Shanghai Borderlands

Citation for published version (APA):

Published in:
Urban Theory Beyond the West: A World of Cities

Citing this paper
Please note that where the full-text provided on Manchester Research Explorer is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Proof version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version.

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Explorer are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Takedown policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please refer to the University of Manchester’s Takedown Procedures [http://man.ac.uk/04Y6Bo] or contact uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk providing relevant details, so we can investigate your claim.
Shanghai Borderlands: The Rise of a New Urbanity?
Deljana Iossifova

Abstract: China’s concomitant demographic, economic, and urban transitions have brought about commodification of space and compression of time in urban centres characterised by sociospatial difference. This chapter looks at everyday life on the borderland between two very different fragments of urban space in Shanghai: one new and flourishing, representing the envisioned future; the other stigmatised and dilapidated, representing the unmemorable past. On the borderland, rural-to-urban migrants, urban poor, and a new generation of middle-class professionals coexist in space and time. This chapter looks at the spaces that they appropriate and inhabit in the context of an ever-present State, claiming that Shanghai’s borderlands constitute the link between the past and the future and might give rise to a new urbanity.

***

New China rioted with gigantic building schemes, with barracks, schools, sports grounds and airports. The old China lived in narrow alleys, echoing with the chanted cries of the coolies and peddlers; it hung birds before its doors, smoked water pipes, bargained and haggled, ate and slept, played and smiled, and was happy. (Baum 1986)

A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space (Lefebvre 1991).

The street in-between the Village and the Compound was rather busy in April 2007. Around five o’clock in the morning, the local market janitor would usually perform his morning exercises. Young workers would start unloading trucks stacked with meat, vegetables, eggs, and other products just minutes later, and on some days, a woman on a bicycle would deliver pigs, cut in half. Nearby, behind closed curtains, a group of players would perform the finishing moves in an all-night game of mah-jong. The middle-aged female cook at a soup restaurant would roll up her shutter, announcing the beginning of a new business day, and cross the street to collect the dishes of the previous night’s dinner from the guards on duty at the gate of the Compound. Construction workers would then begin to pour out of their dormitory, carrying their orange helmets in one hand and their breakfast—a bag of soymilk and youtiao, freshly fried dough sticks covered with sugar—in the other. Street sweepers in blue uniforms would do their rounds to collect the garbage that had accumulated overnight. A couple of teenage boys, returning from their night shifts of selling Beijing duck in the streets of Shanghai, would store their carts and display boxes away, urinate against the fence of the Compound, and crawl into tiny spaces behind roller shutters along the street for a few hours of sleep. Men and women—some dressed-up in professional sports clothing, others wearing just shorts and flip-flops—would jog up and down the street.

By six thirty, people would be up and busy in front of most shop-dwellings, brushing their teeth, gurgling, and spitting. They would wash their hair in plastic tubs on the street, do their laundry, and later hang it up to dry on clotheslines spanning between trees, lampposts, and the fence of the Compound. Residents of the Village would empty and wash their chamber pots at the public toilet, which a sanitary worker in her blue uniform would arrive to clean little later. Young women would gradually transform crammed dwellings into small but welcoming shops, placing their produce on display on large tables and
taking over the narrow sidewalk. Residents of the Compound would buy breakfast at one of several food stalls along the street. Drivers would polish the outsides of their employers’ automobiles, and taxis would start lining up in front of the Compound to pick up boys and girls with school bags and musical instruments. The young women in the shops along the street would hand over their children to neighbours to watch when leaving their shops to run errands. Men and women collecting used goods, old paper, and bottles, would ride their tricycles, smiling, ringing their bells, and calling out for customers: ‘Congtiao...diannao!’—‘Air conditioners...computer!’ The sound of somebody practicing to play the saxophone in the Compound would fill the air, mixed with the noise of workers mowing the lawn.

***

In the ‘urban,’ it has been argued, ‘everything is calculable, quantifiable, programmable; everything, that is, except the drama that results from the co-presence and re-presentation of the elements calculated, quantified, and programmed’ (Lefebvre 2003). In Shanghai, ever since China embarked on its journey of ‘Opening Up and Reforms,’ the ‘drama’ of co-presence and coexistence enfolds in the everyday, as long-term urban residents in decrepit housing prepare to vacate their homes in the city centre, about to give way to countless urban renewal projects; as members of a well-educated emerging middle class, the dutiful consumers in a new economy, take their place in new-built, commodified inner city housing; as migrants from the countryside arrive in hope of employment, trading rural homes for shabby shacks and crowded dorms; as international students and expatriates, huddled together in gated compounds, experience the city from the air-conditioned interior of the taxis that take them to selected points on an ever-changing map. In midst of processes of enormous sociospatial restructuring, people with different backgrounds rub shoulders in a city that keeps continuously changing (see Figure 1).
Almost a century earlier, grappling to understand the forceful changes resulting from the Industrial Revolution in the West, the Chicago School of Sociology developed ecological arguments about the city and the ‘urban’ (see, for instance, Park et al. 1925), defining the city as a ‘relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals;’ proximity, density, and diversity were seen as characteristic of the distinct ways of ‘urban life’ (Wirth 1938). ‘Diversity,’ generally regarded as a necessary condition for urbanity in the Western context, has remained a favourite subject of critical inquiry ever since (see, for instance, Sandercock 1998, Fainstein 2005). Some argue that physical proximity and everyday encounter between the different do not always translate into meaningful contact or a ‘culture of recognition’ (Valentine 2008), while others see the experience of ‘difference’ as a prerequisite to the ‘urban mindset’ (Sennett 1974) and understand co-presence, everyday social interaction, and cultural confrontation in shared space as sources of social renewal, economic innovation, and creativity (Amin and Graham 1997).

Looking at diversity and coexistence of ethnic groups—an ethnic group defined as a ‘corporate group’ which shares an identity ‘based on some shared cultural traits’ and ‘finds itself in competition with other groups for wealth, power, opportunity, and recognition,’ (Eller 2009), Barth (1969) identified four alternative modes of coexistence within polyethnic societies: when ethnic groups occupy clearly distinct niches, they can coexist in a stable condition of minimal interdependence when they compete minimally for resources; they can negotiate their border politics when they compete for resources; and they can reach close interdependence in political, economic, and other fields when they provide services for each other. When, however, they occupy the same niche, they either reach a state of accommodation through increasing interdependence, or one group is displaced by
the other. In this chapter, I will show how some of the different groups and their (inter)actions in a selected case study neighbourhood in Shanghai contribute to the formation and negotiation of multiple urban identities (and hence, to the definition of a new urbanity) on the very stage of Lefebvre’s urban ‘drama’: the space in-between the new and old, the rich and poor, the wanted and unwanted—the borderland.

THE SOCIOSPATIAL DIVIDE

The selected case study neighbourhood, today, contains urban fragments representative of different stages in urban development: the Compound, a gated high-rise development for the new middle class, and the Village, the remaining part of an old shantytown. The old shantytown came into being when, during the century before 1949, thousands of immigrants arrived in Shanghai from nearby and faraway provinces. It was not unusual for people from the same towns and villages to cluster in certain parts of the city, their ‘native place identity’ leading to the assignment of a particular value to their respective neighbourhoods. Those who settled in the focus area, located on the north bank of Suzhou Creek, came largely from northern Jiangsu Province. Categorised by Shanghai Chinese as ‘Subei people’—a label signifying lower quality and class—they found themselves sharing an ethnic-like identity that prohibited them from finding occupation beyond the lower ranks of industrial production or shelter outside the boundaries of their Subei neighbourhoods, which came to be feared and avoided by anyone who considered themselves to be of higher social standing (Honig 1992).

Differentiation based on native place identity became less common when the household registration system (hukou) was introduced to restrict migration between rural and urban areas almost completely during the early years of socialist rule. Built on inequality from its very beginning, the hukou system has been described as a ‘caste-like system of social stratification’ between urban dwellers and the rural ‘peasantry’ (Potter and Potter 1990), entitling urban hukou holders to the regulated supply of daily necessities (such as food and clothes), education, health services, and housing in the municipality of their registration. The holders of a rural hukou, however, received none of these services, and they were not permitted to leave their villages without permission (Chan 1996, Chan and Zhang 1999). It was with the introduction of the hukou system that the immigrant population of the old shantytown became officially urban. Their new urban identity did not contribute to the improvement of their vastly overcrowded living conditions, as the Central Government, conceiving cities as places of production, had little interest in the maintenance of urban infrastructure (including housing). Nonetheless, improvements took place gradually (bamboo shacks, for instance, were partly replaced by sturdy multi-storey dwellings), and by the late 1980ies, the shantytown had even acquired access to electricity and tab water.

With Opening-Up and Reforms, socialist state-owned factories and enterprises became increasingly less competitive and many of them had to fold (see, for instance, Wang et al. 2005), not without consequences for the people in the focus area. Most of them had inherited from their parents their work place at the nearby factory and lost their jobs when it closed down in the early 1990ies. Lacking the skills and training necessary to start their own businesses as propagated by the new maxim of ‘getting rich first,’ many remained without a permanent job ever since, getting by on temporary jobs now and then and on the small allowances they received. Over the years, to accommodate their growing families, they, the Locals, constructed additions to their homes wherever available space permitted, and, spending their abundant spare time together in tiny living rooms, backyards, and alleys, they built friendships and close networks of mutual support with neighbours, who usually shared their fate (see Figure 2). Later on, when Shanghai started its Suzhou Creek beautification programme in 1998,
arousing a wave of shantytown demolition, resident displacement, and state-sponsored, property-led gentrification (He 2007, He and Wu 2007), Locals experienced the top-down sociospatial transformation and commodification of space first hand—the factory, their former working place, was demolished, and in its place appeared the new, ‘modern’ Compound. Surrounded by fences and secured by gates, the Compound was slowly populated with a younger generation of well-educated professionals—the Urban Newcomers to the area, their ‘collective form of social identity’ defined by privileged access to the real-estate market and the relatively new experience of home ownership (Tomba 2004).

They were not the only newcomers to the area. With the relaxation of migration restrictions, a so-called ‘floating population’ (liudong renkou) of rural-to-urban migrants began to re-emerge in China’s cities. The ‘rural migrants’ are generally portrayed as peasants and temporary guests in the city, seeking to make money but rooted in (and bound to return to) the countryside. Because of the urbanisation processes taking place back ‘home,’ however, many of the recent Rural Newcomers in the focus area stated that they had never worked in ‘farming;’ they did not depend on the state for its services; better educated than the previous generations, they were often not employed in the ‘typical’ industry or construction sectors; and they frequently operated their own businesses in the city. Furthermore, in their narratives about their reasons to come to Shanghai, they often spoke of the image of ‘the sparkling city’ conveyed to them through magazines and television—a city they were genuinely interested in, one that they wanted to be part of and one they wanted to explore. In the case study area, the Rural Newcomers settled mainly in vacated housing in the Village, resulting from the reduced willingness of commodity housing owners in the Compound to rent to them, but also from ever-new policies introduced by the Municipality to prevent them from so doing2. Consequently, the living conditions of Rural Newcomers in the Village were much worse than the living conditions of Locals, but they paid
higher rents per square meter in comparison. Rural Newcomers looked up to and associated certain spaces, places, and lifestyles with the ‘urban’ and ‘other.’ As a Rural Newcomer resident in the Village for over ten years put it:

There are so many migrants around in the Village now; because of the many migrants, people lack the sense of belonging. Look, people in the Compound [...] are very well educated. And if you happen to live with them, you will be better off yourself. In the Village, there is no chance for people to progress! (Interview with CZQ, September 2008)

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PLACE

On the example of recent developments in the case study area, the previous section has focused on the ways in which certain social groups are assigned particular identities and their respective place in the city because of various, mostly political, motivations. It is interesting in this context to look at Graumann’s (1983) ‘multiple identities’ model, which builds on the understanding that a person, a place, or a thing may have more than one identity, and that the various social identity formation and maintenance processes take place simultaneously—sometimes complementing, and sometimes contradicting one another—making a certain minimum of interaction between ‘self’ and the ‘other’ necessary for the maintenance of individual and inter-group stability. Graumann positions identity as the product of constant negotiation between the following three modes of identification: identification of, being identified, and identification with. ‘Identification with’ refers to the role models we choose as things and places become representative of our values. The second mode, ‘being identified,’ refers to the ways in which the individual or object becomes subject to (sometimes historically handed down) typifications. ‘Identification of’ refers to the experience of sameness and the feeling of familiarity. It is a process of appropriation, particularly in regards to language, as it involves the assignment of pre-existing categories (e.g., names) to objects or people. It is useful to keep in mind the model of ‘multiple identities’ when looking at the different groups and their actions in the focus area.

Having appropriated it physically and psychologically over a lifetime, most of the Locals, for instance—born and raised in the focus area—had developed strong ties with the neighbourhood and its people. However, the validity of their ‘identification of’ their neighbourhood was scrutinised by recent and ongoing changes. Many of their former neighbours and co-workers who had succeeded in adapting to the new economy had gradually left the old Village to move into new, ‘modern’ commodity residential areas, just like the one across the street that had taken the place of the old factory. Lacking the skills to do so for themselves, the Locals left behind depended on the Government to decide upon their future, i.e., to sell the land on which their homes were built and resettle them to ‘better’ and ‘newer’ apartments at the edges of the city. Waiting in their impoverished neighbourhood (the negative perception of which was exacerbated by the possibility of direct comparison with the new-built Compound), they watched Rural Newcomers move into the now vacant homes of their former neighbours and friends in the Village. The sociospatial transformation brought about feelings of discontinuity and insecurity, and Locals felt increasingly alienated from their once familiar neighbourhood, excluded from a better off society, and restrained to the ‘ghetto’ in their residential choice. In this context, it is interesting to consider the findings of Dixon and Durrheim (2004), who studied place-related identity processes in post-Apartheid South Africa and found that the disruption of place may become a way to ‘justify collective resistance to social change’ and to sustain ideologies of segregation. Similarly, the appearance of increasing numbers of Rural Newcomers reinforced the Locals’ feeling of decreasing social control, which used to be particularly pronounced in the Village owing to the large amount of time that residents spent in their
neighbourhood because of unemployment and mobility restrictions. With time, Locals had established the norms of ‘appropriate’ behaviour in the Village, and they found that Rural Newcomers did not readily adhere to these norms. They clearly identified Rural Newcomers as the trigger of environmental and social decline, and referred with nostalgia to the ‘good times’ before Opening Up and Reforms.

In the Compound across the street, Urban Newcomers tried very hard to distinguish themselves from those occupying the Village. Torn between their sympathy with life in the Village, the ‘other,’ and a hostility emerging from the desire to make use of and assert their new identity and power as the dominant group in the city, Urban Newcomers strived to ‘behave’ according to their newly acquired role as the new ‘urban elite.’ In interviews, for instance, they stated frequently that the services and products offered across the street were ‘obviously too cheap to be any good’ (contradicting their statements, however, they could often be seen buying groceries and small everyday goods from hawkers on the street). Equally, space for them had acquired the status of commodity, and in contrast to Locals who appropriated space predominantly through locomotion, ‘doing,’ and personalisation in an expression of both the lack of accessible private space and the struggle to survive in an increasingly commercialised environment (see Graumann 1976 for a detailed elaboration on the different modes of appropriation)—Urban Newcomers appropriated space in the first instance through purchase. The consumption of space as commodity can be read as the result of selectivity, and hence as an expression of categorization: choosing one place or location over another. Choosing a gated residential compound in a particular location is the expression of previous ‘identification of’—marking a process during which space becomes a status symbol (see Figure 3). Duncan (1985) has argued that individuals in individualistic societies express their identity through material objects, whereas home is not seen as a
symbol of social status in collective societies. Hence, the new role of space as a status symbol for Urban Newcomers indicates the transition from a ‘traditional’ (or collective) to ‘individualistic’ society.

BETTER CITY, BETTER LIFE

In 2005, President Hu Jintao introduced a new vision of an ‘orderly society’ in line with the concept of ‘scientific development.’ The Leadership, acknowledging threats to social stability like the growing gap between rich and poor, an inadequate social security system, and increasing unemployment, seemed headed toward a shift from economic development to a new paradigm: the doctrine of a ‘harmonious socialist society’ (see Bo 2005, Department of International Organizations et al. 2005, Fan 2006). The main goals included maintaining rapid economic growth, establishing the rule of law and an adequate social security system, strengthening the xiaokang (middle-class-oriented) society, and—in particular—improving the ‘morals’ of the population. Consecutively, Hu launched the ‘eight honours and disgraces,’ a ‘social engineering campaign’ (Suessmuth-Dyckerhoff et al. 2008) promoting a set of values, such as ‘social morality’ and ‘cultural harmony,’ and calling upon, for instance, the virtue of being ‘disciplined and law-abiding,’ rather than ‘chaotic and lawless’ (Yan 2006). ‘Civil society,’ so Short (2006), ‘emerges from the practices established in the shared space of the city.’ While Hu’s campaign was mainly targeted at combating corruption on all levels of government, it also showed effect on the street. Power relations become explicit in space through the language of architecture and urbanism, they become physically perceivable in the urban ‘landscape of power’ (Zukin 1993). It appears that when a city is striving to portray itself as Global (and especially so in view of an event like the World Expo 2010, bearing the motto of ‘Better City, Better Life), some practices are by far less desirable and desired than others.
Shanghai seemed determined to erase any possible trace of poverty or disorder within the city proper. Local customs, like wearing pyjamas in public (see Figure 4), drying blankets on the street, and spitting, for instance, began to be portrayed as backwardly or rural, and they were ascribed distinctly to the residents of ‘old residential areas’ by the Government and its media (Lu 2009). In the focus area, residents and homeowners in the Compound had started to complain loudly about the ‘chaotic’ conditions in their neighbourhood: the fence around the Compound, they claimed, was constantly ‘abused’ by the residents of the Village, in that they converted it to suit their non-purpose uses (like, for instance, that of the community drying rack); unwanted, purposely excluded individuals (from which the fence and guards were supposed to offer protection) persistently succeeded to ‘invade’ the Compound (see Iossifova 2009a); vendors on the street caused traffic jams, pollution, and noise. The jiedao (subdistrict level government) decided to take measures in an effort to pacify them. Within only one week in the summer of 2008, a two-meter-high concrete fence appeared in front of the very dwellings and shops along the street that tenants rented from the jiedao, without adjustments to the rents to reflect the worsening conditions. Standing in front of shop fronts and housing facades, the fence was praised by jiedao representatives and residents of the Compound for successfully preventing shopkeepers from occupying parts of the street; surprisingly, even some of the tenants behind it found that it succeeded in ‘disguising’ the decrepit appearance of the Village. The changes triggered by the micro-transformation of the borderland had mainly affected Rural Newcomers, showing largely negative consequences in terms of continuity and the right and ability to negotiate livelihoods in the city (see Iossifova 2009b for a detailed elaboration). Owing in parts to the cultural bias against spatial mobility—traditionally regarded as the source of disorder and instability (see Zhang 2002)—‘urbanising’ efforts included further, for instance, the ban of street vendors from public spaces in the city. Street vendors, hawkers, and entrepreneurs who provided cheap services in comparison to competitors in local supermarkets but did not pay rent or taxes became the subject of a daily chase (see, for instance, Cai and Liang 2009, Yang 2008). Consequently, the long-established presence of street vendors, hawkers, and service providers on the street between the Village and the Compound in the case study area was not welcomed any longer. As the tenant of a hardware store had it:

Now they [the migrants] are not allowed to do business any more due to the World Expo 2010.
So, my business is going down—many of my customers were from the countryside. (Interview with ZLH, July 2009)

The chengguan (city management), for instance, had taken to patrol in the mornings and evenings, appearing in convoys of three to four trucks carrying ten officers each. Their visits ranged from the routine patrol up and down the street to thorough raids, during which they searched shops and housing along the street for hiding hawkers. They were said to be very violent at times, and whereas they were not entitled to arrest and detain street vendors, chengguan officers were in a position to confiscate their products. Hawkers had quickly grown familiar with the chengguan routine and had established strategies (like hiding their goods in the shops along the street for the duration of the chengguan’s patrol) which enabled them to disappear from the street in less than thirty seconds. Correspondingly, they re-appeared to occupy their preferred spots just minutes after the chengguan’s departure. The chengguan officers, on the other hand, were fully aware of the futility of their efforts and even sympathised with the harassed street vendors—but stated that they were just doing their jobs.
In October 2008, residents of the Village still emptied their chamber pots at the public toilet; the saxophone player in the Compound still practiced in the morning, and ‘Congtiao...diannao!’ still could be heard occasionally. After an initial phase of conformity and adaptation, the people on the borderland began to work around imposed rules and regulations to reinvent their lives and livelihoods, regardless of the moral efforts and physical barriers instituted to prevent them from so doing. Shopkeepers behind the fence had gradually begun to remove concrete bars to facilitate better access to and more light inside their businesses (see Figure 5). In early 2009, young women could be seen on the street with large plastic tubs, again, doing laundry, washing their hair, brushing their teeth, and bathing their children. A bicycle repair shop—its tenants busy repairing bikes and mopeds around the clock—had taken the place of the former Beijing duck store. Everyday life on the borderland was about to return to a slightly modified version of what it was, before the fence.

THE BORDERLAND

Following Lefebvre’s (1991) argument that social transformation must manifest effects on daily life, language, and space, we may assume that the ongoing transformation of contemporary Shanghai is ‘truly revolutionary’ in character. Graumann’s (1983) ‘multiple identities’ model can help to illustrate and understand the different aspects that contribute to the formation of an urban identity for the city as an entity. The desired identity of the city (its ‘identification with’), its buildings, and its residents is carefully drafted and propagated by those who manage it: Shanghai wants to be the Global City and glittering metropolis. Outsiders who have absorbed the image of the successfully branded city (‘being identified’) as well as resident groups, not unlike the Locals, Urban, and Rural Newcomers outlined
above, have to negotiate the mismatch between the envisioned or imposed identities and the reality that they experience in their everyday lives through appropriation—the ‘identification of.’ Negotiation and re-negotiation between the different groups involved form the foundation of an emerging ‘multiple identity,’ made up of the different layers created and appropriated by diverse actors. It is precisely their interactions and linkages that can lead to conflict (but, we shall not forget, it is the in the urban ‘where conflicts are expressed’) as much as to the emergence of a ‘new’ urban culture and experience—a new urbani-ty; the site for this transformation is the borderland, the ‘in-between’ that carries ‘concrete contradiction’ (Lefebvre 2003).

Urbani-ty, then, can be thought of as the condition of ongoing negotiation among co-present actors as well as among actors and their environments. The State and its citizens engage in the iterative transformation of society and space: the State, imposing the urban identity envisioned from above, is continuously challenged by the counter-tactics of citizens and their everyday lives. The co-presence of gated communities and decrepit neighbourhoods in immediate proximity in Shanghai make existing social hierarchies readily perceivable. We find several of Barth’s (1969) conditions of coexistence between the different groups: the Locals and Rural Newcomers occupy the same niche (the Village)—but they do not necessarily compete for resources and hence can achieve a stable condition of close interdependency. Similarly, whereas they occupy distinct niches, the ‘Villagers’ and the residents of the Compound compete minimally for resources, as they have very different needs. Rather, they can reach a stable condition because they can coexist in close interdependency through the services that they provide for one another (Rural Newcomers selling food to Urban Newcomers, for instance, and using Urban Newcomers’ park area within the Compound for recreation). However, the group dynamics between the distinct groups may take a dangerous turn in the future, owing largely to an urban identity politics propagated by a State that clearly favours its emerging Urban Elite. Where political ideology has such a strong impact on identity formation processes, social engineering should be taken seriously. Here, the role of the borderland—the space in-between facilitating everyday encounter—as contributing to the process of positive appropriation of the ‘other’ through the continuous re-negotiation of learned values in everyday practice is of particular importance.

In Shanghai, coexistence of extremes in immediate proximity make possible an alternative urbani-ty, which invents its own rules and specificities, allows for informality at all scales, and permits high degrees of interaction between unlikely partners in a process of appropriation. The borderland in this article—between the Village and the Compound—has been shown to reaffirm difference, rendering the street simultaneously a site of encounter and a representation of the social practice of spatial differentiation (for instance, Newman 2003, Newman and Paasi 1998, van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002). In-between gentrification, very real, and ghettoisation, real or perceived, emerging coexistence requires constant negotiation between the individual members of different socioeconomic groups involved. Co-adaptation among various groups of citizens (the Locals, Rural Newcomers, and Urban Newcomers, for instance) appears as they experience the conscious and un-conscious transformation of value- and belief systems and the changes in their everyday culture in response to the immediate presence and continued exposure to the respective ‘other.’ This co-adaptation manifests further in space, as the existing built environment is transformed to respond to a new popular consumer culture, and as design intentions are ignored and long-established traditions and customs find their place in new environments. Shanghai’s borderlands offer a unique chance for the emergence of a new urban culture across the different scales and times, as confrontation with the ‘other,’ rather than an exception to be feared and avoided, becomes the normal condition of everyday life.

REFERENCES


1 The study is based on a total of ten months of fieldwork in Shanghai between October 2006 and July 2009. The research strategy allowed for as much flexibility as possible in the selection and application of research methods. Photography helped to establish important contacts with residents and extended periods of open observation as well as over sixty interviews revealed the particularities of everyday life, the rituals of residents and visitors, and their interactions. In this article, random abbreviations are used for the names of people and places.

2 The division of new-built apartments into smaller units and their rent-out to migrants, for instance, was prohibited in order to ‘protect tenants’ safety’ (Yan 2007).

3 It is through this kind of appropriation that ‘space’ becomes ‘place’ (Graumann 1976).

4 Shanghai, as ‘one of the world’s most rapidly growing, emblematic twenty-first century cities’ (see http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/STUDY/VISITING/shanghai.php), has recently been the city of choice and subject of investigation for summer schools, architectural and urban design units, field trips, and courses in diverse disciplines at universities all over the world.