

MEMORY OF *THE HOUSE OF 72 TENANTS*: THE SOUNDSCAPES OF DAILY LIFE IN SHANGHAI CITY

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Abstract

The House of 72 Tenants is a comedy performed by artists of the Shanghai People's Farce Troupe in the 1950s, depicting the challenging lives of grassroots residents. Set against the backdrop of spring 1949, this drama concentrated on the destinies of diverse characters from various backgrounds, showing their diverse loves, hates, and life temperaments. In the drama, the cramped living space of 72 tenants serves as a typical representation of urban life in **Old Shanghai**. What sounds emerge in the daily lives of residents in such a confined space? How are those sounds expressed? How do they interact with the actions of the residents and evoke fundamental human emotions, including private secrets, harassment, interpersonal conflict, loneliness, mutual aid, and the vibrant noise of everyday life?

In 2013, I organized a project named **Sounding China: Audio-visual Eco-musicological Ethnography**, which included a subgroup focused on the soundscapes of Shanghai, encompassing living space, public space, and artistic space. This research on acoustic ecology extended the study of human sound culture beyond musical boundaries, exploring the relationship between living organisms and their surroundings. The study particularly emphasizes the listening experiences and memories associated with houses and homes through the study of soundscapes in living spaces.

After presenting this paper at the 2014 CHIME conference, I revisited and completed this article in 2022 during the COVID-19 period.

Keywords

The House of 72 Tenants, Shanghai city, soundscape of daily life, acoustic memory, hearing and remembrance

INTRODUCTION: REMEMBERING THE COVID-19 PERIOD— WHEN REVISING THIS PAPER . . .

Morning, 1 April 2022. Eerie, unprecedented silence.

Outside my window is Huaihai Road, the best-known avenue in Shanghai—without any car, or people. Downstairs, the crossing of Xinhua Road at West Huaihai Road is barricaded with a fence, with two police officers in white coverall standing by. Although their faces are covered in masks and plastic shields, body gestures tell of their genders, a woman and a man.

Is it really silence without sound?

No.

This silence is merely a lack of human activities. In fact, tweets of birds in the trees sound more distinct and diverse than ever before: doves right in front, cuckoos at a distance, fluttering and cooing, lingering to and for around edifices and glass facades.

A few minutes past 10 o'clock, I'm writing at my computer. Suddenly it sounds like rolling and chasing above the roof—Dong dong dong... Thump... Dong dong dong dong... Splash—splat splat splat, like a litter of pups running away and upsetting everything along. Soon, cries of a small baby emerge...

Who is living upstairs? Although I always spend a lot of time preparing classes and writing papers at home over the years, why have I hardly heard such noises before?

When revising the paper presented at the 2014 CHIME international conference on the theme **Sound, Noise and the Everyday: Soundscapes in China**, I personally recall the two recordings played at the beginning of my keynote speech at Aarhus University, Denmark, eight years ago. The idea behind

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these recordings is harking—Who are you? How is the environment that you are in? What determines the sound that your ears hear?

Let's revisit the two recordings played that afternoon, eight years ago, which were picked from students' exercises in my soundscape course at Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

The first is an excerpt recorded by a student doing sound-walking (Westerkamp, 1974) on campus in November 2013. There is a very distinct, looping yet varying rhythm of flip-flap, above which some *suona* and piano music vaguely floats, in addition to some occasional footsteps. Note that I describe the instrumental sound from the piano rooms of the conservatory as vaguely floating, because it is hardly discernible in the recording. As for the most distinct flip-flap, it turns out to be shrivelled falling leaves blown by the wind on the concrete pathway on campus. It is so ordinary that we don't even notice the crispy rhythm of fallen leaves in daily life; instead, we are used to hearing instrumental sounds from the piano rooms on campus. In this recording, students vividly differentiate sound marks, keynote, and sound signals (Schafer, 1977) and become aware that special attention commonly paid to the "perfume of hearing" (Ackerman, 1990: 202) in music conservatories tends to drown out the perception of natural sounds. Music as an artificial virtual soundscape may become a sound wall that overshadows the Lo-fi soundscape consisting of falling leaves, wind, or footsteps.

The second excerpt was recorded in a delivery room in Shanghai Eighth People's Hospital on 27 March 2014. It starts with some bizarre wheezy sound, followed by vomit-like gurgles, until a few pats on the skin lead to the baby's howling cries that contextualized this recording in a caesarean section—the recorder has been placed in an anaesthetist's pocket. When playing it back, the students were very curious about what the wheezes and gurgles were and asked the doctors. However, the doctors asked back: there was only the baby crying, anything else? Not until they listened to the playback did the doctors realize that the odd sounds were made by the aspirator. Obviously, the doctors turn a deaf ear to the aspirator while paying sensitive heed to the baby's cries in order to judge the newborn's health, and the cries carry so much emotional significance to the new mother. On the contrary, the students' attention is fully drawn to the aspirator's sound.

Thus, by recording and listening to practice, the students deeply feel that a person's identity predetermines what would be heard and what would be shielded from the subject. Therefore, the sounds are more experiential than objective.

Back to the present in Shanghai on 1 April 2022, when the hustle and bustle on Huaihai Road is completely shut down, when people are all confined at home, the birdsong outside suddenly exhibits its abundance in sonic layers around everyone. It is also because of the home confinement that children no longer go to school or kindergarten as usual, and I feel their fuss for the first time. Yet, some 30 years ago, neighbours' fuss of all kinds was an essential constituent of the Shanghainese domestic soundscape. Hence, my current experience echoes my presentation given at the Aarhus conference. Not yet 10 years ago, I explicated the hearing and remembrance of domestic sounds in the typical urban living landscape in old Shanghai, entitled *The House of 72 Tenants*, after a comedy created by the artists of the Shanghai People's Farce Troupe in the 1950s, who drew their inspiration from the Shanghainese underclass' hard life. Within a confined and crowded space, people of different identities, classes, temperaments, and fortunes came together, along with their experiences of love, hate, laughter, and swearing. What diverse sounds characterized their daily lives? What roles did these sounds play? How did they interact with the tenants' fundamental emotions and actions, like their privacy, harassment, conflict, loneliness, reciprocity, pastime, excitement, and exuberance?

This study belongs to the **Sounding China: Audio-visual Eco-musicologist Ethnography** project that I managed². During the research, profound feelings came to me that the living landscape epitomized by *The House of 72 Tenants* is undergoing vicissitudes that must lead to changes in domestic sound patterns as well as different experiences and recognition of the domestic sense of belonging among

² In 2013 **Sounding China: Audio-visual Eco-musicological Ethnography** won **The Project Financially Supported in Local Universities by the Central Government**; until 2019, three audio-albums, respectively *Sounding Shanghai*, *Singing Life of Crickets*, *Remembrance of Jiangnan: An Elegant Assembly of Friends with Music and Tea*; four films, respectively, *Choriin-duu*, *The Resonance on the Mongol Steppe*, *Performing Komuz*; *The Language of Drums: Manchurian Shaman's Spring Sacrifice of the Xiketeli Family*, and *Home Coming—The Ethnography of Dong (Kam) People's New Year* were published by Shanghai Audio Visual Publishing House Co.

the Shanghainese seniors. Comparably, Steven Feld's desire is to illuminate a doubly reciprocal motion: as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place (1996: 91). Therefore, sound is supposed to shape the sense of place, as far as human perception can be localized via sound.

At the end of the presentation, I revealed Shanghai citizens' nostalgia for their former living environment and soundscape in deep resignation (Lu Guoping & Xiao Mei, 2014), as they have moved from downtown alleys to high-rise apartments where neighbours rarely greet one another. Yet unexpectedly, during the lockdown in April 2022, to seek subsistence resources in home confinement, the citizens in modern apartments have established WeChat groups for group buys. Although the government implements a **dynamic zero** (qīng líng) policy on all that interrupts the pace of social life in general, folks managed to attain an autonomy of hospitable neighbours (qīn lín) and repair the amicable relationship that had been distanced during the lockdown. Meanwhile, WeChat ringtones and TikTok **instant shots** served as a genuine bridge between the **islets** of each individual human and a social community. Thus, daily sounds relate to lifestyle and inscribe certain historical moments in Shanghai's memory of the spring of 2022.

FIND THE UNIQUENESS OF SHANGHAI'S URBAN SOUNDSCAPE

As a study of acoustic ecology, it has extended the research of human sound culture beyond musical sound walls and explored and reflected on the relationship between organisms and their surroundings.

In the Shanghai City Soundscape project, we set up three parts in the research, which include living space, public space, and artistic space. Except for the local Jiangnan sizhu (江南丝竹) that artistic space focused on, the living space and public space paid more attention to the urban landscape, which interacted among the spaces. It is noteworthy that in China, the concepts of the **urban soundscape** and urban acoustic ecology have been far more fully investigated in the field of urban architecture and design than in musicology. Up until 2014, in China, there had been only one published research on urban soundscape, the short study titled *Historical Methods of Acoustic Ecology and the Sound of the Old Beijing* (Meng Zihou, An Xiang, & Ding Xue, 2011). The writers were from the Communication Acoustics Laboratory at the Communication University of China. This short study focused on how to treat acoustic ecology as historical data, but this book makes phonetic and physical analysis of the rhyme (韵) and flavor (味) of the peddlers' yo-heave-ho in Beijing dialect, as well as a perceptual analysis of the sounds of the local traditional sound instruments. It also studies the soundscapes of Tiananmen Square and the city's transportation. Through this specific research, the book is intended to reveal the relationship between Beijing's sound and its history and culture. In other presentations of urban soundscape, however, we do have some recordings of fieldwork and acoustic journals in the form of records. For instance, Yan Jun [颜俊], an acoustic artist, published his CD *Qiu Jiang Lu* (虬江路) in 2008. He recycled the sounds from a road in the marginal area of Shanghai, which abounds with shops selling cheap digital products, machine parts, and secondhand machines. Just as he said,

I like these sounds just as I like second-hand goods...I will produce a CD on Qiujiang Lu and then sell it at Qiu Jiang Lu. It will be the publishing and circulating that only happen on Qiu Jiang Lu. It would be fashion and capital of the cheap Qiu Jiang Lu. Sounds are gone where they come from. (Yan Jun [颜俊], 2008)

With such sound artwork as *Qiu Jiang Lu*, Yan Jun is doubtlessly a pioneer in collecting Shanghai city soundscapes. Another person I'll introduce is a Filipino American, Terence Lloren [罗天瑞]. He took up a project, *Growing Up with Shanghai* from 2009 to 2011, and made a work, which was called *Shanghai in the Voice* (Oriental Morning Post, 2013).

When classifying projects into categories of living space and public space, we are most concerned with one problem: what soundscape is special enough to differentiate Shanghai from other cities? In other words, how can we hear Shanghai, except for its dialect?

One afternoon, when we were searching for material in the Shanghai Municipal Archives on the Bund, my students and I suddenly heard the bell tone of the Customs Building (Figure 1) nearby, with the melody of the famous tune of *Dong Fang Hong* (东方红, *The East Is Red*), closely followed by the siren from the ships on the Huangpu River. These two kinds of sound, intertwined with each other, just like a sound mark, instantaneously inspired our sense of the acoustic localness. We can hear the

bell of customs in many places in the world, but not necessarily accompanied by the siren of ships; even if there is a siren, it is impossible to find another bell playing *Dong Fang Hong*. The question is, nearly 40 years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, why does the bell still play this song? Then the group investigated the history of the bell tone. On New Year's Day in 1928, this **biggest bell in Asia**, 5.4 meters in diameter, made its first sound, playing the *Westminster Quarters*. Since then, it had played this tune every quarter of an hour. When the Cultural Revolution began, the tune was replaced by that of *Dong Fang Hong*, and the clock dial was turned into the shape of a golden sunflower. In October 1986, when the Queen of Great Britain, Elizabeth II, visited Shanghai, the bell tone reverted to *Westminster Quarters*. In 1997, the year of the return of Hong Kong, in response to the demand of some overseas patriotic Chinese people, the bell stopped playing, just before July 1. It stopped playing not merely the English tune but any tune. A bell tone without music seemed to have taken away the characteristic atmosphere that only belongs to the Bund, to Shanghai. Therefore, by the requirement of the public, the argument of the experts, and the permission of the government, the melody of *Dong Fang Hong* was restored. This bell can be regarded as the sonic landscape of the Bund. But at this moment, the tune *Dong Fang Hong* no longer symbolizes the Mao Era and the cult of personality during the Cultural Revolution; instead, it has somehow become a certain sonic dependence of the people, or a geographic symbol that stands for China.

Period	Sounds	Sound mode
January 1, 1928	Westminster Quarters	Mechanics
In May 1966	Dong Fang Hong [The East Is Red]	Electronics
In January 1986	Westminster Quarters	Mechanics
June 30, 1997	No melody, only striking bells	Mechanics
May 1, 2003 until now	Dong Fang Hong [The East Is Red]	Mechanics

Figure 1: The history of changing Customs chimes tune.

In this investigation, however, I found that the Shanghainese above 50 years old have a clear memory of *Dong Fang Hong* replacing *Westminster Quarters*, but don't remember much about the changes after that. This means a decrease in the importance of the bell tone to the daily life of the citizens and the weakening of their historical sense of the city, probably caused by the changes in the ways of their lives. For example, as I remember, the Bund (Figure 2) always served as a huge public park for the Shanghai people, and the bell tone on the Bund also functioned as the standard time for many citizens. Nowadays, when everyone has a watch with them, when the urban noise is increasing, and when population mobility in the city is reinforced, the Bund has become a tourist attraction instead of playing a role in the local daily life.

From the vicissitudes revealed in this timetable of the changes of the bell tone (Figure 1), we can see the modern history and ideologies of this city. And the requirements of the people concerning the tune of the bell in different historical periods demonstrate the listeners' sense of place and body brought about by the bell. To make a comparison, I asked one of my friends in Hong Kong to record the bell tone at Central Star Ferry Pier. Obviously, the *Westminster Quarters* in Hong Kong is very different from *Dong Fang Hong* on the Bund in terms of pitch, tempo, and timbre. The former is a fourth higher, faster in tempo, and crisper in sound, like a music box. So, to me, Hong Kong's *Westminster Quarters* is lighter than Shanghai's. But my Hong Kong friend disagrees with me; he hears the *Westminster Quarters* as something depressing. The fact that the same bell tone rouses different feelings demonstrates that sound is not simply an object to be measured scientifically, but an event to be experienced.

Personally, I am a new Shanghainese who moved to this city in 2005. On the other hand, since the final years of the Qing dynasty, the family on my mother's side had traditionally travelled between Guangdong Province and Shanghai as medical practitioners and settled in Shanghai before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. As a result, when I was a little girl, it was customary for me to spend my summer holidays in Shanghai. But it was not until I entered adulthood that the bell tone on the Bund left an impression on me. At the beginning of 1980, one day on a ferry on Huangpu River, I heard the bell tone, the siren, and the sound from the machines of a shipyard on the bank, all of which constituted a particular soundscape. In that historically significant period of China's reformation, we

began to enjoy long-lost freedom, socially and intellectually. When I stared at both banks of the river, especially the magnificent buildings on the Bund, it suddenly occurred to me that just because Shanghai was the only place in China that truly had industrial workers and the most concentrated national capital, it could develop into what it was now. Although those striking buildings on the Bund were foreign enterprises, they were built by the Chinese architects and construction workers. From a historical perspective, this soundscape conveys the great contributions made by the Chinese national capitalists.



Figure 2: The Customs Building at the Bund of Shanghai. Photography by courtesy of Liu Guiteng [刘桂腾].

Another factor that helped to form my experience of Shanghai's soundscape is a comparison between the sound of fireworks in Beijing and Shanghai. At the moment, when the Chinese New Year's Day came in 2010, I listened to the fireworks on the 4th Ring Road of Beijing. The fireworks flew straight into the expansive dark sky, carrying the sound toward the remote fields and mountains until it died away. At the same moment of the next year, I was doing the same thing on West Huaihai Road in Shanghai. The sound, though generated by the same kind of thing, was squeezed and reverberated between a crowd of high-rise buildings. This sound, so ear-deafening, had nothing to do with reverberation and direction, only moving in a fluctuating stasis. The two kinds of firework sounds communicate two different senses of place. The firework sound in Beijing reminds me of the city's strict layout as well as its traditional administrative management. Specifically, as the capital city with a long history, Beijing has a hierarchical centre–margin structure, whose influence can still be seen in today's organization of residential communities and the names of the streets. In such a city, the interlocking and movement of the firework sounds are discernible. The situation in Shanghai is quite different. In a city with such an orderly but extremely complicated and dense layout, there is no question of the center/margin dichotomy. All the fireworks fuse with each other in the narrow space of the city, creating a resounding and complex sonic field, in which it is impossible to trace any single sound. Crowded, flourishing, and full of possibilities and uncertainty, that is exactly what the Chinese people think of Shanghai.

CLASS, LIVING SPACE, AND SOUNDSCAPE OF SHANGHAI CITIZENS

Although I don't attempt to define Shanghai in some essentialist tags, the city's history does pre-determine its landscape. My students and I conducted concrete investigations that emphasized the various unique aspects formed throughout history, which still persist today. For example, Chinese people prefer the word Haipai (海派) to describe Shanghai style, with the Shanghainese further articulating it through idiom, **the sea receives all rivers**. This is best epitomized by all immigrants from all over China and around the world accommodated in this city, where various immigrants shape various

residential spaces. Shanghai's architecture has long enjoyed the reputation of an exhibition of the world's architectural styles, reflecting the image of this metropolis since 1843, when it became an open commercial port. However, there is much more than this image. Take the types of residential housing as example. Before 1948, there were independent villas (Figure 4), townhouses (Figure 3b), apartment buildings (Figure 3a), shikumen (石库门; that is to compare to a Figure that is not depicted here, a new shikumen-lane built at the Xinzha Road, Shanghai, Jing' an District), shantytowns, and slums (Figure 6). Following 1949, a few redeveloped shantytowns (Figure 7) came into existence, and subsequently, more residential communities were constructed. These communities typically featured two-story apartment buildings designed for former residents of shantytowns and newly employed workers. Each building contained 10 apartments, with shared toilets and kitchens. These communities, referred to as new villages for workers, could accommodate about 20,000 households.



Figure 3a (left): Apartment building, photography by courtesy of Lin Yayi [林雅怡]; Figure 3b (right): Townhouses, No. 1025, Nanjing West Road, Jing'an District, photography by courtesy of Jiao Ying [娇英].



Figure 4 (left): Independent villa, Moller villa, photography by courtesy of Liu Guiteng; Figure 5 (right): Moller villa as advertised in booking.com, picture open access.

All these various residential types represent different living environments and social statuses of the residents. Among these buildings as symbols of social ranks, the sense of space of sound is also divided. For instance, lives in villas often strike us as mysterious, for people outside the private garden or yard cannot see through. As to the townhouses, also known as new-style Lilong (里弄), a big family usually takes up two such houses, separated by a garden, so rings are needed to call everyone to dinner at 7 p. m. (Cheng Naishan, 2011: 14).



Figure 6: Slums (滚地龙) (left), The makeshift huts at Yaoshui Lane, South Bank of Suzhou Creek. The photography is from *The World Transformed: Changes in Shanghai's Shanty Towns*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, September 1971. By courtesy of the publishing house. Figure 7 (right): This Civilian Village was built to redevelop shantytowns and can be called the pioneer of modern residential compounds. This is a picture from *Remembrance: A Pictorial History of Modern Shanghai*. Edited by Shi Meiding. Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, September 1996. By courtesy of the publishing house.

The relationship between sound and human beings is first and foremost about survival. According to the sense of space and perceptual experience of sound mentioned above, it is clear that what can be heard and how it is listened to not only direct specific attention, but also shape social consciousness, social relationships, and daily lives.

THE HOUSE OF 72 TENANTS

The project explored various aspects of Shanghai's soundscape, and this article will focus specifically on shikumen, the city's most iconic residential space. It will discuss the sounds and sonic experiences within this special environment, as well as the personal relationships that emerge from it. First, let me introduce three key concepts: shikumen, longtang (弄堂), and lilong. As this plan of shikumen shows (Figure 8), we can see the front door, the front courtyard, the hall, the wings, the pergola room, the attic, and more. This architecture combines Western and Chinese elements, preserving the traditional Chinese lifestyle of extended families while adapting to the newer lifestyles of more nuclear families and single residents. The term **shikumen** literally means **stone warehouse gate**, as the main gates are made of stone. Now, what is longtang? It refers to the alleys located between rows of houses. Each house features both a front door and a back door, with the back doors of one row facing the front doors of another. The space in between serves as a public living room. As for Lilong, (as can be imagined): it depicts an alley that surrounds a group of dwellings, with a gate marking the entrance to this area. The name of the area is carved on the gate. Entering through this gate leads us into what is called the big longtang, while the rows of dwellings inside are referred to as small longtangs, or Lilong, meaning the inside of a longtang. It is the everyday life within Lilongs that has come to embody the most characteristic part of the urban culture of Shanghai.

In her famous novel *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, Wang Anyi [王安忆], one of the most accomplished Chinese contemporary writers, dedicated the whole first chapter to a longtang, which she regarded as the distinctive background against which this story of Shanghai unfolded. She described longtang as large areas of darkness after sunset, behind the lights on the main streets and skyscrapers. The lights float in the darkness, rest on the darkness, and the darkness, like an expanse of sea, deep, fluctuating, even dangerous, anything but peaceful. This description tells us the fact that it is not the glorious and luxurious appearances but the life in the **dark** longtang that constitutes the basis and main body of the urban life of Shanghai. Here are some pictures of the daily life in longtang (see Figures 9–14). It must be unthinkable for born Scandinavians to live in such a crowded and narrow place.

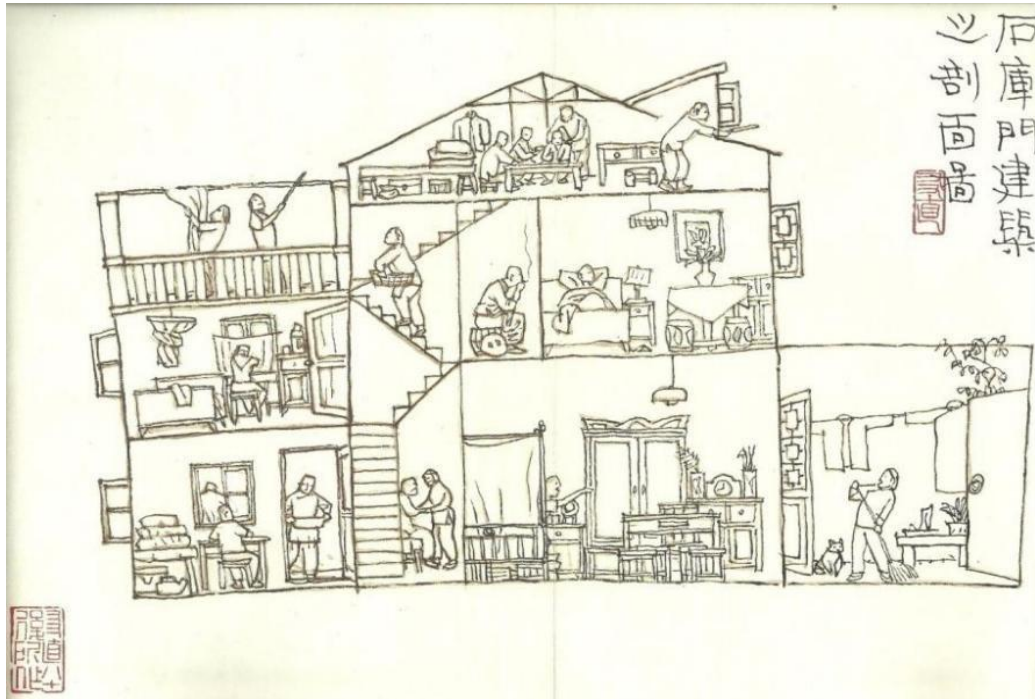


Figure 8: Sectional drawing of a shikumen house, by Jin Yucheng [金字澄]. All these pictures are courtesy of the publisher of the novel 繁花 [Blooming Flowers], first edition.

The House of 72 Tenants has become a fixed expression of the lives in a longtang. Among numerous novels, paintings, and pictures that depict a longtang, *The Shanghainese in the Old longtang* by the artist He Youzhi [贺友直] can best present the soundscape in this particularity. In shikumen, we have the hall, the wings, the front courtyard, the pergola room, the attic, and more. As we can see in Figures 9–13, in the back area of the longtang, people who live in the pergola room, the back terrace, and the back of the hall are busy washing up, making a fire, buying food, or selling breakfast.



Figure 9 (left): The back doors of one row of houses. This is a typical scene in the morning in a longtang in the 1930s-1940s, exactly until 1980s; Figure 10 (right): Hey! Lin chu lai! (Bring them out!) When hearing the shout, many female residents, old and young, rush out, each one carrying her chamber pot from her small home. Oh, what a horrible smell! I must close the window quickly says the man.

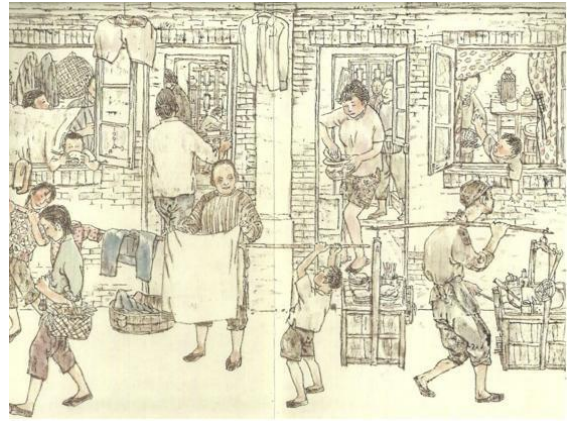
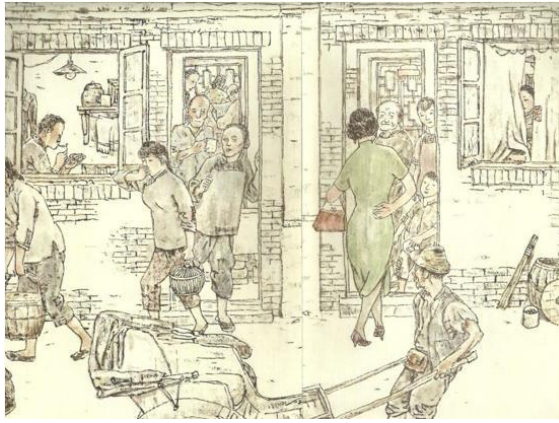


Figure 11 (left): Who is she, clicking her high heels as she walks? Notice the strange expressions on the faces of the five people watching her approach. They know her very well. They feel deep sympathy that, in order to support her family, she must work in the red-light district every night. She is exhausted now. Of course, this happened before 1949. **Figure 12 (right):** Da bing, You tiao (大饼, 油条), baked cakes and deep-fried twisted dough sticks. Usually, there is quite a number of food stalls near this kind of residential area; it is convenient for local residents to buy snacks or have breakfast.

Most of them are working-class people. Besides, children are on the way to school; prostitutes, on their high heels, return from work. And all these activities have their own sounds. In the front part of the longtang, we can also hear the knock on the door and the noise made by a milkman. Upstairs two wives are quarreling, and their embarrassed husbands are trying to make peace, and all the farce is overheard or eavesdropped on by their neighbours.

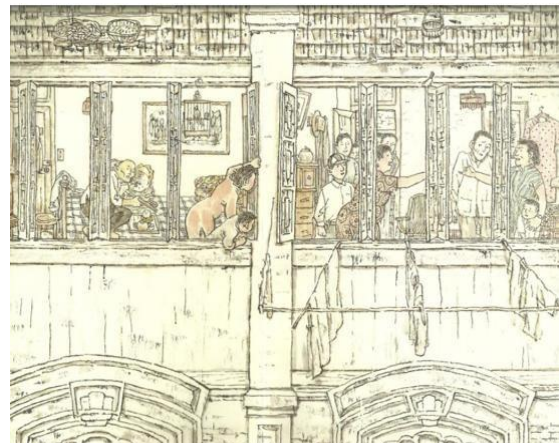
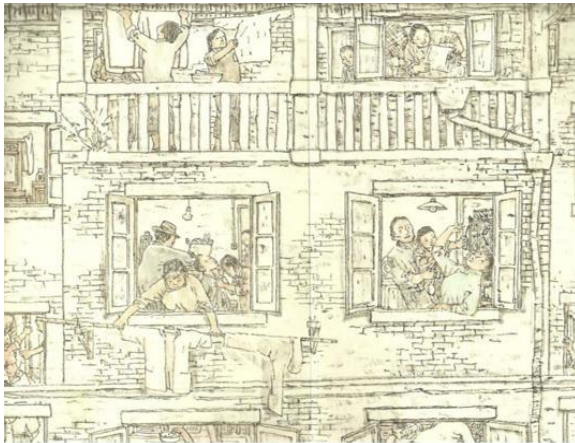


Figure 13a (left): Hey, be careful! You have poured your dirty water into our room! If you are not careful, you are bound to trouble others when you live in a crowded house. **Figure 13b (right):** What are they doing? Look at that man standing between the two quarrelling women! The woman with a boy behind her is his wife, and the other with his second child beside her is his mistress.

My mom's side of the family lives on No. 24, the 119th long, North Shaanxi Road. I came to this place for the first time at the age of five, when there were much fewer tenants, and the front courtyard and the hall were a public sphere. My grandmother told me that in the first half of the 20th century, this hall used to be something like a saloon for playing Guangdong music. Several artists, both professional and amateur, had been regular guests. (Actually, many meeting centres for various kinds of traditional music were set in halls of shikumen, rather than pavilions on lakes or tea houses.) However, by the early period of the Cultural Revolution, the hall had been taken over as a dwelling. Nowadays, it has been rented to migrants as a little shop (vegetable vendor). The history of this ordinary hall tells us that the soundscape in shikumen has been altering with the change of life here. The rise of shikumen in the first place was a response to the increased need for migrants who moved to Shanghai. So, in one single longtang, we can hear all sorts of dialects from Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Guangdong provinces. Consequently, the complex of languages is an important feature of the soundscape here, reminding us that Shanghai is a city of migrants.



Figure 14a (left): *To Each His / Her Own Task*; Figure 14b (right): *The House of 72 Tenants* (by courtesy of Gong Jianhua, who photographed both shots in July from Yang Xiaoneng, 2010).

During the Sino-Japanese War, many refugees fled into the foreign settlements of Shanghai, causing a rapid increase in the population. The population grew from 5 million in 1949 to 8 million in the 1960s, but the residential housing area was limited. In the late 1970s, a policy was carried out that allowed residents in shikumen to improve their living conditions within their living space. That meant that individuals could build additional structures to facilitate their living conditions, such as setting up a kitchen in the courtyard or making an attic in the room. Previously, such modifications had been forbidden. Although it made more use of the extent space, the policy caused severe consequences, leaving the areas of shikumen in a mess. Living in these types of houses meant that privacy was scarce. I still remember the sounds of snoring and urinating from neighbours during the night when I was a teenager. In 1980, the average area of the dwellings of 910,000 households was less than 4 square meters, with most of them located in shikumen. In the 1980s, when I visited my grandfather's shikumen-there was a family with five kids living there. Three of the boys had married but continued to live in the same place, separated only by thin clapboards and curtains. Everything could be heard, and everyone was listening. Such a living space inevitably had an influence on people's behaviour and state of mind. Shanghainese ridicule this kind of life as **shells of snails do Taoist rites** (Figures 13–14).

THE URBAN SOUND LANDSCAPE OF SHANGHAI IN THE NOVELS

However, with ongoing urban construction, many such houses and alleys in the city centre have been knocked down, to be replaced by multi-story office buildings and commercial streets. Their original inhabitants have mostly left the area, moving to spacious new high-rises. The changes in living environment have brought about changes in the pattern of residential sounds; it is now difficult to uncover the soundscape of daily life in the alleys by means of conventional synchronic fieldwork; instead, we are interweaving current experience with memories of the past. With this purpose, the team didn't only employ traditional fieldwork methods, emphasizing interviews and oral histories, but also greatly expanded the type of sources used, to include documents such as novels, reminiscences, and literary essays, along with pictorial representations (like He Youzhi's picture-story book I just mentioned above) and archival recordings.

Wang Shihua [王诗姍], a senior undergraduate majoring in musicology at Shanghai Conservatory of Music and also a member of the team, researched on the description of Shanghai's soundscape found in the modern realist novels with Shanghai as background and by writers living in this city. The works she chose cover a span from the 1930s to the present, including 24 novels by 11 writers. From these novels, she extracted excerpts depicting sounds, including indirect references like **Pouring a glass of water from the thermos**, suggesting the sound made by this act. Such indirect references to sound are much fewer than those to the visual sense, taste, and tactile sense. She classified these excerpts and made a statistical study of them. The result is, out of the 22000 word excerpts, there are 6811 words of lyrics and transportation noise, 14774 words of sounds made by people, 235 words of animals, and only 162 sounds of nature. This means that the soundscape in longtang is dominated by the sounds made by human beings.

I might as well quote several passages from literary works by Shanghai writers.

A passage quoted from Ba Jin's *Destruction* (灭亡):

There seemed to be the sound of the door, followed by footsteps and talking. It was the landlord and his wife. Every movement downstairs could not escape his ears. He heard them lock the door, enter the back room, open the lock, turn on the light, move the furniture, speak, laugh, whisper.... Suddenly the woman laughed passionately... the man was also talking... in the silence of the night, ears functioned just as eyes, seeing everything downstairs so clearly... someone fell... and she was rolling on the floor. (Ba 2008: 12–14)

This passage describes various sounds in a household as well as the people who made them. The writer also used the effect of synaesthesia, comparing the ears to the eyes.

A passage quoted from Jin Yucheng's (2013: 4) *Blooming Flowers* (繁花). "The Mei's lived in a front wing in the old Shanghai shikumen. The floor was shaky. The clapboard had grilles. One neighbour was criticizing her little girl, and the other was singing Shaoxing opera".

This passage tells us that there was only a single-layer floor between upstairs and downstairs, and the floor had cracks. One can hear what the neighbours are doing.

A passage quoted from Wang Anyi's (2006: 3) *Passing By* (流逝): "The back door opened, making a squeaky noise and it closed gently. Then there were footsteps on the stair. The voice of the mother-in-law came from the next room, very loud."

All passages above convey the experience of overhearing and eavesdropping.

In the next passage from Jin Yucheng's (2013: 189) *Blooming Flowers* (繁花), peculiar sounds made in a very small and crude toilet was described: "Even at night, when it was impossible to see anything, you could hear everything on the other side the clapboard: taking off trousers, urinating, getting toilet paper. Besides, the newcomer usually drew out the papers that had plugged the holes on the clapboard and plugged the holes with new paper, making a rustling noise".

This passage describes the embarrassing experience of a toilet user hearing the sounds of a fellow user. (It is no one, but those who see the embarrassment.)

Here is another passage from Jin Yucheng's (2013: 128) *Blooming Flowers* (繁花): "People are everywhere... Endless human voices and noises. Wooden slippers, quarrels, spanking the daughter, scolding the husband, radio, playing huqin or flute, singing regional operas, coughs, spitting, cooking, pouring water, mopping the floor, and the consistent opening and closing of the toilet door."

This **symphony** of sounds is an ordeal that each person living in the narrow spaces of old Shanghai city must undergo. This may explain the bad temper of many Shanghai women. They always have to fight for the interest of their own families to survive in such crowded places. Due to such crowdedness, many old Shanghainese who were interviewed told the team that **all the pleasures were outside the longtang**. In the early evening, people spent their leisure time outdoors chatting, telling stories, playing poker or mahjong, and even making fun of certain neighbours.

When I interviewed my colleague Han Zhongen [韩锺恩] (Han Zhongen and Xiao Mei, 2014) who is teaching at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, he said,

I spent much of my childhood learning to play the cello, and I rarely went out to play. So, I was alienated from other kids in the longtang. My daily practice also became annoying to the neighbours. As a result, I was often bullied by other kids; they even made fun of me with the melody I played . . . There used to be a fat guy in the longtang, and we would make fun of him by singing "large body, large body . . ." (Sol mi la mi, Sol mi la mi...) Wearing wooden slippers, we stamped our feet with the tune. A bunch of naughty boys.

MEMORY, NOSTALGIA IN THE CHANGE OF URBAN SPACE

As you have seen, what I have talked about is a description of the past life, a memory. Beginning in the late 1980s, more high-rise apartment buildings replaced longtangs, and the old Shanghainese moved into the modern apartments. Others whose dwellings in longtangs were not torn down also bought apartments to improve their living conditions. When I returned to the longtang where I used to live and did my field recording, the more than 10 gas-ovens in the kitchen had reduced to three or four ovens. In our 24-hours continual recording, the team could not find a single situation with more

than three people talking. The former public **living room** has been deserted. With television and the Internet in every household, no one needs to watch the Japanese or South Korean soap operas using the shared video recorders; with air-conditioners in every family, no one wants to enjoy the cool air outside in summer. Instead, electroacoustic has become a new part of the soundscapes. Most of the interviewees portrayed a nostalgic sensation toward their years spent in shikumen. What people miss most is the intimate relationship between neighbours. An excerpt from an essay *Why Are Shanghainese Nostalgic* by Shen Jialu [沈嘉禄], shows:

In the longtangs of shikumen 30 years ago, people were close to each other without much vigilance. One could read newspapers subscribed by another without asking. A woman who happened to be out while it rained did not need to worry about her clothes hung up in the courtyard, for one of her fellow housewives would take care of that. Girls, who made their own sweaters, would introduce the latest styles to everyone who was eager to follow the fashion. And people were always willing to share their delicious food with all the other households. (Shen Jialu [沈嘉禄]. 2011. B8, October 17)

They helped each other, shared with each other, and communicated with each other. All these came to an end with the establishment of the new lifestyle in the apartment building. The nicest memory of the sounds in shikumen is that of peddlers' **yo-heave-ho and cicadas** chirping.

A Wen (阿文), a young man who was interviewed, keeps a cultural saloon (Figure 15) in a new-style Lilong on Wanping Road, dedicated to the memory of old Shanghai. He depicted the soundscape of one normal day in longtang as follows (A Wen & Xiao Mei. 2014):

In the early morning, the first sounds heard are those of the milkman's cart, Then there is the sound of emptying the night stool, followed by having a typical breakfast.
People greet each other on their way to work or school or in the kitchen.
Then the longtang can enjoy a period of peace, when the women, who have gotten up early, can have a rest, before getting down to washing clothes, cooking lunch and other chores. Peddlers come and go.
At noon in summer, we can hear cicadas chirping and sparrows twittering.
Someone next door is coughing. Then there are radio programs of regional operas.
Again, there come the peddlers.
People return from work by bike, and children play with balls in longtang.
When a thundershower comes, women must rush to the flat roofs to get their clothes or help other families to do so.
Then it is cooking time, accompanied by chatting and sometimes quarreling.
Doves fly back home.
After supper, some people began to play poker or mahjong.
Having finished homework, children climb to the roof and sing songs.
It is time for bed. Parents call their kids to return home in Shanghai dialect. Some parents may be punishing one naughty child.
Someone is whispering.
When the night falls, doors are closed.
Someone is snoring. Another turns over in the bed. Still another is using the toilet.
Finally, everything falls into silence.

These sounds constitute an integral part of people's memory of the old times in shikumen. But now it is very difficult to record these sounds in a single longtang. The recording I played is collected from different longtangs and edited together. So, these are memories before the 1990s. In recent years, the structure of the residents in Shanghai has changed once again. Foreigners, many of whom work in international firms, live in the central area of the city. The outer areas, which used to be the countryside, have become new districts, into which the old Shanghainese moved from. In the areas between these two parts live the new Shanghai citizens who came from other provinces and have settled here. Thus, the central part of Shanghai is undergoing another round of gentrification.

During fieldwork, a question was posed to the interviewees: what is the biggest difference between the sound in shikumen and that in the new districts? One answer is that they can hear more chirping of birds and insects, making them feel closer to nature. From the memories of the old Shanghainese, we got to know that there are two kinds of cicada in Shanghai. One is big and dark brown; the other is small and turquoise. Having recorded the cicada chirping in every district of Shanghai, we find that the sound of the small type has completely disappeared in downtown areas. And we eventually found

such chirping in Pudong. Perhaps this suggests some changes in the evolution of insects for environmental changes. The change of residential styles will inevitably lead to the change of types of **family sounds** and cause a different sense of family identification among the old Shanghainese. In the sense of place formed by daily sounds in the investigation, experience of the present and memory of the past echo with one another. We deeply feel that the three elements of soundscape—keynote sound, sound signals, and sound mark—proposed by Murray Schafer (1977) are altering with time and different human activities. The daily soundscape in longtang in the past can be regarded as the keynote, which cannot be noticed by people who live there. Only when these people get out of this living space does the sound, lost or dying, become a unique mark.



Figure 15: Interview at A Wen's store. Photographed by the author in 2014.

Thus, nostalgia is playing a prominent part in the current lives of the Shanghainese. I'd like to give three little examples, all recorded as short interviews and available on request. (Yao and Xiao Mei, 2014). "When I was living in shikumen, the place struck me as damp, dirty and chaotic; but now, whenever I return there, all I feel are warmth and comfort."

Her companion said in the same interview that old dwellings, with their particular atmosphere, are something we can never get rid of. I miss the chirping of crickets. Now I still buy one or two, keeping them at home, only in order to listen to their chirping, which brings me back to the old times.

In my interviews, in addition to their memories of beautiful sounds, the team also asked interviewees about the daily sounds they hated the most right now. The most common answer is the sound of upgrading the dwellings through interior decorations (Open Interviews, 2014).

Q: Isn't there such sound in the past life in a longtang?

A: No. People only had to make furniture themselves. If someone was going to get married, all they needed was the simplest decoration.

It occurred to no one that it had to do something with the old house.

Q: I would like to visit Tian Zi Fang. It is propagated as the best place to experience the culture of the old Shanghai's longtang.

A: Seriously? Not possible. Can you hear Shanghai dialect there? Does it have the longtang life for real?

Nostalgia arises because something is lost forever and cannot be restored. Shanghai in nostalgia means a sonic, physical, and spiritual home. The narrative of the traditional soundscape in shikumen is based on a background that pieces together the present life and the past memory. And the life in this city is and will be constantly changing into something new. Shanghai is a city built on tidal land, a city of migrants, a city that is quite young yet has a history of more than 150 years. What sound will be made in this expanse of dark sea? In any case, through the above bit-by-bit collection, the soundscape of Shanghainese's living space has conveyed people's experience, memory, desire, identity, and other emotions.

EPILOGUE

In childhood, I looked forward with fervent anticipation to spending summer vacation at my grandmother's home in Shanghai, especially to climb up the rooftops of the shikumen with cousins and neighbours' children to chill out and sing. I still remember the year 1968 when Shanghai celebrated "The Whole Country Is Red" (i.e., all provinces in China had established Revolutionary Committees that displaced former governmental agencies); we were surrounded by fireworks rising above the rooftops, so excited that we stomped on the creaking red tiles. Yet I did not know that beating basins and drums on the rooftops used to be a nationwide campaign in Shanghai.

In an interview of the team's **everyday life soundscape in the shikumen** project, some retired seniors recall their childhood routines with parents on the rooftops: a clamour of cymbal clashes and drumbeats intended for nothing other than **Elimination of the Four Pests**—making ear-splitting noise to stun sparrows, one of the Four Pests, until they lose balance and fall. This sonic remembrance immediately reminds me of an upcoming course for graduate students Sound and **Transformation of Consciousness**; as well as Francis Huxley writing about voodoo in Haiti, **the Apparatus of Drumming, Dancing, and Singing** can not only affect the inner ear, and "it is the drummers who largely provoke dissociation" (Huxley, 1967: 286–287); Andrew Neher pointing out that intermittent acoustic stimuli having particular characteristics are capable of **driving** the brain's alpha rhythms, and "producing a particular effect upon the central nervous system and thereby triggering convulsions" (Rouget, 1985: 172–173); and John E. Pfeiffer claiming that drums produce the sort of steep-fronted sounds, sounds emitted abruptly and explosively, best suited to stimulate the auditory cortex, the part of the brain's outer layer concerned with hearing (Pfeiffer, 1983: 212). Vehement percussive sound would even put human beings into a coma, much less minuscule sparrows. Nevertheless, such **Elimination of the Four Pests** (Zhao Sheng & Su Zhiliang, 2025) by stunning sparrows still amused me and the Millennial students a lot during the interview. I also recall the only Shanghainese nursery rhyme that I can sing—

Ringworm in June is annoying,	[六月里的癞痢真苦恼]
flies and mosquitoes are biting,	[苍蝇叮来蚊子咬]
yang ah yangliu qing,	[杨啊杨柳青]
the People's Commune's call	[人民公社来号召]
to eliminate the Four Pests above all,	[消灭四害最重要]
(aihai ai-hai yo),	[哎嗨哎嗨哟]
makes the ringworm-headed laugh out loud	[癞痢头听了哈哈地笑].

The Four Pests in this ditty consist of flies, mosquitoes, mice, and bedbugs. Many interviewees proudly told us that the greatest achievement of the Four Pest campaign was the thorough elimination of bedbugs. Indeed, bedbugs remain a frequent annoyance even in the dormitories of London, Cambridge, and Oxford universities. However, the bedbugs eliminated in Shanghai at that time were originally an alternate to sparrows. A wild search readily provides such documentation (Zhao Sheng & Su Zhiliang, 2011: 28):

As the first ever campaign during the Great Leap Forward, the Four Pests was primarily defined as mice, sparrows, flies, and mosquitoes. Faced with united opposition from zoologists, the Four Pests were redefined in 1960 as mice, bedbugs, flies, and mosquitoes." "The campaign to besiege and annihilate sparrows first started in Sichuan province, totaling 15 million sparrows, 80 thousand nests, and 350 thousand eggs province-wide on 20-22 March 1958. It is then followed by cities including Tianjin, Harbin, Hangzhou, Changchun, Zhenjiang, and Beijing, where 16 million sparrows have been annihilated by 6 April. Beijing killed 401,160 sparrows on 19-21 April. Shanghai killed 505,303 sparrows on 27-29 April. According to data available, 1.96 billion sparrows have been killed nationwide by early November 1958.

Yet, the media coverage was more saddening. *People's Daily* reported, "This is a key component of the historically mighty fight whereby humans wage wars against the nature and conquer it."—How familiar this behavior model is to people!

Flashing forward to 2022, the lockdown in Shanghai persists as I finish revising this paper. Xinhua News covered the epidemic prevention and control on May 5 (Xinhua News Agency, 2022): "Practice

has proved that prevention and control policies can stand the test of history, and measures are scientific and effective. We have won the battle to defend Wuhan, and we will certainly be able to win the battle to defend Great Shanghai.”

Indeed, living at this time in the Chinese city of Shanghai is possibly forever stately, honorable, and correct! I look forward to hearing the echoes of history.

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ABSTRACT IN CHINESE LANGUAGE

七十二家房客，是上个世纪五十年代上海人民滑稽剧团的艺术家们以上海底层市民的艰苦生活为素材创作的一出喜剧。这出戏以 1949 年春天的特定时代为背景，在一个特定的生活空间里，浓缩了不同身份不同阶层不同性格、不同命运的人们，并展现了他们的爱恨情仇和嬉笑怒骂。剧中快被房客们挤爆了的狭小空间，也成为人们形容老上海城市居住环境的典型景观。在这个空间中，声音在日常生活中有哪些样态？它们扮演了什么角色？它们与居民的隐私、骚扰、矛盾、孤独、互助、娱乐、兴奋和热闹等关乎人生基本情绪和行为发生怎样的互动？

2013 年，笔者主持了一个以声音生态学为视角的“声音中国影像民族志”（Sounding China: audio-visual ethnography）系列项目，包括了以生活空间-公共空间-艺术空间中的声音景观为内容的“上海城市声音景观”民族志子项目。秉持当代声音生态学的研究，将人类在声音文化方面的研究，扩展至音乐的声墙之外，力图通过围绕人类生存的广义声音，反映生物体与其周围环境之间相互关系的基本立场，并将生活空间中的声音景观聚焦于家居声音的聆听与记忆。

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