



## LIVING WITH THE FUTURE

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Shanghai is a city in flux where all that is solid seems to melt into air, or rather into concrete, steel, glass and ever more high-rise towers which add attention-demanding verticality to an already overloaded skyline. The towers, globally understood symbols of the city's ambitions, coexist uneasily with a certain nostalgia for the built forms of the city's colonial past. *Tabula rasa* developments on a huge scale transform entire sections of the city into new business districts at the same time that they make a point in preserving or recreating pockets of historic spaces. At the street level, the Shanghainese understand that their city is changing rapidly and many express unease about the disorientating pace of restructuring and the surreal spatial juxtapositions that it produces. In contrast to the apparent cohesion of the Mao years, the recent social transformation of Shanghai has resulted in a more diverse urban society where inequalities are as deep and the possibility for conflict as present as they were during the period of the international settlement. Expatriates from the Asia Pacific region and the West, highly educated overseas Chinese and a surfacing immigrant population engaged in some niches of the city's service economy, all contribute to an increasingly complex and disjointed social landscape. No other group challenges the social order of Shanghai as much as Chinese internal migrants from rural areas, a "floating population" approaching 5 million with limited rights and vulnerable livelihoods. Poverty, low educational levels and the stigma of crime hinder the possibilities of incorporating this population into the social fabric of Shanghai. Developing a harmonious society in the city has become an official local public policy goal, one perhaps made more urgent by recent disturbances amongst disaffected migrant populations, and on the other hand, the central Chinese government's policy directing the city to continue absorbing rural migrants and turning them into urban citizens. Sharing responsibility for security in public spaces with the support of both institutions and local communities is nothing new for urban Chinese, schooled in a culture that emphasises a collective sense of responsibility and with the experience of decades of a tightly controlled social order. Nevertheless, these objectives may necessitate the broader cultivation of conditions and perceptions of

"security" capable of engaging a wide range of the city's residents and a more profound understanding both of the nature of public spaces in a city in the midst of tidal change and of how these public spaces can contribute to a shared sense of community within the city.

### AFTER THE SURGE

#### Labour markets and workplaces

After over a decade of doubledigit economic growth, Shanghai's concerns about its future prosperity now relate to the city's capacity to innovate. Important challenges have resulted from the city's many successes in terms of economic development, attracting foreign investment, international trade, transformation of its built environment and upgrading of its urban infrastructure. These challenges require more complex planning processes and policy interventions than the formulas deployed so far. Shanghai now needs to assume a more defined economic identity and adopt a set of strategic priorities to guide its metropolitan development path. As the density of economic interactions has increased at multiple scales, making decisions about Shanghai's economic future also implies shaping its role in the Yangtze River region, the People's Republic of China, the Asia Pacific and the wider world economy.

Strengthening its centrality at one level may pose negative consequences to the city's other roles – becoming a consolidated global city that is attractive to international investors and leading economic sectors may require different types of public investments and interventions than growing as China's industrial powerhouse and job generator for a rapidly urbanising population. A number of different questions arise from this dilemma. To what degree should policy makers attempt to strengthen the city's advanced services sector? How much effort should be put in to upgrading, modernising and expanding its manufacturing base? Are post-industrial New York and London the models to learn from, or will Shanghai be better off following broader base high-tech development strategies such as those of Tokyo and the city-regions of California. In broader terms, can Shanghai learn from established urban models of economic growth and what lessons can it teach the urban world in terms of development

expediency and urban restructuring at a breathtaking pace? What synergies can be fostered between the leading economic sectors of car production, semiconductors, petrochemicals, trade, finance and real estate and construction? How can planning steer property development—roughly half of all fixed capital investment in Shanghai—so that it supports rather than crowds out the city’s manufacturing base?

Further questions arise about the relationship between urban development and physical planning in the unique context of Shanghai’s urban form and pressure for growth. What is the right territorial balance between Shanghai’s suburban industrial parks and development zones, its premium business and commercial districts and the increasingly visible creative industries in the revitalised inner core? What considerations need to be taken in the design of the differentiated workplaces that these industries require? How will these workplaces be integrated to the living spaces of the workforce and the everyday lives of people in Shanghai? What is the social life of Shanghai’s multiplying high-rise office towers? What investment, design, planning and tenancy regulations, decisions, agreements and negotiations have shaped their existence? In what symbolic and functional ways does this most ubiquitous workplace of contemporary Shanghai shape and confer meaning to the businesses and livelihoods that it hosts?

## TRADING CITY FOR SPACE

### Housing and urban neighbourhoods

Living conditions have steadily improved in Shanghai. Since 1990, housing space per capita has more than doubled to reach almost 15 square meters in 2003. Some improvements are also noticeable in the quality of the urban environment, with the area of urban parks and woods multiplying almost sevenfold, covering over 35% of the urbanised area of Shanghai. Despite these improvements in living conditions however, nearly half of households experience overcrowding, and a further 16% suffer from severe overcrowding.

As metropolitan growth continues, high-rise buildings fill the dense city centre and new towns are constructed along peripheral ring roads. Yet, in a pattern where concentration predominates over dispersal, close to half of Shanghai’s population lives in an area smaller than 5% of its total land surface. Urban densities average slightly over 40,000 residents per square kilometre in the city’s four core districts and reach a peak of 760 persons per hectare in Huangpu’s central neighbourhood of Old West Gate, just south of the People’s Square. It is interesting to note, however, that the structural densification of the city centre is occurring at the same

time that population densities have decreased in this area, following development imperatives towards increasing the quantity of living space per resident. Household size has been decreasing over time and small households now comprise a considerable proportion of the population. The massive changes to Shanghai’s housing conditions have not been without social friction. Speculation in the housing market in both development and resale, mostly at the luxury end of market (symptomatic of increasing inequality in terms of housing consumption) has prompted government actions to increase interest rates and discourage non-occupant ownership. Conflicts over development rights have flared at the city’s periphery, where farmers seek to convert agricultural land into profitable housing for both migrant workers and the wealthy. In central neighbourhoods, policies of slum clearance and the accompanying displacement of residents to more suburban areas have been met by some community protest.

At the same time, new social structures, such as residents’ management committees in high rise towers, are evolving to address the particular conditions of new housing typologies. The quality of life in Shanghai’s high density neighbourhoods is now an issue to address, as are the impacts of densification and massive vertical growth on the physical tissue of the urban core. What factors lead residents to remain in the congested city centre rather than moving to modern suburban housing complexes? How does the provision of housing relate to Shanghai’s employment sectors? While the creation of peripheral new towns may be the most efficient model of metropolitan growth, what alternatives might be considered, such as the expansion of the core by generating a high density belt around it?

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