sacred significance of guanxi—the guanxi maintained by themselves or their parents in their simple hometowns cannot be transferred or has been weakened in the big city. This gives Shanghai a chance to attract creative talent and guarantees a relatively open and fair stage for people who are not supported by guanxi.

**Intolerant Inhabitation Policy?**

Another theme tightly clustered with the concept of tolerance is how much the migrant creative workers feel welcomed by the city, and this relates to China’s inhabitant registration system—hukou. China’s hukou system has been long designed to control inner migration and prevent too many people from squeezing into the cities. Farmers registered with rural hukou can only live and work in their villages, while citizens registered with urban hukou can remain in cities. The Open Out Policy launched in 1979 has gradually loosened the hukou restriction, and farmers are now free to live and work in cities to contribute to massive urban construction, and some are involved in art and design industries. However, the migrant workers do not receive rights equal with those who have urban hukous, which makes some of my research participants feel not welcomed by Shanghai. Xiaomei’s story described below may reveal the situation.
Xiaomei (female, 25-year-old) moved to Shanghai from a far away countryside 3 years ago. She works in a high-end hair saloon near Tianzifang as a stylist assistant. Because of lacking Shanghai hukou, she is not covered by social welfare, health insurance and other social services. She would not go to hospital to see the doctor unless she is very sick, because she cannot afford to. She finds it hard to find a decent job, because most companies prefer to hire people who have Shanghai hukou. In addition, even if one day she earns enough money, it is still not simple to buy a house due to complicated property regulations for non-Shanghainese migrants, and she is required to get married first. What matters most, as many of my research participants said, their children do not receive rights of education equal with Shanghainese kids. Most public elementary and middle schools do not accept non-Shanghai-hukou students, so her child can only get education in private schools (and paying more tuition). And even if her child finishes primary education, he or she still cannot participate in Shanghai’s high school entrance exam due to the hukou restriction. Instead, her child has to go back to the countryside, where his or her original hukou was registered (usually the same as the mother’s hukou) for more education, and if he or she performs outstandingly in high school, he or she may get a chance to participate in Shanghai’s university entrance exam. But not surprisingly, the admission standard is much higher than for Shanghai hukou students. “Don’t you think this is unfair? We work so hard for small pay, why do we deserve these discriminations” (OB-04/25/2013)? She suddenly asked me. I nodded my head to say yes. “Well…but we are used to it, and can only accept it” (OB-04/25/2013). Xiaomei complained with a bitter smile. Xiaomei’s situation is a prevalent one for non-Shanghaiese migrant workers, whether they work in arts or not. Shanghai’s open and plentiful job opportunities make it easy to access, but the strict hukou policy makes people feel it is hard to survive.
However, although hukou hinders non-Shanghai migrants in many aspects of life, for people who migrated from foreign countries and areas, the Chinese government is much more welcome and “tolerant”. Hukou regulation on foreign workers is basically on a different track which has more privilege. For instance, their children can receive better education without competing with local Chinese students. Except the privilege of inhabitation, job opportunities are also strongly attractive to foreign creative workers. A young French product designer (female, about 26 years old) said: “I couldn’t find a job in my country, but Shanghai provides me many choices with same pay as in France. So why not?” (OB-05/30/2013). A Taiwanese creative director (male, 30-year-old) said: “It is nearly impossible to work with name brand companies if I stay in Taiwan, but now I interact with the world’s top brands and a lot of cool people, and they pay me twice the salary!” (IN-Eros-06/22/2013). Moreover, foreign workers often feel more welcomed and admired in Chinese society. A young American (male, 21-year-old), interned in an advertisement company in Tianzifang, told me that he earned a higher salary than his Chinese colleagues, and his opinion was always considered valuable because he represented a “Western perspective”; even in shopping, he felt he received more respect and discounts from store clerks than his Chinese mates (IN-Alex-06/13/2013). A friend even showed me a calendar that noted which days in which bars were free for white customers. To attract creative workers, the Chinese government seems to have created a more tolerant and open environment for foreign talent than inland Chinese talent.

Is Amenity Important?

Amenity has been viewed as a crucial factor to attract creative people by some urban researchers. For Landry (2000), public facilities, such as the beauty of a city, health, transportation, shopping facilities, cleanliness and parks, are important for encouraging creative
processes and exchange of ideas. For Florida (2005), amenity is the quality of place, including climate, leisure services, and cultural facilities. He believes that creative people like to work in an environment where they can shop in high standard retail stores and cafés surrounded by museums, where they can have arts and outdoor activities, and where they can bump into interesting people in their community who work in top labs or enterprises.

However, these kinds of amenities have seldom been mentioned as key factors by Chinese creative workers; at least they are not their major concern. On the contrary, some reported that life is full of “challenges”, because living and working in Shanghai actually makes their life pressured and uncomfortable (IN-Qiaozhen, 05/08/2013; IN-Dong-05/20/2013). The unaffordable housing prices and living expenses are hard to balance with their low salary. I again use Xiaomei’s example as an example.

Xiaomei lived in a Shanghai suburban apartment with 2 roommates and had to spend 3 hours commuting from home to work every day. Her wages were RMB$ 2,500 (US$ 417) but she had to pay RMB$ 2,000 (US$ 333) for rent and utility. Apparently, the rest of the money barely covered her monthly expenses, so she still had to receive economic support from her parents. I asked her: “Then why not go back to your hometown? Would living with your family save more money?” She said: “The rest of the money is even better than the salary I can earn in my hometown, because people there won’t spend much money on hair styles. Besides, if I work hard, I will become a stylist one day and I may open my own saloon, and then everything will be worthwhile. I want to see how far I can go” (OB-04/25/2013). With her inferior hukou status as non-Shanghainese, she suffered from many inconveniences in life. Xiaomei came to Shanghai simply for jobs and to fulfill her dream rather than seeking amenity of living.
But this is not to say that migrant workers do not care about amenity. Migrant workers had their reasons to stay in Shanghai and one long-term goal I heard quite often was providing a better life for their child. They believe that education was one of the best ways to improve life and, since they believed that Shanghai had better education, they tried as much as they could to see their only child study in Shanghai. If possible, getting a Shanghai hukou for their child would be most valuable. As Qiaozhen said: “We work so hard to stay in Shanghai, we want our child to get a better education, and we hope he or she can be a true Shanghainese (having Shanghai hukou), and not suffer like our parents and we did” (OB-04/24/2013). Being poor and feeling discriminated is endurable. The whole family put hopes on the future.16

While Chinese interviewers indicate no concerns for the place’s amenities, many overseas workers point out their significance. Carol is a French designer who moved to Shanghai after a few years of learning Chinese in Beijing. I asked her why not stay in Beijing. She said: “I like Shanghai’s climate better…Beijing’s fog is too bad” (IN-Carol-06/28/2013). The thick fog is a result of serious air pollution that is caused by exceeding industrial development, which deeply threatens the environment and human health, and it became the main reason for Carol and her family to find another habitat. Similarly, British artist Christopher, who moved from Beijing to Shanghai, commented that Beijing had serious problems of pollution and traffic, and this made it nearly not “art” at all. Furthermore, Shanghai has a freer and comfortable living environment. Christopher said: “I got used to Shanghai very quickly…Shanghai is neat. I can go everywhere by riding on my bike” (IN-Christopher-06/10/2013). A Taiwanese graphic designer who has

16 There are some ways to get Shanghai hukou, but none of them is easy. One is continuously paying required fees for at least 7 years, and then people can get into the line to spend more years waiting for new hukou to be issued. An alternative way is getting a Shanghai Residence Permit, which has partial benefits of Shanghai hukou, but is limited to people who have higher academic degrees and higher skills in specific professions.
frequent travels between Beijing and Shanghai told me: “Haven’t you ever been to Beijing? I promise you won’t like it! Although it is the capital, it does not look like a big city, and it is not very convenient” (IN-David-06/10/2013). But in downtown Shanghai, living facilities and infrastructures are in reachable distance. Heavy Metro system, shopping malls, and busy business make the pattern of life convenient and similar to other globalized metropolises. This may be a strong attraction to overseas creative workers.

The Magnet Power of Universities?

Western scholars see universities as magnets that draw talent (Hall, 1998), and some further emphasize that if a university partners with institutions and companies to extend students’ career paths, it will retain talents in the area, as in Silicon Valley and Route 128 (Saxenian, 1994; Friedman, 2006; Florida, 2002). However, Shanghai’s situation is different. First of all, Shanghai basically recruits local talent rather than from the whole nation. As described in previous paragraphs, Shanghai’s universities primarily accept students who have Shanghai hukou, and only a small number are open to very outstanding non-Shanghai-hukou students. According to an undergrad student from a top ranking university, the ratio of non-Shanghai-hukou students versus Shanghai hukou students is about 1:9, and non-Shanghai-hukou students’ admission rate is about 0.01% (OB-06/14/2013; OB-02/21/2014), which has weakened the power of attractiveness.

Another issue is how the linkage between universities and the job market can sustain talent after they graduate. Shanghai has plenty of job opportunities; however, hukou system again obstructs non-Shanghai-hukou graduated students from getting jobs. If the graduated students cannot find an employer who is willing to provide Shanghai hukou (which is very limited and only issued by big companies), they may just leave and go back to their original town.
As a result, Shanghai’s local talents remain in the same pool, but for non-Shanghai talents, although there are opportunities open for them, the jobs available do not guarantee their stay. Some researchers point out that universities in China have a statistically high correlation to talent distribution and thus see universities as strong talent magnets (Florida, Mellander, and Qian, 2008; Florida, 2012), but these studies do not mention how many students stay in Shanghai to work after graduation. In other words, without providing equal rights to pursue careers, universities are only temporary 4-year talent camps.

**Tianzifang’s Attraction on District Level**

Like many creative districts in the world, Shanghai’s creative districts are mostly reusing abandoned industrial spaces, and the big spaces of these old factories are viewed as a great advantage to creative workers who need roomy and affordable studios. New York’s lofts in 1960’s Soho and the cast-iron manufacturing spaces in Chicago’s Wicker Park are examples. Likewise in the case of Tianzifang, my research participants who resided in the early stage argue that big space and cheap rent were very important initial temptations (IN-Earl-10/30/2012; IN-Carol-06/28/2013, IN-Catherine & Kao-06/19/2013; IN-Ailin-07/08/2013), that started Tianzifang to flourish. However, since most creative districts in Shanghai have such advantages (Hui, 2006), I would like to pay attention to additional attractions. When creative people move to Shanghai, how do they make location decisions among the 86 creative districts, most of which offer big spaces with cheaper rent? Why is Tianzifang more popular and longer-lasting than them? What else do the creative people care about? Furthermore, when cheap rent is no longer an incentive, what encourages them to carry on?
Diversity, Amenity, and University

The factors which have been recognized as being important to creative people on the city level are also interchangeable on the district level. First of all, in terms of diversity, Tianzifang had the same cultural roots in multiculturalism as did the city of Shanghai. Tianzifang is geographically grounded in central Shanghai. Historically, it was on the border between the French and Chinese governance areas, where it was also a shelter for many Chinese creative minds during wartime (see chapter 6, Tianzifang’s past, 1930-1990). At the present time, Tianzifang offers tolerance and openness in providing job opportunities for its diverse population. According to Zhong’s survey in 2012, Tianzifang has 59.1% foreign employees, including 43.3% from inland China (non-Shanghai) and 15.8% from overseas. Some of my participants who moved to Tianzifang during the early stages mentioned the fun times when the international creative workers got together using their English and poor Chinese, and how they supported each other (IN-Martin-05/26/2013; IN-Carol-06/28/2013; IN-Simon-05/26/2013). When I was collecting historic documents, I found that there was a time that Chinese artists from minority ethnic groups (non-Han people) were active in Tianzifang’s Shikumen area (see also chapter 5). Furthermore, dressing in a strange manner was considered “proper” in Tianzifang (IN-Zheng-06/13/2013). This indicates openness and tolerance to differences.

Secondly, living/working in Tianzifang in downtown Shanghai is little different than living in other big cities in terms of amenities. All of the advantages of amenities on the city level discussed in previous sections were passed along in Tianzifang, which makes the density of the artistic and creative climate and the aesthetics of the traditional Shikumen community even more attractive.
Thirdly, in terms of university, as discussed in the previous sections on district-level, the attractiveness of universities in China has been weakened due to the *hukou* policy. The presence of a university does not appear to be a strong magnet when looking at the district level. In fact, very few of my Tianzifang participants were graduates of Shanghai’s universities. The provincial locations of their schools include Shandong, Shanxi, Guangdong, Anhui, Beijing, and overseas. This shows the weak connection between creative people and Shanghai’s universities, which is consistent with Dai and his colleagues’ (2013) research finding that Shanghai’s creative people graduated from universities located in eastern and southern China rather than in Shanghai.

**Distinctive Spectacle: Being involved in the Old Shanghai Culture**

The historical look, diverse architectural styles, and the native residents of Tianzifang together make a most attractive scenery to creative workers. Tianzifang is a place that showcases Shanghai’s architectural diversity in one site: The south part is lilong factories and different types of Shikumen dwellings, while the north part is filled with more Westernized Shikumen and old French style villas. The multiple historic architectures have drawn creative people’s attention visually. According to Wu, who renovated the southeast factory space to several studios in 2002, he sublet nearly all his studio units in one single night. He said: “The leasers were almost all foreigners or *haiguei* (Chinese who’ve stayed abroad for a certain time)…they were so fascinated with Shanghainese culture, they decided to rent the space without too much thinking (IN-Wu-05/26/2013)” A French children’s garment designer, Carol, who moved to Wu’s studio around 2005, said that she was truly attracted by the lovely old Chinese houses (Shikumen), the little streets (lilong), and the quiet environment in the weekdays (IN-Carol-06/28/2013). Similarly, one of Tianzifang’s pioneer artists, Earl, told me that he was attracted by the diverse historic scenery when he moved in around 2002. As a local documentary photographer, Earl has
been long concerned about issues of preserving heritages. At the time when Tianzifang was newly born, other places were busy in tearing down Shikumen and old lilong. Earl said: “I was not sure how long I could stay in here…but I tried to stay as long as I could” (IN-Earl-10/30/2012).

Creative workers also seek inspiration from the “old” for their art creation. Nini is an antique designer who is crazy about old fashions. She collects old objects that she finds in flea markets and then assembles them into her new designs. She said: “I create vintage style antiques, and I believe all objects have their own stories, memories, and even souls behind them, so I come get them and make them alive…This Shikumen house is the best home for my work and my collections” (IN-Nini-06/03/2013). Likewise, Helen, a young fashion designer, moved to Tianzifang to identify herself as a local Shanghainese artist 10 years ago and gained ideas from the environment. She designed a series of fashion clothes using the symbol of Chinese mahjong, based on her past living experience in Tianzifang lilong. She said in a news interview: “you probably cannot imagine, when I rented this studio, everyday when it came to dinner time, many mahjong ‘dazi’ set up a row of square tables right on the road playing Mahjong for the whole night…at that time, the taxi drivers’ uniforms had not been united yet, you could tell their companies by the uniform’s color…”(Art China, 2013). The old building and the lilong life seem to be an amazing charm to many creative minds.

The native resident is the spirit of the old Shanghai spectacle, and has been viewed as valuable to claim its cultural authenticity and attractiveness. Tianzifang has Shanghai’s unique

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17 According to an urban development report, during 1991-2000, Shanghai tore down 26 million square meters old houses and built many skyscrapers instead (Wu & Yeh, 2007).
18 Mahjong is a traditional table game that is very popular with China’s old generation. It requires four people sitting around each side of a square table. Mahjong Dazi means the game players, usually a group of four.
architecture but the people who live inside Shikumen continue the lilong life and preserve the culture, making the historic site alive. Tianzifang’s pioneer artist Chen Yifei discerned the value of living heritage. According to Zheng, the ex-leader of the sub-district government, Chen originally had a chance to reside in another famous district that was featured as a residential area of past cultural and political elites, but he rejected it: “I don’t want to work with dead people…and this is exactly what I want to live in (pointed to the Shikumen community on Taikang road)...this is true Shanghainese culture and life” (IN-Zheng-06/13/2013). Chen believed that art is generated from simple everyday life; being around with the grass-root residents facilitated him to immerse in traditional culture and also made it easier to bring arts to ordinary people (described by his ex-assistant; IN-Ailin-07/18/2013).

For creative entrepreneurs, the distinct spectacle creates business. This happened a few years later after the pioneer artists moved in. When Tianzifang became more well-known, some creative entrepreneurs smelled the business opportunity in the old shabby lilong. They negotiated with the residents to sublease their spaces, and renovated them into galleries, creative stores, coffee shops and restaurants. A Taiwanese couple who ran a creative store in a corner recalled when they first visited Tianzifang: “At that time, Tianzifang had a really nice and quiet atmosphere, and did not have that many tourists yet. That was exactly the ‘old Shanghai spectacle’ that tourists and foreign people like us would be very interested in and want to discover... (IN-Shi&Ju-06/20/2013).” This couple also planned to transform some Shikumen into a B&B hotel so that foreign travelers could experience one day of life in Tianzifang. Another Hong Kong couple opened a Teddy Bear Workshop & Café inside Shikumen community in 2006. The wife, who was a fabric designer, said: “I loved this place at first glance! My husband took a

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19 This project did not work out eventually due to the conflicts between the residents.
lot of effort to persuade the residents to sublet their spaces to us. Teddy Bear Workshop & Cafe was settled in two 70 year old Shikumen, but I tried to keep the floor, window, wall, and stairs original so that the customers can sense the ‘history’ (IN-Ashley-05/09/2013)”. The trend to transform Shikumen started around 2004, and today nearly all Shikumen in Tianzifang community have been renovated.

**Chen Yifei Effect**

When analyzing the attraction of the Old Shanghai spectacle, I found a type of creative people that was nearly unaffected by it—Chinese artists above 40 years old. Most of them did not mention the spectacle of charm in my data. On the contrary, some couldn’t even understand why Tianzifang was attractive to Chen and other pioneer artists. Guang, a 53-year-old migrated artist, came to Tianzifang with his artist friends in 2002; he described when they walked into the old neighborhood, they found it was a dull area of dilapidated factories; old Shanghainese women looked at them curiously, and they could smell the traditional Shanghai meals from the Shikumen kitchen on the first floor. They felt confused but kept walking down the lane only because they wanted to figure out what exactly attracted Chen Yifei (Shen, 2012). Likewise, the local photographer Yue, although he lived in Tianzifang for 60 years, never took any pictures of his community before it gained popularity. He said:

I was too familiar with Shikumen. Can you believe that this area was all covered by Shikumen dwellings? The Sun-Moon-Light shopping mall and the Si-nan Apartment behind you were just established recently. Before that, they were all Shikumen houses…so I didn’t see its value; I didn’t think it beautiful or attractive (IN-Yue-05/17/2013).
Yue’s answer reminded me of a conversation with a taxi driver on my way to Tianzifang. He said: “I grew up in a Shikumen dwelling but it makes me feel poor and sick. So I spend my whole life to get rid of it! I don’t really understand why lots of people are crazy about it.” (OB-06/03/2013)

If a number of Chinese artists were not interested in the old Shanghai spectacle, then what drove them to Tianzifang? According to them, Chen Yifei’s reputation meant a lot. Chen was a nationally known creative talent in painting, film-making, fashion design, and ceramic art. Tianzifang’s official website, governmental reports, local media and literature all attributed Tianzifang’s success to Chen’s early residency. On one hand, it was widely believe that his efforts to preserve Tianzifang worked out on the local government’s decision-making level and made it exempt from demolishment. On the other hand, his fame attracted more artists moving to Tianzifang and thus continuously fed the art atmosphere.

For creative people, the Chen Yifei Effect worked on two aspects. One is to arouse an artistic aura. A Chinese ink painting artist said: “I came here for the good artistic fen-wei (aura), because quite a few famous artists set their studio here, and I would like to be their neighbors” (IN-Han-05/18/2013). Yuta, another young Japanese-Chinese fashion designer, also said the aura would lead him to a bright side. He said:

It is important to me to cluster with people who work in creative industries. When a crowd of people live or work nearby, it creates energy, a kind of aura; you cannot see it but can feel it when you step in, and you will be affected by it (IN-Yuta&Victoria-06/24/2013).

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20 Chen Yifei worked for the communist government and then went abroad to New York for 12 years (1980-1992). He established a good relationship with Chinese government and Western society. Also, his high priced oil paintings in international art market made him widely known in China.
According to Yuta, the quality of aura varied from person to person, and he believed the aura that Chen and others made carried positive energy. Chen Yifei’s ex-assistant used a Chinese proverb to explained the aura: “One who stays near vermilion gets stained red, and one who stays near ink gets stained black”, and Chen is the vermilion (the good). This sounds like Eastern wisdom: Being with famous artists is like being with positive energy, and the energy will impact the surrounding people/things and make them good too.

Another aspect is more utilitarian—the economic benefit behind the famous name. Artists, curators, art critics and collectors, journalists, politicians and entertainment celebrities, and customers around the world flowed into Chen’s studio every day. Chen’s personal social networking formed a critical mass that attracted other artists’ attention. The first migrant artist who moved into Tianzifang in 2001 said, if he set his studio along the old lilong, it might be noticed by clients who came for Chen Yifei (Shen, 2012). Chen Yifei’s reputation implied customers and business opportunities. Jianshu’s migrant artist, Dong (male, 51-year-old), stated that Chen and other pioneer artists established the “market” and attracted customers who could afford higher consumption, and these customers again attracted more artists to reside (IN-Dong-05/20/2013).

In fact, one industry clustering on one street is a traditional business style in Shanghai. For example, most of Shanghai’s bookstores cluster on Fuzhou Road, which is also known as “the bookstores yi-tiao-jie (the bookstores street)”; Furniture stores gathered on a street called “the furniture yi-tiao-jie (the furniture street)”. Chinese customers go to the clustering area to buy certain products, where they can save the time of going back and forth among different store locations, having broader selections in one place, and maybe can receive cheaper prices with careful bargaining. On the producer’s end, clustering with similar retailers can share resources
and customers. Chen Yifei to Tianzifang is like a name brand company to the commercial street, which enhances the value of all and warrants the quality of products, and thus attracts more customers and artists.

Even though Chen is no longer there, the Chen Yifei Effect is still influential. Customers today still come to look for his footprints, visit his memorial studio, see his artworks that hang in his fashion stores, and discuss his past stories. Although Chen only devoted himself to Tianzifang for about 7 years before he passed away (1998-2005), he led many others to establish the first creative district, enhance its prestige and visibility, and most importantly, raise the art aura and market to continuously feed the creative workers.

**Location and the Critical Mass**

Location and critical mass are two related concepts referring to business potential. The critical mass was described by the research participants as “ren-qi” or “ren-liu”, meaning the quantity of customers who willing to purchase products of art and design is big enough to support the business, while location is usually important to determine whether the place is attractive to customers. Especially when Tianzifang gained more popularity and its rent increased, location and critical mass seemed to be crucial indexes for creative people to decide if they wanted to jump in. People considered questions like: Is it located in a golden area that would attract the critical mass? Is the critical mass big enough to support my business? Is the place easily accessible via buses and MRT? Is it a convenient spot to me? Although some people claimed that they were benefited by Tianzifang’s location because it provided convenient living facilities, or it was close to their homes (IN-Carol-06/28/2013; IN-Earl-10/30/2012; IN-Sophia-07/30/2013), most people preferred Tianzifang’s location for business reasons.
Good location is the prerequisite of attracting customers. Box is an owner of a designer shop in Tianzifang’s Shikumen area. He told me of his location choice and how important it was:

I had a shop that opened in “1933” (another creative district in Shanghai), which is very unique and has a nice atmosphere. One day I went to the shop and asked my clerk how many people came to our store that day, and she said: ‘You are the second one.’ I was shocked and asked her who the first one was. She pointed to herself: ‘Me’. How can I make business in a place only attracted 2 customers? That is not cool at all! (IN-Box-05/29/2013)

He further explained that 1933 was not an appropriate place for him. Although it is a cool spot with awesome atmosphere, the inconvenient traffic and the remote location had greatly decreased his interest. On the contrary, Tianzifang was located in one of the bustling areas in Shanghai, and the busy MRT, buses, and taxis transported tens of thousands of people in and out of Tianzifang every day. An exit of the Da-pu-qiao MRT station is even settled right in front of Tianzifang. These all make Tianzifang a favorite site above other creative districts.

Location and critical mass may look very similar to the Chen Yifei Effect: both imply business potential and sometimes could be overlapping, but they are slightly different. People who are attracted by Tianzifang’s location and the critical mass tend to be arts and creative retailers. They need a physical platform to directly face their customers. Box’s vintage designer shop, Nancy’s gallery, Ashley’s Teddy Bear workshop & coffee, Miao’s and Arial’s handcraft studios, and Yukata’s buyer shop all belong to this type. Their customers are largely one-visit tourists and are probably not the same as customers who would be attracted by Chen Yifei’s fame.
On the other hand, creative people who claimed that they were attracted by Chen’s reputation were mostly creators or artists on the production end of arts and creative industry. An artist who moved to Tianzifang to find a studio may be happy to be around other artists and share the customers; location may not be their main issue, and some of them even want to keep far away from tourists. In other words, the Chen Yifei Effect makes more sense to the production end; while location and the critical mass tend to be crucial to the retailing end of arts and creative industries.

However, I found several professional artists who considered location and the critical mass more significant than other attractions. They were mostly overlapping with those who claimed to be attracted by the Chen Yifei Effect. They were primarily hipiao artists migrating from Shanghai’s nearby provinces. They gathered in the “Artists’ Building” located in the southeast part of Tianzifang, opposite Chen Yifei and Er Dongqiang’s studios. The paragraph below was extracted from my research journal; it describes my first impression of the space of the Artists’ Building and a short conversation with the person I met.

The inside of the Artist Building was quite dark with minimal lighting. The walls along each side of the corridor were covered by tons of artworks: portraits and scenery; realistic and abstract; oil painting and ink art. In a corner on the second story, I saw a Chinese man chatting in an emotional intonation with a blond woman in English in front of an artwork. A Chinese artist wearing a plaid shirt, chino pants, and round glasses stood behind them. The Chinese man sometimes turned to the artist to ask him about his creation and the meaning behind certain symbols, and then translated to the blond woman. The artist seemed to not understand English at all, so he quietly stood with no facial expression and looked through the window between the man and the woman.
Walking by them, I continued to my destination and finally stopped in front of a studio. The door was closed but I could see the fluorescent light glimmering because of the rolling ceiling fan through the crack of the glass window. I knocked on the door and an old woman came out to respond me immediately. “Hi, ni-how (how are you), is this Chung’s studio?” I said.

“Yes, it is! He is my son. Are you here to buy artworks? Does he know you?” The woman was smiling while she put the reading glasses on her nose, and then looked at me carefully from top to toe.

“I am recommended by Mr. Jobs, the Australian boss of the coffee shop downstairs… he said that he collaborated with Mr. Chung before and he thought Mr. Chung may like to tell me some stories about his works and Tianzifang’s past”

“Which media are you from?” The woman asked.

“I am a PhD student writing a thesis about Tianzifang’s creative people…” I passed my business card to the woman.

“I see… Yes we did collaborate with Mr. Jobs a few years ago, but not anymore.” She took off her reading glasses and said: “I am sorry, but my son is very busy and I don’t think he will be interested in your thesis. Go and find other artists!” Then she closed the door. (OB-05/11/2013)

My quick impression of the building was a market that only welcomed people who seemed to be able to afford to purchase artworks, or people who may benefit them in some way. I had similar experiences in other Tianzifang’s galleries before. “Always say you are a journalist and never say you are a student”; I remembered that advice given by one of my research informants but I never really took it. A young gallery assistant who worked in the Artists’
Building later told me that 90% of their customers were foreigners, or middle aged Chinese who had received Western education, so the gallery assistants were trained to judge if the visitors were potential buyers by their appearance, dressing, and manners in seconds. If the visitors seemed not their targets, they wouldn’t spend time on them at all (IN-Mandy-05/18/2013). But after a few tries I found a few artists who were willing and happy to talk about their stories and dreams, and I learned their situations and understood the economic pressures they had to bear.

As mentioned in the first section, a number of migrant artists came to Shanghai to find a chance for professional development, an opportunity to be seen and to survive. Tianzifang serves these purposes just right: customers from around the world would not care about the guanxi or the background behind the artists. Besides, clustering with other artists enhances their visibility and sometimes causes galleries’ attention. Artworks in Tianzifang usually have higher prices; in some cases, selling one piece of work may cover two months’ cost of living.

Unlike some artists who see low rent and big space as Tianzifang’s attractions, ironically, the migrant artists mostly feel it difficult to bear the rent and their spaces are actually cramped and smaller. The building that the migrant artists occupied was renovated from an old hotel, and each hotel room had been transformed into studios, roughly only 10-30 square meters. Not mentioned when Tianzifang gained popularity, the studio space was divided even smaller to allow more artists in. Most of these artists originally moved from larger studios, either their own or others’ in artist villages in suburban Shanghai. As to the rent, which might seem cheap to some artists, it was an economic burden to other migrant artists. According to one, the monthly rent of Pudong Artists’ Village, where he originally resided, was RMB$ 300 (USD $50) in 2002, but was up to RMB$ 1,000 (USD $167) in Tianzifang, and it even increased to RMB$ 3,000 (USD $500) in 2011 (Shen, 2012). So these migrant artists actually moved from a larger and
cheaper place to relatively smaller and expensive studios. Some had even to spend 2-3 hours of commuting a day from Shangahi’s suburbs to downtown.

Dong is an abstract painting artist who rents a small space on the second story of the Artist Building. His studio was unexpectedly clean: the paints were ready mixed in a large amount and arranged neatly on a transparent acrylic plate, and his over-sized canvases stood tidy along the wall. Dong dressed a white shirt with trousers, leather shoes, and wore slicked hair, looking more like a government servant rather than an abstract painting artist in my imagination. He told me of the migrant artists’ situation and his difficulties:

Many artists in this building cannot strike the balance between income and expenditure, and I am probably the worst one. I migrated from Suzhou. I have to rent a house to feed my wife and son. So the cost of living is already higher than other artists…we cannot survive in Shanghai without earning RMB$ 15,000 (USD$ 2,500) a month. I actually sold my house to support my job as an artist. They (the other artists) said I am insane! Thankfully my wife and son are very supportive. They know I am doing well, just not have been accepted by the market yet…what I can do is hang in there. To be an artist has always been my dream. People cannot live without a dream, can they? I will hold on until the spring comes. (IN-Dong-05/20/2013)

Moving to Tianzifang to migrant artists was somehow like gambling: you invested higher rent, withdrew from larger spaces, sacrificed your time, and endured the high pressure of life to gamble on visibility in the market and a better income from selling artworks. According to Shen’s (2012) count, 300 artists moved into the Artists’ Building during 2002-2011; some stayed and persisted for years, but a lot more only maintained for months or weeks. Chen Yifei’s reputation was a signal flare, but location and the critical mass were the flags to decide whether
they should jump in or not. The Shanghai Expo of 2010 pushed Tianzifang to the highest point of investment. Tianzifang was officially selected as an extended travel destination of Shanghai Expo, and the tourists around the world crowded into Tianzifang, which greatly multiplied the business opportunities. As reported by the research participants, during the Expo time the rent of the artists building was extremely high, but the studios were still very popular since a year ago it had no empty studios at all (IN-Moony-07/29/2013; IN-Dong-05/20/2012). Furthermore, in order to squeeze in the “market”, it was very common to see several artists sharing one tiny space. In some extreme cases, an artist could sublease four walls to four different artists for displaying arts, and he or she used only the front wall along the corridor and acted as a gallery manager.

For the migrant artists who have lower economic status, location and the critical mass were the indices to see if they had potential to earn enough to support their career and cover their basic costs. Because of lacking recognition by the “formal” artworld, most of them did not have professional agents or the support of galleries to sell their works, but instead they did the marketing and selling themselves. Dong commented: “This is not an ideal condition. If possible, an artist should only focus on painting, not be bothered by the market or prices, and should hire somebody else to sell the art for him. But I really have no choice, I have to do both myself” (IN-Dong-05/20/2013). This explained why their studios also functioned as galleries: they need a space for both art making and art displaying.

Discussion

Job Opportunities Matter

Florida’s golden formula of the attractions of place has been reversed in Tianzifang—there, job and business opportunities are the major factors. Unlike Florida’s statement that
creative people decide where they want to live before considering their job opportunities, Chinese creative workers first choose the place that offers most job opportunities and they hope a better quality of life may come after.

The causality runs exactly opposite to Florida’s original assumption. To most of my research participants, amenity (the quality of life) is not the priority; instead, in order to work in Shanghai/Tianzifang, they may even have to sacrifice the amenity that they had in their hometown. Hall (1998) even claims that a creative milieu is never a comfortable place at all, because the creative people, who may be young, provincial, or foreign, often feel themselves “outsiders” (p. 646), and not belonging to the order of power and privilege. The situation Hall described perfectly matches the Chinese migrant creative workers in my case. They are not mainly attracted by the place’s amenity.

Finding jobs and business opportunities are the important motivations for Chinese migrant people to leave their hometown. This echoes the view of scholars who argue that occupations and the system of employment are the keys to gather creative people (see Markusen, 2006; Scott, 2005). A place that does not consistently provide jobs and enough income for living cannot retain creative talent for long. This can be seen in the case of some of Tianzifang’s artists: they need to find a location that can attract considerable customers. They need to find a survivable habitat that can cover their rent and financial needs. Many of them see Tianzifang as a market rather than a community to live and work in, and the increasing rent forces them to keep an eye on the market’s development. If things go wrong, they are ready to leave and move to the next district.

Although the quality of life seems to be not that important from my participants’ point of view when they make location decisions, they do expect a better life for their next generation.
Especially the haipiao creative workers hope their hard work can provide a better education for their children, and make their children not experience what they had suffer.

**Tolerance and Intolerance**

In order to understand a place’s tolerance, the population of employees in art and design, foreigner, and gay people has often been used. In the case of Tianzifang, the density of creative people (people who work in art and design) is inherently higher, and the overseas foreign population is also higher; it was probably the highest among Shanghai’s popular creative districts. As regards the gay population, no statistical data is available, and the gay visual culture symbols which are common in Western societies, such as gay bars, do not exist in Tianzifang. A participant once told me about Shanghai’s gay people: “they are not active in Tianzifang area, but if they are present, they would not let other people knowr” (IN-Victoria-06/24/2013). Gay culture in Shanghai/Tianzifang may relate to certain issues involving social tolerance, but there is a need for more understanding, and studies, of Chinese gay culture as a basis for further discussion.

Beyond these indexes, I provide an alternative way of understanding the tolerance of a place by analyzing the narratives of “how much I feel welcomed by the city/district” of the participants in my study. The emergent concepts are job opportunities and inhabitation policy (hukou). Job opportunities and inhabitation appear to contradict each other: on one hand, plenty of job opportunities welcome foreign/migrant workers with fair chances to get hired; on the other

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21 In Florida’s words, they are Bohemian Index, Melting Pot Index (or hukou Index when used in China; see MPI, 2011; Florida, Mellander, & Qian, 2008), and Gay Index. These indexes are broadly applied for understanding the tolerance/openness/diversity of a place in different parts of the world.

22 According to Zhong’s survey (2012), the number of overseas foreign employees is at least 3 times higher than in other popular creative districts, including Creative Factory, M50, and Red Town.
hand, the strict hukou policy blocks people from flooding into cities. Hukou policy may be understood by many Chinese as a form of intolerance, but not by others. It does not constrain overseas foreigners in the way that it constrains mainland Chinese. In fact, many overseas foreigners experience privileges, and feel welcomed by Chinese society. In addition, hukou policy has less impact on people who have high economic status. In other words, Tianzifang/Shanghai seems to demonstrate a greater tolerance for overseas foreign workers and the Chinese middle class than for the inland working poor.

However, the inner social climate is relatively tolerant and open to differences. This is represented by its acceptance of multiple cultures, different ethnicities (including non-Han Chinese), and strange modes of dress on the street. As one participant said, Tianzifang is a runway of quirkiness; it makes the abnormal into the normal, although these sorts of tolerance are actually under certain forms of control and governance. Chapter 6 examines control through spatial management; controlling the freedom of expression is another way of control and will be a major topic in chapter 8.

Other Attractions of Creative Milieu

A distinct historic site and the Chen Yifei Effect may be keys to catalyze a successful creative district. Montgomery (2003) states that the meaning of place, whether it is historical or cultural, is among the necessary elements for cultural quarters, or creative districts. Shangahi’s creative districts are all built in old spaces, factories or dwellings, but merely being old is not enough. A distinct appearance that projects a unique sense of exotic seems to be important as well.
Another type of attractive creative district is built in historic neighborhood. Compared to many other creative districts that are located in hollowed-out concrete industrial factories scattered around the city, creative districts that mix with a residential area seem to gain more popularity and interest from creative people. Tianzifang is the most well-known case in Shanghai; others are Weihai Lu 696, Jingan Apartment, and the just rising Sinan Mansion. Weihai Lu 696, for example, is located in a quiet community and was once a very hot spot for young and foreign creative workers to reside. Christopher lived in Weihai Lu 696 before he moved to Tianzifang. He told me how they invited their neighbors (nearby residents) and friends to participate in “street pajamas parties” and the fun time they had (IN-Christopher-06/10/2013); Chinese contemporary photographer, Ma, recalled his memory in Weihai Lu 696 and said: “That was the best time in my life (IN-Ma-06/26/2013)”. Jinan Apartment is located in another Shanghainese lilong, where a few creative workers moved into the neighborhood and were trying to establish a “second Tianzifang”. These districts are not only attractive to creative people who admire the old spectacle and are looking for inspiration, but are also greatly attractive to domestic and foreign tourists who come to see the old times.

Tianzifang established a new economic type that merges creative districts (creative industries) with tourism in historic/cultural sites, and it later became a “successful model of creative districts” that spread out to all China. Recently, Nanjing, Nanchang, Hefei, Wuhan, and several other big cities claim to “rebuild a Tianzifang” in their old town; even in Shanghai city,

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23 Weihai Lu 696 was not supported by local government, so the site was terminated in 2011 and had ended up by rebuilding in another commercial building; Jinan Apartment stopped development around 2010 due to illegal land uses and bothering the residents’ life. Today’s Jinan Apartment has already become a walled community that does not welcome to tourists and visitors anymore.
Tianzifang is being replicated in every central administrative district. Keane (2009) calls Tianzifang the “related variety model (p. 277)”, referring to a cluster of small enterprises of various kinds of creative industries in arts/creative zones and cultural districts, and he believes this model has become the “default setting (p. 277)” for Chinese local government. Unlike pure artist villages, creative districts are usually more commercialized, and looking for mutual benefit from tourism. Supporting creative districts is an antidote to old dwelling areas where urbanization has not yet set in, or an alternative usage of historic heritages. Most importantly, supporting creative districts facilitates the local economy, provides job opportunities, develops what they called creative tourism (chuang-yi-lu-you), adds kudos to the local officials, and contributes revenue to city and national government.

The Chen Yifei Effect is an economic benefit produced by famous artists’ reputations and can be expected to cause clustering of same industry. As I discovered in my study, famous artists’ residency in a new creative district is like a signal flare; to some extent it guarantees a potential market and a critical mass, and thus makes more artists and creative enterprises more likely to follow. It seems to be a special characteristic of China’s artistic-oriented creative districts. Since Chen Yifei accomplished Tianzifang, some other creative districts began to invite famous artists or enterprises. For example, Yang Fudong is the face of the TOP creative district; Zhou Tiehai and the Shanghart Gallery could be seen as the soul of the M50. In some cases, the district’s developers will hunt reputable artists from other districts.

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However, it is worth noting that the clustering of Chinese creative people and enterprises is not yet equal to the industrial agglomeration that is usually discussed in studies of creative industries. Agglomeration is a production system that takes advantage of concentrations of individuals and industries to do inter-firm transactions and to share the local labor market; in creative industries it sometimes requires high frequency of face-to-face interaction (see Currid, 2006; 2007; Scott, 1999; Zong, 2012) (This will be further discussed in chapter 8). Instead, the clustering of Chinese artists and enterprises shares only the market and the customers, and does not encourage interactions with others. According to my study, people who noted that they came because of Chen in fact moved into Tianzifang after Chen passed away, and those who moved into Tianzifang before 2005 had nearly no contact with Chen. This says that the Chen Yifei Effect does not attract people to have more interaction with him; rather, the attraction is to access the art aura created by him or to share the business benefit behind his fame. The relationship between individuals and enterprises is competitive rather than cooperative.

**Hukou and Mobility**

When discussing the attractions of a place, Westerners assume that a person’s mobility is controlled by his or her free will. But this assumption face challenge if considered in China’s context. Keane (2012), Florida and his colleagues (2008), remind us that the Chinese are far less mobile than people in democratic societies due to the hukou policy. Dai and his research group (Dai, Zhou, Keane, and Huang, 2013) also provide a similar finding that Chinese creative workers are not very mobile. Similarly, when I met Xiaomei and heard her story, I agreed that hukou was an obstacle that greatly limited people’s mobility. However, after I interviewed more people, I found the hukou system in fact is no longer such an obstacle. It once greatly suppressed Mainland Chinese’ mobility but the suppression was greatly diminished after 1978 when it
allowed villagers to work in cities. Although it indeed keeps some people in their registered places, hukou policy does not stop others from moving to cities—those who are willing to take risks and seek to change their life. The inequality and discrimination that hukou policy once generated stimulates the migrant creative workers to go for dreams in big cities. Xiaomei and many migrant artists participating in my study are good examples. From this perspective, hukou policy does not greatly constrain creative people’s mobility, as some scholars believe.

Instead, what constrains Mainland Chinese’s location choices might be the extremely uneven development of urbanization that has happened in the recent decade. I noticed that when I asked the questions about location decisions, many of my participants actually told me why they selected Shanghai rather than Beijing. The decision was mostly made between these two mega cities, because they found it hard to survive in other second or third-tier cities if working in art and design industries. Lacking markets, there is no creative district.
CHAPTER 8: THE CREATIVE CLASS AND THEIR PRODUCTION SYSTEM

Introduction

Western scholars believe that geographical agglomeration is a distinct characteristic of creative industries because it produces more intensive face-to-face social interaction and cooperation between the creative people (see Scott, 1999b; Currid, 2007; Caves, 2003; Lloyd, 2010). Creative districts, where the creative industries cluttered, are recognized as the place of these social interactions happen. Tianzifang, which was meant to be Shanghai’s SoHo, has many things in common with many Western creative districts: artists and creative firms both cluster in one site—mostly abandoned industrial areas; surrounding business like bars and coffee houses are flourishing; art lovers and tourists occupy the streets on weekend; and both artists and creative firms face the challenge of gentrification and are under the pressure of rent escalation. These common features have been noticed by scholars recently in the creative districts in China’s big cities. However, very little research looks in-depth at how creativity works in China, how the district functions as an organism, and how the organism supports and sustains the onsite creative industries. Nor has it explored how the context of a transforming socialist country like China makes it different from the capitalist societies, and how creative Chinese adapt to these political changes.

This chapter explores the lives of the creative people and how much their production system functions as an organism and connects to Tianzifang as a particular locale. I review the theories about the social and collective characteristics of creativity and the necessity of geographical proximity of creative industries. Then I inquire into the life of the Chinese creative class, which I have divided into the pre-80s and the post-80s, to see who they are, what their
lives are like, their works, their value system, and how these components may influence their creativity production systems. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of Tianzifang’s creative industries and a model(s) of how creativity works there.

**Agglomeration and the Production System in Creativity**

More and more contemporary scholars consider creativity to be socially inspired and a result of collective endeavor rather than the work of one single person (Csikszentmihalyi & Sawyer, 1995; Gardner, 1995). Creativity is no longer seen as generated in one person’s head but as growing out of the relationship between creative people. Through interacting with many others, a new idea is inspired, stimulated and refined. The Homebrew Computer Club, for example, was a computer hobbyists group in Silicon Valley in 1975 when personal computers had not yet become prevalent. According to Saxenian (1995), this group left a notice on a bulletin board to recruit members, which said: “come to a gathering of people with like-minded interests. Exchange information, swap ideas, help work on a project, or whatever” (para. 30). This club sooner became the information exchange center in the area and nurtured many young creative spirits, including Steve Jobs and Bill Gates.

Social interaction also happens among different domains of creative productions and solutions. As Parsons (2010b) put it: “Creativity today…lies in the conceptual interaction of ideas from different disciplines, in overlaying one conceptual scheme on another, in developing new procedures or applying old ones to new areas” (p. 35). Likewise, Florida (2002) argues that creative minds, although they might be from varied disciplines, are deeply interrelated, sharing similar thinking processes and reinforcing each other by mutual stimulation. Cross-domain interaction that emphasizes interdisciplinary dialogues is much valued today (Parsons, 2010a,
2010b, Efland, 2010), because human beings are facing more difficult and complicated problems than ever: such as global climate change, the crash of the world economy, controlling infectious disease. These contemporary global issues are thought to be too complex for one discipline and thus call for intellectual cooperation from different domains.

When creative ideas turn to business, they do not stop at the stage of idea collection and circulation but move further to production issues, which involve more interaction and cooperation with other creative people at varying times (Becker, 1984; Caves, 2003). The film industry and popular music recording are frequently mentioned examples that involve complicated interactions (see Scott, 2005; Hennion, 1989; Kealy, 1979). Successful popular music is never a product of only the performers, although as audience we often glorify only the stars. Instead, it is a product of intensive interactions between the composer, the producer, the sound engineer, the performers and many others. This process requires specialized operations from many creative individuals to make it happen. Great pieces of arts require contracts that link creative producers and agents to create a mode of access for customers: artists need galleries; writers need publishers; and musicians need recording studios (Caves, 2003), and these links are all based on social networking. Social life is not a fancy lacework of creative people; rather, social life itself is an operating system that supports the generation, exchange and circulation of ideas, and finally turns out products (Currid, 2006; 2007; 2009; Lloyd, 2002; Molotch, 1996).

Congregation of these people is consequently a necessary condition of creative industries (Scott, 1999b). On a smaller scale, the creative interaction takes place in the “third place”, which Oldenburg (1989) describes as a space apart from home and work—coffee houses, restaurants, bookstores and bars—hot spots open to the public with little expense where unexpected meetings can occur. These informal meeting spaces are thought important to modern cities (Jacobs, 1961),
especially for creative people to share ideas (Landry, 2000; Florida, 2002, 2005, 2008; Lloyd, 2010; Currid, 2007). Currid (2007) calls these places “scenes”, which are strongly connected with social networks. An opening of an art exhibition, she explains, is a scene of selling art on the surface, but more importantly it serves as a social event to stimulate dialogues among visitors who come from other departments of arts/creative industries. Moreover, each place or scene has its own ethos. Creative people may prefer to concentrate in one specific site, and different locations may attract different types of creative expression (Clark, 2004). For instance, Oasis, a local bar, was preferred by the Homebrew Computer Club and they frequented it for many years (Saxenian, 1995); Urbus Orbis Café was popular with Wicker Park’s artists in the Chicago area in 1989-1998 (Lloyd, 2010); and the bar CBGB in New York City was significant for punk rockers in the early days (Currid, 2007). These places and scenes constitute the system of creative social networking, the production and the sustainability of the creative culture.

On a larger scale, the production system of creativity involves more complicated interactions between individuals and firms and tangles of sets of third places and scenes. The geographical agglomeration of creative industries naturally develops into a creative district, a creative field (Scott, 1999a; 1999b; 2006), a creative milieu (Landry, 2000; Hall, 1998), a creative ecology (Howkins, 2010) or, on an even larger scale, a creative city (Florida, 2002; 2005; 2008). Scott (1999b, 2006) believes that an agglomerated production system and geographical proximity is the form of a creative field. First of all, the industries benefit from saving the time and energy of intense face-to-face inter-firm transactions and avoid overstretching resources. Secondly, being close to the local labor pool reduces the complexity of job searches and recruitment, especially since in creative industries many works are freelance or on short contracts. Furthermore, there are other “untraded dependencies” (Storper, 1995) that come with industry
clustering, such as customs, language and values that help to establish cooperation and trust among firms.

Currid (2009) considers the benefits of clustering from the creative individual’s perspective. She values the social networks that build within the site and argues that flexible labor pools, access to potential employers, gatekeepers and certifiers, and instantaneous transactions are what creative people seek. In other words, a place full of job opportunities of no contract or short-term contract may best suit the needs of creative people. An actor may perform in the theater when the show is on but, when the show is off, he can work in another local troupe or in a nearby piano bar while waiting for the next opportunity. Once the actor enters the circle, he has better chance to bump into potential employers since they are all active in the same area. A place with higher “walkability” (Currid, 2007) increases the chances of impromptu meeting with significant others, creating a strong attraction that, in location decision making, could override the increasing rent (Molotch & Treskon, 2009).

If it develops well, an agglomerated production system shapes atmosphere, boosts the return effects and makes the system grow (Scott, 1999b). A successful place with a good reputation adds its “stickiness”, which Markusen (1996) describes as what thrives and sustains the creative cluster in the slippery space. For example, Chelsea’s art street, Hollywood’s film industry, London’s theater and Italy’s furniture increase the products’ value and credibility by the location’s name. The already established place-based identity of art/culture/creativity assists start-up firms or individuals who affiliate with its reputation and gain immediate advantages, which in turn becomes the source of location-specific rising rents (Molotch, 1996; Harvey, 2001). When the system grows stronger with an increased reputation, the place continues to reinforce
itself by attracting creative talents from other places who are seeking for professional fulfillment
(Power and Scott, 2004), and keeps the cluster growing and sustainable.

The Creative Class: The Watershed of 1980

There are several ways to group Tianzifang’s creative class: by nationality, hukou (Shanghainese and non-Shanghainese), media of interest, occupation, gender, socio-economic status, etc. However, none of these groupings are effective enough if one is trying to understand the life, philosophy, and value system of the Chinese creative class. To represent the common characteristics and at the same time to contrast them broadly, I use 1980 as a watershed to classify most of my participants: people who were born before 1980—the pre-80s, and those who were born after 1980—the post-80s.

The dividing line of 1980 is not primarily about age; it is not a comparison between young and old Chinese creative; instead, it is a turning point that marks two distinctive generations of China. The pre-80s grew up in Mao Zedong’s socialist society and experienced the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), which took place when they were young. They lived in a socialist planned economy, which means the jobs and salary were assigned and standardized by the communist government, based on social demands. People’s movement and habitation were strictly regulated as well. In general, they are usually assumed to be poorer and more narrow-minded than the post-80s, and have been described as the Lost Generation (Elegant, 2007).

On the other hand, the post-80s, or so-called baling hou in Chinese, were born in a relatively stable and affluent society with the country’s economy growing. In Deng Xiaoping’s time, China opened up to the West, and the economic reform turned China from a planned economy to a more market-oriented economy (understood as Socialism with Chinese
Characteristics). Besides, the post-80s were single kids in their families due to the enforcement of the One-child Policy launched in 1978. The different background makes these 23 to 34 years old adults a special demographic group, whose viewpoints and attitudes are different from their parents (Moore, 2005). As Elegant (2007) notes: “[the post-80s] serves as a bridge between the closed, xenophobic China of Mao years and the globalized economic powEarlouse that it is becoming” (para. 3). By juxtaposing the creative Chinese of both generations, I attempt to showcase the transformations that reflect China’s dramatic changes in society, economics and politics, and to generate a meaningful comparison of their life, philosophy, value system, and what shape them as members of the creative class.

The Pre-80s Creative Chinese

One Saturday morning, I looked at my watch. It said two minutes to 9am. “Thank God I arrived on time!” I thought. I had promised to be a one-day volunteer in Han’s studio-gallery but was almost late because of the crazy traffic. It was still early, so not many tourists were in Lane 210 of Tianzifang. But Han was already in his gallery. Walking into his studio-gallery, I noticed a cast iron teapot was on a portable stove, and the boiling water made an irritating sound.

“Qimen black tea or Taiping Houkui (green tea)?” Han asked me. I shrugged my shoulder and said: “I never tried them before, so I guess I will drink whatever you drink!” He poured the tea in a paper cup for me, explaining that he did not have additional ceramic cups for visitors because he usually drinks by himself.

Han represents a classic image of my pre-80s participants. The creative people I metaphor, ranging from 37-72 years old, were on one side of the creativity spectrum; their values and lifestyle were simple, moderate, and individualist.
Work hard, live simple. The pre-80s scattered around Tianzifang’s industrial spaces and Shikumen all specialized in at least one traditional type of fine art: abstract ink painting, acrylic painting, Chinese seal cutting and calligraphy, photography or ceramics.

If there is a collective image of the pre-80s artists, it might be a devout monk who sincerely believes in art, or a slim male in his middle age who denies all kinds of material prosperity but only seeks for mental satisfaction. Their dress also reflected their belief: mostly a clean white shirt with Western trousers, or low-key Chinese suits (Mao suits or tangzhuang) with black kungfu shoes. Sometimes it was not easy to tell that they are artists merely by their appearance, because they looked very similar to many public officers. Because of being devoted to art making, the life of the pre-80s artists is relatively simple, without much material desire. Han and Dong said that an artist survives by building a strong mind to reduce human cravings and outward temptation.

However, being an artist is not easy in Tianzifang. During the time when I was shadowing in Han’s studio-gallery, he asked me to count the visitors by their age, gender and ethnicity (Chinese or non-Chinese) and also to note what was sold that day. However, after 6 hours working on Sunday, the only item sold was a postcard (RMB$ 15/ US$ 2.5). I flipped over the tattered notebook he gave me to track the previous record, and found that the postcard was actually the only income of the week. I was a bit confused, because Han’s gallery was located in the most noticeable spot of the Artist Building, and the visitors were not few. But Han just laughed and seemed to not care about it at all; he said: “It’s normal that I do not sell any works of art for months! I never expected to earn money from selling it…I knew it clearly” (IN-Han-05/15/2013). To support his interests and to pay the rent, Han did several part-time jobs: graphic design, teaching children ink painting in his studio, and some other random projects recommend
by his friends. In fact, it is common to have multiple jobs. Yue was an art teacher of a middle school and also an adjunct instructor teaching in a teachers’ college on most Saturdays. He spent 12 hours a day working and went back to his Shikumen studio-gallery after work. Ailin worked for a jade craft store in Tianzifang in the daytime and continued his ceramic making during lunch time and after work in the evening. Dong was the only full time artist but, according to him, his life was much harder than others. “They said I am insane! I sold my house and try to hang in there as much as I can…” (IN-Dong-05/20/2013).

The pre-80s artists devote most of their time and energy to their multiple jobs, which makes their daily life a continual travel between home and work places. Although they have been immersed in Tianzifang’s buzz for years, they were not aware of their neighbors. Yue said that he was too busy to care about the coffee shops, the newly opened restaurants, or even the studios and galleries. Han made his meal box and tea everyday so he never needed to dine or consume in any of the Tianzifang stores. The artists are pretty much detached from Tianzifang’s public area and do not identify themselves as a part of the Tianzifang community. Han explained: “I just borrow a space [for my studio], where it is doesn’t really matter…and I don’t think artists belong to any places. I just do my own duty” (IN-Han-05/15/2013). Similarly, Wang saw his studio as a neutral place where he can escape from the bustle of the neighborhood; he wrote: “When I walk into my studio, I enter another world. Like a filter, the studio stops the noises and the vulgar world and leaves me only inner peace” (Wang, 2011, p. vi).

Artists who stand inside/outside of the system. “Free artist” is a term that is usually mentioned when these Chinese artists identify themselves. I originally thought that “free” was merely a general adjective so I did not realize its meaning until I became aware of the existence of the “system (tizhi)” and its history. During 1949-1980 when China was enforcing a planned
economy, jobs of artists were government positions that were assigned and paid for by Communists. Students who graduated from art colleges were distributed to schools at all levels as art teachers, and those who performed outstandingly were retained in art colleges or sent to national painting academies. These artists later were recognized as inside-the-system artists, primarily producing works of art for the state’s need and for political propaganda. Artworks were not transactionable products. The major themes were representing the revolutionary history of Communists, glorifying Chairman Mao, and praising the great efforts made by farmers and working laborers. Chen Yifei’s *Occupy the President’s Hall* (1976) was made before he studied abroad in New York.\(^{25}\)

On the other hand, the outside-the-system artists, the so-called free artists, were against the national system, giving up or quitting the positions provided by government and migrating to big cities to make a living. This cohort emerged from 1980 when the economic reform began, and it became a trend in the 1990s when the art market was gradually formed (Huang, Hu, Du and Wu, 2007). Without the governmental contract, the free artists have more freedom to express themselves, and are free to sell their art to earn more than the paid salary; however, it also means sacrificing a stable life and consistent pay. Many Tianzifang Chinese artists claimed to be free artists. For example, Earl was a free independent photographer who resigned his official job in early 1980. His behavior was recognized as bold at that time. Other artists quitted their original assigned jobs or simply jumped into the art world from other occupations in more recent years. No matter what, the free artists no longer earn their living by governmental support and are pushed to survive in their own ways.

\(^{25}\) Chen Yifei’s *Occupy the President’s Hall* (1976) represents the moment when Chinese Communist occupied the President’s Hall of the Republic of China in 1949. It was one of the classic themes for the inside-the-system artists.
Pursuing nature and spiritual expression but avoiding sensitive issues. The favorite themes in pre-80s art creation are representing nature and abstract spiritual expression. Local documentary photographers are concerned with the conflicts of urbanization and keep an eye on the disappearing old dwellings, heritages and the tradition of Shanghainese culture. For example, Earl spent more than 30 years studying and documenting Shanghai. Similarly, Yue, who grew up in Tianzifang, was fascinated by Shikumen architectures. He walked through all the Shikumen dwellings in Shanghai to capture their images before they were torn down. Representing Shanghai’s culture and landscapes is one of the most popular topics in Tianzifang, not only in photography but also in painting, paper cutting, and Chinese ink painting.

Some artists tend to explore the inner-self and the relationship between human beings and nature at a philosophical level. As Dong said: “Art is about personal understanding of the universe and life…it reflects my thoughts but it has nothing to do with the physical environment where I am” (IN-Dong-05/18/2013). In his opinion, art making goes beyond the material world and is a pure spiritual creation. Likewise, Wang argues that his art making is a Chinese way of living, which is peaceful, indifferent and metaphysical, and being an artist is merely being who he or she is (Wang, as cited in Chen, 2014). Their opinions seem to correspond to the ancient Chinese philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi, which assumed an invisible super power of nature to balance the world and which cannot be disobeyed or challenged. As Wang remarked: “Artists should go up and down following the natural rhythm” (as cited in Lin, 2013).

Although these outside-the-system artists are supposed to have more freedom to express themselves, sensitive social issues such as politics, violence and sex that are commonly seen in the international contemporary artworld are nearly absent in Tianzifang’s pre-80s’ creations. Han explained that Chinese customers prefer images of happiness and joy, unlike the Western
customers looking for meanings behind the image. For example, he said, his Bei Baby series, which reflects the air pollution problems and ecological crises, are more popular with his Western customers than his other works.

Another reason of why sensitive issues are absent is the limited freedom of expression. Chinese artists are aware of the state surveillance and clearly know the bottom line. Their attitude can be discerned when they address their opinion of Ai Weiwei—a controversial Chinese artist who was officially invited to be lead designer of the Bird’s Nest (Beijing National Stadium) for the 2008 Summer Olympics, and at the same time was oppressed and warned by government because of his harsh criticisms in his art of the Chinese Communists’ attitude to democracy and human rights. Han described his thoughts on Ai Weiwei:

He is interesting and bold. I admire him. He wants to protest but he did not do it in a very radical way…he reacted properly, strongly enough but not too much, so it was still tolerable by the authority. But if he reacts too much then it won’t be a good thing. If he violates the law or challenges public awareness, it will bring him a lot of troubles…(IN-Han-05/15/2013)

I was not sure if Han received as much information about Ai Weiwei as I did since most of Ai’s activist speech and documents were blocked by the Great Firewall of China (China’s internet censorship). But Han did indicate a bottom line between the artists’ free expression and illegal behaviors that are identified by the Communist government. “Artists are powerless to change the world”, Han argues, and he used “barker” and “biter” as interesting metaphors: “Artists are barkers. Artists bark at somebody and the being barked at never really gets hurt; but if artists bite, the being attacked will take some action fighting back” (IN-Han-05/15/2013).
Minimal contact with other creatives. Contrary to the general impression that Chinese people are collectivist (Hui, 1988), the pre-80s artists prize individualism as their important characteristic; all forms of social activity are seen as non-necessary and may slay their creations. Dong said “artists are not good at communicating; we communicate only through our works of art” (IN-Dong-05/18/2013). In some cases, they try to reduce social interaction in order to concentrate on art making. Han argued:

Artists are people who stand aloof from worldly affairs. Artists can work independently without bothering others…I intentionally reduce social activities and interaction with others, because it is not necessary. An artist should concentrate on his work, exhaust his time, energy and talent as much as he can in order to fully contribute to the society. (IN-Han-05/18/2013)

Although a number of artists work in the Artist Building, the interaction between them is very limited.

The Post-80s Creative Chinese

On a Wednesday afternoon, at 1 pm, I knocked on the door of a studio called Silent Voice, but the one came to me was a kitty cat, patting her paws on the transparent glass door and seeming to ask me to set her free. I got a call from Yuta an hour later, a fashion designer I was supposed to meet in the studio, apologizing for being late because he was drunk and had overslept. At 3 pm, we eventually met in the Ups Coffee shop near his studio. Yuta had good manners, wore a neat ponytail, a beard, metal accessories around his wrists and fingers and black skirt-like pants of his own design. His stylish appearance made me a bit embarrassed about my plain and normal dressing. He quickly ordered spaghetti for his first meal of the day with a large
Americano, and then we started to talk at a sidewalk table with non-stopping messages beeping from his Iphone5…

Yuta represents a classic image of my post-80s participants. At an average of 28 years old (ranging from 26-30), the young creative people I met were on the other side of the spectrum of creative people, with values and a lifestyle tremendously different from the pre-80s.

Having ample financial resource and overseas background. The post-80s witness the leap of economic growth of China and are the major beneficiary from China’s opening up. The One-child Policy made them the precious apple of every family; most of them were parented by six adults (parents, grandparents on both sides). They therefore obtained much more financial support and care and received better education than their predecessors. Growing up in flourishing China, my post-80s participants seem to be raised by wealthier families than the average. Although some of them had migrated from other provinces (Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shenzhen, Sichuan, and Anhui), their non-Shanghai hukou did not make their life difficult at all. Their parents are mostly not farmers—who are the great cohort of migrant workers - but are businessmen or local government officials after the 1980 economic reform. Their affluent financial resources support them to sustain their lifestyle and to establish their business, especially in the first few years of work.

Besides, most of them have an overseas background: Yuta is a Japanese-Chinese who finished his college degree in an International Fashion School in Shanghai; Victoria, Nini, Paopao, and Shawn spent their middle school and college years in Canada, Singapore, United States, and England; Miao is a fluent English speaker who taught Chinese to foreign students; Haihui and Box had long cooperated with Taiwanese and Hong Kong creative partners.
Their overseas background demonstrates their better economic condition in that they and their families can afford the higher tuition and multiple international travels; more importantly, the overseas experience was reported as crucial to get inspired in their formation of artists and designers. The overseas experience included studying abroad and having frequent contacts with foreign people. Shawn spent 2 years in the University of Art in London to study fashion photography; according to him, the environment of fashion photography in London was more experimental, more open, more fun, and more creative, which encouraged him to try new things and not be concerned about limitations; whereas in Shanghai it was relatively traditional, conservative, commercial, and the very tight budget also constrained his creativity. Victoria compared her learning experience with Chinese and Western teaching: “Chinese education is captive, and Western education is free-ranging” (IN-Victoria-04/03/2014). The Western style of teaching enlightened and motivated her to develop her own thinking. She explained:

I am a Chinese, so I don’t want to criticize my country, but I really think the teaching philosophy matters. I was lucky to have a French teacher in Canada when I was 18 years old, who is now my friend as well; he taught me how to use sketchbooks in some crazy ways to collect ideas and inspirations. He said the sketchbook did not need to be neat and tidy, and it could be folded, torn, muddy, messy, or whatever you wanted it to be; then you could grow your own thinking from it. That greatly challenged what I have learned in Chinese classrooms in the past and it influenced me to be an independent photographer and even lately an owner of a creative shop. I was once a docile sheep under Chinese art education but now I am a wild wolf after the French teacher’s mentoring. (IN-Victoria-04/03/2014)
Box and Haihai both worked with Taiwanese and Hong Kong designers for a few years after they graduated from Beijing’s Renmin University and they were probably the first wave of post-80s who started to touch creative industries. By cooperating with overseas creative workers, Box said he understood how a trendy brand was established, manufactured and marketed through intensive negotiation and co-working. Especially around 2004, when the term ‘creative industries’ was not yet generally used, Shanghai’s creative industries were primarily led by overseas Taiwanese and Hong Kongers. Haihai said that he saw the spirit of traditional Chinese culture embedded in Taiwanese design, which made the work powerful with cultural roots. He was deeply influenced by Taiwanese designers and also replanted the concepts of culture in his graphic design (IN-Box-05/29/2013; IN-Haihai-06/03/2013).

**Work hard, play even harder.** Like their predecessors, the post-80s creative youngsters work very hard. They are mostly photographers and design-based creators; although a few of them once specialized in traditional art, they switched to applied arts in their career path because “artists find it hard to survive” (IN-Yuta-06/24/2013). Victoria and Shawn are both photographers, graduated from Canadian and English art schools. Victoria is a sensitive documentary photographer and owns a studio in Tianzifang; he loves to capture the careless but interesting moments on streets to present the true aspect of plain everyday life; Shawn is an independent fashion photographer who almost worked for fashion magazines; Yuta is a fashion designer who periodically has fashion shows in Tianzifang; Haihai is a graphic designer with 10 years’ experience; Miao, Paopao, and Nini are handcrafters specializing in wool felt art, knitting art, and vintage jewelry; Box is an interior designer and an owner of a creative shop, where he uses his unique style to display products made by his friends.
Like the pre-80s, the post-80s find it hard to feed themselves with single one job. Having another job to support their loved creations is one common response; seeking additional opportunities to cooperate with other creative individuals/groups is another. To have a stable income, Yuta and Victoria founded a shop to promote and sell the works of their designer friends or of international independent designers. Likewise, as a creative shop owner, Box actively participates in many kinds of exhibition of creative products in Shanghai and surrounding cities to create more income. Because of the difficult situation, it is very common to see the post-80s rely on family economic support. As Nini said: “Shanghai is a place where your income and expenses cannot make a balance, and this is especially cruel to the post-80s” (IN-Nini-06/20/2013). According to her, the average income in Shanghai can only cover the rent, and the other necessary costs demand consistent support from parents, even with the post-80s who have already formed their own new families.

The young creative people’s work and living are intermixed; working and living to some extent is the same thing. Their distinct working style makes their schedule relatively flexible. They refuse to be hired by companies because of the 9-to-5 office routine and yearn for more flexible working schedules, to maintain plenty of free time. Yuta said:

Our work and living have been merged together. We don’t have a marked ‘working hours’ or ‘day off’ but we take rests whenever we want: drinking a cup of coffee, smoking a cigarette, meeting friends, or watching a movie could be both relaxing and working time for us. (Yuta-IN-06/24/2013)

As in Florida’s (2002) findings, these creative people prefer nightlife, no matter whether it is for work or play. The participants said that they usually started their work after noon and then fully concentrated in the studio for hours. Although they have more freedom to use their time as they
wish, it doesn’t mean their workloads are lighter or easier. Working over 12 hours a day and staying up late is normal; especially when a project deadline is approaching, they endure more pressure and anxiety. But they also benefit from the working pattern. When they finish projects, they can arrange days off for a week or two before they start the next working cycle, avoiding the stream of people on weekends or long holidays; then they can enjoy relatively quiet and economic travel.

The creative youngsters crave experiential living. Traveling abroad is a favorite form, which is viewed as a way to recharge their creative mind. Many of them reported to have international travel twice a year, and the most popular destinations are England, France, Europe, United States, Hong Kong, and Japan. Nini spent her time in Europe’s flea markets, collecting authentic vintage materials for her art-making; Miao and Yuta regarded travel as necessary to meet different people, encounter fun things, experience culture shock, open one’s mind and enrich personal knowledge; Haihai and Paopao explored new ideas and things during travel and broadened their vision; Victoria looked for unexpected surprises, adventures, and even dangers when she traveled alone. She recalled her terrifying experience in Paris of getting offended by an homeless man: “I probably won’t encounter this kind of danger on Shanghai’s street, but what attracts me to travel is this kind of unsafe environment” (IN-Victoria-06/24/2013)! The post-80s have a more active social life and the prevalence of social media has greatly increased social interaction in both cyberspace and real life. During the time when I was doing the research, a new type of social media called Weixin was emerging and it soon became very popular, with the prevalence of smart phones.26 Since Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were

26 Weixin is an application of social media founded in China. It is similar to Facebook but only people who process the users’ accounts or phone numbers can be added as “friends”. In other
blocked in China, the rising of Weixin was a new type of communicating and information sharing. My participants all claimed to be heavy Weixin users. By uploading photos and words about their everyday life, the young creative people were reinforcing the image of their tastes, interests, and unique lifestyle. Information about art exhibitions, fashion shows, concerts, cool movies, new restaurants, fun parties, and personal travel tips effectively circulate in the circle via the phone application.

**Their body as the battleground of self-expression.** Their identity is visually noticeable. Generally, post-80s spent more time and money on dressing themselves and purchasing name-brand products to show their taste and economic condition (see Elegant, 2007); but the creative post-80s I met sought for the extraordinary. In dressing, they were eager to show a personality that contrasted with that of same age Chinese. They wore tattoos and smoked cigarettes; men had stylish long hair and beard, and women had pretty short hair with neutral dressing. Interestingly, all of them claimed that they did little shopping for apparel in China, because “there is nothing worth buying” (IN-Shawn-06/20/2013). Instead, “vintage” dressing style was one of their favorites, which used clothes and accessories they found in Western countries or new reproductions of old fashioned apparel. England and Europe are the best destinations to hunt vintage treasures; otherwise Shanghai has some vintage shops importing second-hand products from overseas. In addition to vintage style, they preferred wearing their own designs or products made by their designer friends, from eyewear, t-shirts, clothes, rings, purses, wallets, to iphone cases. Their bodies are icons of cool, rebellion, pride in being different, expressing a certain non-purchasable distinguished taste, and representing the literacy of Western subcultures that cannot be represented by mass-produced fashion products.

words, Weixin is more private and the group of users (or called the “zone of friends”) is relatively highly overlapping with the social circle in real life.
Cherish family values, demonstrate more critical thinking, but keep silent about domestic politics. “How do you imagine your life 5 years from now?” I asked this question of some of my participants. Shawn said: “Have a car, have a dog, have a home, have a lovely kid, and have fun sometimes” (IN-Shawn-06/20/2013). Victoria said: “Have a baby before I am 30” (IN-Victoria-06/24/2013). Box said: “Move to the suburban community in Shanghai where my best designer friend lives, keep a dog, marry a virtuous wife and nurture our child, and bring my parents to live with us” (IN-Box-07/30/2013). Because of their images of cool, independence and rebellion, it was a bit surprising to hear many of them seeing marriage and having a baby as must-dos, and wanting to accomplish it as soon as possible. Traditional Chinese culture of filial piety and family ethics firm up these values and the One-child policy seems further to bind the kinship.

The creative post-80s demonstrate more critical thinking than the pre-80s. It may be because of their experience in foreign countries or getting along with foreign people; they easily talked of the differences with China and indicated a need to make improvement and progress in social values, education, environmental protection and many other aspects. For example, they claimed that they have a different definition of a successful life than most of their generation. “My friends in my hometown see me as unsuccessful because I don’t own a car or a house” Box said, with a facial expression of ridicule. They disdained the traditional and mainstream value of buying an apartment or vehicles to prove one’s economic condition (although they did earn more money than their same age friends) and rejected conspicuous consumption, but not seeking to enhance the quality of life.

In politics, Western scholars have observed that the post-80s is silent (Elegant, 2007) but this seems not completely correct. In fact, these young adults are very interested in China’s
foreign policies and have broad discussion on online forums (Lu, 2012). They especially share
the same hatred and fight against the US, Japan, the Philippines, when dealing with some
particular diplomatic incidents, and actively represent an uncompromising attitude when facing
Hong Kong and Taiwan issues. For instance, during the time I was writing the dissertation, Hong
Kong’s Umbrella Protest began (in September 2014), requesting Beijing for universal suffrage.
The movement was proposed by Hong Kong’s post-80s but it did not evoke sympathy from
Mainland’s post-80s; instead, it aroused harsh criticisms in the social media. Similarly, Taiwan’s
Sunflower Student Movement in March 2014 protested against Cross-strait economic policy,
which caused a large number of on-line discussions. According to my count, within 3 days
Mainland’s most popular social media generated 0.9 million posts about the movement and
mostly with an attitude of hatred.

However, when it comes to domestic policies, the post-80s are relatively silent. The
obvious reason is still the strict censorship filters that control information and speech. For
example, the notorious Tiananmen Protest was eliminated from their history textbooks and the
related reports were almost blocked in cyberspace. A few of my participants were curious about
the protest but can only find very limited information from the Internet. In addition, on-line posts
using those sensitive keywords such as Tiananmen and liusi (meaning June 4th, the date of the
Tiananmen Protests in 1989) are soon removed and thus cannot arouse discussion. So they invent
alternative terms to escape from the automatic Internet censorship, such as using “May 35th” to
replace “June 4th” as keyword. But this kind of discussion cannot last long. The young Chinese
learn other perspectives on China’s history by using illegal applications to unblock online
information, or accessing mass media when they travel abroad. “Damn! We were cheated by
government!” One participant told me he felt anger and shame when he read a history document about Chinese Communists in a foreign museum.

In fact, the youngsters are not uninterested in politics but they feel powerless and pessimistic. Box said, “Why should we care about politics? Who is in charge doesn’t matter, and there is nothing we can do” (OB-11/30/2014). Haihai also said:

you probably cannot imagine how we grew up under the Communist political system…The place you live is a Utopia for us, where you have voting rights; disregarding all the disadvantages that go with it, at least you can elect political leaders you admire. We cannot change the government no matter what and we don’t have any power. What we can do is to choose to be a good person and try to change our next generation if we can. (IN-Haihai-06/03/2013)

Although China has opened up in economics during 30 years, domestic politics is still an untouchable issue. In pursuing creativity for enhancing economy, the central government does not release more liberty of expression. For both pre-80s and post-80s, attempting to challenge authority is always exhausting and not rewarding.

**The Production System of Creativity in Tianzifang**

The production system of creativity is how the creative industry operates, beginning with creative ideas and ending with the sale of products. According to the literature, it is an agglomerated organism between connected industries and has a more or less dependent relationship to the place. To understand Tianzifang’s production system, it is necessary to know the local interpretation of creativity, the common models of the production system of Tianzifang’s creative industries, and the third place that stimulates and sustains local creativity.
Creativity as a Commodity, Usually with Higher Prices

Before discussing the production system of creativity, it is important to know how these creative locals understand the fuzzy concept of “creativity”. Creativity was always described as a vague concept by my participants but was usually finalized as a tangible commodity with some qualities of creativity. First of all, creativity is uniqueness, embodied by handmade techniques. The handmade techniques are unique because they require skillful and talented artists/craftsmen of years of training and are hard to replace with machines. In this sense, creativity is as special and precious as advanced handmade techniques. For example, Qiaozhen (a designer and owner of a Chinese pottery shop) showed me one teacup that had an ink sparrow on it: “Each feather and down was drawn by a writing brush by the old craftsmen, and the tone of the ink is pretty rich even in this tiny body…this traditional technique is now almost missing” (IN-Qiaozhen-05/08/2013). The teacup patterns were drawn by capable craftsmen according to her design. Nini’s handmade vintage “antiques” were created by traditional crafts techniques that she learned in London, and the materials were also “authentic” from vintage stores around the world. She usually devotes days to one single item in order to make it delicate with her own artistic style and personality. “Each one is unique. It is unlikely you could find a similar one in the world”, said Nini (IN-Nini-06/03/2013). Because they involve plenty of time, energy and skill, and also because of they cannot be copied by either machine or other workers, these unique creative products are priced higher.

It is interesting to see how people contrasted non-creative products. For some, although they did not clearly define what creativity was, they were able to identify what was NOT creative. Many of the participants, including creative workers, the residents and the tourists said that the creativity of Tianzifang was threatened by cheap, mass-producible tourism products. They
claimed that these “*xiaoshangping* (little commodities)” were manufactured in southeast provinces of China, which had lower quality and were not creative at all. Besides, according to them, people who sell these goods on the streets were mostly immigrant laborers with little education and lower culture literacy. This view strengthens the assumption that “creativity costs more” because the *xiaoshangping* is mass-producible and not unique; there is also the implication that certain standards are required of who is qualified to own creative capital and to sell it.

Secondly, creativity is original. The designers or sellers of creative products claimed that they were the idea developers who owned the copyright and they harshly criticized pirated copies. Originality is about who was the very first one (at least in Tianzifang) to create the works. It is a frequent complaint of the participants of the lack of awareness of intellectual property rights in China; so they have to fight with numerous copycats, especially from industries that use lower techniques.

Indeed, it is very easy in Tianzifang to see very similar products appearing on the same lane. An owner of a leather shoes shop told me she was originally the manufacturer of one of Tianzifang’s shoe designers, but one day she found the designer had sold directly to customers and the sale price was much higher than her manufacturing price. She said: “These products were all manufactured in my factory, so why not just establish a shop by myself to sell ‘my products’ to gain more profits?” (OB-05/20/2013). She then rented a little space in a corner Shikumen without much renovation, displayed almost the same design as her former partner, but sold at a cheaper price. This situation is very common in Tianzifang. A Taiwanese handcrafts artist said she and her team usually invested a lot of time in one design, but the idea was always stolen and reproduced by their neighbors within one or two weeks, if the product sold well (IN-Ariel-
This climate of pirating also affected the traditional art creation. Pirated paintings that have a similar style to famous Chinese artists can be found in some galleries. The differences between the originals and the knock-offs could be easily told by the lower quality, the cheaper price, and the place where they sold these products—usually bare shops or stands with minimal embellishments, but it did not stop people from buying pirated products. Local creative workers gave a warning: tolerance of the copycats put creativity in danger, which made Tianzifang’s novel designs lesser and lesser.

Thirdly, creativity is understood as applying something new to old designs, including new ideas, functions, materials, techniques, and forms. Creativity is not necessarily a brand new idea or a stunning invention; it could be some adjustments of a former design which makes it better to use, or simply for fun. Paopao’s designs were all about making small changes to products that she used every day; Yuta recognized that the best creativity is overthrowing a stereotype and giving it a new meaning; also it should be able to solve some problems to make life better. Meanwhile, in traditional art, the pre-80 artists see creativity as daring to explore new techniques, try different types of expression, and create distinct language in arts. For example, Han spent 30 years painting and had established his style, using simplified modern sketches but applied with traditional Chinese mineral colors in landscape painting. Dong claimed that he never accepted any art education or training so he was already “outside of the box”, and was able to have new ways of thinking without being constrained. These views of creativity/creative products were not far from Western definitions of creativity but focused more on how it differentiated itself from ordinary goods, and how much value it would add to the sale price.
Models of the Production System

How does creativity or a creative product become business? And how does the system operate? In the case of Tianzifang, it involves one of at least four models of cooperation between the creators, the producers, and the entrepreneurs; which I define as an all-in-one model; an ayi (studio-factory) model; a subcontracting model; and an agency model.

All-in-one model. All-in-one model means that the whole production system, including creating, marketing and selling, is managed by one person (see Figure 8.1). This model is very common with Tianzifang’s artists. The artists themselves are the entrepreneurs. They rent a space for their studios and open them to the public as galleries; they do art-making and at the same time they are able to interact with the client or people who show interest. This model keeps down the expenses of hiring professional sellers and increases income that might be expended by contracting with art agents. For some struggling artists who are not yet known by galleries, the all-in-one model is the best choice for starting up. Dong, Han, and Yue are examples of the all-in-one model.

Another type of all-in-one model involves more sellers. The artists basically have a studio and rent a separate space for the gallery, hire a few clerks to sell their mass producible works and derived products (e.g. mugs with an image of the artists’ creation). This type is pretty common in the field of photography, printmaking, and digital art. These galleries target the general tourists who would like to buy art at relatively affordable prices. Both types of all-in-one model require minimal interaction with non-customers and are highly independent.
Figure 8.1 The production system of all-in-one model

### 1. All-in-one Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entrepreneur</th>
<th>Front stage worker</th>
<th>Studio/Gallery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
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**Ayi Model.** The ayi model is a factory-studio model, meaning that the artists or designers need handicraft laborers to finish the intensive hand making process, depending on the works’ need (see Figure 8.2). In Chinese, *ayi* means retired factory workers or middle aged women employed for housekeeping or street garbage collecting. They are mostly migrant workers and receive little wage by the hour. In Tianzifang, a place with a high density of population, ayi are highly demanded as laborers and therefore become a flexible working force to some creative industries.

In the ayi model, the artists or designer hire a few part-time ayi, assign them uncomplicated but time-consuming handicraft jobs and ask them to follow the designer’s sketch or guideline in the studio. The work is project-oriented and the hourly wage is same or a bit higher than their sanitation work. In a small garret on the top of Catherine’s studio, I saw an ayi sewing tiny ceramic white butterflies onto traditional Chinese clothes according to Catherine’s (a female ceramic artist) pencil sketch on the table. The ayi worked alone 8 hours a day, listening to the radio while sewing. Catherine’s assistant told me that this piece of art required 25,000 butterflies, which would take the ayi about 1.5 months to finish. She said:

The previous ayi we hired worked pretty fast but the density of the butterflies is uneven, so this time we hired another ayi, gave her the exact measurement about how many butterflies should be sewed in an area, and the quality has improved… (OB-06/19/2013)
Same model is applied in many handmade craft workshops. Miao and Ariel’s workshops were both well-known for delicate quality, which is the achievement of a number of ayis’ efforts. Ariel gave two major reasons why she hired ayi instead of subcontracting to professional factory workers. One was quality control. She explained that it is hard to find a factory that maintained constantly high quality of production in China, and the negotiation with the factory workers is ineffective and sometimes frustrating. She mentioned her past experience of communicating with a factory sewer about her hats:

> We originally asked her to use black thread to stitch the edge in order to match the black lace, which we thought is common sense, but the sewer used white thread instead because she was out of black thread. We then asked her to re-stitch the edge with the right color again, but she refused and replied: “It does not look that much different…if you insist, then you can just use black markers to color the thread!” Isn’t it ridiculous?

(IN-Ariel-06/12/2013)

To guarantee the quality of their design, some designers train a few ayi to achieve their standards of quality.

Another reason was preventing copycats. “When you deliver your sketch or sample to the factory, the game is over” (IN-Ariel-06/12/2013) Ariel said. The factory might reproduce the designer products with less detail and lower quality and a cheaper price than the original design. Ariel and Miao complained that this cutthroat competition pushed the creative workers to leave Tianzifang.

The locational advantage of Tianzifang brings to the creative industries proximity to the ayi labor pool. Besides, the flexibility of the cheap workforce does not need job contracts, so the creative entrepreneurs can always find “the right people” to maintain the quality of their products.
Subcontracting model. Entrepreneurs in the subcontracting model subcontract partial or total production to workers who possess more professional equipment or advanced techniques; but the design, branding, and selling section remain with the entrepreneurs (see Figure 8.3). The cooperating subcontractors are usually non-local and remote from Tianzifang. For example, Yuta’s fashion design studio is located in Tianzifang, where he stayed all the time to work and find inspiration, but for the manufacturing part he worked with a sample maker who owned a garment factory in suburban Shanghai. Qiaozhen subcontracted teapot making to Jingdezhen’s ceramic craftsmen because of their fame and mature skill, and he subcontracted the pattern drawing to other skillful painters.

However, the subcontracting model is relatively uncommon in Tianzifang compared to other models. In the case of Yuta and Qiaozhen, their works were not mass producible and both of them have very small amounts of production. Because of the higher demand on skill and quality, their designs took more time, energy, and communication with the subcontractors. Qiaozhen’s design especially required several inputs from different expertises; from design to shaping, repeat firing and glazing, and then finishing by the ceramic painter may take 2 months.
The cost of time and energy is reflected in the product’s price, which is higher than the surrounding stores and is hard to reduce.

**Figure 8.3** The subcontracting model

**Agency model.** The entrepreneurs in the agency model are not necessarily the idea generators, the artists or designers, although some of them are. They often claim instead to have a good eye to discern and contract with independent creative talent. The classic example is the contract between a gallery agent and artists. In this model, producing and selling are absolutely separated; artists and designers focus on their creation, and the rest, including promoting, exhibiting, and selling, is handed over to the agency (see Figure 8-4).

Nevertheless, in Tianzifang, a place dense with artists, the agency model does not appear as often as expected. Most artists have an all-in-one model rather than the agency one. Although there are many gallery signs, they are mostly either artist-owned studio-galleries or galleries (**hualang**) under the Chinese definition—a mounting and framing workshop where the customers can see a selection of frames in different materials and glasses in store. Purchasing works of art is sometimes available as well but it is not primary as it is in the West.
The agency model is more frequently applied between independent designers and the creative shop owners. Box’s Enigma contracted with Nini and several local designers who have a particular artistic style. As an interior designer, Box made Enigma from his own design. His idea was primarily inspired from the Hollywood movie series The Sorcerer’s Apprentice and Harry Potter. He said: “People thought I had studied in Europe but I have never been to any Western countries. The store design and the unique style are formed by the movies and my own imagination of ancient Europe and the Victorian era” (IN-Box-05/29/2013). Box’s business is established on his well-maintained social network. As he said: “There are always odd people around me” (IN-Box-05/29/2013), so he has rich resources of knowing creative people and to introducing them to his business. As Nini remembered, she was introduced to Box in a party by one of their mutual friends, also a creative worker, and started the contract after several talks: “We have similar aesthetic taste and the ‘eerie’ style of his store matches my works of jewelry…He is a nice person who does not always talk about money like other businessmen” (IN-Nini-06/20/2013).

Similarly, Yuta and Victoria’s Taste operates on the same model but they have reached their young creative partners internationally. Yuta and Victoria said there were many creative people around them, but they were mostly too young to be known. They indicated that Chinese customers did not have enough information about arts and design from magazines or TV programs, so they established Taste as a physical platform to introduce and promote these creative minds to the public.

These agents usually have a good relationship with mass media and are good at manipulating Internet marketing via social media. Box said that he was a creativity promoter and his Enigma was actually a resourceful integration platform: his editor friends of an art and design
magazine found interesting materials in his shop; his designer friends enhanced their prestige through media exposure; and he himself earned profits from customers who were attracted by the media or the designers. The rapid growth of Weixin and Weibo stimulates a new way to merge creative consumption into daily life. By posting finely edited words and graphics, the massive information circulation on Weixin and Weibo brings real income. Nini said: “The more retweets, the better income I get” (IN-Nini-06/20/2013).

**Figure 8.4** The production system of agency model

**4. Agency Model**

![Agency Model Diagram]

**The Absence of the “Third Place”**

Tianzifang is surrounded by many restaurants, bars and coffee shops but these places have not yet developed into the important “third place” to support an art and creative atmosphere, or a place for exchanging ideas, as happens in Western creative districts. Most of the pre-80s participants reported that they nearly never went to any of these places, although their studios were just a few steps away. Drinking coffee was not the habit of Chinese: what matters is how important it is to get along with others.
The post-80s, on the contrary, do go much more to these places, as they described. Drinking coffee is a common habit among these young workers. Victoria said that she was addicted to coffee and must start the day by drinking black coffee in the morning (IN-Victoria-06/24/2013). Yuta saw coffee shops as an extension of his working place where he can escape from his silent studio and throw himself into urban buzz, or a convenient space for meeting with friends (IN-Yuta-06/24/2013). Besides, drinking coffee and wine with friends seems to be a part of the identity and lifestyle of the creative class and is an important social activity. However, the places they preferred to have regular meeting with friends were outside of Tianzifang. They avoided going Tianzifang’s coffee shops because these places are “more expensive” and have “too many tourists”, and they go there only for a simple meal, for a temporary working place, or a convenient outdoor living room to receive their visitors. Most importantly, these places have not (yet) formed an atmosphere to attract and retain the creative souls, not to mention to shape a place identity.

This is not to say that Tianzifang has no places for creative social interaction. In the early years, Chen Yifei’s studio was always filled with creative workers from all fields (Shen, 2011), while Earl’s studio with a small coffee shop attached to it continuously played an important role to sustain Tianzifang’s artistic/creative climate until it was priced out. According to Luwan District Almanac (1994-2003) and Earl’s official pages, Earl invited artists to hold exhibitions in his space every month, and the periodical event later formed a climate, and the space became a popular location for creative people and institutes to rent. The activities ranged from art exhibitions, book launches, press conferences, and poetry readings; and the applicants included individual and governmental institutions. These events were all free and open to the public and attracted many creative people and art lovers.
As a privately owned art space, Earl’s contribution in establishing such a “third place” was not easy. To some extent, Earl’s studio was a substitute museum or an alternative culture center. In 2002 *Times* magazine reported that Tianzifang was one of the two art scenes that could rival the Shanghai Art Museum, and pointed out Earl’s space as the major landmark (Beech, 2002). One of Tianzifang’s early founders also responded that the visitors to Tianzifang’s galleries were more numerous than to the national museum (IN-Wu-05/26/2013). While the Shanghai Art Museum was exhibiting traditional Chinese painting and patriotic topics from the past war time, Earl’s studio had already stepped into the contemporary art world. Earl’s space had gradually formed the art climate, becoming not only a landmark in Tianzifang but also a significant hot spot of Shanghai for creative people to come to meet, to participate in art exhibitions, or simply for a cup of coffee. Unfortunately, such a location cannot escape fate and had moved to another district in 2012, as Earl himself had predicted two years ago in an interview: “This (artists priced out by commerce) is exactly how market economy is developing” (as cited in Sun, 2010, p. 48).

**Discussion**

**The Post-80s is the New Emerging Creative Class**

The concept of “creative class” might not be applicable to the Chinese artists and other creative workers from before the 1980s, until works of art became transactable products and people were able to use their “creative capital” to earn a living. However, China’s dramatic changes in politics and economic policy stimulated a new generation. While the pre-80s still retain their old school lifestyle and keep their traditional Chinese artist philosophy, the post-80s have transformed themselves to be more globalized and open-minded creators.
The post-80s creative Chinese have very similar values and lifestyle to those of Florida’s (2002) creative class: both cohorts desire experiential living, flexible working schedules and not being fixed to one working place. However, Florida’s creative class does not imply an economic status; a well-paid game designer and a low-paid worker can be in Florida’s creative class if they devote their energies to creative activity. In fact, the economic condition of the young creative people I interviewed was mostly above average, though some were supported by their family. The Chinese term for creative class, or the description of one’s job as “having to do with art/design/creativity,” usually refers to a young, affluent, and well-educated (most had received a Western education) crowd.

Consequently, The Western stereotype of bohemian poor young artists does not exist in Tianzifang. In New York’s Soho area, Zukin (1995) observed a number of artists who migrated from around the world and were doing part-time jobs like restaurant waiters and bartenders to maintain a stable income. More recently, in Chicago’s Wicker Park area, Lloyd (2002) describes a similar young creative crowd; they live in dilapidated studios, dress sloppy, and also work temporary jobs as servers in restaurants and bars. But Lloyd points out that some of these people are not in poor economic condition in reality; some of them just choose to be poor to exhibit their unique personality and lifestyle. However, being poor is not the preferred style for creative people in Tianzifang, and they seldom work in service industries to sustain their living. A Chinese artist told me how surprised he was in his first solo exhibition in New York City: “I hired some carpenters, paint workers and some electricians for my gallery setting, and on the opening, they all came dressed nicely and exchanged their business cards with me…you know what? They were artists too!” (IN-Lin-05/02/2013). He said it was incredible to see Western artists do not worry about being working class to sustain their arts career. However, in China,
artists have a higher social status and they will not easily surrender to a worse economic status. The creative Chinese may work multiple jobs but they will keep their mentality as creators and seldom work for restaurants and bars or other physical work.

The Idea of Creativity in Contemporary China is Deeply Influenced by Western Society but has Its New Adaptation

Western-defined creativity has had a strong impact in contemporary China. The concept of creativity in contemporary China, especially when written in official documents, is primarily an appropriation from the West. The Chinese government did not use the term creative industries (chuangyi chanye) in official rhetoric until 2005 (Kong, Gibson, Khoo, and Semple, 2006; Zhong, 2012). Since then, new terms, such as creative districts (chuangyi qu), creative economy (chuangyi jingji), and creative real estate (chuangyi dichan), have boomed and are been broadly used in China. Western theories such as Richard Florida’s and John Howkin’s have been introduced by influential Chinese scholars (see Li, 2011) and have become the major theoretical foundation for promoting local creative economies (Keane, 2009). In the case of Tianzifang, it was originally intended to be a reproduction of SoHo (see chapter 5), and people also attribute its success to foreign creative workers’ early involvement (primarily Western people). On the one hand, the Tianzifang founders believed that the residency of talent, foreign and Chinese, would show what a creative district should look like and form a doable model. On the other hand, the foreign creative workers see their impact on the Mainland Chinese and believe that they led the Chinese to thrive together in Tianzifang (NHK, 2011). Moreover, the post-80s creative young Chinese broadly absorb creative ideas and get inspired from foreign/Western culture and see foreign/Western creative people as their role models. Massively browsing international
magazines, watching TV and movies, surfing the Internet (and unblocking the Great Firewall of China), and traveling abroad are their ways to get immersed in a creative world. I asked some of the young creatives who is their admired creative role model. I got many different answers ranging from Steve Jobs to Yohji Yamamoto, but when I further asked them to specify one Mainland Chinese, none of them had ever figured it out before and could not provide an immediate answer. This anecdote again confirms the great foreign impact on the Chinese creative workers.

In China, creativity tends to be viewed as a final product and the process of idea generation is relatively disregarded. One reason might be how the government appropriates and positions the related terms in official documents. These new emerging concepts of creativity, such as creative economy and creative districts, are more or less related to enhancing regional economy. Creativity in whatever form then becomes a method of improving economic performance, which might be why people mostly recognize creativity as a kind of expensive product, or a way of service that adds value to the products. Municipal governments delimit abandoned industrial spaces for creative districts, and whatever businesses are located inside the districts seem to be called creative industries. As one of the participants said: “I was originally selling imported commodities…one day the government officer came to Tianzifang and hung a metal plate on the entrance that said ‘Tianzifang creative district’, then I realized that I had been defined as part of the creative industries” (IN-Ju-06/22/2013).

27 The loved creative role models includes: Steve Jobs, Yohji Yamamoto (a Japanese fashion designer), Bao Yi-Ming (a Taiwanese designer), Anna Wintour (an American editor-in-chief of Vogue), Karl Lagerfeld (a German fashion designer), Paolo Roversi (an Italian photographer). One participant said his Chinese role model was Ai Weiwei (a Chinese contemporary artist) a day after our interview.
Besides, the freedom of expression must yield to state surveillance. The socialist political environment in China in some ways constrains people’s creativity. If Western defined creativity tends to include freely expression, openness to challenges and tolerance of differences, then it must have some alternatives when it is replanted in China. State surveillance and censorship restrict the themes of art and creative expression. Most pre-80s do not want to “get into trouble” and avoid dealing with challenging issues. The post-80s, although they represent more critical thinking than their previous generation, demonstrate a passive attitude to social participation and feel powerless to change the society. Challenging any form of authority in public is still a big concern. China of course has its creativity but, as Wang (2004) states, the term creative industries is anomalous and compromises the “western concept of creative freedom”, and does not yet deliver what Keane (as cited in Wang, 2004, p. 13) called “unfiltered, market-led content”. Although China demonstrates an ambition to pursue a creative economy, it maintains a “tight ideological grip” (Li, 2013) on the creative industries.

Furthermore, in the frustrating environment of rampant copycats, creativity and creative industries face severe challenges. As the participants mentioned, they spent time and money developing ideas, finding material, and experimenting with different samples before they launch a new design product and were soon easily defeated by pirated products with cheaper prices. Investment in idea generation is costly but they may not receive corresponding rewards. For people who produce novel creative works, this environment is undoubtedly difficult.
The Production System of Creativity Tends to be Independent, Micro, Manufacturing-oriented, and Detached from the Locale

Social interaction between the creative people is not their way. Especially for the pre-80s, they prize individuality that stands against the mainstream and would like to keep their spirit pure from social interference. They described themselves as non-sophisticated, so that social activity is not necessary, and they even try to escape it. This situation of low interaction between artists has also been noted in Kong’s (2009) study when she interviewed Chinese artists in M50, another creative district in Shanghai. The post-80s, on the other hand, are more social and demonstrate more interest in collaborating with other creative workers. Their business and their type of lifestyle have already combined into one and embodied in one “friend zone (pengyou quan)” on social media where they intensively share their work and life with friends. However, in my understanding of the post-80s participants, although they have a vivid social life, when it comes to creation, most of them still prefer working individually. Their social interaction does not make a strong environment for creative or idea-stimulating discussion. Besides, since creativity is viewed as commodity and a certain kind of immediate business, new ideas are always a secret, and they would completely avoid talking about them in their interaction with others, especially with those who have the same profession.

The new, micro and factory-style creative industries have not yet matured as an industrial chain and thus have loose connections with each other. The all-in-one model usually requires no more than three workers, including the artist/designers themselves, to run the business; while the ayi model only hires a few staff, laborers, and basic equipment. These two models, which are both on a micro scale and mostly have operated for less than 5 years, dominate Tianzifang’s production system of creativity. Although they cluster in the same place, the industries are too
simple to develop a mature industrial chain: they work independently, they face their customers directly, and they do not share resources and information. Therefore the motivation to collaborate with others is greatly reduced.

A number of these industries are low-cost manufacturing-oriented, which means the design section is only a small portion; the manufacturing part relies on intensive human labor. The labor pool is consequently important. However, unlike the labor pool in Western cases, it does not consist of creative workers; in Tianzifang the labor pool consists of cheap, migrated, middle aged house-keeping ayi. These women are asked to repeat similar handiwork in small spaces of Shikumen or warehouses or they are hired by studios and shops as sellers. These ayi contribute greatly to Tianzifang’s low-cost micro creative industries and are a feature of the creative district.

Geographic agglomeration does not effectively support Tianzifang’s production system as a creative district. According to Western agglomeration theories, geographic proximity is necessary to creative industries because of the sociality of creative individuals and firms and the vicinity to a creative labor pool that matches the characteristics of unstable and short-term contracts needed in creative industries. But in Tianzifang the creative producers either work alone or in partnership with non-local individuals or firms; social interaction is minimal and the required labor pool is formed by a general migrant working class. Although they assemble in the same area, the creative workers, industries and the place have not formed a strong symbiosis. Like a parasitism, the creative people’s work and life are pretty much detached from the land. In other words, Tianzifang is a loose organism that seems to exist only for sharing customers and tourists rather than to sustain the production system of creativity.
Moreover, the lack of significant third places curtails the stickiness of a creative district. Without a public place for idea sharing and exchange between creative people or art lovers, the creative environment is diminished. In the case of Tianzifang, Earl’s art center had just matured as a creative center after 10 years development, but it was forced to shut down because of rent escalation. As happens in many other cases, gentrification increases the speed at which these third spaces disappear and gives the spaces over to commercial, high-profit use. Today’s Tianzifang may still look like a thriving creative district that is full of tourists and creative industries; however, the soul of creativity has been eclipsed and hollowed.
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

‘Building a Chinese SoHo in Shanghai’ was the initial slogan used for establishing and later preserving Tianzifang. The works of Western theorists such as Richard Florida and John Howkins were widely used as the theoretical backup for the government’s actions that sought to promote both creativity and a creative economy by developing creative industries in certain districts. However, several adaptations and adjustments have been made when implementing these theories and making them into reality in the context of a socialist country. This final chapter summarizes what I have learned and answers my research questions: (a) how has Tianzifang emerged and matured as a creative district? (b) how have Tianzifang’s infrastructure and physical spaces been used as a creative district? (c) what are Tianzifang’s attractions for the creative class? and (d) how does the creative production system function in Tianzifang?

Creative District Developed as an Urban Commodity

Tianzifang spent 15 years transforming itself from a shabby outdoor market place into a district that mixes artists’ studios, creative industries, historic dwellings, and a highly commercialized area. It experienced at least 4 years of local resistance to urban renewal but finally obtained support from the Luwan District government to “preserve Shanghai’s SoHo” and the diverse cultural heritage of Shikumen. It then became one of the first areas to be officially certified as a “creative district” in Shanghai.

The formation of creative districts in China has two features worthy of note: land ownership, and the authority of the Communist government. In China the land and industrial spaces are all state-owned, so development usually depends on how much support is received from the local government. Consequently, the government’s attitude is determinative. One
reason for Tianzifang’s growth can be attributed to the long-term leasing contracts provided to the artists by the local government, which was a guarantee which sought to prevent price gouging, and in the past years has resulted in Tianzifang becoming an important milieu for contemporary art in Shanghai.

However, beginning in 2012 it became evident that the process of gentrification had only been postponed. On the one hand, the government claimed it would preserve Tianzifang for its cultural diversity and creative industries; on the other hand, the government transferred the land property to real estate developers and ceased to offer 10-year contracts to artists. These two actions appear to be contradictory; they reveal how a creative district is considered an investment and a valuable urban commodity that generates regional GDP and revenues for the municipal government. As a result, the gentrification game is ongoing in Tianzifang just as it has played out in other capitalist countries. Moreover, the gentrification process appears to be systematically manipulated and has effectively been shortened in terms of time.

Tianzifang: A Spectacle Juxtapositioning Diversity, Amazement, Creativity, Conflicts, and Segregation

Tianzifang demonstrates the multiple conflicting meanings of place. Chinese and foreign tourists consider it an exotic destination that celebrates diversity and creativity. The creative class sees Tianzifang as a lovely but transitional place to work and usually finds itself psychologically detached from the locale. The local residents view Tianzifang as a home that is inscribed with lifelong memories and they feel threatened when outsiders invade their habitat. The tourist gaze, spatial segregation, and temporal segregation in Tianzifang create alienation, and result in tension, social conflicts, and a sense of insecurity among the residents. The high-sounding rubric of “establishing Shanghai’s SoHo” causes some social downsides to be ignored
and disguised. As Tianzifang has become more developed, the inner social hierarchy has been reconstructed and intra-district inequality exacerbated. Those who subsist below the poverty line and those who can afford luxuries are both present on the same stage, but the gap between wealth and poverty has been clearly demarcated and enlarged. These social issues can also be found in Western creative districts but the characteristics of Tianzifang as a long-living, densely populated poor community make these social issues more noticeable.

**Jobs and Business Opportunities: The Major Drivers**

Richard Florida’s golden formula of the attractions of place has been reversed in Tianzifang, where jobs and business opportunities are major factors. Unlike Florida’s statement that creative people decide where they want to live before considering job opportunities, Chinese creative workers first choose the place offering the most job and business opportunities, and then they expect a better quality of life to follow in the future. Amenities and universities were not the main causes, nor were they considered to be important to the participants in my study. More particularly, in the Tianzifang creative district, the distinct Shikumen spectacle and the Chen Yifei Effect were believed to be very attractive for the creative class: creative people are fascinated by the special atmosphere of old historic sites and the reputation of the celebrity artist Chen Yifei was a brand-name beacon attracting additional artists and customers.

The concepts of tolerance, diversity, and openness are usually recognized by Western scholars as crucial features of a creative milieu and represent the acceptability of differences. However, tolerance as practiced in Tianzifang can be controversial. In terms of the outward social climate, Tianzifang has a large foreign population, a high density of creative people, and is home to multiple ethnic groups (from inland China but not the Han people) — all are important indexes of a tolerant atmosphere in Florida’s opinion. However, in terms of inhabitants, the strict
hukou policy constrains people from non-Shanghai areas from having the same rights to social insurance, welfare, and education as do residents who have Shanghai hukou. In comparison with overseas foreign workers, Tianzifang (Shanghai) exhibits less tolerance for the inland working poor, not to mention the government control over land ownership and freedom of expression.

**New Adaptations of Creativity and its Production System in China**

The meaning of creativity I learned from this study may differ from the previous ideas about Chinese traditional creativity such as the invention of the compass, papermaking, printing, and gunpowder. The modern concept of creativity in contemporary China has been primarily appropriated from the West. The Chinese people and the government claim to have caught up with the West through its adaptation of foreign theories and experiences for the purpose of stimulating local creativity and promoting its creative economy in two ways. First, creativity is usually understood as a product or certain kind of service rather than a series of thought processes because official rhetoric has often linked the concept of creativity to business or economic enhancement. Second, although the Western definition of creativity tends to include free expression, openness to challenges and tolerance of differences, in China it must yield to state surveillance and censorship by the Communist government. These controls more or less block creativity by constraining the expression of socially and politically sensitive issues but encouraging positive attitudes toward cultural and social harmony.

Regarding the production system of creativity, Chinese creative individuals and industries in Tianzifang prefer to work independently rather than collaboratively. For some artists, social interaction has been largely reduced to guarantee pure and full concentration in art making. This is quite different from contemporary discourse that conceptualizes creativity as being socially generated. This feature also is reflected in the creative district. Western theorists
assume that an agglomerative production system is the necessary model for creative industries because creative works involve intensive face-to-face interactions and collaboration. However, the production systems in Tianzifang tend to be independent, conducted on a micro scale, manufacturing-oriented, and detached from the place. The local labor pool of creative talent has been replaced by low-cost Chinese migrant workers, and the significant third spaces for sharing creative ideas are nearly absent. Although Tianzifang consists of clusters of artists, creative people and industries, they have weak connections with each other and do not form a social organism to support the production system as a whole in a creative district.

**Implications**

From an art educator’s perspective, Tianzifang is a medium that teaches and reflects the public notions of creativity and art in China. In such a “creative district,” the products displayed, the sense of the place it generates, the ideas it sells, and the styles the artists and customers prefer—all of this projects how Chinese people understand and interpret art and creativity. Compared to the West, the Chinese creative district tends to be a fancy exotic market that sells paintings, photography, printmaking, and tourist souvenirs; the intention of the aesthetic is to pursue the beauty of representation and seek harmony and inner peace. In fact, Tianzifang is a scaled-down world that barely shows the interrelationship between the notions of art, creativity, and society—a society that differs from most Western and capitalist countries and which may also explain why Florida’s accounts of creative class/creative cities do not apply in this space.

These differences are to be seen in the aspects of culture, education, politics, and commerce. The culture of highly praised individualism and the competitive nature of the Chinese art society make Chinese creative workers hesitate or even avoid collaborating with others.
Without building long-term trust they cannot share their thoughts, which forms the impression that Chinese creative people prefer working independently.

Education is one way to understand the traditional Chinese ethos of conformity. The metaphors of “docile sheep” and “wild wolf” that are used to contrast Chinese and Western (art) education systems were offered by my participants to explain the distinction. Chinese teachers teach students to comply with convention and the political regime rather than challenge or break the rules. In art class, as reported by the participants, students are often taught to precisely draw a tea kettle, a dish of fruit, or a plaster figure in a certain style. Realistic drawing skill is recognized as the foundation in art classes, and is also the crucial criterion of most entrance exams to professional art schools. Critical thinking and idea generation is nearly absent.

In terms of politics, the communist government has long been criticized for its strict censorship and limited freedom of expression. As discussed previously, the politics indeed in some ways constrain the possibilities of art. Sensitive social issues are not often the artists’ preference; experimental and avant-garde creative events are easily suspended by the local police due to the anxiety and fear that the government will not understand the purpose of the events. In order not to get into trouble, some artists work on “safe” topics and material while others mute themselves in other areas and make art that won’t cause much public attention in Tianzifang.

Commerce is most harmful to art. Although the balance between art and commerce is not a new issue, it seems to be polarized in post-revolutionary China. Commercialism and tourism erode the soul of the artists, bending their mind to adjust to the demands of the market. Within a very short period, Tianzifang’s artists have renovated their studios for the purpose of selling art and make art by merging the visual icons of Shanghai or China that please the tourists; the income allows the artists to survive; high-profit art business such as galleries exclude the
low/non-profit art organizations; and experimental theaters have been transformed into designer gift shops. High-speed commercialization has gradually morphed creativity in the district to kitsch. Today’s Tianzifang is far too commercialized and homogenized, which makes a false impression that business is what art and creativity are all about. Once art/creativity has been simplified as merely a buying behavior, the art dies. The distance between people and art widens and the district is no a longer place of creativity. However, through infusing an educational purpose into the creative district it could function as a ground for demonstrating the diverse possibilities of art and creativity, instead of being just a dazzling tourist attraction. This requires certain actions to control gentrification and to protect the habitat.

On the managerial level, the degree of commercialization definitely needs to be controlled. Gentrification may be inevitable but strong management can prolong the lifespan of the creative habitat. Since the Chinese government seizes most land ownership, it is much easier to plan the land use than in capitalist countries. Rent control in both post-industrial studios and Shikumen dwellings is necessary; providing long-term contracts to artist is also necessary. However, in the context of China, it is worth noting that more and more creative districts are being developed by real estate developers through acquiring land management rights from the municipal government. The developers then earn profits by subleasing the renovated old industrial space to retail stores. The government could aid the developer in setting goals for developing creative industries and regulating what types of business/individual are allowed to rent the space from the developer. Hiring a professional manager who is expert in art and creative industries could salvage the erosion of Tianzifang as an art space in six important ways: define clearly the range of creative industries; set up the proportion for each category (coffee shops, boutiques and galleries are parts of creative industries but won’t have the same
proportion); give young and potential artists priority in renting space; establish an effective review system; review the district annually; and eliminate incompetent managers.

Using art/creativity merely as a local economic boost is myopic and weakens the spirit of creative districts that are intended to maintain and nurture creative minds. What should be valued are the artists, their talent, and their ideas, not just the products they produce and the immediate economic income they bring. A creative district needs to rely on its own production system, small business, and individuals interconnected with each other; then it could function as an organism. It should be an open environment that welcomes new and multiple types of creativity without barriers and surveillance. It may include tourism but not as dominant entity. It is an agglomeration of creative people and industries, not just a tourist destination.

The local residents’ needs and concerns also deserve serious attention, and the conflicts among the residents, the creative class, and tourists require reconciliation. Figuring out how the district can thrive with minimal interference in its original living is crucial. The Shikumen dwellings are old and need proper maintenance. Security and poor hygiene conditions must be improved. Moreover, to facilitate mutual understanding, interactions between the creative workers and residents must be encouraged, such as inviting the residents to participate in public art making and relevant activities, providing job opportunities, or encouraging the artists to make art by using local materials and culture with respect. Once this type of partnership has been established, the district is more likely to grow as a sound and sustainable community.

It has been approximately 10 years since China’s government officially announced its intention to cultivate creativity and promote a creative economy. Compared to many developed countries in which the concept of creativity has long been instilled in their cultures and educational systems, China is young and has a long way to go. There is a schism between
establishing creative districts to pursue a creative economy and cultivating talent for creative sectors of companies. Tianzifang’s development bears witness to the recent appropriation of related concepts of creativity. Tianzifang’s story is an example of how the Chinese government, creative class, and ordinary people have faced and adapted to conflicts when accepting new ideas. Although the ideas have primarily been derived from foreign theories and experiences, all parties have developed an alternative local model dependent on their culture and needs, one which is more like a regional economic revitalization proposal.

The “reform and opening up” of creativity in China has just begun, and it is too early to judge its current state. However, the post-80s generation is joining the stock of creative talent. They are smarter, more critical, open-minded, and sophisticated citizens in the globalized world, more so than the previous generation. With the rapid economic growth and the recent boom of social networking services in China, a more open and creative China can be expected in the near future.
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