

# Commercial Community Spaces Redevelopment: A Case Study of Shanghai Xintiandi Area

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**Abstract.** In the delicate process of revitalizing and preserving Shanghai's iconic Shikumen architecture, a profound question emerges—how conscientiously safeguard the warmth and authenticity inherent in traditional cultural elements while concurrently nurturing the evolution of public commercial spaces nestled within the historic alleyways? This endeavor necessitates a nuanced approach that navigates the intricate balance between preservation and progress, aiming to avoid the perilous pitfalls of homogenization frequently witnessed in contemporary commercial developments. This paper categorizes and examines the issues and challenges faced by historical buildings in the Shikumen area of Shanghai during urban renewal. It explores the successful example of Xintiandi, highlighting valuable methods and insights for urban development in China. Additionally, the author compares Xintiandi in Shanghai with Nanluoguxiang in Beijing, emphasizing key issues such as commercial homogenization and the over-commercialization of distinctive historical urban districts, as seen in the case of Nanluoguxiang. This introduction, sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the nuanced challenges faced in the revitalization of Shikumen architecture. The subsequent discourse will delve into strategies and considerations that go beyond the superficial, seeking to establish a blueprint for the coexistence of tradition and commerce in these venerable alleyways.

**Keywords:** Shikumen; Commercial Spaces Design; Redevelopment; Homogenization.

## 1. Introduction

Xintiandi's successful commercial renovation of Shikumen, a historic conservation building in Shanghai, provides a compelling reference point. This case not only provides inspiration for the preservation and revitalization of traditional buildings but also highlights the possibility of successful commercial space development while maintaining historical and cultural heritage. The renovation of Shanghai Xintiandi stands as a remarkable case in business, impressing its success and serving as an inspiring model. This project highlights a crucial dilemma: balancing modern commercial development with the preservation of the cultural heritage embodied in Shikumen's unique historical architecture.

This study aims to delve deeper into the commercial evolution of Shikumen in Shanghai, using Xintiandi as a prime example. The objective is to identify strategies that safeguard the distinctive cultural aspects of these buildings amidst commercial progress. This involves a thorough examination of Shikumen's internal structure, renovation approaches, and urban planning policies. Furthermore, the Xintiandi project represents a significant milestone in China's historic building conservation efforts [1]. By analyzing varied success stories like Xintiandi, the hope is to uncover actionable insights for perpetuating the cultural legacy of Shikumen within commercial spaces, thereby addressing the challenges of homogenization.

## 2. Critical Analysis of Homogenization Trends

### 2.1. The Homogenization of Urban Commercial Space Affects the Process

In the realm of global economics, a discernible shift towards uniformity is evident, propelled by the proliferation of standardized business models. This shift, largely a consequence of the expansive



reach of multinational corporations and international brands, is characterized by the replication of successful business paradigms across diverse urban landscapes. Such replication manifests in the ubiquitous presence of analogous shopping complexes, franchise stores, and entertainment outlets. This phenomenon engenders an increasing homogenization of urban commercial environments, wherein a globalized commercial identity supersedes and obscures local cultural distinctions.

A collateral consequence of the proliferation of standardized business models is the diminishing sense of community identity. The inherent inability of homogenized commercial patterns to reflect local nuances and community characteristics results in urban spaces lacking distinctiveness [2]. This deficiency, in turn, fails to meet the residents' demand for public spaces filled with cultural and historical significance. The disappearance of community features aggravates the commodification of urban spaces, rendering them generic and detached from the authentic essence of their locales. As cities grapple with the challenges posed by these trends, it becomes imperative to explore alternative approaches that prioritize cultural preservation and community distinctiveness in the urban development paradigm.

## **2.2. The Uniqueness of Xintiandi is Maintained**

The successful transformation of historical buildings, specifically Shikumen residences, into contemporary commercial spaces in the case of the Xintiandi project, serves as a compelling example of historical preservation and adaptive reuse. Xintiandi adeptly retains the external architectural features of these historical structures while renovating internal spaces to meet modern business demands. This innovative approach not only safeguards Shanghai's unique historical heritage but also establishes Xintiandi as a modern hub for commerce and entertainment.

Furthermore, the design philosophy of Xintiandi seamlessly integrates historical elements with contemporary commercial requirements. This intentional fusion attracts consumers and deepens their understanding of Shanghai's traditional culture. Xintiandi, by harmonizing its distinctive historical ambiance with contemporary commercial activities, emerges as a space that not only showcases Shanghai's rich history but also caters to the demands of modern lifestyles. In essence, Xintiandi's multifaceted success lies in its meticulous preservation of historical buildings, the seamless integration of historical and modern design elements, and a strategic market positioning that reflects and influences broader societal trends [3].

The market positioning of Xintiandi primarily targets middle to upper-class consumers, encompassing local elites, expatriates, and tourists. This strategic positioning not only sustains its image as a high-end entertainment and shopping destination but also reflects the prevailing trend in urban commercial spaces under the backdrop of globalization. By adopting strategies such as the protection and adaptive reuse of historical buildings, as well as the integration of historical elements with modern design, this case exemplifies how to navigate the globalized business landscape—simultaneously fostering economic growth and safeguarding local cultural heritage [1].

## **3. The Reason Analysis of Xintiandi as a Successful Case**

### **3.1. Xintiandi- Urban Identity and Commercial Space Design**

The "Liong and Lane" of Xintiandi has a long history, and these Shikumen Liong were originally the traditional unique residential forms in the old city of Shanghai [4]. Shikumen architecture originated in the 19th century and is a unique stone door frame structure, combined with Chinese and Western architectural styles, forming a unique historical architectural form in Shanghai. These Shikumen lanes bear witness to the urban evolution of Shanghai in the past 100 years, carrying rich historical and cultural memories.

With the need for urban development and the common idea of preserving history and culture, the government has played a key role in the transformation of Xintiandi Shikumen. The government's renovation requirements mainly include the protection, restoration, and rational reuse of Shikumen

buildings. The emphasis is on maintaining the appearance of the original building, and respecting the historical culture while adapting to modern commercial needs [5]. In addition, the government has also put forward requirements to upgrade the surrounding public facilities and improve the community environment to promote the sustainable development of the Xintiandi area [6].



**Figure 1.** Achieving Abundance Lane [7]

### **3.1.1. Integrate the Historical and Cultural Elements into the Commercial Space Design**

Conservation and Investigation phase: This phase involves a detailed investigation and assessment of the Shikumen architecture. The professional team has a comprehensive understanding of the structure and historical value of the building to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of the conservation work [8]. It can be seen in Figure 1, that the team should sufficiently consider how to preserve Shikumen's original historical elements.

Reuse and development stage: This stage involves organically integrating Shikumen Liong into the commercial and cultural development of Xintiandi. This includes the design and development of Spaces adapted to modern living and commercial activities while retaining the unique charm of Shikumen architecture.

The article, "From Xintiandi to Sinan Mansion," details the transformation of Xintiandi Shikumen, including the idea of restoring the old to the old. This concept emphasizes the preservation of the original taste of historical buildings in the renovation, and the restoration of the original appearance as much as possible in order to inherit the history and culture. Specific transformation steps include: "Architectural assessment and survey," "Structural repair and reinforcement," "Facade restoration, Internal modernization," and "Community involvement and cultural preservation." Through these steps, Xintiandi successfully achieved the goal of restoring the old in the renovation of the historic building Shikumen, creating a unique space that has both modern functions and preserves the traditional history [9].

Xintiandi has transformed the original Shikumen building, a typical residential form in Shanghai, into a stylish entertainment district. Shikumen houses were originally built by Western landlords for Chinese tenants during the colonial period [10]. The development of Xintiandi emphasizes Shikumen's international connections, such as its Western-influenced architectural features, repackaging it as a symbol of the colonial past of the Shanghai metropolis and using it to showcase a more glorious global future.

This transformation, carried out by the international architecture firm, transforms the "lower finger corner" (referring to poorer quality residential areas) into the "upper finger corner" (referring to better quality residential areas), demonstrating the economic potential of historic buildings in the design of urban Spaces [11]. This reinterpretation strengthens the link between commercial space and Shanghai's traditional urban cultural identity.

### 3.1.2. The Role of Design Elements in Strengthening the Connection with Urban Cultural Identity.

Media and academic institutions have played a supporting role in promoting Xintiandi, which they portray as a symbol of Shanghai's global future [12]. At the same time, it reinforces the link between commercial space and Shanghai's identity as a global city.

Despite the commercial success, the transformation of Xintiandi has also brought challenges, especially the impact on local residents. The issue of compensation and relocation of residents in this process shows that resident communities, while excluded from the decision-making process, their actions of resistance pose a major challenge to the governing coalition of political, business and professional elites.



**Figure 2.** Integrate the Historical and Cultural Elements of Shanghai Shikumen into Commercial Space Design [13]

### 3.1.3. Result.

Xintiandi's case analysis shows that historic buildings are protected not only for their value as cultural heritage but also for their value as symbolic capital that can demonstrate a globalized future by referencing Shanghai's internationalized colonial past [12]. (It can be seen in Figure 2) In the process, the design elements associated with international connections are emphasized, such as the European flavor in the Shikumen architectural style and the Westernized lifestyle of middle-class families during the colonial period. The economic value of Shikumen lies in the symbolic capital of this global connection. As a result, Shikumen's history has been rewritten by international and local actors, transforming it into a symbol of Shanghai's cosmopolitan past and global future.

## 3.2. Commercial Development and Cultural Heritage Conservation

Shanghai Xintiandi stands as a shining example of successful commercial development intertwined with the preservation of cultural heritage. Nestled in the core area of the former Shanghai French Concession, this project meticulously preserves and restores numerous European-style buildings and historical landmarks, exemplifying a deep respect for cultural heritage [13].

But this development introduces contemporary commercial elements, transforming the area into a comprehensive commercial district that encompasses shopping, dining, entertainment, and cultural

activities [8]. Xintiandi has become a thriving hub, attracting both tourists and locals alike, contributing significantly to the city's vibrancy.

Furthermore, Shanghai Xintiandi fosters a rich cultural and artistic environment through the hosting of diverse cultural events. It has successfully cultivated an atmosphere of fashion, creativity, and international flair, enhanced the city's cultural icon and providing residents and visitors with a plethora of leisure and entertainment options. The development has revitalized the surrounding areas, enhancing the overall image and infrastructure of the vicinity.

From an economic perspective, Shanghai Xintiandi serves as a cornerstone for local economic growth. It attracts domestic and international investments, generating numerous employment opportunities and catalyzing both commercial prosperity and urban economic development. In summary, Shanghai Xintiandi stands as a paradigm of harmoniously blending modern commercial demands with the preservation of historical and cultural heritage. Its success serves as a valuable example, offering insights and inspiration for sustainable urban development [14].

### **3.3. Consumer Culture and the Shaping of Urban**

Shanghai Xintiandi stands as a testament to the profound influence of consumer culture on the urban landscape. As a dynamic commercial hub, the area has strategically adapted to consumer-driven trends, offering diverse retail experiences and attracting a mix of local and international shoppers. Consumer preferences have not only shaped the commercial scene but have also played a pivotal role in influencing the dining and entertainment offerings, creating a vibrant and culturally rich atmosphere. Shanghai Xintiandi, therefore, exemplifies the harmonious interplay between consumer culture and urban development, resulting in a multifaceted, socially engaging, and aesthetically appealing urban environment [15].

## **4. Comparative Case Study Research**

### **4.1. Comparison with Similar Commercial Developments**

Shanghai Xintiandi (XTD) and Beijing Nanluoguxiang (NLGX) offer intriguing comparative case studies. Xintiandi, located in Shanghai, stands as a testament to the successful integration of modern commercial elements with cultural heritage preservation. In contrast, Nanluoguxiang in Beijing places a strong emphasis on preserving its historical charm, particularly prioritizing the protection of traditional alleyways. However, NLGX grapples with challenges related to commercial homogenization and the potential loss of community traditional lifestyles.

### **4.2. Issues Facing Nanluoguxiang**

Beijing's Nanluoguxiang confronts specific issues in its pursuit of maintaining uniqueness. The potential disappearance of traditional community lifestyles raises concerns about the impact of commercial development on the authentic local experience. Nanluoguxiang's struggle is underscored by the need to reconcile the preservation of historical authenticity with the demands of commercialization, coupled with the risk of eroding traditional community practices [16].

In summary, the comparative case study of Shanghai Xintiandi and Beijing Nanluoguxiang highlights distinctive approaches to urban commercial development [17]. While Xintiandi successfully navigates the balance between modernity and historical preservation, Nanluoguxiang grapples with challenges related to commercialization and the potential loss of traditional community lifestyles. These cases underscore the complexity of maintaining urban uniqueness amidst evolving commercial and cultural dynamics.

## 5. Conclusion

The redevelopment of Shanghai's Shikumen, as exemplified by the Xintiandi project, highlights the intricate balance required between preserving historical heritage and fostering modern commercial growth. Xintiandi's success lies in its ability to maintain the architectural integrity and cultural significance of Shikumen while seamlessly integrating contemporary commercial elements. This project has set a benchmark for urban renewal, demonstrating that it is possible to create vibrant commercial spaces that honor and preserve local history.

The comparative analysis of Xintiandi with Beijing's Nanluoguxiang further underscores the challenges and potential solutions in urban redevelopment. While Xintiandi showcases how historical preservation can coexist with commercial success, Nanluoguxiang illustrates the risks of over-commercialization and the loss of authentic local experiences. These cases provide valuable insights into the necessity of thoughtful urban planning that prioritizes cultural heritage alongside economic development.

In conclusion, the preservation and redevelopment of historical urban spaces like Shikumen require a nuanced approach that values cultural heritage as much as economic benefits. The experiences of Xintiandi and Nanluoguxiang offer important lessons for future projects aiming to achieve sustainable and culturally rich urban environments. By learning from these examples, urban planners and developers can better navigate the complexities of modernization while honoring the unique histories that define the cities.

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