

Research Paper

## Renewing the old, creating the new: examining the strategies and results of urban conservation in Singapore and Shanghai

Zhao Yihua <sup>1,\*</sup> 

1 - National University of Singapore; 4 Architecture Drive, Singapore 117566  
- Guangzhou Urban Planning & Design Survey Research Institute, China; Pearl River Planning Tower, Jianshe Avenue, Yuexiu District, Guangzhou city, Guangdong province, 510030

\* Correspondence: [zhaoyihua@urbantopia.com.cn](mailto:zhaoyihua@urbantopia.com.cn)

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### Abstract

This paper explores the concept of authenticity in the conservation and renewal efforts in Singapore and Shanghai. Despite the past belief that demolishing or modifying historical buildings was acceptable for rapid urban development, the cities have recognized the value of preserving these buildings to maintain a sense of cultural heritage and authenticity. Through the analysis of typical conservation cases in both cities, the study examines the relevant strategies, methods, and results, and compares the changes and progress of conservation over time. The study finds that the conservation of historical buildings and districts can contribute to the authenticity and cultural identity of a city, fostering a sense of community and pride among residents. However, the concept of authenticity can be complex, and there may be debates over the appropriate level of restoration or modification required. Overall, the dissertation highlights the importance of balancing urban development and conservation and the evolving strategies towards people-based and coordinated development in both cities.

**Keywords:** city authenticity; conservation; urban conservation

## 1. Introduction

Several decades ago, both Singapore and Shanghai were bustling port cities characterized by disorder and underdevelopment. During Singapore's early years of independence (from the 1960s to 1980s) and China's period of reform and opening (from the 1980s to late 1990s), limited financial resources and the pressing need for urban development posed significant challenges. As a result, both cities pursued rapid economic growth, showcasing extensive, large-scale, and fast-paced urban development. The primary focus during this period was on expanding the urban areas. Subsequently, as the economies of the two cities flourished and urbanization levels increased, the concept of urban development underwent a significant transformation towards diversification and sustainability (Lehmann, 2012). The strategy for urban regeneration shifted from the initial emphasis on large-scale reconstruction to a more diversified approach that prioritized preservation (Juanjuan, 2007), (Ren, 2014). During this stage, urban renewal projects started to explore alternative options, such as adjusting and reorganizing existing spaces, rather than resorting to demolition.

Starting from 1972, the National Heritage Board (NHB) began incorporating significant landmarks into the national monuments list. However, regarding broader urban conservation efforts, although the Concept Plan (1971) proposed relevant strategies, their implementation was delayed until the mid-1980s. Singapore's urban development strategy shifted from a simplistic approach of "demolition and construction" to a comprehensive urban renewal strategy that integrated conservation practices. Singapore introduced several key plans to guide conservation efforts within the city center and Marina Bay area. These included the Conservation Master Plan (1986), the Draft Master Plan for the Civic and Cultural District (1988), and the Urban Waterfronts Master Plan (1989). These plans outlined detailed conservation methods and strategies for preserving the designated areas. Furthermore, in 1987, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) initiated a series of restoration projects in the Tanjong Pagar area. These projects aimed to showcase the feasibility and outcomes of conservation to the public. From the 1990s onwards, the authorities embarked on an experimental journey, exploring the method of adaptive reuse that harmoniously blends old and new elements. Their goal was to strike a delicate balance between preserving historical buildings and fostering urban development. During this period, various stakeholder groups also actively engaged in urban renewal efforts, further enriching the collaborative nature of the process.

Shanghai's awareness and understanding of urban conservation initially lagged that of Singapore. Prior to the 1990s, historical buildings in Shanghai did not receive significant attention, and the core idea of conservation during that time was focused on preserving and restoring buildings to their original appearances. Examples of this approach include the restoration of Xujiahui Church (St. Ignatius Cathedral of Shanghai) in 1982. In 1989, Shanghai established the category of "Excellent Historical Buildings," marking the beginning of increased public attention to conservation. The introduction of the Measures for the Preservation and Management of Shanghai Excellent Modern Heritage in 1991 was the city's first local regulation dedicated to preserving important historical buildings (Chen, 2007). These measures defined the assessment criteria for historical buildings, considering their historical, artistic, and scientific values (Cohen, 2004). The measures also outlined the boundaries of historical areas and buffer zones, while providing basic conservation requirements and offering opportunities for future transformation and reuse (Hald, 2009). The approval of the Regulations of Shanghai on the Preservation of Historic Buildings and Areas by the Shanghai Municipal Government in 2004 shifted the focus of urban renewal towards the planning and management of historical buildings and areas (Ren, 2014). The mayor of Shanghai at the time emphasized that "new construction is a form of development, while conservation and renovation also contribute to development (Sing & Yoh, 2016)." Although projects such as Yuyuan Tourist Mart in the early 1990s and Xintiandi Plaza in the late 1990s preceded these regulations, the legal framework and construction practices were still relatively immature (Zhang, 2004). Since the 2000s, the number of large-scale demolition and new construction projects has significantly reduced year by year. Discussions have shifted from new towns or complexes to the built environment and urban micro-renewal. Dynamic and continuous conservation and transformation have gradually gained wider acceptance, as seen in the long-term renewal of Tianzifang in Shanghai. In essence, Shanghai has entered a post-development era. In 2015, the authorities introduced the Measures for the Implementation of Urban Renewal in Shanghai, signifying that urban renewal would become the primary approach for the city's sustainable development, even amidst "zero growth" or "negative growth" in planned land use (Ding & Wu, 2018). Currently, the urban development strategies of Singapore and Shanghai are transitioning from a government-led and market-oriented period to a people-centric era that places greater emphasis on daily life and the quality of public spaces (Kong, 2007).

Table 1: Stages and Characteristics of Urban Development and Renewal in Singapore and Shanghai in recent decades

		Period	Objectives	Typical Policies and Strategies	Representative Projects
The First Stage: Rapid Development Period	Singapore	Late 1960s to mid-1980s	Clean up slums in urban areas and meet the needs of public service spaces.	<i>Amendments to the Planning Act; Master Plan Rules</i>	Construction of HDB flats; Marina Bay Reclamation Project
	Shanghai	1980s to late 1990s	Improve living conditions and achieve economic growth.	<i>Measures for the Preservation and Management of Shanghai Excellent Modern Heritage</i>	Development of Pudong District
The Second Stage: Diversified Development Period	Singapore	Late 1980s to late 1990s	Preserve historic areas and improve the quality of urban spaces.	<i>Conservation Master Plan</i>	Preservation of Chinatown, Little India and so on.
	Shanghai	Late 1990s to early 2010s	Preservation of cultural sites and transformation of industrial areas	<i>Regulations of Shanghai on the Preservation of Historical Buildings and Areas</i>	Tianzifang Renewal Project
The Third Stage: People-based Period	Singapore	2000s to present	Improve various systems and achieve sustainable development	<i>Amendments to the Planning Act; Town Design Guide</i>	“Hello Neighbor;” “Remaking Our Heartland.”
	Shanghai	2010s to present	Regenerate waterfront industrial area and focus on community micro-renewal	<i>Shanghai Urban Renewal Implementation Measures</i>	Community Gardens Project by Clover Nature School

Source: Partial information from Heng Chye Kiang, Wei Juanjuan, 2012; Ding Fan, Wu Jiang, 2018

Partial information compiled by the author.

Historical buildings hold significant cultural value and serve as invaluable resources within a city (Jiang, 2014). Conservation plays a crucial role in fostering comprehensive and sustainable development. Cities are intricate and interconnected entities, and the

preservation and reuse of historic blocks aim to achieve harmonized urban functionality (Cummer, 2021). Singapore and Shanghai, being international metropolises, face immense pressure for urban development, resulting in the presence of extensive conserved areas in their city centers. Therefore, besides national monuments and a few buildings of exceptional historical significance, a substantial portion of historical buildings requires repurposing through adaptive reuse to serve new functions (Aigwi et al., 2018).

Table 2: Typical Conservation Projects in Singapore and Shanghai in recent decades

Period	Singapore		Shanghai	
	Project	Type	Project	Type
1980s	Tanjong Pagar (1986)	Restoration Project	St. Ignatius Cathedral of Shanghai	Restoration Projects
1990s	Bugis Junction (1990-1995)	Transformation of Shophouses	Yu Garden Tourist Mart (1991-1994)	Transformation of Historical Area
	Clarke Quay (1993)	Transformation of Shophouses	East Nanjing Road Renewal (1995-1999)	Transformation of Historical Area
	Far East Square (1995-1998)	Transformation of Shophouses	Xintiandi Square (1999-2001)	Transformation of Historical Area
2000s	Former Fort Factory (2006)	Adaptive Reuse of Industrial Heritage	M50 Moganshan Road (2000)	Adaptive Reuse of Industrial Heritage
	Old St Andrew's School (2005)	Preservation of Historical Buildings	Wukang Road Renewal (2007)	Commercial Street Regeneration
2010s	The Warehouse Hotel (2014)	Adaptive Reuse of Industrial Heritage	Long Museum West Bund (2014)	Adaptive Reuse of Industrial Heritage
	Civil Service Club at Changi (2014)	Transformation of Colonial Buildings	West Guizhou Lilong (2017)	Community Micro Renewal

Source: Compiled by the author

This section examines two cases of adaptive reuse in Singapore and Shanghai during the early 1990s, a significant period characterized by the initial exploration of repurposing historical buildings in both cities.

The study aims to assess the role of policies and their influence on actual projects, investigating how policy frameworks shape the implementation and outcomes of conservation initiatives.

1.1. STRATEGIES AND POLICIES OF URBAN CONSERVATION IN SINGAPORE

Singapore's Concept Plan in 1971 initially introduced the concept of urban conservation, aiming to emphasize the "Asian identity" of the city through planning. However, the implementation of urban conservation strategies did not materialize until the 1980s. Prior to that, conservation efforts in Singapore primarily focused on the identification and evaluation of individual historic buildings by the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB). During the early years of Singapore's independence, the government's primary focus was on demolishing slums in the city center and constructing new public housing to relocate

residents to the suburbs. By the end of 1986, approximately 86% of the population resided in public housing units, significantly alleviating housing pressure. In the same year, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) released the Conservation Master Plan, which designated seven historical conserved areas and established detailed preservation standards and methods for over 3,000 historical buildings within these areas. Subsequently, URA initiated model projects in Tanjong Pagar to showcase the feasibility and methods of historical shophouse conservation. Concurrently, several policies were introduced to encourage private owners' involvement in the conservation plan.

Meanwhile, Singapore experienced rapid economic and urbanization growth in the early 1980s. However, an economic downturn posed new challenges for the government. In 1983, the tourism industry, Singapore's fourth-largest industry, declined for the first time since 1965. Additionally, the completion of the Marina Bay land reclamation project in the city center partially alleviated land pressure for urban development.

In November 1987, the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system, a more robust transportation network, commenced operations. This strengthened connectivity between the central area and residential zones, improving citizens' commuting experience. In response to these challenges, the authorities began to shift their urban development strategy, slowing down expansion and transitioning from a simplistic "demolish and build a new" approach to one that prioritized history and culture.

By 1989, ten historical areas, including Chinatown and Little India, were officially designated as conserved areas, encompassing 4% of Singapore's central area (Yajing, 2012). This marked a shift in public perception of historic buildings, no longer associating shophouses solely with slums. In the early 1990s, Singapore embarked on the exploration of combining the old and new through adaptive reuse of historical buildings, aiming to provide them with new functions aligned with urban development needs. The 1991 Concept Plan proposed enhancing the city's quality and distinctive characteristics while ensuring economic competitiveness. The Ministry of Information and Arts (MITA) emphasized the creation of an environment conducive to economic prosperity, designating Bugis as a potential area for fostering a creative environment (Juanjuan, 2007).

However, it is important to note that during this stage, Singapore had not completely shifted away from the belief that urban development took priority over conservation.

### 1.2. STRATEGIES AND POLICIES OF URBAN CONSERVATION IN SHANGHAI

In 1986, Shanghai was included in the second batch of National Historical and Cultural Cities in China. During the 1990s, as Shanghai's urban area experienced rapid expansion, the conservation of urban features began to emerge in the central urban area. In 1990, the authorities organized the first Shanghai Tourism Festival as part of efforts to attract investment to the Pudong New Area. Concurrently, China recognized the potential of tourism as a new driver of economic growth. From the early 1990s to the early 2000s, Shanghai's tourism industry witnessed significant development (Ding and Wu, 2018).

Against this backdrop, Shanghai's authorities began to prioritize the preservation of history and culture. In 1991, the Shanghai Historical and Cultural City Preservation Plan was introduced. However, conservation efforts during this stage tended to be hasty and focused on maximizing benefits, likely influenced by concurrent large-scale demolition and construction activities. Unlike Singapore, which had largely addressed its housing challenges during this period, Shanghai's urban renewal efforts still primarily focused on slum clearance and urban expansion.

## 2. Methods

This research involves a comprehensive literature review examining the policies, strategies, and underlying reasons behind the various stages of urban conservation and adaptive reuse in Singapore and Shanghai. Field research is conducted to document the current state of the

selected study areas. This includes analyzing the types of businesses operating in these areas, studying their relationships with surrounding regions, and gauging the attitudes of users towards these spaces. Furthermore, a comparative analysis is carried out to identify differences in strategies and case studies between the two cities. By drawing upon these findings, the research strives to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the effective approaches employed in each city.

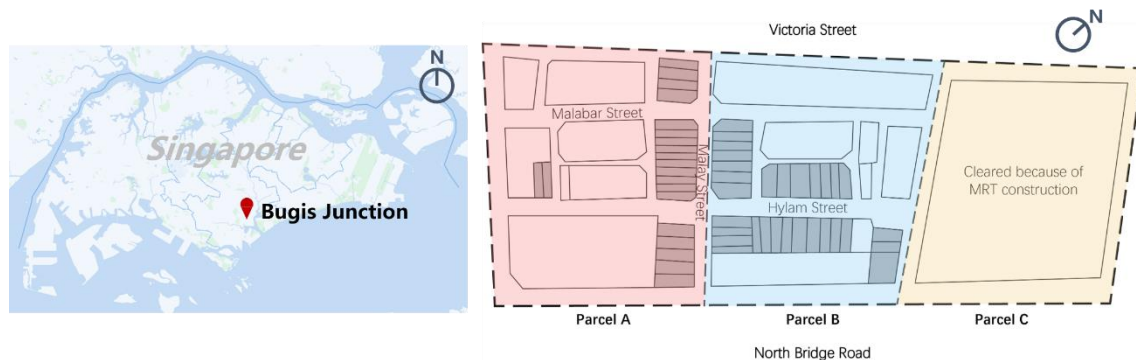
### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Bugis Junction is a case study (1991-1995).

Bugis Junction is an integrated development situated in Bugis, Downtown Core, Singapore, spanning Victoria Street, Middle Road, and North Bridge Road (Alam, 2015). During the 1970s, Bugis emerged as one of Singapore's most popular attractions. It served as a vibrant hub for nightlife activities, thus drawing transvestites, gamblers, and a variety of businesses, including bars. Later, in the 1980s, the site was chosen for an MRT station, significantly increasing the plot's value and significance.

Bugis Junction was divided into three separate plots. Unlike the well-preserved shophouses found in Bugis Village, the historical buildings within Bugis Junction were in a state of severe deterioration, see Figure 3.1 above. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) decided to restore only a portion of the shophouses, primarily focusing on plot B, while only a few were restored in plot A. Unfortunately, due to the construction of the subway station, the old houses in plot C were demolished.

Figure 3.1 Plots division and existing shophouses on Bugis Junction in 1990  
Information from Wei Juanjuan, redrawn by the author.



Bugis City Holdings (BCH), the developer of Bugis Junction, envisioned a comprehensive project that would repurpose the historic buildings and transform the area into a vibrant hub integrating a hotel, a shopping mall, and an office building. The design team made the decision to construct new hotels and office buildings in plot A and plot C, respectively. As for plot B, which contained most of the historical buildings, it was designated for adaptive reuse as a shopping mall, preserving the rich historical character of the area.

Figure 3.2 Malabar Street in Bugis (1980s), now it is a “indoor street” in Bugis Junction  
Source from: National Archives of Singapore



Initially, the developer was tasked with preserving the original layout of the area and restoring the historical buildings situated along Malay, Malabar, and Hylam Streets, see Figure 3.2 above.

However, the presence of the original shophouse foundations posed challenges to the construction of a large underground parking facility outlined in the design plan. To mitigate costs, the design team proposed demolishing the original shophouses first, constructing a new foundation and underground parking lot, and subsequently rebuilding the shophouses in their original locations. After several rounds of negotiations, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) ultimately approved this revised design scheme.

Figure 3.3: Bugis Junction was under construction. The original shophouses had been demolished in 1991. Source from National Archives of Singapore; edited by the author



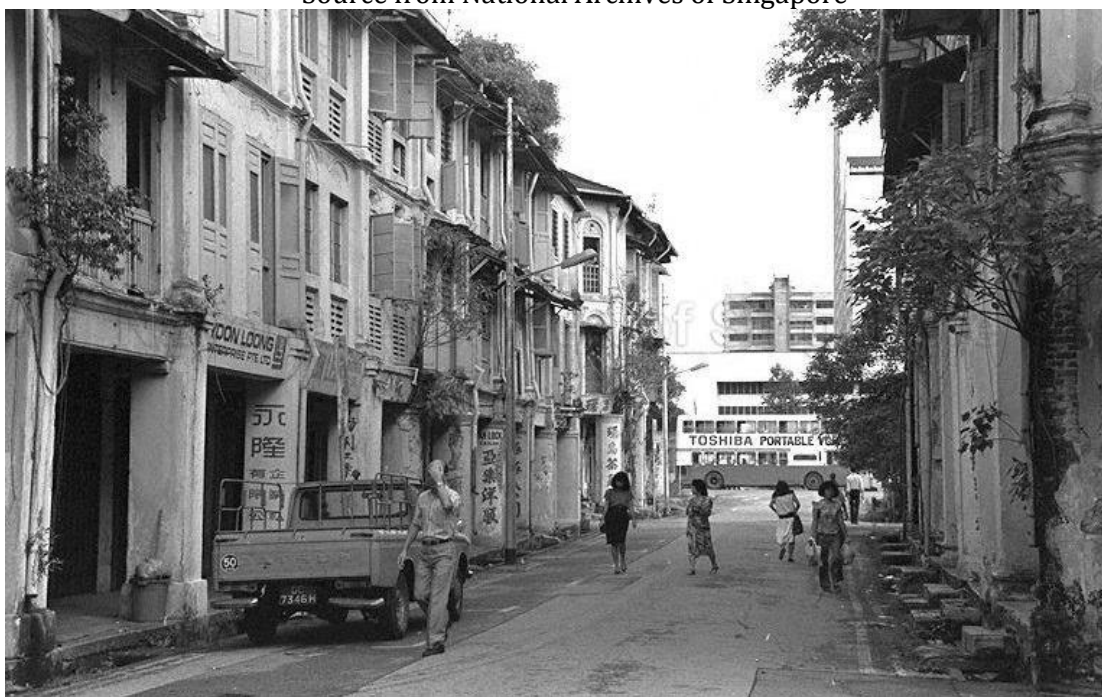
Upon completion of the foundation work, the shophouses were reconstructed in accordance with documented records, with efforts made to restore the facades and details to their original appearances as closely as possible. The new section of the shopping mall was

designed in a modern style, intentionally distinct from the restored shophouses, creating a clear differentiation between the old and new parts of the building, see Figure 3.3 above. The historic district underwent a transformation into a covered corridor-style shopping mall, with a new glass roof connecting the shophouses on both sides of the street, forming a unified indoor environment. This marked the establishment of Singapore's first glass-covered, air-conditioned shopping center, referred to as the "indoor streets."

However, it is important to note that although Bugis Junction is considered a combination of the old and new, the original shophouses were demolished at the start of the project. Furthermore, the reconstructed shophouses did not utilize the original materials, and the interiors were not restored to their original state to accommodate the needs of the shopping mall. Consequently, many people still perceive the shophouses at Bugis Junction as mere empty shells.

Given the limited space within the shophouses and the constrained indoor dining area, it is common for customers to dine outdoors. Additionally, recognizing the frequent inclement weather in Singapore and drawing from the experience of Bugis Village, the developer believed that large commercial establishments required air conditioning and shelter. However, as modern shopping destinations continue to proliferate, the historical buildings that were demolished cannot be restored.

Figure 3.4 Malay Street looking towards Victoria Street in the 1980s  
Source from National Archives of Singapore



Malay Street looking towards Victoria Street in the 1980s (see Figure 3.4) exuded a vibrant atmosphere with bustling activity. The street was adorned with a mix of traditional shophouses, each displaying its unique architectural features and colorful facades. Pedestrians strolled along the sidewalks, exploring the eclectic array of shops and establishments that lined the street.

The air was filled with the aromatic scents of local delicacies emanating from the food stalls and eateries. The vibrant sounds of merchants haggling, customers bargaining, and the



occasional honking of cars created a lively symphony of urban life. The street was alive with the constant flow of people, as residents and visitors alike went about their daily routines or sought out the hidden gems nestled within the bustling neighborhood.

The shophouses, with their distinct architectural styles and intricate decorative elements, showcased the rich heritage and cultural diversity of the area. Traditional businesses such as tailor shops, jewelry stores, and traditional medicine dispensaries thrived, attracting customers from near and far. The narrow lanes between the shophouses provided glimpses of hidden courtyards and intimate gathering spaces, adding an element of charm and mystery to the street.

Overall, Malay Street looking towards Victoria Street in the 1980s was a vibrant tapestry of sights, sounds, and scents a microcosm of the dynamic and multicultural city of Singapore.

Figure 3.5 Malay Street looking towards Victoria Street in 2021



Malay Street looking towards Victoria Street in 2021 in Figure 3.5, presents a transformed scene compared to its 1980s counterpart. The street now showcases a blend of modernity and cultural heritage, reflecting Singapore's progress and urban development.

Lining the street are contemporary buildings that feature sleek designs and modern architectural styles. Glass-fronted structures house a diverse range of businesses, including trendy boutiques, vibrant cafes, and innovative eateries. The street is adorned with well-maintained sidewalks, landscaped green spaces, and modern street furniture, providing a pleasant and inviting environment for pedestrians.

The atmosphere is alive with a mix of locals and tourists bustling about, exploring the various retail and dining options available. The scent of international cuisines wafts through the air, enticing passersby to indulge in culinary delights from around the world. Along the street, vibrant signage and eye-catching advertisements reflect the energy of the commercial activities taking place.

Despite the modernization, remnants of the area's cultural heritage can still be seen. Some well-preserved shophouses with their distinct architectural features provide a glimpse into the past, offering a sense of nostalgia amidst the contemporary surroundings. These shophouses often house specialty stores, art galleries, or cultural centers, showcasing Singapore's commitment to preserving its heritage.

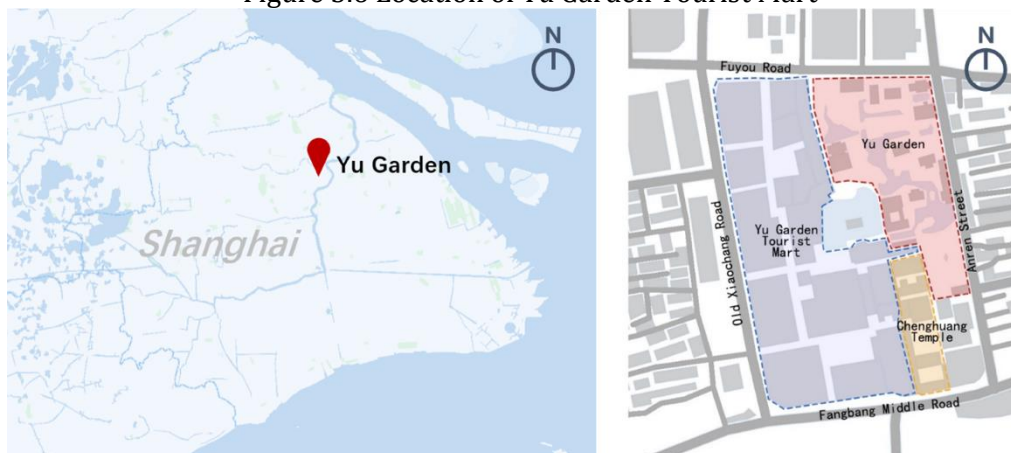
Malay Street looking towards Victoria Street in 2021 encapsulates the harmonious blend of modern urban development and cultural preservation, creating a dynamic and vibrant streetscape that appeals to both locals and visitors alike.

### 3.2. *Yu Garden Tourist Mart is a case study (1991-1994).*

Yu Garden Tourist Mart, situated near Yu Garden and Chenghuang Temple, is in the Chengxiang conserved zone at the heart of Huangpu District. With its establishment dating back to 1559, Yu Garden is recognized as a national monument of China. In its prime, the expansive Yu Garden spanned over 70 acres, encompassing the present-day Yu Garden Tourist Mart.

This area has been characterized by the integration of the temple, garden, and mart since the late 18th century (Ding and Wu, 2018). Prior to its transformation in the early 1990s, it thrived as a bustling marketplace, attracting a constant flow of domestic and international tourists, as well as residents seeking to purchase various goods like fabric, pastries, tea, and more. The teahouse within the Mid-Lake Pavilion was particularly renowned, often bustling with visitors eager to indulge in its offerings.

Figure 3.6 Location of Yu Garden Tourist Mart



Between 1991 and 1994, the developer embarked on a reconstruction and expansion project in the southwest of Yu Garden, drawing inspiration from early 20th-century photographs. This endeavor resulted in the establishment of the foundational layout for the present-day Yu Garden Tourist Mart. The newly constructed buildings were designed in an antique style and carefully integrated into the existing historic area, effectively capturing the essence of a traditional street market.

The architectural layout of the reconstructed area cleverly combines commercial streets and leisure squares, fostering an authentic atmosphere reminiscent of bygone eras. The project aimed to demolish old structures and replace them with a commercial complex comprising antique-style buildings. This reconstruction undertaking serves as a prominent example of revitalizing the area through the creation of a commercial hub that pays homage to the historical charm of Yu Garden.

Figure 3.7 Yu Garden Mart in 1980s. Source from: getty images (a); Archives of Huangpu District (b)



In the 1980s, Yu Garden Mart exuded a vibrant and bustling atmosphere, captivating visitors with its lively marketplace scene, see figure 3.7 above. The mart, situated adjacent to Yu Garden and Chenghuang Temple, was a hub of commercial activities and cultural exchange.

At that time, the market area surrounding Yu Garden Mart was teeming with local vendors and merchants, offering a diverse array of goods and produce. Locals and tourists alike flocked to the mart to immerse themselves in the vibrant trading environment. The streets were lined with traditional stalls, their colorful displays showcasing a wide range of products such as textiles, handicrafts, traditional medicines, and delectable street food.

The aroma of freshly cooked delicacies permeated the air, enticing passersby to sample an assortment of local snacks and culinary delights. The teahouses nestled within the mart served as gathering spots for locals, where conversations flowed freely over fragrant teas and steaming hot brews.

The architectural style of the buildings surrounding Yu Garden Mart reflected the rich cultural heritage of the region, with traditional elements harmoniously blended into the bustling market setting. The intricate details and ornate designs of the structures added a touch of charm and authenticity to the overall ambiance.

In the 1980s, Yu Garden Mart stood as a vibrant and thriving center of commerce and cultural exchange, drawing people from near and far to experience the vibrant tapestry of sights, sounds, and flavors that defined the bustling marketplace, see figure 3.7.

Figure 3.7 Crowd in Yu Garden Mart in the 1980s. Source from: getty images



In 2019, Yu Garden Tourist Mart continued to captivate visitors with its unique charm and cultural allure, see Figure 3.8 above. Situated near Yu Garden and Chenghuang Temple, it remained a prominent landmark within the bustling Chengxiang conserved zone of Huangpu District.

The mart underwent various transformations and modernizations over the years, adapting to the changing times while preserving its cultural heritage. The vibrant marketplace of the past evolved into a dynamic hub for shopping, dining, and cultural experiences. The bustling streets of Yu Garden Tourist Mart were filled with a plethora of shops and boutiques, offering a diverse range of products to cater to both local shoppers and international tourists. Visitors could explore an extensive selection of traditional crafts, art pieces, fashion items, and souvenirs, allowing them to immerse themselves in the rich cultural tapestry of the region.

Numerous eateries and teahouses dotted the mart, inviting visitors to indulge in authentic local cuisine and experience the art of traditional tea ceremonies. The aroma of freshly brewed tea and delectable delicacies permeated the air, creating an inviting atmosphere for food enthusiasts and cultural enthusiasts alike. The architectural landscape of the mart blended traditional elements with modern design, creating a harmonious fusion of the past and present. Beautifully crafted structures showcased intricate details and symbolic motifs, paying homage to the historical significance of the area.

Yu Garden Tourist Mart in 2019 continued to serve as a vibrant cultural destination, where visitors could explore and appreciate the rich heritage of the region, indulge in retail therapy, and savor the flavors of local cuisine. It remained an enchanting place where tradition met modernity, providing a memorable experience for all who ventured through its bustling streets, see Figure 3.8 below.

Figure 3.8 Yu Garden Tourist Mart in 2019. Source from: Shanghai Huangpu (WeChat Platform)



### 3.3. Comparison and Discussion

During the early exploration period of urban conservation in Singapore and Shanghai, two projects, namely Yu Garden Tourist Mart and Bugis Junction, serve as typical cases of demolishing original historical buildings and constructing new historical-style buildings.

Yu Garden Tourist Mart, instead of rebuilding the original modern historical buildings in their original appearances, opted for completely different structures in the Ming and Qing architectural styles. This departure from the original design aimed to create a cohesive historical atmosphere within the mart.

On the other hand, Bugis Junction took a different approach by reconstructing the appearances of 55 shophouses based on documentation. However, the materials and internal layout used in the reconstruction differed significantly from the original structures. The original shophouses, constructed of brick and wood, were susceptible to moisture damage in Singapore's wet and rainy climate. Consequently, the structural components and wall tiles experienced considerable weathering over time. With the lack of a detailed and feasible reconstruction plan, it became necessary to abandon the original materials and employ new materials for the rebuild (Zheng, 2017).

Although the demolition of the original shophouses followed by the construction of "replica" historic buildings may seem unreasonable from today's perspective, it is important to recognize that during that period, the design team aimed to preserve the authenticity of the area as much as possible. Multiple options were considered to ensure the preservation of the area's character rather than simply resorting to complete demolition.

Table 3: Comparison of Regeneration between Bugis Junction and Yu Garden Tourist Mart

	Bugis Junction	Yu Garden Tourist Mart
Construction Period	1991 to 1995	1991 to 1994
Location	Located in the city center, the MRT Station is just under the site.	Located in the city center, near the subway station. Next to the

		Yu Garden, a national monument.
Conservation Methods	Demolished the old shophouses and rebuilt them	Demolished the historic buildings and built “ancient style buildings”
Conserved Buildings	55 shophouses (reconstruction)	3 historic buildings (restoration)
Function before Transformation	A night activity center for transvestites, etc.	Shopping mart
Function After Transformation	Integrated Shopping Mall	Tourist Mart

Source: Compiled by the author

These two projects exemplify typical cases of demolishing original historical buildings and constructing new historical-style structures during the early exploration period of urban conservation in Singapore and Shanghai. However, there were notable differences in their approaches.

In the case of Yu Garden Tourist Mart, the original modern historical building was not rebuilt in its original form. Instead, entirely new buildings were constructed, drawing inspiration from the architectural styles of the Ming and Qing dynasties. This decision resulted in a distinctive blend of historical elements within the mart.

Conversely, the developer of Bugis Junction aimed to recreate the appearance of 55 shophouses based on available documentation. Although the rebuilt shophouses resembled their historic counterparts, the materials used and the internal layouts differed significantly from the original structures. The original shophouses, made of brick and wood, were vulnerable to the year-round wet and rainy climate of Singapore. Moisture-related issues such as structural deterioration and weathering of wall tiles were inevitable. Therefore, without a detailed and feasible reconstruction plan, it became necessary to utilize new materials for the rebuilding process.

While demolishing the original shophouses and constructing "fake" historic buildings may be viewed as unreasonable from a present-day perspective, it is important to consider the context of the time. The design team explored various options to preserve the authenticity of the area as much as possible, rather than resorting to outright demolition. The intention was to retain the cultural character and historical significance of the site, acknowledging the challenges posed by environmental factors and the need for feasible restoration solutions.

Conventional architectural principles such as "cleanness, integrity, and harmony" should not be applied directly and uniformly to historical buildings. The preservation of authenticity holds greater importance in comparison. However, at present, both cities are still pursuing a "conservation" strategy that prioritizes "good imitations" which closely resemble the original structures. In this pursuit, the historic districts have often been sacrificed in exchange for commercial success, with the long-term sustainability of such outcomes being questionable.

In both Singapore and Shanghai, the recognition and understanding of architectural heritage have undergone a gradual process. Regrettably, during this process, Shanghai has witnessed the demolition of 30 million square meters of buildings, including notable landmark structures and designs by renowned architects.

It is essential to reassess the conservation strategies employed in these cities and place greater emphasis on preserving the true essence and historical significance of the buildings. Sustainable preservation practices should be embraced to ensure the long-lasting cultural and architectural heritage for future generations (Zheng, 2017).

Despite the presence of numerous issues and controversies, the two cases in the early 1990s served as pioneering examples in the realm of conservation and the exploration of new utilization approaches for local historical areas. These projects sparked extensive discussions on the transformation and adaptive reuse methods for historical buildings. They played a crucial role in raising awareness and stimulating dialogue on the preservation and sustainable development of cultural heritage.

3.4. *Changes of Regional Master Layout and Details*

The entrance square and atrium of Bugis Junction shopping mall have replaced the traditional small streets and five-foot lanes that once characterized the area. The transformation also involved the conversion of individual shophouses into unified stores lining the indoor atrium. However, this shift from the original layout and fabric of the Bugis business district has resulted in the loss of its naturally diverse and dynamic character. In the past, the site usage and activities were determined by the residents and merchants who were intimately familiar with the area, leading to a vibrant mix of diverse and unpredictable happenings. Presently, the function of Bugis Junction is fixed as a standardized shopping center, lacking the spontaneous street activities that once defined the area. Similar issues can also be observed in Far East Square.

Developers often focus solely on the individual characteristics and decorative elements of shophouses, neglecting the overall atmosphere and environment of historical blocks. While the plans of Bugis Junction show a restoration of the fabric and layout of Plot B, traditional shophouse neighborhoods typically feature narrow back lanes primarily used for fire escapes and drainage, resulting in small backdoors. However, due to the unsuitability of the original narrow shophouse units for modern shopping malls, some units on the first floor have been divided into two smaller shops, while others have incorporated glass elements into their front and back walls. Additionally, certain shophouses have been merged to create larger spaces to accommodate modern retail demands. Consequently, the individual buildings, interiors, original street layout, and traffic organization of the district differ significantly from their original forms, see figure 3.9 above.

Figure 3.9 Original Bugis Junction in the 1980s. Source from Wei Juanjuan, redrawn by the author

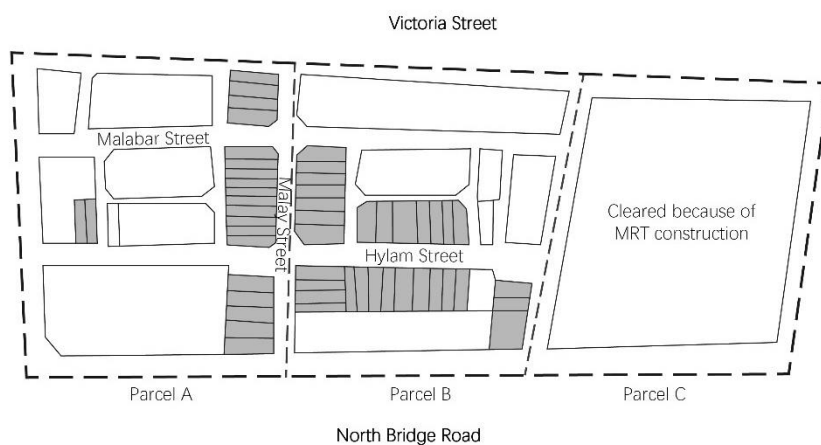


Figure 3.10 Current Bugis Junction (2021). Information from Mall Xplorer, Redrawn by the author

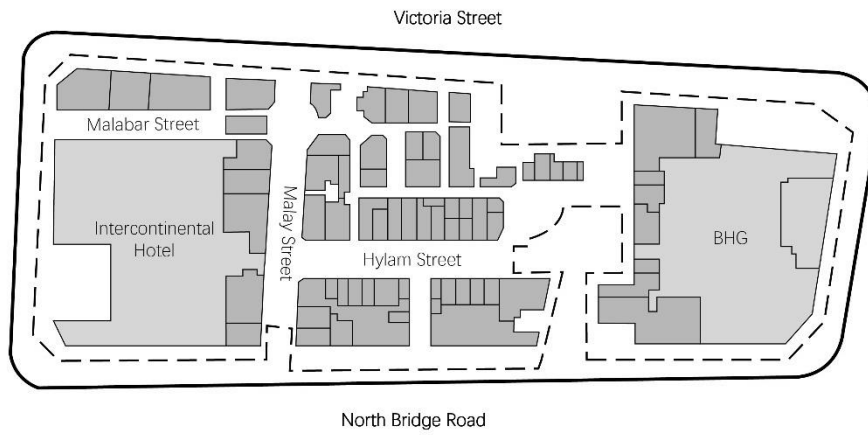


Figure 3.11 An example section of typical shophouse district

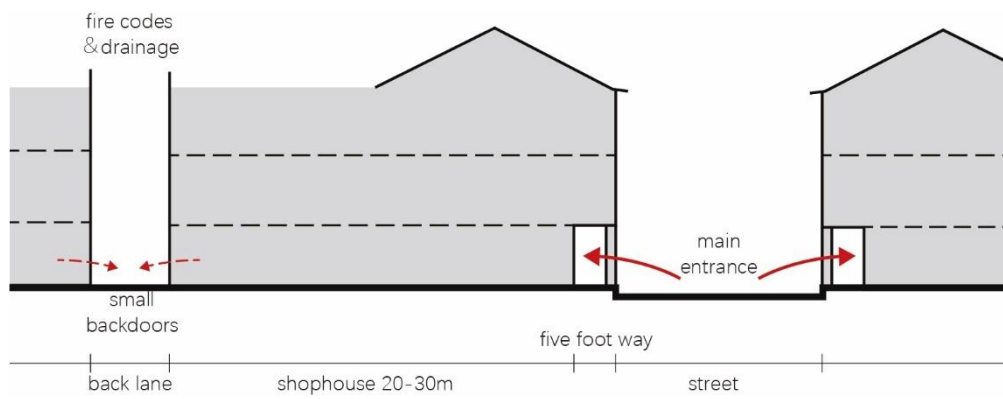
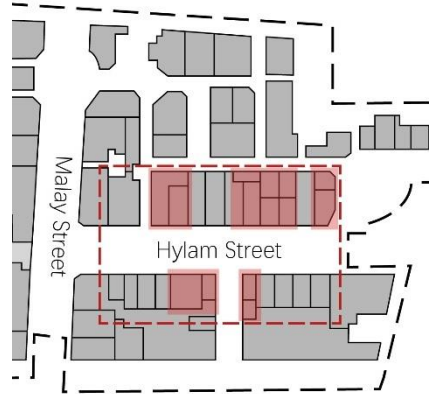


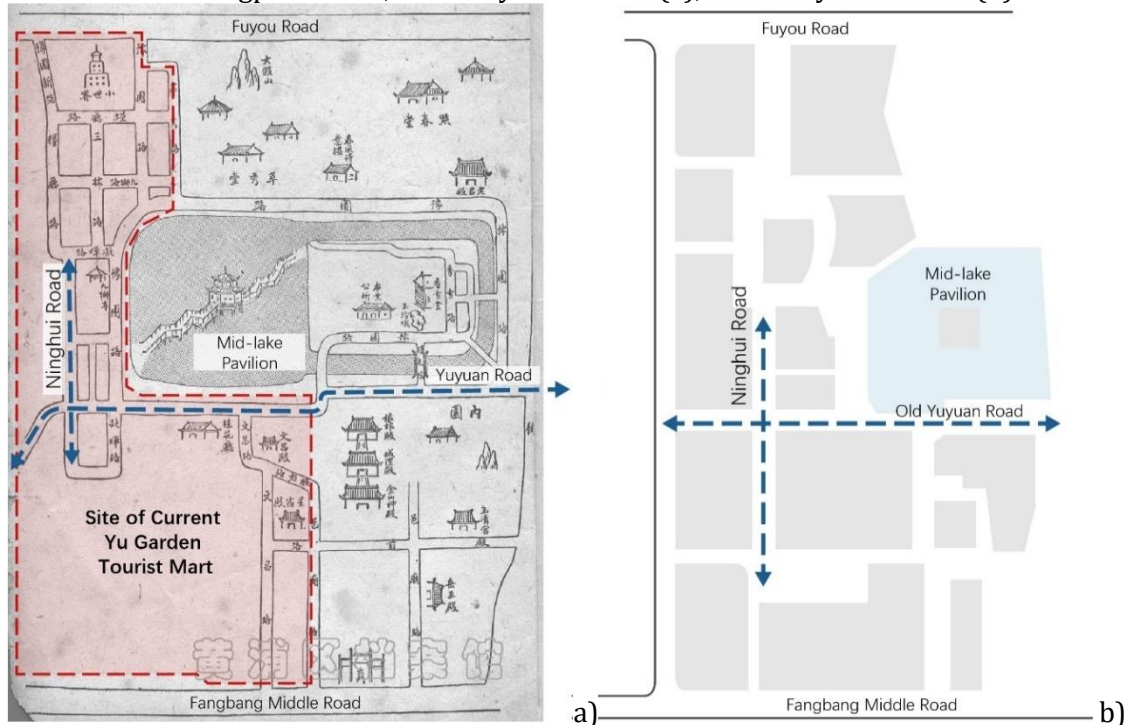


Figure 3.12 Changes of the interior layout of shophouses in Bugis Junction



The fabric and arrangement of plot B have been mostly restored, as evidenced by the plans (Figures 3.9, 3.10) before and after the alteration. However, in traditional Shophouse neighborhoods, the back lane between two rows of back-to-back shophouses is typically utilized for fire escape and drainage, therefore the inadequate alley is frequently quite narrow, and the backdoors are very small (Figure 3.11). However, because the original narrow shophouse units were unsuitable for modern shopping malls, the first floor of some shophouses was divided into two shops; the front and back walls of some shophouse units were replaced with glass; and some shophouses were merged into a large space to meet modern sales demand. The district's unique buildings, interior, original street plan, and traffic organization are all radically distinct (Figure 3.12).

Figure 3.13 Plans of Yu Garden Area before and after Regeneration. Source from Archives of Huangpu District, edited by the author (a); Drawn by the author (b)



In contrast to the maps depicting the area before and after the transformation (Figure 3.13), it is evident that, apart from old Yuyuan Road and Ninghui Road, the layout of the area has undergone significant changes. The construction of large-scale antique-style buildings in the

Yu Garden Tourist Mart necessitated the relocation of over 1000 households, including valuable examples of modern historical buildings. Currently, only three authentic historical buildings remain within the Yu Garden Tourist Mart, all situated along old Yuyuan Road. The buildings flanking Yu Garden represent the sole areas where the original fabric of the city remains unchanged.

Figure 3.14 Billboards on the antique-style building. Source from DC International; Edited by the author.



Initially, the authorities and developers undertook the renovation of the Yu Garden Tourist Mart with the intention of harnessing the rich cultural resources of the Chenghuang Temple and Yu Garden to bolster Shanghai's tourism industry. The project involved the construction of new dining and shopping areas, as well as the provision of supporting facilities.

However, due to the lack of clear regulations pertaining to the aesthetic guidelines for individual shops, certain issues, as depicted in Figure 18, arose. Inappropriate modern billboards and buildings can be observed, which do not align with the overall ambiance. Consequently, upon entering Yu Garden, visitors may perceive it as a subsidiary component of the bustling and somewhat disordered Yu Garden shopping mall, as depicted in Figure 3.15 below.

Figure 3.15 The ways from urban roads to Yu Garden



3.5. Current Situation Of Commerce

It is noteworthy that while both the Yu Garden Tourist Mart and Bugis Junction feature a significant number of clothing and jewelry stores, there is a distinct difference in their target customers and product offerings. In the case of the Yu Garden Tourist Mart, the primary clientele consists of tourists, and the stores predominantly sell products related to tourist souvenirs, rather than high-end branded items typically found in integrated shopping malls. On the other hand, Bugis Junction caters to the local Singaporean population and serves as a conventional shopping mall. Table 4 illustrates that Bugis Junction has a higher proportion of service shops and brand stores compared to the Yu Garden Tourist Mart, offering a wider range of shop types.

Table 4: Comparison of Store Types and Quantities in Bugis Junction and Yu Garden Tourist Mart

	Types	Bugis Junction	Yu Garden Tourist Mart
1	Restaurants	27 (11.6%)	21 (7.1%)
2	Dessert Shops	8 (3.4%)	26 (8.9%)
3	Café and Teahouse	5 (2.1%)	15 (5.2%)
4	Fast Food and Snack Bars	34 (14.6%)	58 (19.7%)
5	Home Accessories Shops	7 (3.0%)	12 (4.1%)
	<b>Total Amount of F&amp;B</b>	81 (34.8%)	132 (44.9%)
6	Clothes & Accessories	68 (29.2%)	90 (30.6%)
7	Jewelry Shops	14 (6.0%)	36 (12.2%)
8	Beauty & Wellness Shops	26 (11.2%)	8 (2.7%)
9	Books & Stationery	4 (1.7%)	5 (1.7%)
10	Grocery Shops	2 (0.9%)	15 (5.1%)
11	Services	12 (5.2%)	5 (1.7%)
12	Electronic & Technology	17 (7.3%)	3 (1.0%)

13	Entertainment Shops	3 (1.3%)	None
14	Other Brand Shops	5 (2.1%)	None
15	Supermarket	1 (0.4%)	None
	<b>Total</b>	233	294

Source: Compised by the author

Following the renovation, the area has shifted its focus towards restaurants and shops specializing in tourist souvenirs, resulting in a less diverse marketplace compared to its previous state. The main customer base now consists primarily of tourists, while residents tend to avoid the area due to traffic congestion and heavy footfall.

From a commercial perspective, the transformation of Bugis Junction has proven to be successful. Prior to the project, the vicinity was predominantly occupied by office buildings. However, the strategic positioning of the MRT station and the introduction of a shopping complex attracted a larger crowd, contributing to the economic development of the region.

In the case of Yu Garden Tourist Mart, data from Dianping in 2018 revealed that the average per capita spending in the mart was 64 yuan per shop (equivalent to 13 SGD), significantly lower than the other two historic districts in Shanghai. Tianzifang, for instance, boasted an average spending of 145 yuan per shop (equivalent to 29 SGD), while Xintiandi Plaza recorded an average spending of 329 yuan (equivalent to 66 SGD). This discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that Yu Garden Tourist Mart has been established for a longer period, with most shops still primarily offering traditional tourist souvenirs, lacking distinct brand stores. In contrast, the other two historic districts have witnessed the emergence of shops emphasizing local culture and temporary brand pop-up stores, appealing to a wider range of customers, especially the younger demographic.

### 3.6. Findings

During the early period of exploration in adaptive reuse, the authorities in Singapore and Shanghai recognized the significance of urban preservation and took some measures accordingly. However, the prevailing understanding at that time was that conservation served as a complement to development, implying that its purpose was to support and enhance development.

These two projects marked the initial endeavors to leverage historical buildings and local culture to stimulate consumption. They represented the early integration of historical area preservation with commercial development. While conservation became part of the commercial projects, it demonstrated that the authorities and developers recognized the potential of historical buildings in shaping urban identity, promoting consumption, and fostering tourism. However, the combination of conservation and commercial development necessitated careful consideration of both aspects.

Furthermore, unlike Far East Square and Xintiandi Square, which were primarily residential areas before their renovation, Bugis Junction and Yu Garden Tourist Mart were renowned commercial districts with distinct local characteristics. The Bugis area, for instance, exhibited diverse formats throughout the day, with bustling breakfast stalls in the morning and vibrant entertainment venues in the evening. Prior to its renovation, Yu Garden Tourist Mart thrived as a comprehensive business district, featuring both street markets and indoor shopping malls. The subsequent regeneration relinquished the original vibrancy, leading to the loss of its original users and consumers.

During this stage, the renovation projects were predominantly driven by top-down decision-making. The authorities and developers did not extensively consider public opinions, despite the existence of various dissenting voices against these projects. Nonetheless, the renovations proceeded as planned.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Singapore and Shanghai have seen a transformation in their approach to urban conservation over several decades, shifting from initial repair and restoration driven by fast urban expansion to a complete and sustainable development model centered on the community. In both cities, conservation measures have become more diverse and mature. In contrast, Shanghai and China confront issues due to the involvement of many government ministries in the revitalization of historical neighborhoods and ambiguous roles. The government frequently delays addressing historical building issues, resulting in cases when structures are demolished before authorities' act, resulting in penalties for developers. Shanghai's conservation of old buildings has larger implications for other Chinese cities as a metropolis with a highly developed economy and rich historical and cultural resources. As a result, Shanghai authorities should be more cautious in the construction and management of historical regions.

Understanding, support, and participation from citizens are critical. Over time, public participation has become increasingly important in urban regeneration and historic building preservation. In recent years, urban redevelopment efforts in both cities have shifted from primarily top-down to a mix of top-down and bottom-up activities. Public participation also helps residents become more conscious of their local culture. In addition, both cities should devote more time and resources to documenting historic crafts and training craftspeople. Conservation technology is just as vital as design concepts in actual applications. Technology is critical in realizing the intended concepts.

Without their original natural and social settings, preserving the absolute authenticity of historical buildings is difficult. The importance of conservation is in imbuing old buildings with new purposes and meaning within a current cultural context while preserving its historical and aesthetic aspects to the greatest extent possible. Beyond physical structures, conservation should involve the preservation of historic commerce and living environments. Citizens' intangible heritage, collective memories, and shared experiences are critical for building a city's identity and cultivating a sense of belonging. When addressing conservation, the term "continuity" refers to not only the preservation of the physical environment, but also the maintenance of lifestyle and cultural institutions. These goals shape the conservation activities of both cities now and in the future.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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