

The struggle to belong
Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.

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Nirvana of Two Bargain Streets

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Introduction

In the early 20th century, both Shanghai and New York welcomed newcomers to settle in the urban space from all over the world. Shanghai was opened to the world as a “treaty port” post the Opium War, and subjected to imperialist powers, which subjected it to segregated urban landscape under the United States, British and French jurisdictions. Together with those “Shanghailanders” occupying the top of the social hierarchy, there were refugees from Russian and Belorussia fleeing from the Communist regime, and Jews during the Second World War. The flourish of manufacturing industry, trade and being a biggest port in the Far East, and a booming East-meet-West urban culture attracted Chinese elitists, and also migrant workers from the rest of China. Tracing the recent history of Shanghai, we see the communist regime devalued and suppressed the consumer culture by identifying it as “evil, capitalist practice” in the Maoist era, then the sprout of small-scale entrepreneurship at the first two decades during China’s economic reform, but most recently the mentality of the municipal government to present Shanghai as a modern, global city again changed the character of Huating Street, the object of our study here.

While New York has been the first stop for immigrants from Germany, Ireland, Italy or other parts of the world after they entering the New World at Ellis Island. Both cities bear the characteristic of a land of strangers, borrowing Simmel’s notion, and his argument on metropolis. Both cities reward adventurers and provide space for upward mobility while keeping the social distance distinct. The identity seeking and display in a metropolitan area has long been argued to be associated consuming patterns, in this case, a consumer culture serves as the backbone of the urbanites’ identity. In the New York case, the dominant actor

along time is the market, rather than the state. The Lower East Side (LES), where Huating's counterpart, Orchard Street is located, was once the most densely inhabited neighborhood in the world, the immigrant families occupied the tenements for living and laboring on the piece-work for the garment industry. The pushcarts on the street provided cheap commodities for their daily lives and also job opportunities (Wasserman, 2009). Later on, under the LaGuardia administration in the 1930s, the pushcarts on the street were cleaned up, moved into the indoor Essex Market in the process of "modernizing" the city. Undergone rezoning and disinvestment, together with the flight by better-off residents in the 1960s, Orchard Street together with the LES was labeled gritty. However, the re-investment for artsy neighborhood since the 1980s following the SoHo area to its north, revitalizes Orchard Street with a hip scene, accompanied with the gradually expansion of Chinatown adjacent to its West.

The shopping streets in both cities illustrate the daily lives of the residents, meanwhile the changes happened to which also signify the changes to the neighborhoods or even in the city, politically, economically and socially. By looking at the changes happened to Huating Street in Shanghai under French colonial jurisdiction, in the Maoist era and amidst Chinese economic reform, I argue the significance of governmental intervention in the changes happened to commercial urban space. Shanghai Municipal Government's agenda in presenting the "new" Shanghai as an "international big metropolis (*guoji da dushi*)" to the world returned the street to its pre-liberation time, depriving it of a grass-root commercial culture. On Orchard Street in New York, the interests of real estate developers and gentrifiers transformed the shopping scene, blending its bargain history and fame for

cheap clothing into the big picture of a hip Lower East Side. Both of the streets were once famous for cheap clothing and a bargain culture in densely inhabited world cities. When we lament the loss of this characteristic, we actually forget it merely was one phase of their nirvana, tightly connecting to the corresponding ideology of urban renewal and of the imagined city image by different actors. Rather than looking for a genuine spatial-temporal point for return, we should acknowledge that change is what truly timeless. An old Chinese saying perfectly illustrates that shifting nature is merely “thirty years east bank, thirty years west bank (*sanshi nian he dong, sanshi nian he xi*)” within the endless nirvana. What makes the nirvana inspiring and informative is the role of different actors or actants (Latour, 1996) contributing to the trajectories in this two world cities, which will be traced in this paper.

Huating Street

The French Concession, where Huating Street located at started from Jan 23rd, 1848, when Charles de Montigny opened a consulate in Shanghai. The next year, on April 6th, France was granted a 164 acre concession adjacent to the International Settlement established in Shanghai by the British and American. During the years, the concession kept expanding, in 1900, another 171 acres were added, and the most significant expansion happened in April 8th, 1914 when the French authorities obtained a 1,000 hectare expansion of its Shanghai Concession. In the 1920s The French Concession became Shanghai’s most fashionable district. Avenue de Roi Albert was favored by wealthy Chinese businessmen. White Russian émigrés established “Little Russia” on the Avenue Joffre. Communist writers, intellectuals fleeing the Kuomin Party and European Jews all found refuge in the concession. The French

Concession was famous for its prestigious inhabitants. From 1918 to 1924, Kuomintang founder Sun Yat Sen and his wife Madame Song Qingling maintained a residence on 29 Rue Molière in Shanghai's French Concession. In 1929 Lin Fengmian an instructor at the Hangzhou School of Fine Arts founded the Artists of the An 18 group which rejected the principle of "art for art". These artists wanted to use the art of the print to denounce social injustice. The group was expelled from China for communist activities and settled in Shanghai's French Concession (WorldAtWar Timeline). Close to Huating Street, two of the Western-looking houses once were the residency of the prestigious Peking Opera actor Jiaotian Gai, and writer Congwen Shen.

In 1930, The French Concession houses 434,707 of Shanghai's 3,000,000 inhabitants including 12,922 foreigners of whom 1,208 are French nationals. The story of an ethnic-mixed concession came to an end on July 30th, 1943, when Vichy retro-cedes the French concessions to the Japanese puppet Government of China in Nanking. Consul General Roland de Margerie turned the keys to the French Concession over to the Mayor of Shanghai Cheng Genbo. The Free French refused to recognize the act notwithstanding, the Japanese occupy the French Concession of Shanghai and confine the Jewish residents to a ghetto in the Hongkou district of the old American settlement (WorldAtWar Timeline). Since 1943, Huating Street has been using its current name.

History of Huating Street can be traced back to early 20th century (Figure 1). This north-south narrow two-block street was constructed between year 1919 and 1921, named after a French Consul Meyrier (Mai Yang Rd). It connects Chang Le Rd, former Rue Bourgeat, at

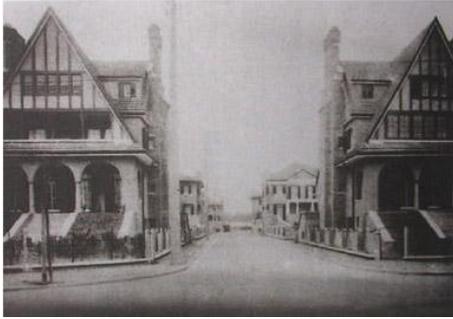


Figure 1: South end of Huating Street in 1920s.

its north end, and Huaihai Rd, former Avenue Joffre to its south (see Figure 2 for Huating Street's location). In a relatively long period since 1921, Huating Street was sided by garden houses and neo-Lilong row houses, inhabited by wealthy Chinese families in the French Concession. With the fled of

Westerners and wealthy families during the civil war years post WWII, Huating Street was downscaled, and bore the characteristics of a street of second-hand and antique market. Following the cleaning-up-slums and providing working-class with better housing policies, Huating Street and the previous middle to upper-middle class family neighborhood saw more and more working-class moving in. The used to be one-family-houses were then cramped several families sharing kitchen and bathrooms. The change to the street character followed: most Shanghaineses would remember the yesterday of Huating Street in the 60s as a destination for used goods. On its west side, towards the south end – close to Huaihai Road, the stands were selling second-hand clothes, shoes and hats, sometimes one or two fur coats would appear on the market. Towards the north end of the street, Western “antique” was predominant, from Western porcelain, glassware, brass artifact to chandelier etc. The east side of Huating Street was more like a flea market, merchandises varied from old-fashioned crystal reading glasses, ivory cigarette holder, Western utensils, mahogany Mahjong box, or framed wood carve, all sorts of odd goods. The goods sold on the east side increase in size towards the street's north end, for example. Russian samovar, coffee brewer, enamel bathtub, and cast iron children's bed etc.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the second-hand market surprisingly prospered against the broader anti-capitalism ideology, rather than been banned. During the heyday of confiscating family possessions, more used goods appeared on the market, which attracted more treasure-hunters.



Figure 2: Huating Street and its neighboring area.
Produced from Google Map, 2011.

In September, 1984, the very first clothing market by self-employed merchants emerged on Huating Street. The total number of stands was around fifty, occupying a small portion of the Street, taking half of the sidewalk between Huaihai Road and Yanqing Road. Despite the small scale, they actually made a big noise upon the birth of the market against the political and economic background of China's Open Policy. Clothing fair was organized by the enthusiastic merchants – some took overnight train to Gaudi Street in Guangzhou for fashion clothing, while others picked materials and sewed clothes by themselves based on the most recent styles in Japanese, Hong Kong or Taiwan fashion magazines. The attraction of these clothes to young people still wearing militia uniforms or *Zhongshan Zhuang* was irresistible! The fame of its stylish clothes spread rapidly across the city and beyond.



Figure 3: Huating Street in the 1980s.

Photo Credit: Lu Jie.

At the beginning, the small merchants on Huating Street got their merchandises from coastal areas in the south like Shishi, Xiamen, and Shenzhen. Later they tried the strategy to brand the merchandises “exports for domestic sale” – play on the public’s perception that goods for export are of relatively better quality. “They are sharp at recognizing the fashion trend, grasping market opportunities, and swift in mass producing ready-to-wear new designs. It did not take long for clothes sold on Huating Street to embrace the fame of “new, unique, and special (*xin, qi, te*). Once, fashion on Huating Street signified the trend of the entire Shanghai.”¹ “Flare pants (*laba ku*)”, “Ami pants (*ami ku*)”, “Gao shirt(*gaodi shan*)”, “culture shirt” (T-shirt, *wenhua shan*), and “overall jeans” popular in Shanghai during the 80s and 90s all originated from Huating Street. At that time, if you ask where to find the most avant-garde while cheapest clothes, the answer was without a doubt, Huating Street.² The frequenters to Huating Street ranged from ordinary college students, young white-collars, to celebrities and foreign tourists. Once enjoyed the fame of “Chinese first clothing shopping street”, Huating Street disappeared from the horizon on November 1st, 2000 due to the shifted governmental policy. “732 meters of length, it had more than four hundred stands, per minute foot traffic once topped 150 persons, and the daily headcounts reached 100,000. On average, the daily sales of each stand ranged between three to four thousand pieces, including retail and wholesale. During the sixteen years of its clothing market, Huating

¹ Hu, X.Y. & Jian Liu (2000). “留恋华亭路服装街（市场巡礼）.” 《市场报》 Nov.1st, 2000. <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper53/1830/294838.html>

² Hu, Xiyin (2008). “上海襄阳路服装市场从兴亡走向毁灭”. Sept. 23rd, 2008. Online blog: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5c4a584f0100aszi.html

Street contributed more than 31 million *yuan* tax, while accumulated significant symbolic capital.”³ (See Figure 4 for a typical scene on Huating Street)



Figure 4: Huating Street in the late 1990s. Photo Credit: Bomb Bao.

The end of the sidewalk clothing market on Huating Street can be understood in terms of the popular Chinese concept *renqi*, which means the breath or energy of human beings but also implies vitality or dynamism and is derived from the Daoist notion that the ideal state of being is one in which human beings are harmoniously immersed in nature (or the physical surroundings). “The presence of strong *renqi* in a given place is inseparable from its spatial form and is crucial to business prosperity (Zhang 2006:471)”. The once crowded Huating Street with strollers brushing shoulders and customers haggling represented vigorous *renqi*. However, in November, 2000, the vicissitude of Huating Street reached a new phase. A statement from the Shanghai Municipal Government on August 15th, 2000 announced the planned closure of this famous clothing street, for the purpose of “returning street to people (*huan lu yu min*)”. Ironically, there were people enjoying the street by strolling and bargaining; after the closure, it is actually the few traffic or rather emptiness

³ Hu, X.Y. & Jian Liu (2000). “留恋华亭路服装街（市场巡礼）.” 《市场报》 Nov.1st, 2000. <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/paper53/1830/294838.html>

dominates the street. The quietness of the street now expressed the loss of the shopping scene, which once dominated a generation's clothing taste, and the disappearance of a bargain culture in the form of *renqi*. On its successor, Xiangyang market, knock-off and counter fake products contaminated the shopping culture once represented by Huating Street⁴.

After ten years, the noise and chaotic bargain scene on Huating Street has faded in lots of Shanghainese' memory, and for the young, it is merely a predecessor of the Xiangyang Market. Huating now is a quiet narrow street with row houses and garden houses on both sides, like in its early times. Although the Changshu Rd subway station is located at the south end of the street, where it intersects with one of the major west-east roads of the city, Huaihai Road, Huating Street does not have much foot traffic nowadays. It appears to be more like a neighborhood back alley, while next to it, the paralleling Changshu Road hosts quite some boutique stores and small restaurants. Nevertheless, another dimension of Huating Street's location is that it situates at the heart of a "cultural district" in the former French Concession, as shown in the street map (Figure 2). It is within 5 minutes' walking distance to both the Shanghai Opera House and the Shanghai Music Conservatory. Though it is not shown on the map, Huating Street is also less than 10 minutes' walk away from the Shanghai Theatre Academy on Huashan Road. Unlike the literature on how cultural capital of a locale contributes to the revitalization of an inner city neighborhood, represented by increased rent, hip store and galleries opening in the Western context (Lei 2000, Lloyd 2005, Smith 1996, Zukin 2010), Huating Street's proximity with cultural institutions does

⁴ Qian Xiao, "华亭路的旧货摊". Online blog: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4cc5ecc60100helq.html

not render similar phenomenon under the “return street to people” framework of urban renewal policy by the Shanghai Municipal Government.

Although market forces are expanding rapidly in China’s economic reform era, the party-state retains hegemony in certain domains such as city planning and land allocation. “The reason that most of the major urban restructuring and family relocation can be carried out swiftly is linked to the state-dominated land-ownership regime. Despite the privatization of many other social and economic domains, the state is still the sole legitimate owner of Chinese urban land (Zhang 2006:464)”.

When investigating the urban renewal project in Kunming, capital of the Yunnan Province, Zhang posed the questions “To what extent can Chinese cities maintain their unique cultural heritage while transforming themselves into modern metropolises? Is it possible for them to take a dualistic approach in which traditional and modern spatial form is treated not as opposing forces but as mutually constitutive evolving?” (2006:463). In the case of Shanghai, the “tradition” itself is a hybrid because the current urban landscape was expanded by the colonizers. The urban space was transformed from rural land by British, American and French post the Opium War. Surrounded by the International Settlement, the French Concession, and the Huangpu River, where Yangzi River joins the East Sea, the small walled area called Chinese City with traditional buildings appeared as foreign to Shanghai’s urban space as a typical Chinatown to the American cities. Rather than looking at the changes happened to the large residential areas post the role shift of Shanghai from an industrial backbone of the country to a financial center, or gentrification of an inner city

neighborhood disinvested during the Maoist era, I focus here on a narrow, though famous clothing bargain street in the former French Concession in the south-west Shanghai to illustrate the power of state policy and the ambivalence of the local residents in Shanghai's recent urban renewal.

“While party loyalty and ideological struggle used to be the basis for political capital under high socialism, today it is economic achievement and the ability to transform the city into a cosmopolitan center that count more in political advancement. The dramatic urban spatial restructuring of recent years has to be explained therefore not only in terms of the cultural logic of spatial modernity but also in light of politicians' new orientation in building up political capital and popularity (Zhang 2006:464)”. By tracing the history of this street, and the vicissitude of the commerce on this very street, I try to present the unique approach of Shanghai Municipal Government in regulating a phenomenal market, amidst the process of creating the image of Shanghai as an emerging “global city” (Sassen, 2001). “Urban redevelopment has been employed as an effective tool to realize place promotion and local boosterism in Shanghai (He and Wu, 2005)”. The clean-up of the street and swipe-away all the stands on sidewalks were tightly associated with the foreseen potential benefit from re-installing the status of an elegant, elite French Concession area – though the mapping does not really match the historical geography – in the real estate market.

“Some good quality old houses built by foreign developers during the semi-colonial period are still of great historical and architectural value. Since the mid-1980s, the rise of a ‘nostalgia culture’ for old Shanghai evokes people's revaluation and appreciation of these

houses (He 2007:191)". Quite a few of those types of garden houses were landmarked to be historical heritage by the municipal government. Their presence could be viewed as objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) for the immediate neighborhood, a limited asset for the new housing in the former French Concession. As land and housing have once again become valuable assets, private developers are eager to capture huge profits through redeveloping/ gentrifying the inner city. The attention paid to the Western-looking housing stock close by, and the selective nostalgia towards a bourgeois neighborhood before the liberation times, together with the sole land-ownership by the state contributed to the end of this once termed "First Shopping Street in China", chaotic while prosper Huating Street.



Figure 5: Snapshot of the documentary "Huating - Huating"

After ten years, "Huating - Huating (华亭·画庭)", a recent 15 minutes' documentary produced by an international workshop organized by Shanghai Theatre Academy – the first word is the name of the street, while the second sharing the same phonetics means "painting court" – brought Shanghainese' attention back to this now peaceful street. The documentary was produced by an international team of students from Shanghai Theatre Academy, Swedish Film Institute and University of Zurich. It tells a story of shared space on Huating Street between a Shanghainese painter and two food vendors originated from outside of the city (Figure 5). There are two signs, "Chizuru Sushi" and "Taiwan Millet Rice Roll" hanging outside of the two windows of that first floor apartment, in a house with no storefront on Huating Street. The sixty-year-old painter living there rents out the two window space. The younger sushi chef is from Anhui, dreaming about higher education

opportunities, but for the time being only settles for selling sushi in Shanghai. The middle-aged one has been selling rice roll for more than ten years. Unable to afford an individual storefront for the small one-man business, they both are satisfied doing business from a small window space. The Shanghai native, self-taught painter spent his early years in rural Heilongjiang Province during the Cultural Revolution. Deprived of opportunity to enter a professional art institution to learn oil-painting, he now masters portrait painting by years of self-learning. He sleeps during the daytime, emptying the space for the two small merchants, while paints at night. The rent collected is his staple income, from which the director wants to tell about the business-minded stereotype of Shanghainese, blended with a taste of petit-bourgeois characterizing Shanghai working-class living in the French Concession⁵. From a Bourdieuvian perspective, this Huating in the documentary is a site for reconversions of economic, cultural, and symbolic capitals in the transformation of urban space. Their innovative sharing of space is a creation out of the intertwined Chinese *hukou* system, rural-urban inequality in accessing social resources, eroded welfare system for the retired, and the hybrid East-meet-West identity of Shanghainese originated from the former French Concession.

Presumably, the decision to close the Huating Street clothing market was made from the intention to urban space beatification, and an upgrading of neighborhood image. On 1312 Huaihai Road, just between Huating Street and Changshu Road, there is the Maison Mode (Mei Mei Baihuo). Opened in 1994, it was the very first, and the model of high-end clothing store in Shanghai, carrying luxury brand like Gucci, Salvatore Ferragamo, Ermenegildo

⁵ Zhu, G. “华亭路上卖早点的画廊”, Xin Min Evening News. Nov. 5th, 2010.

Zegna, Kenzo, and Mont Blanc, to name a few. Its image appeared to be more compatible with the garden house neighborhood, or the imagined elite French Concession – which in fact housed mostly Chinese elites back then, while the bargain scene on the nearby Huating Street represents the haggling tendency among working-class, and reminds people of the commodity scarcity during the planned economy times.

The state's involvement in other gentrification projects in Shanghai plays on both the demands of gentrifiers and the flow of capital, for example, in the case of Xintiandi in the TaiPingQiao area at the east side of Huai Hai Road also in the former French Concession (He 2007:185). In the case of Huating Street, the closure of the clothing market returned the street to its original residential character without any future planning. The intellectual property rights dispute paid attention on the knock-off products sold on XiangYang Market, which has its front on Huaihai Road, also located in the former French Concession overshadows the way people remembered Huating Street. Huating was a street once served as a window for the young Shanghainese to peak at and have a taste of global fashion. Under the same governmental mentality “return street to people”, wet market stands selling fresh vegetable or produce were raided, together with the clothing stands on the sidewalks of Huating Street. From this case, we need to take caution in looking at how the benefit of “people” was articulated and manipulated in bylaws for urban renewal and beautification projects happening in current Shanghai.

Orchard Street



Figure 6: Orchard Street, between Grand and Broome. Photo Credit: Fang Xu

Once of cherry and apple orchard, and later crowded by pushcarts selling cheap clothes and household appliances in the early 20th century, Orchard Street in the Lower East Side of Manhattan now hosts Sunday Bargain Event on the north of Delancey Street, Lower East Side Tenement Museum, and emerged as another art gallery destination, not to mention the LES has been “hipified” in the last several years (Figure 6). Orchard Street has been for more than a century shaped by immigrant or urban resettler groups moving into the neighborhood, and the types of businesses catering to their needs. Like the relation of Huating Street to the former French Concession in Shanghai, what has been happening to Orchard Street characterizes the changes in the Lower East Side. “For decades, there was a discount men’s suit shop at 183 Orchard Street. Then, in 1995, came Kush, a stuccoes Moroccan-themed bar. Then the bulldozers. And now, the 18-story Thompson Lower East Side hotel is rising on the site. That four-part history of one address — from shmattes to

hipsters to bulldozers to tourists — is a summary of much of the recent evolution of the Lower East Side.”⁶

If the Huating Street inhabited by middle, or upper-middle class Chinese and foreign expats in the Western-looking garden houses before the liberation is the reference point for an “authentic” space (Zukin, 2010), the pushcarts business and tenement living in Lower East Side is the face of Orchard Street in the city’s memory. In 1930, 47,000 family members depended on earnings made at pushcarts; the pushcart business generated \$40-50 million dollars yearly. In addition, more than 50 percent of all pushcarts in the city were still to be found on the Lower East Side by then (East Side Chamber News, March 1930, quoted in Wasserman 1998:330)”. Under the LaGuardia administration in the 1930s, the pushcarts on Orchard were moved into the Essex Market at the corner of Essex and Delancey Street, though most of the stores were still associated with the garment industry, hosiery store was the common business on the street. The status of a low-cost retail center strived in the 1940-50s though downscaled due to the public housing projects under a Le Corbusier vision installed by the city government. Orchard Street in the 80s was still a retail zone within a gritty, slum-like area, while dive bar and artsy scene sprouted due to its proximity to the East Village.

“Mr. Misrahi, who started his working life as a 14-year-old pants salesman at his father’s menswear shop on Orchard Street, founded the Lower East Side Business Improvement District (LES BID) in 1991. He had been hoping to resuscitate the bargain-shopping culture

⁶ Salkin, A. “Lower East Side is under a groove”. The New York Times, June 3rd, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/03/fashion/03misrahi.html>

originated by Jewish immigrants by creating a historic district, a sort of old-time theme park with pushcarts. However, he later changed course, advertising to fill some 18 vacant storefronts on a one-block stretch of Orchard Street by promoting them to night-life businesses. 'We decided to rent to bars and restaurants who would bring in the hipsters and change the neighborhood,' Mr. Misrahi, 57, said".⁷ "Modern property entrepreneurs are part of the culture industry; they seek to produce, advertise and sell not just functional space but desirable places for everyday life. As much as housing, their product is lifestyle (Caufield 2010[1989]: 166)".

The current president of LES BID, Mark Miller, whose family owns the building at 92 Orchard, opened his own art gallery in the storefront of this "family heirloom". Sharing the store front of the every same building, there is Ja-Mil Uniform Company, which was run by his mother since 1961. Mark's vision of the street is the development of "boutique office space" or hotels, which would bring in much needed foot traffic during the day. "The Blue Moon Hotel has been touted as the kind of development that is sensitive to the neighborhood's historical value while transforming a tenement for new use. Owner Randy Settenbrino added three new floors to the five-story building, but preserved the original exterior architecture and incorporated many historic elements into the rooms. 'Everything that's of genuine value costs more. That's just the way the world works,' he said. 'But that

⁷ Salkin, A. "Lower East Side is under a groove". The New York Times, June 3rd, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/03/fashion/03misrahi.html>

doesn't mean that what's here should be disregarded. The workmanship that's here from 100 years ago is more valuable than a glass structure.”⁸

Zukin argued that a city is authentic if it can create the *experience* of origins. This is done by preserving historic buildings and districts, encouraging the development of small-scale boutiques and cafes, and branding neighborhoods in terms of distinctive cultural identities (2010: 3). What if the distinctive identity has always been fluid, and always being one phase of the place's nirvana without a starting point to go back to? The power struggle in claiming a “dominant” identity in one particular urban space always reflects the power struggles in a larger context. In the case of Orchard Street, it is the business and residential expansion of the adjacent Chinatown, and the simultaneous artsy trend from SoHo towards the south. Smith used the terminology of “new urban frontier” to describe the exploration mentality (1996), but were earlier settlers, say Indians not conquerors of the nature themselves? Waves of new settlers created the environment for their own comfort and later be conquered by more recent groups. The identity of a place is painted on layer upon layer of leftovers from urban nomads originated elsewhere.

On the other hand, the governmental intervention is not non-existent on Orchard, as Mr. Misrahi complained on behalf of property owners in the neighborhood: “in the past, it was the storekeepers who were buying the buildings to protect their business on the ground floor. But the city has made it impossible for an owner to have one building himself. It is very difficult to manage 16 apartments and two stores, if they only own one building. They

⁸ Giachino, A. “Back to the future of L.E.S.; District plan revives”. *The Villager*, May 16-22, 2007. Vol. 76, No.51. http://www.thevillager.com/villager_211/backtothefutureofles.html

have to own eight to 10 buildings to make it a business for the economy of scale. The city's rules, regulations and tax structure have made it impossible for the small building owner to survive."⁹ In this realtor's narrative, increasing rents and upscale the commercial space appear to be the way out for long-time property owners. While for those protected by either rent-control, or rent-stabilization, it is the celebration of a cleaner and safer street.

Orchard has long been famous for its leather goods and hosiery wholesale scene. "I grew up in Chinatown, at that time no one came to Orchard Street, or maybe on Sundays for cheap clothes," commented David Eng, current VP of the Public Relations at the LES Tenement Museum in his early 40s. Even today, on Orchard Street south of Delancey, there still exist several wholesale clothing stores adjacent to hip clubs and art galleries, reminding people of the old days. The store close to the west side corner of Orchard and Canal, G.T.L.L. Trade Corp on 15 Orchard, sells a T-shirt for \$1.99. There were boxes and boxes of clothes on floor, scattered on counters, and piled on shelves. A poster on its glass window reads "We print and embroider your favorite design on T-shirts and Hats" in both Chinese and English. On 62 Orchard there is a menswear store owned by a Jewish old man, who also provides tailor service.

The historic garment factories on Orchard, and it being a longstanding destination for cheap clothes shopping attracts new boutiques, which acts as an upscale participant into the local "critical mass" (Fischer, 1975). Wasserman observed that from the late 80s young and cutting edge clothes designers seem to be again attracting customers by playing on an

⁹ Dehncke-McGill, M. "Lower East Side: staying affordable despite the hype". The Real Deal. Sept.2nd, 2008.

historical image (1998:337). By Robert James, a vintage boutique menswear store with a tailor workshop at the back of the store on 72 Orchard anchors its branding on “hipstoic” characteristic. The store has been written up in various media outlets including Time Out Tel Aviv, Bonjour in France, the New York Times style section.” The owner, Robert in his mid-30s living close by on Stanton Street, originally from a suburb of



Figure 7: Window display of By Robert James on 72 Orchard.
Photo Credit: Fang Xu.

Columbus, Ohio, explained the reason for opening his store on 72 Orchard two years ago: “When I wanted to open a shop I did a cluster study between Stanton and Orchard Street; surveyed the types of stores and their locations, and also paid attention to where the new condos were being built, trying to determine which areas were believed to be nice or hot.” Orchard Street’s history as a garment district was another factor that attracted him.

The business on the street has been diversified already for decades. From 1981 to 2008, the number of apparel stores decreased from 419 to 164, its share among all the business on the street dropped from 45% to 11.9%. While in the Arts Museum and Gallery category, the very first appeared in 1990 data¹⁰, and now only on the part south of Delancey there exist eight! The presence of Chinese owned printing shops, and kitchen supply stores catering to the needs of Chinatown restaurants is another component of the street scene.

¹⁰ Produced from U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. County Business Patterns, 1981-1993 Annual Files: Special Tabulation by Zip Codes (Unedited data). Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2010, and U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Zip Business Patterns, 1994-2008 Annual Files. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2010.

Art Scene as a Spill-over from Chelsea

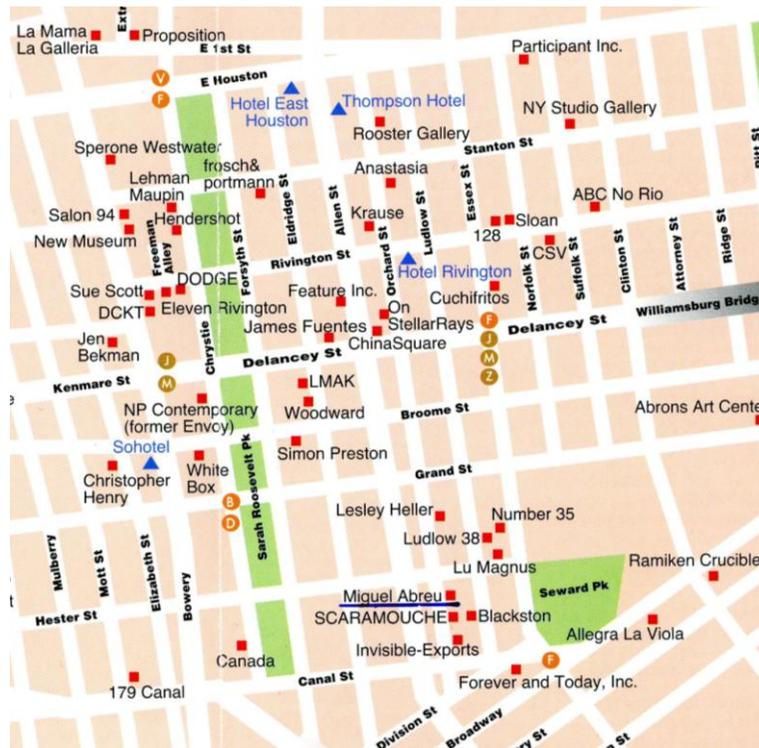


Figure 8: LES Gallery Map. Credit: LES BID.

On the November-December, 2010 version of “M LES” (Figure 8), the gallery map created by the LES BID, sixty-four art galleries are listed, scattered on Orchard, Rivington, Broome and Bowery, not to mention the New Museum moved to the neighborhood about two years ago. Among them, Lehmann Maupin on Chrystie is actually branching out from Chelsea. And Salon 94 on Bowery actually moved from Chelsea to the LES recently. Every gallery owner I talked to, using Chelsea art scene as a contrast to what they have been creating on Orchard Street. From Rachel, the owner of Rachel Uffner Gallery which opened in Sept., 2008 on 47 Orchard:

“I worked as an art director in an art gallery in Chelsea. You know, art gallery is like mom and pop store, small, not requiring much money to open, so I wanted to open my own. When thinking about opening my own, I didn’t even bother to ask about the price in Chelsea. I love this neighborhood, because for this amount of rent, I can have a nice store front.”

A most recent art gallery owner, opening Windows Gallery on 37 Orchard, said that being a native New Yorker, he knows there is no way he can afford a storefront in Chelsea, where he lives. For a half-size storefront space here he already invested everything. This economic drive echoes the argument made by Mark Miller, the president of LES BID, that “comparing to SoHo, or Chelsea, LES has the cheapest rent per square feet.”



Figure 9 Miguel Abreu Gallery on 36 Orchard.
Photo Credit: Fang Xu

The staff working in Miguel Abreu Gallery on 36 Orchard, between Canal and Hester, told me that their gallery was the very first on the street; it has been open for almost five years. The owner, Miguel, grew up in Paris with a degree in film making, decided to choose Orchard Street because he wanted to escape the art scene in Chelsea, which is too commercial. “He was looking

for a new environment to produce art and to look at art” explained by his staff. Clearly, he found it on Orchard, where he loves so much that two years ago, he moved from TriBeCa into an apartment above his gallery. The mixed space usage tells the story of Orchard as a clothing-shopping destination blended with recent art scene. Right beside the simplistic looking Miguel Abreu Gallery, there is the P&I New Fashion Hosiery with lingerie hanging in shop windows, up to the ceiling shelves piled up by merchandises crowding a narrow half-storefront space. Its signage is in both English and Korean. The hosiery store shares the storefront of 34 Orchard with Lisa Cooley Gallery. While on the left side of Miguel

Abreu Gallery, 38 Orchard is No.8b, a hip boutique menswear store featured repeatedly in Time Out New York. On its Dec.9-15th issue, a chambray button-down shirt, “sheared from \$299 to \$210 at the sample sale”. This represents the yesterday and today of clothes shopping on Orchard, bringing new meaning to “bargain”.

Apart from the commercial culture and the built environment, Chelsea also acts as the reference point for conducting business. The two staff working in Miguel Abreu Gallery corrected my comment that “after Chelsea, this is now an emerging ‘cultural district’” by insisting and chuckling between themselves:

“A ‘cultural district’? It has already emerged! We have customers all over the world. Miguel is from France, so he has lots of friends. Quite some business was made through art fairs. Also we have people coming from Chelsea, which is closed on Sunday. We open on Sunday; it’s our biggest day of the week.”

On the other hand, Rachel from Rachel Uffner Gallery told me that the collectors visiting her gallery are mostly from New York, “young professionals or people in their 70s with lots of money; ... My things here are not that expensive, ranging from \$800 to \$10,000, the medium is like \$3,000. There are some old collectors (she knew from her previous years working in Chelsea), now they come here; still this place is not that convenient (if come directly from Chelsea).”

The historical characteristic of Orchard Street or Lower East Side in general attracts gallery owners, who are searching for a less commercial space, while embodied with business potentials. There is a fine line between too-much and adequacy for art business, which a delicate field of conversions between economic and cultural capital, and the creations of

distinctive tastes. The degree of grittiness and artsy atmosphere is supposed to be carefully handled so that collectors will not be scared away by crime or filth, but finding exoticism and comfort in a manipulated “hipstoic” surrounding. We can regard art galleries as the second cluster on the street, which connects with the art scene in Chelsea, overlooking the geographically distance in between. Interestingly, what we see here is not a new business hostilely displaces old ones, which can be exemplified by the collaboration between art galleries and Chinese owned printing shops.

Sense of Community between the Old and New

Mrs. Y, a Malaysian who owns the printing shop at corner of Orchard and Division for more than twenty years, proudly showed me a wooden frame with an old newspaper clip in it, saying:

“We have lots of old customers, especially restaurants in Chinatown. The art galleries recently came to this street also gave us some business. Unlike other printing shops (owned by Fujianese) on the street, we are of better quality. My husband studied printing, and has been in this business all his life. Those people from art galleries say his art is very good! They also gave him this plaque. We are of better quality!”

With longer involvement in the adjacent Chinatown, Mrs. Y and her husband are more detached from the recent young, hip scene evolving on the street.

The BID president stressed that “(LES) is like a small town in a large, cold city; here everyone



Figure 10: Printing Shop at the corner of Orchard and Division Street.
Photo Credit: Fang Xu

knows everyone! It was once ranked the most livable neighborhood in the city.” This comment was echoed by Mrs. Y living close by on Henry St., though with a twist. Her image of the neighborhood remains in the old time:

“It was very quiet before, we used not to go out after 7pm. Now it is safer, but after 6pm, if I don’t know that person, I won’t buzz him into my store. If you guys come a little bit late, I won’t let you in! I know everyone on the street, upstairs, downstairs, in the neighborhood, we know the people who come and go, those newcomers, we know them all! So if I don’t know your face, I won’t let you in in the evening.”

The presence of Chinese business and residents on Orchard is of abundance. On 28 Orchard, there is a Chinese owned laundromat right next door to the art gallery “Untitled”, which occupies the tallest condo on the block. The notice posted on its door is a recruitment advertisement solely written in Chinese. Ethnic Chinese are not only the tenants on the street, for example, the building at the east side corner of Broome and Orchard, where a European style café 88 Orchard has been opening for seven years is located, is owned by an Chinese old lady.

Those restaurant supplies store, laundromat, and printing shops owned by middle-aged Chinese descent merchants seem to be out of place, whose clientele are mostly living in Chinatown. On the other hand, though seemingly wishful thinking, located on the border of the two integrating neighborhoods, the shop owners might have two forces to answer their concerns on the street. From the president of the Lower East Side BID, who grew up in this neighborhood, the picture of Jewish and Chinese living or owning business in the LES seems very harmonious:

“There is something like synergy happening between Jewish and Chinese. We share same values about family and education. There are still lots of Chinese living in the neighborhood,

in one of the buildings I own, the Moi family has lived there for three generations. Now it's grandpa and grandson living there. We have both, newcomers from China, and those living here for generations."

Cases of art gallery, clothing stores and printing shops on Orchard Street depict the multi-lateral change happening in this historical bargain district. Neither the integration nor the exclusion follows a linear pass. More than often, I heard stories about long-time residents for generations living in the neighborhood or owning property on the street, despite the rent increase of both residential and commercial spaces. The Malaysian owner of the printing shop did complain about the rent increase increased from \$700 to more than a thousand for the apartment she and her husband live in. The rent for the store front and basement her shop occupies for more than twenty years rises from \$1,500 to about \$5,000. From a real estate broker on the street, Alam Tam, the 1,000 sf. ground level plus mezz. for 32 Orchard is on the market for a month rent of \$7,000. However, there still remain questions whether the business from the adjacent Chinatown would sustain the ethnically dominated restaurant supply and printing shops on Orchard, and whether the possible formation of a Chinatown BID, with its coalition with LES BID will buttress the shop owners on the fringe of the two forces generating changes on Orchard, namely, gentrification and Chinatown expansion. At least one thing is clear, that changes on Orchard Street are more fragmented and prolonged than what happened to Huating Street, where the landownership solely belonging to the state and a lack of grassroots resistance posed little challenge to urban renewal or beautification plan issued by the municipal government.

Conclusion

“In recent years image has become an important part of the city branding process. Just as image helps to market individual buildings and places, so it also markets cities as, if not productive, at least creative, interesting, and attractive. The process of branding always merges developers’ interests and consumers’ desires with officials’ rhetoric of growth; branding tries to make each city appear different from and better than the competition (Zukin 2010: 231).”The branding of Shanghai mobilizes the image of the Old Shanghai in its semi-colonial times in early 20th century, rather than an industrial backbone of the country in the planned economy times, especially not the evidence of its scarcity of commodities for the general public. The craving for stylish apparels played out on the sidewalk market on Huating Street from the mid-80s does not give credit for building a “global city”, rather some humiliating story one wants to hide. Therefore, the closure of the street market under the rhetoric “returning street to people” was fully legitimized.

On Orchard Street, the Chinese residents living in the tenements still shop groceries in Chinatown, sending children to P.S. 42 at the corner of Hester and Orchard, while collecting rents from storeowners newly interested in the neighborhood. The Jewish building owners might not even live in the country, not to mention in the borough of Manhattan. There is not a full-scale demolishing-rebuilding happening to Orchard, which provides long-time residents time to strategize, and to seek support. “Commercial streets take a central role in building local neighborhood identity, they are fundamental to understanding the process of inclusion and exclusion at the neighborhood level (Deener 2007:294).” The identity of Orchard thus is a hybrid, same as the types of the stores on it and the residents living above.

The hybridity extends to the neighborhood the street is located in, which is the same story for Huating Street. Jacobs noted that a vital street is never a singled-out strip (1961:120).

Zukin notices the significance of time when investigating the authenticity of an urban neighborhood, that each generation creates their own mental mapping of the neighborhood and its image (2010:29). However, neighborhood or a street itself would rather experience the change as nirvana, hosting continuous newcomers, enriching itself from the *renqi* and the footprints. Installing a new image of a bargain street in the renewal of an inner city neighborhood by diverse actors – municipal government for Huating and property owners and local organizations for Orchard – using different historical, cultural and geographical reference point, alters the way a local street is (re)connected with the neighborhood, the city, the country, and with possibly the world. There will always be a renewal.

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