

Time, space, psychology: Liminal Edition of Shanghai

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INTRODUCTION

What is "liminal space"? Different from the waterfront, ring road, and POPS square mentioned in the lectures in the past few days, the liminal space that most youngsters are familiar with nowadays is an indescribable new Internet art, such as shopping malls at four o'clock in the morning, schools during summer vacation, and empty hospital corridors at midnight—they are more akin to a particular aesthetic of a subculture than merely a physical space, the core of which lies in the unique feelings of eeriness, nostalgia, anxiety that people can feel while staying in them, and serve as an intermediate point between the beginning and the end.

Fig.1: Liminal spaces that causes eeriness, nostalgia, anxiety, Wikipedia, 2023



Such "liminal space aesthetics" seems to have nothing to do with the "liminal space" in the context of architecture and urban planning. However, after careful exploration and analysis, the group found that there are prominent similarity and correlations between the two. First and foremost, the passage of time has played an indispensable role in promoting the changes in their function and spatial experience—after decades, the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston and Cheong Gye Cheon in Seoul have transformed from a traffic artery to a leisure and entertainment venue. Secondly, the transformation of space is another major feature of it, meaning you're supposed to pass through them on your way to something else. Instead of a destination where you can rest for a long time, "liminal space" emphasizes being transitory and between two defined spaces—the waterfront recreational areas can be seen as connections and transitions between cities and water bodies, and the exquisitely and beautifully decorated trails that become landmarks are still essentially spaces that help people travel between different destinations. Finally, similar to the liminality proposed by Arnold van Gennep¹ in the early 20th century, people in the liminal space are also undergoing changes at the psychological level, as the uncertainty of the function and nature of the liminal space has caused the mental instability and ambiguity of the users to a certain extent.

¹ The concept of liminality was first developed in the early 20th century by folklorist Arnold van Gennep, indicating the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of a rite of passage, when participants no longer hold their preritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the rite is complete.[2] During a rite's liminal stage, participants "stand at the threshold" between their previous way of structuring their identity, time, or community, and a new way (which completing the rite establishes). (source: Wikipedia)

Based on the three categories of similarities mentioned above, the group decided to start from the three aspects of time, space, and psychology. Taking the downtown area of Shanghai as the research scope, we selected three different types of liminal spaces to record the rich and diverse urban spaces form and explore the historical and cultural heritage behind it.

Fig.2: Similarity between the 2 kinds of liminal spaces in the aspects of time, space and psychology, Zhuoxin Li, 2023



Fig.3: Three selected liminal spaces in Shanghai, Ruiyang Gao, 2023



BACKGROUND OF URBAN SPACE

Shanghai is one of the municipalities under direct administration of China and the core of the world class city cluster in the Yangtze River Delta area, which is planned as an excellent global city and a modern socialist international metropolis with world influence.

The modernization of Shanghai began in the concession, which had been expanded to the north and west at the end of the 19th century because of economic development. Decades later, *the Great Shanghai Plan* laid the urban pattern of modern Shanghai, which was later changed by the Republic of China's acceptance of concession, into an important industrial base and financial pillar of China. In the following years, Shanghai went through marked changes in the aspects of development goals, reform and opening up. Currently, Shanghai is an international center of economy, finance, trade, shipping, scientific and technologic innovation and a cultural metropolis as well as a national historical city, with its GDP reaching over 430 billion yuan, ranking first in China.

Fig.4: The concession division in Shanghai in the 19th century, Weibo, 2023



Fig.5: The drawing of the Greater Shanghai Plan, Google, 2023



Fig.6: Changes of Shanghai between 1945 and 2016, Google, 2023



Constrained by ecological baselines, Shanghai is drawing on key transportation corridors as the framework, applying the town clusters to promote overall urban and rural development, applying life circles to build the life network, optimizing urban and rural system, cultivating a multicenter public activity system, and forming a “networked spatial system characterized by multi-centers, clusters, and compactness”, a “main city – new city – new town – village” municipality-wide urban and rural system, and a central system comprising of “city center (central activities zone) - city sub-center - local center - community center”.

Fig.7: Spatial structure map of Shanghai, Shanghai Master Plan 2017-2035, 2018



Fig.8: Urban and rural system planning map of Shanghai, Shanghai Master Plan 2017-2035, 2018



Fig.9: Network planning map of public activity centers in Shanghai, Shanghai Master Plan 2017-2035, 2018



LIST OF URBAN LIMINAL SPACES IN SHANGHAI

1. Heyang Railway

Located in the northeast of Yangpu District, Heyang Railway, which was built in 1937 to meet the transportation needs of industrial and mining enterprises, has been in a place of significance where had been defined as the center for trade and transportation by several versions of Shanghai master plan because of being close to an important road (*Jungong Road*) and a port (*Qiujiang Port*).

However, in modern times, with the transformation and upgrading of the city's urban functions, traditional industries have been gradually transferred to outskirts of the city. As a consequence, the volume of railway freight will keep declining, and the railways typically in the northeastern region will also be gradually weakened in the future.

Nowadays, Heyang Railway is no more prosperous but faced with uncountable uncertainties, as according to the latest master plan, it is set to be removed and constructed into a new facility equipped with brand new functions. On the one hand, the effects from the past still continue, with trains for transportation still at work, giving people a glimpse of its glorious past. On the other hand, those who walk on the railway casually are implying that the Heyang Railway's transportation function is at the edge of abandon. Being sandwiched between the remnants of the past and the uncertain future, Heyang Railway is in an intermediate state of uncertainty, becoming a liminal space in time, where various indeterminate activities and functions take place.

Fig.10: Location map of Heyang Railway, Ruiyang Gao, 2023



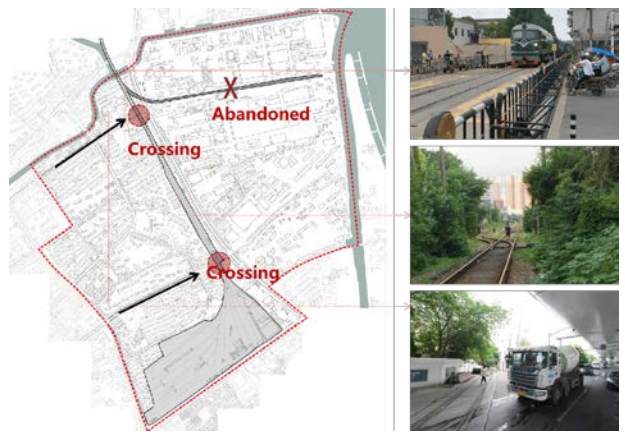
Fig.11: Surroundings, Ruiyang Gao, 2023



Fig.12: Historic railway map, Zhuoxin Li, 2023



Fig.13: Current usage of the railway, Zhuoxin Li, 2023



2. Wujiaochang Underpass

From the aspect of space, Wujiaochang has been chosen as the second liminal space to be analyzed.

Located in Yangpu District, Wujiaochang whose name means “the place where five roads meet” is one of the four urban sub-centers. Since originally being planned to break the monopoly of the Shanghai concession in the 1940s, after decades of development, Wujiaochang has already transformed into a unique business gathering place, which can be divided into three major sectors, namely the Southern Commercial Center, the Central Knowledge Innovation Center, and the Northern Business Center.

To connect different sections, an underground pedestrian system has been constructed at the intersection of five roads, with five passages around the perimeter, leading to different commercial spaces, constituting the Wujiaochang Underpass. Following further changes of urban construction, the spatial appearance of the underpass has also undergone remarkable development, with multiple new functions being superimposed, while the essence is still the communication between different destinations. The current Wujiaochang Underpass can be seen as an urban liminal space from the aspect of space, as it can be regarded as not only a stopover among several defined spaces, but also a landmark in the whole surrounding area where people can take a short rest, admire the urban scenery, as well as conduct transit transfer.

Fig.14: Location of Wujiaochang, Ruiyang Gao, 2023



Fig.15: Surroundings, Ruiyang Gao, 2023



Fig.16: Historic and current photos of Wujiaochang, Rongqiao Huang, 2023

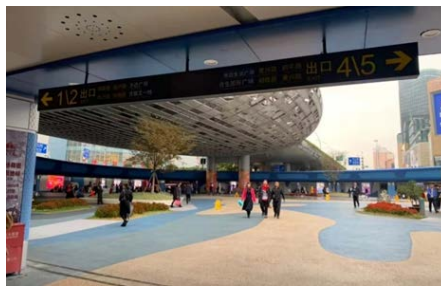


Fig.17: Plan of Wujiaochang, Rongqiao Huang, 2023



3. Chunyang Lane.

From the aspect of psychology, Chunyang Lane has been chosen as the third liminal space to be analysed.

Located in Hongkou, a district of downtown Shanghai, Chunyang Lane is a typical Shikumen community built in the early 20th century, with a high density of population and a superior location. Consisting of 23 detached buildings, Chunyang Lane has a total floor area of 22273m², accommodating 1181 households. Among the more than 3000 residents, most of them are foreign tenants receiving low pay, while local residents account for just over 40%. leads to little communication and misunderstanding, undermining community.

The high proportion of foreign population results in different lifestyle and cultural background, as well as lack of identity, making the residents not able to acquire neither a sense of belonging nor psychological stability, and the internal social relations of Lilong short of cohesion. Therefore, in Lilong, a unique liminal space in Shanghai, it is imperative to realize the effective integration of all kinds of residents, by means such as adding more public spaces or facilities, which will be further researched in the follow-up discussion.

Fig.18: Location map of Chunyang Lane-1, Ruiyang Gao, 2023

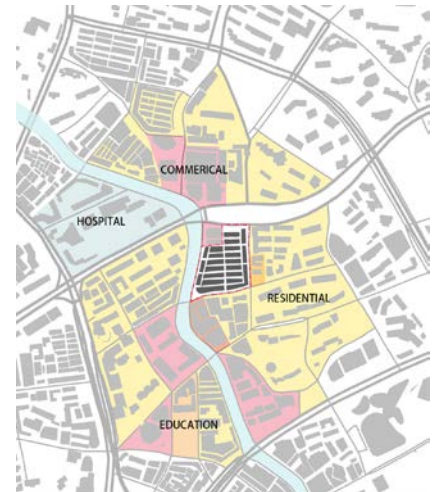


Fig.19: General layout of Chunyang Lane, Yi Xu, 2023

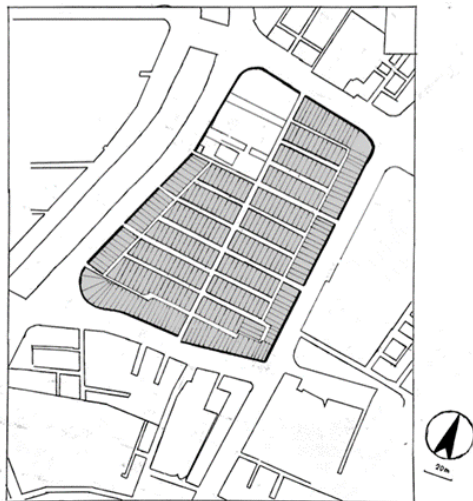


Fig.20: Narrow aisles in Chunyang Lane, Yi Xu, 2022

