Survival of Shanghai Urbanite Culture in the Mao Era: Bourgeois Aspirations and Practice of Longtang Everyday Life

Lei Ping

The New School, New York, United States

Corresponding author: Lei Ping, 66 W12th Street 6th Floor, New York NY 10011, USA. Email: PINGL@newschool.edu.


ABSTRACT

This essay studies an often overlooked and understudied topic – the survival of Shanghai vernacular longtang (alleyway house) urbanite culture in the Mao era (1949-1976). It discovers how bourgeois sentiments embodied by the Shanghai national bourgeoisie were aspired to and inherited by the longtang petty urbanites (xiaoshimin) and their quotidian practices of Shanghai-styled (haipai) everyday life. By delving into archives, newspapers, and urban cultural studies, the essay particularly examines how urbanite culture was revitalized by the mode of Shanghai everyday living and how it resiliently co-existed with socialist revolutionary culture through a type of distinctive material culture particularly manifested in housing and food. It investigates the dialectical and conflictual relationship between the discourse of revolution and that of everyday life. It challenges the problematic incompleteness of Socialist Transformation project and searches for a new understanding of historical viability and sustainability of Chinese socialism, as Chinese socialism did not succeed in eradicating bourgeois sensibility as an oppositional historical force in Shanghai in the Mao era. In this context, the essay argues that Shanghai maintained a privileged urban center while its urbanite culture persisted by means of self-preservation of the longtang everyday life and fetishized bourgeois materialism and aspirations under Maoist Chinese socialism.

Keywords: longtang, urbanite culture, Mao era, everyday life, Shanghai, haipai

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1. INTRODUCTION
The entrenched resilience of Shanghai bourgeois ideology, culture, and value system under Maoist socialism has largely remained as an intellectual conundrum. Socialist Transformation of the Shanghai Capitalist Industry and Commerce project in the socialist transition period (1949-1956) might have profoundly remolded the mode and force of production, it however, left the task as to how to fundamentally transform the residual bourgeois thought and life-world unfinished. Mao Zedong’s profound rejection of capitalism and growing fear that China would suffer a “bourgeois restoration” eventually led to the outbreak of political radicalism culminated by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).[1] His populist critique of capitalism and radical belief in the “advantages of backwardness” theory greatly determined the direction of Chinese socialism. In other words, without achieving or simply bypassing the prerequisite of orthodox Marxist understanding of socialism – a full-fledged capitalist mode of production and means of subsistence, China prematurely embarked on the practice of socialism. What believed was the moral and social virtue inherent in the backwardness of Chinese society precisely encountered the irony of Chinese socialism vis-à-vis bourgeois influence on the Eve of the founding of the People’s Republic. In contrast to the utopian prospect of Maoist socialism, capitalist modernity embodied by the lure of the Shanghai modern seemed to suggest a more enchanting way of everyday life to the Shanghai ordinary urbanites.

As a city fundamentally defined by its class-coded culture, bourgeois heritage, and quotidian everyday practice, Shanghai has been labeled as a modern metropolis that is somehow culturally and ideologically semi-detached from its post-1949 socialist Chinese nation-state. Despite the unequivocally distinctive tradition as the cradle of Chinese communism in 1921 and the left-wing radicalism during the Cultural Revolution, Shanghai remained to be a city that had been entangled with the historical development of capitalism since forced open as one of China’s five treaty ports after the first Opium War (1839-1842). This kind of Shanghai’s relation to bourgeois sensibility lies at the core of what I call the “myth of Shanghai.” The tension-charged combat between the two oppositional and antagonistic cultures, traditions, beliefs, value systems, and political discourses, namely, the bourgeois vis-à-vis the socialist, the mundane vis-à-vis the sublime, thus requires critical scrutiny.

As part of a larger research project on the historical transformation of Shanghai vernacular architecture and urban identity, this essay studies an often overlooked and understudied topic – the survival of Shanghai longtang (alleyway house) urbanite culture in the Mao era (1949-1976). It foregrounds the socio-spatial significance of the Shanghai longtang architecture, at the same time, discovers how bourgeois sentiments embodied by the Shanghai bourgeoisie were aspired to and inherited by the longtang petty urbanites (xiaoshimin) and their quotidian practices of Shanghai-styled (haipai) everyday life. By delving into archives, newspapers, and urban cultural studies, the essay particularly examines how urbanite culture was revitalized by the mode of Shanghai everyday living and how it resiliently co-existed with socialist revolutionary culture through a type of distinctive material culture particularly manifested in housing and food. It investigates the dialectical and conflictual relationship between the discourse of revolution and that of everyday life. It challenges the problematic incompleteness of Socialist Transformation project and searches for a new understanding of...
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1.1. Shanghai Modernity on the Eve of 1949 Revolution

While observing the dazzling Shanghai modern splendor in the Republican era, the left-wing writer Mao Dun writes the following passage in his realist novel Midnight.

“The sun had just sunk below the horizon and a gentle breeze caressed one’s face...Under a sunset-mottled sky, the towering framework of Garden Bridge was mantled in a gathering mist. Whenever a tram passed over the bridge, the overhead cable suspended below the top of the steel frame threw off bright, greenish sparks. Looking east, one could see the warehouses of foreign firms on the waterfront of Pudong like huge monsters crouching in the gloom, their lights twinkling like countless tiny eyes. To the west, one saw with a shock of wonder on the roof of a building, a gigantic neon sign in flaming red and phosphorescent green: LIGHT, HEAT, POWER.”[2]

This kind of modern glamor, energy, and vitality notwithstanding, Shanghai, as early as in 1922, was denounced by the May 4th New Culture Movement leader and co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Chen Duxiu. To Chen, the “Old Shanghai” (Lao Shanghai) appeared toxic and contaminated by the bourgeois-colonial social ethos,

“Shanghai society, if analyzed, [was composed of] many uneducated hard labors, unscrupulous businessmen who directly or indirectly make living under the power of foreign capital, swindlers who fraud western medicine, whores, hooligans, pornographic fictions,...there are only very few youthful students who hold on to their idealism. Under this circumstance, [they] do not have power to conquer the external environment, but only the one to remain self-defensive.”[3]

If the modern history of Shanghai is often overdetermined by the phantasmagoric lure of the modern, Chen’s diagnosis of the dire social problems serves a timely observation and critique of Shanghai modernity – a type of modernity that is tremendously entangled with feudalism, colonialism, and imperialism. The encounter of the “Old Shanghai” and the socialist revolutionary forces on the eve of the liberation day of the city in 1949 was bound to carry the weight of an unprecedented course of history.

1.2. Clashes between Communism and “A Big Dyeing Cat”

In her studies of modern Shanghai history, Marie-Claire Bergère insightfully points out that Shanghai did not destroy communism but was obliged to submit to it; and neither did Communism destroy Shanghai, it simply changed it.[4] The transformation of Shanghai from a colonial cosmopolitan metropolis was never an overnight magic. The austere socialist revolutionary culture embodied by the Democratic Dictatorship of the People (renmin minzhu zhuanzheng) ceaselessly battled with Shanghai urbanite culture. Once the policing was relaxed in an already liberated city, the characteristics of the bourgeois “Old Shanghai” immediately reemerged almost unscathed. The historically rooted bourgeois “old habits” continuously prevailed through a unique form of quotidian practices. Noted by Xinmin Evening Newspaper, in June 1950, about a year after the liberation of the city,
Shanghai somehow “changed again.”[5] Not only did restaurant and café business begin to revive, theaters continuously catered Hollywood movies to anxious local audiences. All sorts of financial news reported prices were increasing. The “Anecdote of Shanghai” column in Xinmin Evening Newspaper recorded that the market appeared active and the price of meat bounced back to eight thousand yuan.[6] Walking in the city streets, one felt like old bourgeois sentiment in actuality returned to wage a cultural and ideological guerilla warfare against the fruitions of the socialist revolution.[7]

Although in the meantime Shanghai was also the revolutionary bastion and birthplace of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), it was labeled as a “big dyeing vat” (darangang), namely, a serious social epidemic whose conjured-up urban phantasmagoria was believed fatally harmful to socialist revolutionary conduct, morale, and fighting spirit established as early as 1921 and culminated by the Long March of the Red Army (1934-1935) during the Civil War. The CCP’s initial reaction as to how to remodel and rebuild urban centers like Shanghai was noted by the metaphor that Mao used in 1949 – a city that was contaminated by seemingly insurmountable sugar-coated bourgeois-colonial legacy.[8]

During the socialist transition period, a series of campaigns known as “Three-anti” and “Five-Anti” were launched by the CCP to address the growing concerns and problems among the Communist party officials as well as the bourgeoisie, such as corruption, waste, bureaucratism, bribery, tax evasion, fraud, theft of state property, and leakage of state economic secrets.[9] Shanghai continued to be at the center of condemnation and Socialist Transformation of Capitalist Industry and Commerce (1952-1956). In February 1957, after the campaigns gradually drew to an end, Mao emphasized the continued class struggle in the ideological field in his speech “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People”:

“The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the class struggle between the various political forces, and the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the ideological field will still be protracted and tortuous and at times even very sharp. The proletariat seeks to transform the world according to its own world outlook, and so does the bourgeoisie. In this respect, the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, is not really settled yet.”[10]

The ideological battle took a dialectical turn in 1963 when socialist revolutionary culture was propagated through the campaigns of “Emulating Good Eighth Company of Nanjing Road” (Nanjing lu shanghai hao balian) and “Learning from Comrade Lei Feng.” While both offered a national role model in the 1960s, the former represented a self-disciplined People’s Liberation Army unit stationed in downtown Shanghai, and the latter became a symbol of the selfless, dedicated, and sacrificing socialist revolutionary culture.[11] However, the dramatic and ironic embourgeoisment story of a Good Eighth Company soldier in Shanghai was vividly captured by the stage play and film Sentinels under the Neon Lights in 1963 and 1964 respectively – just a few years before the outset of the Cultural Revolution and intensified class struggle. The soldier who came from the rural area was portrayed as unexpectedly infatuated by the dazzling urban commercial ambiance on Nanjing Road in Shanghai. Although he was eventually re-educated by the CCP, his path to re-searching and returning to his socialist revolutionary identity remained hugely impacted by the “corrosive” Shanghai bourgeois urbanite culture and material life-world. One then would ask, what exactly
made Shanghai such a “big dyeing vat” that seemed to possibly undermine and unravel socialist revolutionary tradition?

2. **SHANGHAI IDENTITY: LONGTANG PETTY URBANITES AND HAIPAI**

After Shanghai was forced open (*kaibu*) as a treaty port after the First Opium War, in November 1845, Daotai Gong Mujiu and the first appointed British Consul George Balfour signed the agreement on “Shanghai Land Regulations” and announced the principle of “separation between the Chinese and the foreigners.”[12] Due to the flooded refugee population that fled from the Chinese quarter to the International settlement and French concession, it wasn’t after Small Swords Uprising and Taiping Rebellion that the British, American and French consuls revised “Land Regulation” and legalized the real-estate trade inside and outside concessions in 1854. As a result, both the Chinese (*hua*) and foreigners (*yang*) were gradually allowed to co-habit in the concessions.[13] The population of Shanghai was around 200,000 in 1843, it reached 1 million in 1900, 2 million in 1915, 3 million in 1930, 4 million in 1947, and 5,460,000 in 1949.[14] At the beginning of the twentieth century, almost three-quarters of Shanghai’s inhabitants were not natives of the town. They arrived from other regions of the country, as well as Europe, the United States, and toward the end of the century, Japan. The image of “patchwork” or “mosaic” therefore was often applied to Shanghai during that time.[15]

2.1. **Shanghai Longtang as Defining Vernacular Architecture**

In order to tackle with the vast population growth in Shanghai resulted from the war refugees of Small Swords Uprising and Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864), a type of architecture *longtang* alleyway houses started to define the Shanghai urban space in the 1870s. It was a dwelling space that looked like a cluster of two, three-storied houses connected by shared front and back alleys that led to broader commercial streets. There were mainly four types of Shanghai *longtang* – *shikumen*, new-styled, apartment and garden house-styled. Among all the residential structures, traditional *shikumen* (“wooden door within a stone framework”) *longtang* was built in 1870s and regarded as the most common.[16] At first, *shikumen* appeared to facilitate the overgrown Chinese population in the concessions. The early-stage *shikumen* was tinged with the integration of both Chinese and Western architectural elements. Its re-formed traditional Chinese courtyard interior and European row-house exterior were designed for the rapidly increased housing demand and compact living space in the foreign concessions at that time.[17] The new-styled *longtang*, equipped with more modern sanitary fixtures and better kitchen facilities, was popularized in the 1920s, followed by the more westernized garden and apartment-styled *longtang* in the 1930s that became residences of foreign adventurers, compradors, and wealthy Chinese merchants.

The *longtang* became the backdrop of Shanghai’s vernacular cityscape. The breathtaking rows and rows of *longtang* embodied a distinctive habitus of Shanghai and its urbanites. According to Shanghai Statistic Bureau, by 1949 almost three-quarters of Shanghai’s residential dwellings were built in the form of *longtang*.[18] It is well known that multiple spatial layers of the *longtang* extended from public space (streets), semi-public space (main lanes), and semi-private space (sub-lanes) to private space (residential interior), which created a strong sense of community, home, and belonging. The unique traditional Chinese-styled front courtyard meets with the rooftop sundeck, creating a flow of well-purposed
spatiality. The *longtang* were designed and built in various aesthetically appealing forms, each with colors and sounds of vernacular and cosmopolitan spirits. As scholars Luo Xiaowei and Wu Jiang delineate, “The decoration of the [traditional-styled *shikumen*] houses showed the special feature of residence in the regions south the Yangtze River. The gate of *shikumen* house at the early stage was very simple. It was framed with stone, and the gate itself was made of thick wood painted black. Attention was given to the decoration on the eaves and pediment of the gate later on. The pediment, triangular, rectangular or arched in shape, with carved or molded ornament made of brick or cement, its pattern and design were influenced by Western architectural styles.”[19] However, after the CCP took over the city in 1949, the entire *longtang* housing stock was turned into largely state-owned properties and redistributed among the original local residents and new comers of varying socio-political classes and backgrounds who were assigned into a single unit of a *longtang* house. This kind of overcrowded housing condition continued until many *longtang* architectural structure gradually became dilapidated throughout the Mao and early post-Mao eras.[20] Further discussion of this phenomenon will be made in section 3.2.

### 2.2. *Longtang* Petty Urbanites

From the modern labyrinthic *longtang*, Shanghai urbanite everyday life unfolded. Its passion for trivial details of mundane gratification was rooted in a social class-coded culture.[21] The residents who dwelled in the *longtang* were often associated with the term “petty urbanite” (*xiaoshimin*). It is believed that this social group appeared as early as the end of the nineteenth century. Many lived in the *longtang* and spoke a typical “ah la” Shanghai dialect. Some Shanghai Studies scholars such as Wen-hsien Yeh, Hanchao Lu, and Marie-Claire Bergère state that the term petty urbanite usually referred to a group of lower or lower-middle residents who led more or less a temporary immigrant life and lived in hardship due to their non-elite socio-economical status in Shanghai. The majority of them worked as employees, minor officials, schoolmasters, qualified out-of-work students.[22] In a different but comparable account, Zhang Zhen elaborates the complexities of this social group, “Their [petty urbanites’] cultural taste and commercial acumen, a conspicuous marker of the Shanghai social character, were eclectic, curious, and worldly (shisu) in both senses of the word. The petty urbanites approached the middlebrow. Their participation in the production and consumption of a burgeoning mass culture gave rise to a distinctive metropolitan culture, which voraciously mixed popular entertainment with cultural aspirations, cosmopolitan yearnings with everyday concerns.”[23]

The dialectic of cosmopolitanism and quotidian sentiment well captured the main characteristics of this social group. The renowned life-style and cosmopolitan beliefs of these Shanghai urbanites influenced the making of a consolidated urbanite class (*shimin jieceng*) in the early twentieth century, all of which determined the formation of the city’s social norm and cultural ideology. These socio-cultural sensibilities gradually grew into something almost completely local and regional, and in the meantime, western and outward-looking in the era was highly self-enclosed and socialist revolutionary – a so-called Shanghainese way of life and native-place identity (vis-à-vis migrant *waidiren* identity). With various professional backgrounds and social statuses, the majority of petty urbanites resided in a heterogeneous and diversified (*za*) urban space, namely,
longtang, from which a distinctive urbanite culture emerged over the course of modern Shanghai history.[24] If the longtang were the backbone of Shanghai, then the petty urbanites were the backbone of the longtang. In the post-1949 Mao’s Shanghai, it was through these petty urbanites that everyday life was constituted and established.

The implied pejorative and under-defined term “petty urbanite” was precisely captured by a Xinmin Evening Newspaper essay “Petty Urbanites Carrying Old Habits When Taking a Bus” on January 17, 1950: “The possessive desire that petty urbanites possess is completely revealed in the city. Considering taking a bus or a tram as an example, the ordinary petty urbanites have such thoughts on their minds – they either wish to be the first person to get on the bus or the tram or likely to have no one else sharing the space except for their beloved ones.”[25] The rather satirical tone suggested that as a socially, culturally, and historically determined group, Shanghai petty urbanites or perhaps all “Shanghainese” (Shanghairen) continuously lived on with their petty limitations after the socialist revolution. To these Shanghai petty urbanites, quotidian gain and loss seemed to supersede many other sublime subjects and aspects of daily life, thus became daily life as such.

“Shanghainese” as a social identity and cultural concept appeared around 1904. Cai Yuanpei and other eminent editorial members of Jingzhong Daily officially introduced the term “Shanghainese” (Shanghairen) in the essay “New Shanghai.”[26] In 1905, a group of late-Qing local scholar-officials led the Shanghai Self-governing Movement in hope of developing the physical infrastructure of the Chinese quarter and gaining political self-autonomy under the semi-colonial ruling. Attempts of place-making also pertained to the ever-growing domestic and international curiosity about Shanghai. It was said that Shanghai Travel Guide was continuously re-published seven times within three years after it first came out in 1909. Much of the book was also to introduce the Shanghai dialect and way of life to the readers. The dialect originated from the two dialects of Ningbo and Suzhou, and developed into its own distinctive form after the Opium War. It was not only spoken by native-born Shanghainese but also by those migrants who were from provinces such as Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Guangdong.[27] It is worth noting that this native-place identity became further stabilized after the implementation of the housing registration system (hukou) in the Mao era. The hukou system was at first promulgated in 1958 in order to control overpopulated rural-to-urban migration. Migration from the rural to the urban was then largely prohibited. The relatively immobile and insular environment catalyzed the making of a type of Shanghai identity.

2.3. Haipai Culture
What cannot be overlooked is that the making of the urban identity concurrently occurred with the rise of haipai culture (Shanghai style) in the late Qing dynasty.[26] The word haipai originally appeared to refer to a fine art style definitively oppositional to what was known as jingpai culture (Beijing style). It was derogative to jingpai advocates who believed that haipai betrayed the Chinese Confucian scholar-official tradition. The heterogeneous (za) and modern characteristics of haipai were often relentlessly critiqued in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as contaminated by foreign influences and subordinated to commercial interests, thus, neither Chinese nor quite yet Western.[29] Despite the inconclusive criticisms and debates orienting around the characteristics of haipai, the particularity of the cultural formation was recognized. Most
significantly, the birth of *haipai* and its affinity with the imagined and sometimes deviant forms of bourgeois aspirations fundamentally shaped the socio-cultural unconscious of Shanghai. It was the very expression of the commercial and cosmopolitan culture of modern China, and simply a “double betrayal at once of traditional culture and its foreign models: the richness of Shanghai culture stemmed from its fertilization through its cross-cultural influences.”[30] The clashes between the traditional, provincial, mundane, modern, and cosmopolitan converged into something both Chinese and Western, resilient and porous.

A key aspect of *haipai* culture was that it was grounded in the class-conscious everyday life of the ordinary Shanghai urbanites. The sense of class distinctions was well displayed in the interior of the *longtang* – a discrete world that was wondered with gossip and embroiled with localized bourgeois life-style. In Wang Anyi’s literary imagination, the prevalence of bourgeois sensibility was impeccably retained in Shanghai domestic space during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, “ Newly waxed brown wood floor shines elegantly, leather sofas surround themselves at the corner...a grand piano standing at the other corner of the room, in between there is a dining table.”[31] The secluded, detached, and self-absorbed living space was exquisitely arranged and decorated, representing a particular taste and preference in the middle of a radical political time, a meticulous reminder of the bygone lure of the modern, as well as a fatalistic sense of nostalgia. In search of the lost modern splendor, the Shanghai urbanites tenaciously led their everyday life in between imagined opulence and austere frugality, urban sophistication and restrained living spaces.

3. **LIVING LONGTANG EVERYDAY LIFE: “PRACTICING DAOIST RITES IN A SNAIL SHELL”**[32]

3.1. **Iconic Longtang Pastime**

Despite change of political milieu or turbulence of history, this ordinary Shanghai longtang everyday life was meticulously deployed in its so-called “practicing Daoist rites in snail shell” (*luosike li zuodaochang*) – an almost self-indulged exquisite form of life lived and enjoyed with its particular daily routines, rituals, and rites. It was in the far less than spacious “snail shell,” in other words, the compact physicality and mundane spirituality of the individual *longtang* dwelling space, that everyday life offered a kind of haven for the ordinary Shanghai urbanites. As if the mundane, quotidian, and everyday was the raison d’être of life itself.

One of the most definitive daily scenes of the petty urbanites would be nothing more than gossip (*liuyan*). Shanghai urbanite culture lay in the landscape of gossip. Gossip perhaps did not necessarily qualify as history, however, carrying over the shadows of time, it entered into a Baudelairean understanding of modernity – transient, fleeting, nonetheless, eternal. It was this dialectical movement that allowed gossip to be read as both fiction and reality, life and death for the Shanghai *longtang* petty urbanites. Although gossip seemed trivial, fragmented and after all, full of imagined narratives, heresies, and rumors, it was one of the definitive highlights of the daily events for the *longtang* petty urbanites. Modern urban space implies, contains and dissimulates social relations.[33] The quotidian and mundane was the cradle of endless gossip and imagined relationships between *longtang* neighbors. Flying around the maze-like *longtang*, gossip communicated and interacted with individuals and neighbors, knitted and shaped both fiction and reality. It was
produced and reproduced in temporal and spatial dimensions. Following its own scripts and plots and traveling through its own time and space, gossip made socio-historical time fade away from the center to the backstage. All the joyous and sorrowful drama of life lay in gossip, without which the longtang were bodies with hollowed souls. Without gossip, it became impossible to decipher the immediate social relations and the unconscious of the city. It was only through the self-reproduced mundanity and self-reinforced vulgarity that Shanghai everyday life found a sense of home. There was a moment of eternity born out of all the worldly transient and fragmentary, its urban fabric and quotidian density emerged from the exceptionally ordinary. The quotidian took a leap of faith with gossip whose self-sufficiency and self-autonomy overwhelmed and discomforted the utopian ideology of socialist revolutionary culture.

Mu Mutian depicts this kind of longtang gossip with a sense of humor, “Housewife of this house, maid of that house, [are both] broadcasting longtang news, and propagating longtang public opinions. If you are able to understand their ‘nong ah nong’ dialect, you would hear tons of precious happenings. Even if [you] do not understand the language, you could also appreciate them as endless silent dramas.”[34] There seemed no other languages more suitable than the Shanghai dialect for the creation and circulation of the longtang gossip. Its soft, brisk, down-to-earth, and sometimes shrewd tones were the impeccable catalyst of gossip. The everyday-oriented topics stretched from mahjong and poker invitations to husbands next door who returned home later than expected. Whenever there was a fine day, the longtang dwellers would bring their wooden or plastic stools to alleyways for a leisurely chat. Festive noise intermittently filled up the alleyways, with running children chasing after one another and playing jumping rubber-bands and flipping cigarette cards, with talkative housewives standing around in circles knitting innocent and serious rounds of gossip while keeping eyes on their warm kitchen stoves, and with half-asleep grandparents carrying handcrafted fans and listening to beloved shaoxing regional operas on the radio during the years of tumultuous political campaigns.

This sense of enjoyment and obliviousness never seemed disrupted by the transformation of the socio-political world outside of the longtang. Noted in Xinmin Evening Newspaper, on an unusually hot summer day June 30, 1950, a year after the liberation of the city, many longtang dwellers “migrated” to the neon-lit evening city commercial streets to escape the heat wave. Nanjing Road and Xizang Road intersections were immediately stuffed with gigantic “human flesh walls.”[35] In June 1957, besides going to parks for leisurely strolls and rooftop gardens of the department stores on Huaihai Road for evening window-shopping, the Shanghainese picked up their straw mats searching for breezy shades.[36] Streets were turned into a spacious longtang neighborhood after sunset, with the rounds of gossip carried out as summaries of the day. The main theme of gossip rarely went beyond trivial, self-absorbed daily matters. Disputes over occupancy of shared shikumen kitchen or townhouse hallways could be life-and-death struggles for many husbands and wives. The highlight of each quarrel did not arrive until one started referring to the other as “petty urbanite” (xiaoshimin), for the magic word meant to characterize all the most infamous reputation of the Shanghainese – vulgar, calculative, and narrow-minded.
3.2. Dilemma of Longtang Housing Condition

The irony lied in the dilemma of the Shanghai longtang everyday life itself. The Shanghai petty urbanites internalized their self-entitled sense of privilege as Shanghairen on the one hand; on the other hand, their pride constantly was ridiculed by what I would term “loopholes of the Shanghai modern.” Housing shortage contributed much to the problem. As previously mentioned, the shortage was not new to Shanghai, in fact it started in the late Qing-Republican era. The condition exacerbated in the 1950s and was gradually labeled as a comical phenomenon called “house of seventy-two tenants.”[37] The reason of the sudden shortage was due to the lack of awareness of drastic population increase in the macro-level planning.[38] During the socialist transition in the 1950s, the confiscation and redistribution of private housing previously occupied by those foreigners or “bourgeois counterrevolutionaries” did not greatly improve the housing shortage situation in the city. Bergère sharply observes, “Although many households were then crammed into the old villas, whose reception rooms were divided and subdivided and whose garages and annexes were converted into apartments, Shanghai did not contain enough bourgeois residences to lodge all the city’s inhabitants living in shocking conditions.”[39] Rather than increasing the investment in residential construction, on the contrary, the central government decreased the investment scale. In 1957, the average living space in Shanghai dropped to 3.1 square-meters per person, which became the lowest since the founding of the nation. The problem was only slowly taken into consideration by the city municipal government. In order to relieve the housing pressure, downgrading construction standards for residential space was the most immediately effective solution between the late 1950s and 1970s. However, from 1958 and 1962, the investment in Shanghai housing construction again decreased by 1.84% than the previous five years. The project was disrupted by political campaigns and economic turmoil during the years of the Great Leap Forward and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.[40]

Table 1. Statistics of Housing Investment in Shanghai from 1949 to 1975 [1]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Investment in Infrastructure (ten thousand RMB)</th>
<th>Investment in Housing (ten thousand RMB)</th>
<th>Increase or decrease</th>
<th>Living space per person (Sq M)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950-1952</td>
<td>24,541</td>
<td>3,262</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953-1957</td>
<td>164,437</td>
<td>18,364</td>
<td>+462.97</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-1962</td>
<td>529,625</td>
<td>18,026</td>
<td>-1.84</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963-1965</td>
<td>179,363</td>
<td>13,342</td>
<td>-25.43</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-1970</td>
<td>302,066</td>
<td>7,765</td>
<td>-42.23</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-1975</td>
<td>870,309</td>
<td>27,669</td>
<td>+256.32</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-1980</td>
<td>1,349,506</td>
<td>115,321</td>
<td>+316.79</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Crowded living space became the first and foremost daily concern for the Shanghai longtang urbanites. Disputes over space and gossip about privacy took the center stage of Shanghai “living everyday life” (guorizi). Rooms in shikumen were infamously known as sizes of pigeon cage or prison cell.[41] In the 1970s, out of survival instinct, dwellers in shikumen attempted to maximize every corner of their living space.
“Creative scenes” could be spotted everywhere – more and more roof-top attics were built; kitchens were turned into additional bedrooms; livable spaces were extended from shared balconies to courtyards; public hallways became private storage space. In addition, the Shanghai longtang petty urbanites encountered more dilemmas on a daily basis. According to Shanghai Statistic Bureau, even until 1986, 51.8% of the longtang residents were still using public water supply, 31.2% did not have kitchens, and 74.1% households did not have private shower or bath facilities. Among all the inconvenience, what used to be most “losing face” (embarrassing) for many Shanghai shikumen dwellers was the fact that there was no private sanitary facility in the house. This kind of spectacular scenery is reminiscent of Mu Mutian’s comments on the 1930s shikumen longtang, “Seen from the backdoors, as if every household has one or two red portable spittoon on display. It reminds me of a grand military review.”

In the 1960s and 1970s, with more shikumen longtang gradually provided with manure pits and public urinals, emptying and cleaning night-soil rendered quite a cacophony. The “genetic deficiency” of Shanghai everyday life, nevertheless, did not interrupt the daydreams of the petty urbanites. Rather, it grew into a norm that never made the Shanghairen identity less snobbish and proud.

4. SHANGHAI FOOD CULTURE UNDER MAOISM

Food culture was an equally important criterion of Shanghai urbanite everyday life ever since the mid-nineteenth century. The heterogeneity of Shanghai cuisines created a rich spectrum of regional flavors to cater to the Shanghai diners. The Shanghai way of life would hardly be complete without mentioning its affection for Shanghai snacks. No urban dwellers could resist anything delicious to the palate. The delicacy and abundance of the snacks could be overwhelming for the eye. The sophisticated long list of names could easily exhaust a person whose native tongue was novice to the city. Simply differentiating gao, bing from bao, tuan in the Shanghai dialect could be a challenge.

From crab-apple cake to tiaotou cake, cream cake to coconut yoke cake, the Shanghainese philosophy of naming its traditional and Western cakes and Chinese buns was reminiscent of the typology of naming the city streets. Stories of each snack were meticulously noted in the Xinmin Evening Newspaper, with lively, observant, and diary-styled reports by the local journalists throughout the years in the Mao era. From oil chicken to fried pork bun, sweet rice wine glutinous rice dumpling to radish pancake, sour plum juice to Russian borscht, cinnamon sugar taro to stir-fried sugar chestnut, Shanghai found itself almost hedonistic in the era led by socialist frugality.

4.1. Longtang Snacks

Eileen Chang’s definitive line about the enchantment is by no means well-known, “Eating is such a crucial thing [for the Shanghai urbanites], the rest all became jokes.” The sound of selling tasty goods from peddlers in the Shanghai longtang alleyways was also extensively written by Lu Xun, “Cream of pearly-barley, almonds and lotus-seeds...sugared rose cakes...noodles with shrimp and pork wonton...spiced eggs boiled in tea...” Lu Xun’s love-hate relationship with Shanghai during his stay in the 1930s was reflected in his satirical delineation of the Shanghai
snacks and petty urbanite culture. For “a rustic newcomer to Shanghai” like him, these chants of vendors were more piquant than he could ever have dreamed of at that time. For him, snacks were not only for biting away time, but also for nourishment and cultivation. Sometimes, however, those chants “could have one bad effect on those who lived by the pen, for unless one had achieved the perfect serenity and thus one’s ‘heart is like a stagnant well.’ One would otherwise be too distracted by these cries all day and all night to produce anything.” Lu Xun’s dilemma seemed only to witness the charm of material consumption and mundane gratification that those scrumptious Shanghai snacks reminded one of.

The revolution did not change the Shanghai appetite. Life went on in the form of oblivious blissfulness. In 1950, shortly after the 1949 revolution, Shanghai ordinary urbanites already began to express their sense of nostalgia. Eating itself took the center stage of everyday life, without which life would have been dull and dreadful. The joy was unveiled like a sumptuous feast, tempting and irresistible, “Buy it, watermelon!” “Want it? Green beans!” The blasting sound of peddlers making popcorn in the front entrance of the longtang was usually the event of the day. It made the adults compulsively checking their bike tires in the longtang, and the children drooling while eagerly waiting for their popcorns.

4.2. Exceptional Food Consumption and Shanghainese Taste
The longtang snack saga extended itself further to the streets. Despite food shortage and rationing under the socialist planned economy, Shanghai ordinary urbanites carried on with their cosmopolitan passion for culinary consumption. As Shen Jialu writes, “No matter how poor they were, the Shanghainese liked sesame oil, for improving the taste of dishes.” The delicate variety of the Shanghainese favorite daily items was continuously made available after the 1949 revolution, ranging from oil chicken, roast duck, fried bun (shengjiabao), Russian borscht (luosongtang), to coffee, coca-cola, milk and traditional Guanming brand ice cream. For the Shanghai urbanites, the nostalgic time machine brought back all the temporarily disrupted daydreams. Dining and snacking offered a type of shelter and anchor. The banal, harsh, stoic, and unpredictable were placed aside for the sake of living the everyday (guorizi). Indulging oneself in savoring the mundane might be against the spirit of socialism and revolution, but for the Shanghai urbanites, it was certainly a coping mechanism by which they could alleviate immediate sufferings, live in the materialistic now, and be oblivious about all the precarious.

Even during the heavily criticized Three Years of Natural Disasters (1958-1961), the Shanghai Food Department continuously managed to provide the Shanghai residents dining and snack vouchers so that they could resume the daily food consumption tradition. Fixed-amount and local food vouchers were required when purchasing snacks after July 1963. In addition to the regular vouchers, small-amount monthly food vouchers such as 100g, 50g, and 25g were issued to cater to the special “delicate taste” of the Shanghainese. The tremendously favored Shanghai traditional breakfast items, such as soymilk, fried dough stick, peach shortcake, macaroon, sesame cake, saltine, and sponge cake were exchanged with only half-liang food vouchers. In 1965, right before the Cultural Revolution, monthly vouchers were replaced by the fixed-term ones. This initiative was known as carried out in consideration for the variety and “sophistication” of the Shanghai diet.
June 1972, the long-term city food vouchers were widely issued, whose face value amounted from half liang to five liang.

What is particularly worth noting is the dichotomy between “normality” and “abnormality” that occurred during the Cultural Revolution. Situated in the middle of material scarcity and austere revolutionary will, Shanghai was discovered as a city privileged with abundance and prosperity of material consumption. Pastry sales in Shanghai food stores and delicatessen sales in eateries reached 80,000 tons and 110,000 tons respectively, and daily sales reached 10 to 100 tons. The supply of delicatessen and pastry began to increase rapidly especially after 1972. According to Liberation Daily (Jiefang Ribao), local snacks such as Nanxiang juicy soup dumpling, sugar rice porridge, gluten bean curd sheet, chicken and duck blood soup, ligao candy, five-spice bean were widely welcomed in Shanghai Yu Garden market. Even the once out-of-market Changzhou style sesame pastry, Hangzhou style bread, and pigeon egg rice dumplings swiftly resurfaced in the market. Another interesting phenomenon was the consumption of pork. Shanghai was under the protection of the central state during the time of nation-wide food scarcity. It was one of the cities that were offered special allocations and supply policies on pork. The idea pertained to Mao’s practices of relying on and privileging cities for state building and industrial advancement. In purchasing pork it was not required to present any food vouchers in Shanghai. Between 1969 and 1974, the annual supply of pork ranged from 120,000 tons to 170,000 tons, most of which was allocated from provinces outside of Shanghai. The retail sales price for pork was discounted at 0.85 yuan per 500 grams throughout the entire decade of the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile, the consumption rate steadily increased from about 2 jin per person per month to about 4 jin toward the end of the revolution.

Table 2. 1966 – 1976 Shanghai Deli and Pastry Supply Statistics

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deli (ton)</td>
<td>87,965</td>
<td>88,595</td>
<td>93,090</td>
<td>90,425</td>
<td>82,090</td>
<td>87,305</td>
<td>93,605</td>
<td>96,990</td>
<td>98,965</td>
<td>104,340</td>
<td>111,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastry (ton)</td>
<td>25,290</td>
<td>22,270</td>
<td>22,270</td>
<td>28,080</td>
<td>29,775</td>
<td>28,945</td>
<td>29,435</td>
<td>30,685</td>
<td>34,775</td>
<td>40,895</td>
<td>48,395</td>
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Source: Shanghai Food Gazette

The seemingly unusual prosperous consumption of food by the ordinary Shanghai households amid the political radicalism in the 1970s was also noted in Xinmin Evening Newspaper.

“During Chinese New Year’s Eve in the 1970s, looking from afar at the shared kitchens of the new-styled Shanghai longtang – cold appetizers such as roasted meat, salty meat, original flavor sliced meat, and white cut chicken were displayed; braised pork with preserved vegetable and dried bamboo shoots were cooked in the wok; yellow fish and hairtail fish were fried in the pan. Meanwhile, hot dishes were being prepared, such as steamed gluten (kaofu), vegetable chicken (suji), enoki mushroom, black fungus, peanuts, cabbage with sliced pork, yellow sprouts, fried tofu, house tofu with garlic and scallion,…One would ask, isn’t this already a ‘moderately well-off society’ (xiaokang)? In fact, the Shanghainese prepared these New Year goods (nianhuo) for months at that time. This kind of scene of ‘abundant meat and fish’ (dayu darou) came from one’s monthly...
savings of limited and rationed meat and fish vouchers...”[68]

The unusual findings showed that the ceaseless socialist campaigns not only did not discourage the Shanghai urbanites from keeping their usual daily food consumption; on the contrary, there appeared to be a rather ironic tacit agreement between the Shanghai urbanites and the socialist state. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took over the city at the time it underwent the wartime economic stagnation and disorder that resulted from the aftermath of the Japanese occupation and the civil war between the Guomindang (GMD) and the CCP. The importance of efforts to manage the crises and restore the order was thus made clear by the new socialist state. One of the focal points was daily food supply and consumption. Complete discontinuity or radical deprivation of the former food and culinary practices was recognized as insufficient and detestable to the ordinary Shanghai urbanites.

Continuity of everyday food consumption during the Mao era was coincidentally sought through the idea of satisfying the local taste and culinary tradition. The Shanghai urbanites now participated in their everyday life as the so-called “ordinary people” (laobixing) and “great masses” according to the definition of the socialist revolution. As a result, savoring mundanity was in fact permitted if not encouraged. Numerous “memory discussion” sessions held at City God Temple (Chenghuangmiao) by the Food and Drink Company officials thus bespoke the opportunities to revisit the fond memories about various tastes and flavors of the pre-revolutionary experience for the Shanghai urbanites. Revolutionary practices thus synchronized with the unconscious of the worldly and quotidian. High-end restaurants were also not dismantled until much later during the Cultural Revolution. Rather, frequenting those places was oftentimes a privilege enjoyed by local and state political elites. Such officials were, after all, the main patrons of these restaurants during the late 1950s and early 1960s.[69]

The collective nostalgic remembrance of the bygone bourgeois-colonial era offered some compensation for the overall material shortage and political austerity. Savoring traditional Shanghai snacks became a symbolic action for the ordinary Shanghai urbanites. It was this resilient practice of savoring mundanity that lived itself in a hollowed-out shell through which the enchantment with daily material gratification overshadowed a politically “absent-minded” present. However, the interesting irony was the interplay between the state controlled socialist economic policies and the exceptions that were made for the Shanghai urbanites in the Mao era. These “initiatives with Shanghai characteristics” in revitalizing local specialty food and upscale restaurants remained controversial.

5. CONCLUSION
Based on the historical evidences manifested particularly in the key aspects of ordinary Shanghai urbanites’ quotidian practices such as housing and food, this essay discovers often-overlooked research findings that address the question as to the quintessential role that the Shanghai longtang and urbanite material culture played in the Mao era. It argues that a distinctive type of Shanghai longtang everyday life miraculously persisted in the Mao era when it was denounced and rectified by the CCP and Chinese socialism. Shaped by a worldly and cosmopolitan spirit, Shanghai’s historical emphasis on culture over politics, city over nation, and its ideological detachment from the rest of the nation in fact facilitated and materialized the survival of a longtang-based urbanite life-world.[70] What sustained
the Shanghai longtang urbanite everyday life during Mao’s ceaseless political campaigns and “permanent revolution” was the urbanites’ resilient pursuit of Shanghai-styled material pragmatism and everyday-oriented habitus. It was the rigorous and visible practices and aspirations encapsulated in longtang urbanite mundanity and bourgeois sensibility that kept Shanghai an enchanting battlefield constantly reclaiming its bourgeois and socialist heritage in the Mao era. If Maoist Chinese socialism did not succeed in eradicating the kind of bourgeois sentiments embodied by Shanghai urbanite everyday life, then ironically enough, it was the arrival of the age of global capitalism that the seemingly self-autonomous longtang everyday life unforeseeably encountered a radical change of historical course – while the urban bourgeois sensibility was finally legitimized through “socialism with Chinese characteristics” in the post-Mao market reforms, globalization, and urban gentrification, it was only to find the sweeping demolition of the Shanghai longtang and the un-making of the petty urbanites radically taking place.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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REFERENCES AND NOTES
[6] “Yuan” here refers to jinyuanquan or “jinyuan paper currency.” It was first issued on August 20th, 1948 by the Nationalist Party (GMD) and was phased out 10 months later due to inflation and economic crisis. One jinyuanquan was equivalent to three million fabi (legal currency).
[9] On December 1, 1951, the Central Committee issued “Decisions on Practicing Better Troops and Simpler Administration, Increase Production and Thrift, Anti-Corruption, Anti-Waste and Anti-Bureaucratism.” The Three-Anti Campaign (sanfan) officially began thereafter. It was intended to remove the politically unreliable state officials and party cadres, as well as to correct the specific problems found in the function of the administrative organs of the new state. On January 26, 1952, the central government further deepened the campaign scale by issuing “Instructions on Thoroughly Launching ‘Five-Anti’ Campaign during Limited Period in the Cities.” The Five-Anti Campaign against bribery, tax evasion, fraud, theft of state property, and leakage of state economic secrets. The target of the “Five-Anti” extended from industrialists and merchants to the national bourgeoisie in
general. On April 30, The Liberation Daily newspaper announced that the Five-Anti Campaign had secured an overall victory in Shanghai.


[12] Xiong Yuezhi. Shanghai urban life in heterogeneous cultures. 2008, Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe. “Shanghai Land Regulation” especially regulated land lease policy and legalized separate co-existence of the Chinese and the non-Chinese. Regulation item 15 indicated that the Chinese could not negotiate rent among themselves, nor could they build houses and rent properties to other Chinese businessmen. Regulation item 16 indicated that the Chinese were allowed to trade in the public properties built by the British, but were prohibited from renting them.


[17] Siheyuan is a type of traditional Chinese style architecture that is a compound with houses on four sides.


[22] “Ah la” means “we” in the Shanghai dialect, it is used here to represent the dialect itself. Wen-hsin Yeh argues that the term “petty urbanite” first appeared in the pages of popular 1930s Shanghai magazines. This notion of “petty urbanite” (xiaoshimin) is also illustrated by Marie-Claire Bergère in Shanghai: China’s gateway to modernity. 2009, Standford University Press, as well as by Hanchao Lu in Beyond the neon lights: everyday Shanghai in the early twentieth century. 1999, University of California Press.


[27] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[37] Also see Lu Hanchao. Beyond the neon lights. 1999, University of California Press. This term comes from a Shanghai local comedy also called “House of Seventy-two Tenants” in 1958.
[41] It is also from the 1958 comedy “House of Seventy-two Tenants.”
[44] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[55] Xinmin Evening Newspaper. September 4, 1950. The sound of making popcorn is reminiscent of the one of broken tire.
[59] Due to food shortage, the state issued food vouchers based on monthly rations between 1955 and 1993.

[62] Ibid.

[63] During the Cultural Revolution, pastry stores in Shanghai often took urgent orders from the “revolutionaries” who organized rallies in People’s Square and Cultural Revolution Square in Shanghai. Thousands of jin (500 grams) bread and biscuits were produced for the rallies, including the most popular ones such as “evergreen sweet biscuits,” “sandwich biscuits,” “cream soda biscuits”.

[64] Yu Garden market had a long history and tradition in Shanghai. Yu Garden was first built in 1559 during the Ming Dynasty.


[66] One of the state convictions was “the entire nation was obliged to protect Shanghai, also known as quanguo bao Shanghai. Also see Jin Dalu. Normality and abnormality: Shanghai social life in the Cultural Revolution. Vol. 2. 2011, Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe.

[67] Ibid.

