



Advertising Homeownership through Cultural Capitalism: Neoliberal Making of New Shanghai Middle-Class Dream

Lei Ping

The New School, New York, United States

Corresponding author: Lei Ping, 66 W12th Street 6th Floor, New York NY 10011, USA.
Email: pingl@newschool.edu

Citation: Ping L, 2020, Advertising Homeownership through Cultural Capitalism: Neoliberal Making of New Shanghai Middle-Class Dream. *Journal of Chinese Architecture and Urbanism*, 2(1): 977. <http://dx.doi.org/10.36922/jcau.v2i1.977>

ABSTRACT

Private homeownership has increasingly become a kind of new obsession and a symbol of upward mobility among the emerging middle class in post-Mao Chinese society. This essay studies the neoliberal making of the new Shanghai middle-class dream by exploring how this dream is invented and imagined through the pursuit of cosmopolitan citizenship, socio-spatial class distinction, and tiered lifestyles. It analyzes and problematizes the enduring charm of Shanghai as a global “city of magic” continues to attract those who aspire to eventually own a piece of property and display cultural capital of this highly unaffordable neoliberal city. Through a series of distinct case studies of recent real estate advertisement, interior design philosophy, and signature furniture stores and architecture magazines whose storytelling aesthetics are middle-class-inspired and focused, the essay critiques the way in which private homeownership is engineered, advertised, and made as one of the key prerequisites for the new Shanghainese (*xin Shanghairen*) to become middle class in the past two decades. It argues that the making of the new Shanghai middle-class dream is problematically preconditioned by a type of state-market promotion and advertisement of private homeownership and urban citizenship that ultimately synchronizes with the state-capitalist, neoliberal making of a moderately prosperous (*xiaokang*) society where class distinctions have revived to dominate the social, cultural, and economic discourses of a bourgeois Shanghai in the age of global capitalism.

Keywords: homeownership, cosmopolitan citizenship, cultural capital, new Shanghai middle-class

Copyright: Ping L. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International 4.0 (CC BY-NC 4.0), which permits all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium provided the original work is properly cited.

1. INTRODUCTION

Guided by the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic tenets and slogans of "Reform and Opening-up," the ordinary Chinese people have been encouraged to aspire for economic prosperity and social class re-stratification in the past four decades. With state-endorsed capitalist practices taking place in the post-Mao everyday life, former socialist frugal lifestyle and sense of scarcity and self-sacrifice are rapidly replaced and overshadowed by outright conspicuous consumption and pursuit of individual success and happiness in a moderately prosperous (*xiaokang*) society ^[1]. The famous "four big items" of a modern household (*sidajian*, namely, bicycle, sewing machine, wristwatch, and radio) in the 1950s are now upgraded to seemingly universal acquisitions of private homeownership, cars, and money economy among the emerging Chinese middle class. The latest China Consumer Report 2020 shows that the urban consumers are now the main driver of the Chinese economy, with their spending accounting for more than 60% of the nation's GDP growth ^[2]. Regardless that the COVID-19 Pandemic has hit the global market hard, total sales from the first day of shopping after the lockdown was lifted in May 2020, reaching USD \$2.2 billion in the city of Shanghai alone ^[3].

At the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2017, President Xi Jinping heralded the dawn of a new era by pointing out that "The Chinese nation ... has stood up, grown rich, and become strong – and it now embraces the brilliant prospects of rejuvenation ... It will be an era that sees China moving closer to center stage and making greater contributions to [hu]mankind" ^[4]. For Xi, such a new historical juncture foresees the pursuit of the Chinese Dream ^[5]. Hence, a robust middle class is regarded by the Chinese State as the vanguard and precondition for continuously building a prosperous *xiaokang* society and a rejuvenated nation. Predicted to surpass

550 million in 2022, the Chinese middle class is already the world's largest consumer force ^[6]. And by 2022 a new middle class (those earning \$17,300 to \$37,000) will account for 54% of residents in Chinese cities, and more than 75% of China's urban consumers will earn 60,000 to 229,000 RMB (USD \$9,000 to \$34,000) annually ^[7].

Among the many attributes of the emerging Chinese middle class, homeownership is often considered as the "quintessential Chinese dream." Largely due to the long-term ownership-oriented housing policies, Chinese urban homeownership rates are now among the highest in the world. The nation has rapidly developed its housing stock since 1979 after Deng Xiaoping came to power. Noted by China National Statistics Bureau, per capita housing space increased from 4 sqm in 1980 to 27.1 sqm in 2006 ^[8]. It is argued that housing is becoming a property that is central to urban development in the past 20 years in China. The radical shift in housing tenure from socialist public housing provision to housing privatization and commodification has given rise to now known as a nation of homeowners. Homeownership rate in urban China first time reached 82% in 2007 and became the highest in the world ^[9]. Based on the statistics from the National Statistical Bureau, in 2010, homeownership rate reached 89.3% in the urban sector, among which 38% urban residents own commodity housing, 11.2% own inherited private housing, and 40.1% own privatized public housing (aka. "reform housing") ^[10]. In 2019, about 96% of China's urban households owned at least one home, according to a Chinese central bank survey released in April 2020 ^[11].

It is important to understand how and why homeownership plays such a central role in the nation's making of the middle-class *xiaokang* society in the post-Mao era, especially since the late 1990s. Radical urbanization and gentrification processes have simultaneously taken place

throughout urban China, echoing the accelerated and strengthened market reforms. The nation's GDP-oriented economic growth model has heavily relied on capital accumulation in the commercialized housing and land market. Housing reform has been anchored on privatization of previously public rental housing through subsidized sales, commodification of the housing sector with massive provision of private housing, and promotion of homeownership, all of which have contributed to the rapid increase in homeownership in the nation ^[12]. The housing policies in the 1990s revealed the government's strategic plan in "seeking every means to disengage from public housing through the promotion of homeownership" ^[13]. The accelerated housing marketization since 2003 and new commodity housing for sale promoted the expansion of the housing markets in Chinese cities ^[14]. The housing sector, in this case, similar to what David Harvey underlines about the American housing market, on the one hand is an important stabilizer of the economy; on the other hand, it directly absorbs a great deal of surplus capital through various phases and forms of urbanization ^[15]. Homeownership is thus a crucial tool with which the Chinese State aims to tackle its post-1989, post-Tiananmen Democracy Movement legitimization crisis by providing an economic turn and a temporary remedy to the aftermath of the massive forced demolition and displacement, also known as "accumulation by dispossession" and "creative destruction" ^[16] following the state's neoliberal-looking market reforms. The omnipresent intervention of the Chinese State in the market, in other words, pro-market policy combined with state authoritarianism, in this respect, is often labeled as "Neoliberalism with Chinese Characteristics" by scholars and critics in the West ^[17]. It is argued that the neoliberal state, rather than a regulator of the market, has become the consummate agent of the market ^[18].

With domestic commercial housing reaching USD \$1.2 billion in 1993, Shanghai, one of the nation's first-tier megacities officially entered a new phase of rapid economic development. By 2004, housing and real estate became the city's third largest key industries. In 2007 alone, over 5 million sqm of high-end residential housing were sold in Shanghai. In the meantime, financial profits that development companies gained reached 73.6 billion RMB that year, among the biggest winners in this process ^[19]. According to statistics, between January and August 2014, the total sales volume of Shanghai's housing market was 5,417,000 sqm (or 45,927 units) and the sales volume of high-end residential property (defined as 40,000 RMB per sqm or above) increased by 5.1% (or 5,696 units) ^[20]. In 2011, Shanghai's total GDP grew to \$297 billion with GDP per capita of \$12,784. In 2018, it reached \$494 billion and became the nation's number one ^[21]. Meanwhile, the emerging Shanghai middle class, rivaling its counterparts in other megacities such as Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, has significantly contributed to the making of the nation's distinct middle class. Largely constituted by urban professionals and entrepreneurs who have college degrees, the emerging Chinese middle class remains as a fluid and unfolding concept. Based on metrics such as income bands and purchasing power parity (PPP), those whose average annual income between 75,000 and 500,000 RMB (USD \$11,500 and \$62,500) were already considered the middle class in China in 2010 ^[22]. However, it is worth noting that the income bands for the middle class in these megacities are usually considerably higher than those of lower-tier cities largely due to the cost-of-living differences resulted from the nation's historical uneven development. According to the Social Blue Paper published in December 2015 by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), an average middle-class citizen in Shanghai earns 219,770 RMB (USD \$34,007) annually,

and more than half of Shanghai residents can already be considered as middle class [23].

Thus, in cities like Shanghai where wealth is distributed increasingly unevenly, and showcased explicitly and admirably, homeownership, among other material categories, has come to define general quality of life, class distinctions, and social status of the ordinary urbanites. It is often regarded as the ultimate passport and magic wand with which emerging middle-class floating population, or simply known as white-collar *waidiren* (those whose origins are not from Shanghai) can claim true citizenship and rights to the city [24]. Like many other major Chinese cities, what has become the driving force of Shanghai's fervid fascination with homeownership is a type of government-sponsored neoliberal cultural capitalism and state entrepreneurialism in the name of building a middle-class *xiaokang* society as well as one of the world's leading global cities. With China's new state entrepreneurialism, Fulong Wu observes that it manifests a different state-market relation, that is, "the state acts through the market rather than just being market friendly" [25]. In the meantime, relying on the production of symbols, knowledge, and information as the guiding principle of capital and wealth creation, cultural capitalism, according to Slavoj Žižek, becomes the sale of attitudes and lifestyles. It differs from traditional industrial capitalism and is in fact "global capitalism with a human face" [26]. The key players in this new type of capitalism are transnational media companies and advertising agencies that control cultural resources and advertise neoliberal values such as cultural sensibility, aspiration, affect, individual freedom, social status, wealth accumulation, among many other seemingly bourgeois imaginations. In the context of selling homeownership dream to the emerging new Shanghai middle class, cultural capitalism is skillfully played out by abiding by state-controlled neoliberal principles. As Giovanni Arrighi powerfully

points out, "Capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state, when it is the state" [27].

With the massive and often violent demolition of the vernacular and heritage architecture – Shanghai *longtang* alleyway houses since the early 1990s, many Shanghai natives and original *longtang* residents were displaced and relocated to what is known as "new social welfare" apartments (*xin gongfang*) at the outskirts of the city [28]. Meanwhile, the nationwide radical urbanization process has resulted in historically unprecedented large-scale migration. Shanghai, as one of the most hyper-modern vertical megacities, has attracted people from everywhere. Soon there emerged a group of new settlers who is called "New Shanghainese" (*xin Shanghairen*). Noted in an article by *People's Daily* in December 2001, the term "New Shanghainese" is distinguished from the "native Shanghainese" or "old Shanghainese," and usually refers to urban professionals recently migrated to the city who belong to the middle-income stratum, and those who have a Shanghai household registration system (*hukou*) and identification card with first three digits starting other than "310" [29]. The New Shanghainese's non-native (*waidi*) roots, education background, family value, and aspirations to upward social mobility seem to make them great candidates for the Shanghai middle-class membership club. Most importantly, housing status, among other pursuits, is one of the definitive preconditions for acquiring what is known as "cosmopolitan citizenship." Dwelling in a global metropolis where one's success seems to be largely and increasingly measured by the sophistication of housing, levels of wealth, and abundance of material possession and cultural capital, these anxious minds are deeply intrigued by the phantasmagoria of Shanghai where all appears unsettling without a decent deed of property ownership.

With private homeownership substantially becoming a kind of new

obsession in Chinese cities, advertising private homeownership is thus to introduce and marketize a new concept of lifestyle, sensibility, aesthetics, and philosophy with which the emerging Shanghai middle class is ready to cultivate itself. This essay studies the neoliberal making of the new Shanghai middle-class cosmopolitan citizenship dream by exploring how this dream is invented and imagined through the pursuit of cosmopolitan citizenship, socio-spatial class distinction, and tiered lifestyles. It analyzes and problematizes the enduring charm of Shanghai as a global “city of magic” (*modu*) continues to attract those who aspire to own private property and display cultural capital of this highly unaffordable neoliberal city. Through a series of distinct case studies of recent real estate advertisement, interior design ideals (*li nian*), and signature furniture stores and architecture magazines whose storytelling and image-making are middle-class-inspired and focused, the essay critiques the way in which private homeownership is engineered, advertised, and made as one of the key prerequisites for the new Shanghaiese (*xin Shanghairen*) to become middle class in the past two decades. It argues that the making of the new Shanghai middle-class dream is problematically preconditioned by a type of state-market promotion and advertisement of private homeownership and urban citizenship that ultimately synchronizes with the state-capitalist, neoliberal making of a *xiaokang* society where class distinctions have revived to dominate the social, cultural, and economic discourses of a bourgeois Shanghai in the age of global capitalism.

2. COSMOPOLITAN URBAN CITIZENSHIP AND ENDURING LURE OF SHANGHAI

From one of the earliest and largest treaty ports after the first Opium War to “Paris of the East” in the Republican era (1911–1949), and then a capitalist “sin city” labeled by the Chinese Communist Party in the Mao era (1949–1976), Shanghai, as the

French historian Marie-Claire Bergère depicts, “the gateway to China’s modernity,” experienced and witnessed the ebbs and flows of history and dramatic relations to bourgeois cosmopolitanism. Recognized as the cradle of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921 and a battleground for disseminating communist ideologies during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Shanghai, nevertheless, has never easily besieged its profoundly bourgeois sensibility and aspirations culminated in the way of ordinary urbanites’ everyday life and cultural consumption. In 1992, upon the completion of the historic tour of South China by the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, Shanghai was strategically re-positioned as the nation’s “dragon head” and economic backbone of the strengthened market reforms. This was shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the June 4th Democracy Movement in 1989, when economic development was made as the nation’s “shock therapy” and top priority to cope with the political and social unrest. The full-fledged tidal wave of global capitalism, thus ironically grants Shanghai a sense of new found legitimacy, through which it has come in full circle and emerged as a hyper-capitalist global city reminiscent of the modern times before the 1949 socialist revolution^[30]. With the state-advocated integration into the global market and the nation’s official entry to the WTO in 2001, the once denounced and repudiated Shanghai bourgeois cosmopolitanism seems to be quickly rekindled by the socio-spatial re-stratification of the city through the nation’s radical urbanization and hyper-modernization.

2.1. Aspirations to Cosmopolitan Citizenship

The enduring lure of Shanghai cosmopolitanism can be largely explained by the revival of the city’s prominent *haipai* (Shanghai style) culture in the post-Mao era. Originated in the late Qing dynasty, *haipai* embodies the heterogeneous characteristic

that attracts domestic migrants and foreign Shanghailanders in the past two centuries^[31]. The tumultuous yet distinctive urban history of Shanghai has left significant imprints of convergence and co-inhabitation of cultures, customs, ideologies and people on the city. Shanghai, in this sense, as noted by Xiong Yuezhi as well as many other Shanghai Studies historians, inherits a world spirit like “an ocean welcomes all rivers” (*hai na bai chuan*). It is thus a place and space where the East meets the West, socialist tradition wrestles with bourgeois culture, and revolutionary sublimity intersects with ordinary mundanity. The distinctiveness and particularity of Shanghai modernity also sets Shanghai apart from the rest of the nation, which, to a great extent, stems from the urban history of Shanghai and the kind of uneven development between the city and the provinces – a rather familiar discourse embedded within the nation’s own search for modernity.

The implementation of the household registration system (*hukou*) in 1958 endorsed by Mao, aiming at social and population control, widened the gap between the urban and the rural sectors. *Hukou* serves an identity proof for citizens while also records one’s basic information and permanent residence. A Shanghai *hukou*, deemed as one of the most privileged and much coveted urban *hukou*, has become nearly impossible to obtain by migrants from other parts of China. During the post-Mao market reforms, however, the *hukou* system is often criticized as a controversial and outmoded state policy. The restrictions of social mobility set by the *hukou* system are increasingly recognized as an obstacle to the nation’s ambitious goal of urbanization and globalization which requires free flow of people, capital, and labor. The influx of white-collar and blue-collar migrant workers to the cities demands policy reform to better respond to the needs in housing, education, and social welfare, namely, a more sustainable migration system. It is in this context that in

2018, cities like Shanghai and Beijing launched what is called “point-based *hukou* system.” Under the new policy, non-natives of the city who held a temporary residence permit with the city’s social insurance records for seven consecutive years without a criminal record are eligible to accumulate points for the urban *hukou*^[32]. However, the highly competitive system largely favors those who are regarded as the professional middle class with good employment and educational background. This kind of exclusive and differentiating tendency in the *hukou* reform process was also seen in the state’s *hukou* relaxation policy in 2019. Although significant change was made to the *hukou* system by relaxation of the *hukou* policy in medium- and small-size, namely, second, third, and fourth-tier cities as part of the 2019 Urbanization Plan endorsed by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the nation’s 13 first-tier cities (also known as megacities and super cities) including Shanghai are excluded from the relaxation practice^[33]. According to the guidelines issued by the State Council and the Communist Party of China Central Committee, those who can apply for a Shanghai *hukou* include the new university graduates, those who earned at least a bachelor’s degree overseas, those who have qualified talent, such as having established a startup, owning patents, holding senior management roles in a leading company^[34]. In other words, for those white-collar migrants who are often referred to as a “marginal middle class,” with the potential to join the actual middle class^[35], obtaining a Shanghai *hukou* remains as an uphill battle.

Thus, the aspirations to what Gerard Delanty and John Rundell call “cosmopolitan citizenship” in this context are not something to be easily acquired by anyone, but rather a highly desirable dream requires tremendous cultural, financial, and social capital^[36]. Saskia Sassen describes the global city as a partially denationalized space that enables migrants to lay claim to partial and aspirational forms of

cosmopolitan urban citizenship ^[37]. This kind of cosmopolitan citizenship in the case of Shanghai, although seemingly attainable as the metropolis claims its hospitality in the spirit of cosmopolitanism, it is fundamentally based on acquisitions of *hukou* and private property ownership, without which one is deemed as an “absolute stranger” deprived of the true rights to the city. Absolute strangers, as Agnes Heller notes, “are not estranged from their world because the world in which they live has never been theirs. They are not strangers because they act against the expectations of others, just the contrary – they are expected to act as strangers. Their relation to the world is accidental, for the territory of their actions has nothing to do with their roots, upbringing and tradition” ^[38]. The realization of the dream in cities like Shanghai, governed by the principles of neoliberal state capitalism, reinforces and perpetuates the privilege of the Shanghainese identity versus the *waidi* “outsiders” and “strangers” in the city. For those *waidi* dreamers, becoming Shanghainese is first and foremost to erase and overcome the sense of estrangedness and social class and place-based discrimination. It is a status symbol that fulfils a sense of achievement and success. An admirable Shanghai *hukou* is the admission ticket without which the non-Shanghai natives are not able to claim true cosmopolitan citizenship in a city whose *haipai* culture, embracing neoliberal self-governing and self-cultivating entrepreneurial value system, is shaped by its class-coded conspicuous consumption, hierarchy of desire, and socio-spatial distinction.

2.2. Becoming New Shanghainese: “To buy or not to buy?”

In this sense, obtaining a Shanghai *hukou* is only the first step for those new settlers and dreamers to “become Shanghainese.” In addition to *hukou*, private homeownership is another major validator with which cosmopolitan citizenship is often deemed to

be truly exercised. The reality, however, is that the unrelenting real estate boom and sky-rocketing housing prices in Shanghai and other megacities have crushed many homeownership dreams. The speed of inflation is known always faster than that of saving ^[39]. “To buy or not to buy” comes to the fore of the conundrum for the “new Shanghai middle-class-to-be.”

What is also worth noting is that the sale of residential properties was not permitted in China until the late 1980s. The year 1988 marked a turning point in land transaction history in the nation – together with introducing the sale of existing public housing and newly built housing stocks across the entire nation, land leasehold market was formally established. In Shanghai, a first lot of land was successfully leased to a Japanese company that eventually started the trend. It is in this context that private homeownership is recognized as a relatively recent concept since it was officially launched in 1998 after the State Council endorsed the abolition of the nation’s employer-allocated work-unit *danwei* housing system inherited from the socialist tradition ^[40]. The nation’s housing policy since then has been geared toward prioritizing market provision over public housing.

During the last two decades of the strengthened market reforms, private homeownership dream has been feverishly advertised by real estate developers, brokers, and state media, and more recently, by social media as the key prerequisite for the ideal (*linian*) of building a sense of home, individual happiness, and good life, as well as a prosperous *xiaokang* society. According to Aihwa Ong and Li Zhang, post-Mao marketization and privatization are accompanied by values of self-optimization that liberate subjects and induce them to pursue a range of self-managing goals in everyday life ^[41]. Although the rapid inflation of housing prices seems to make the state-engineered middle-class homeownership dream increasingly unreachable, the fetishization

of this dream at the same time, clouds eager homebuyers' sense of judgement and conceals the relentless and unsustainable upward climb of the real estate market boom. Some of the determined new Shanghai middle-class-to-be are often portrayed as prototypes of "property slaves" (*fangnu*) in the nation's hit TV dramas such as *Dwelling Narrowness* (*Woju*), *Property Slaves* (*Fangnu*), and *Ode to Joy* (*Huanlesong*), to name a few. The newly imagined ideal, in stark contrast to Maoist-socialist self-sacrifice, classless, frugal, and collective value, is thus well received and internalized by the young urbanites as one of the "must-haves" to secure a decent middle-class lifestyle, and oftentimes, a proper marriage. Interesting academic research findings, as well as an interview published by *New York Times* in 2011 showed that young urban professionals in Chinese cities, especially men, increasingly find themselves lovelorn and despairing as a growing number of women insist that they select a mate with a property deed^[42]. Pressured by the face (*mianzi*) culture as well as the increasingly materialistic and wealth-flaunting post-Mao consumerism, many of the so-called "post-1980" younger generation (*balinghou*) are trapped in the fixation on real estate and competition for social class status, reminiscent of the doomed "Keeping up with the Joneses" tragedy in the West. Those new settlers who have a Shanghai *hukou* but are identified as "property-less renters," often feel "losing face" and not yet Shanghainese. A big proportion of their seemingly high income is usually spent on costly rent which leaves them limited maneuvering space to become a homeowner in the city.

Mounting pressure notwithstanding, the New Shanghainese (*xin Shanghairen*) are not ready to give up their Shanghai middle-class homeownership dream. Statistics also show that these new settlers continue to find ways to enter the homeownership market. It is pointed out by researchers that homeownership in China is distinctly a multi-generational endeavor.

Parents and grandparents often make considerable contribution to the homebuying process to help alleviate financial burdens for their children and grandchildren^[43]. In addition to this kind of gifting, the rapid expansion of homeownership is also fueled by the nation's high saving rate, thus the financial capital to buy into homeownership^[44]. In addition, it is important to note that regardless of the abolition of the employer-subsidized housing benefits associated with the former socialist work-unit system, the emerging white-collar middle class who work at places such as government agencies, public institutions, and large state-owned enterprises (SOEs), are usually provided with access to a type of employment-based housing saving deposit, called "Housing Provident Fund" (HPF), which substantially helps this middle-income group of employees to afford their homeownership dream^[45]. These combined facts to some extent explain how a homeowner society has been formed in spite of the disproportionate income-to-housing price ratio in megacities such as Shanghai.

3. ADVERTISING HOMEOWNERSHIP DREAM IN THE RE-STRATIFIED NEOLIBERAL METROPOLIS

Encapsulated in the waves of what Joseph Schumpeter calls "creative destruction" since the 1980s, Shanghai observes new and exhilarating hyper-modern urban spectacles. With the constantly expanded downtown financial district, the city finds itself re-mapping what was previously categorized as "upper corner" (*shangzhijiao*) and "lower corner" (*xiazhijiao*) – a type of social class-coded spatial distinctions that was familiar to "old Shanghainese" (*lao Shanghairen*) before the massive demolition of the historic Shanghai *longtang* neighborhoods. Today's Shanghai cityscape is re-configured by its ring-road determined real estate value, namely, by "inner ring"

(*neihuan*), “middle-ring” (*zhonghuan*), “outer-ring” (*waihuan*), and “suburb ring” (*jiaohuan*). The new regime of living is advertised as a new way to achieve a distinct class identity through homeownership consumption in neoliberal cities like Shanghai. As Jean Baudrillard discovers, “Consumption has become the chief basis of the social order and of its internal classifications... consumer objects have their effect in structuring behavior through a linguistic sign function” [46]. The meaning of the kind of “linguistic sign” in this case is manifested in the advertising and branding of homeownership – one of the quintessential consumer objects in Chinese society today. By re-inventing and invoking meanings and desires for a modern private homeownership dream, real estate advertisement guides Shanghai urbanites and settlers, native and non-native to the city, to dream about a kind of re-stratified lifestyle, value system, and cultural capital beyond the often-construed as outmoded *Shanghai longtang* and socialist welfare housing. Homeownership, thereby, is sold by the majestic hand of advertisement that cultivates and facilitates the spread of consumerist values. The production and reproduction of consumer-driven ideology has quickly replaced socialist revolutionary ideology that paints a utopian picture of ordinary people’s everyday life and advocates egalitarian, classless, and propertyless societal ethos and values.

In the following section, real estate advertisements will be studied through three signature cultural and architectural styles that attract those whose income categories belong to the middle and upper-middle class in Shanghai, namely, Puxi “upper-corner” high-rise, “modest extravaganza” (*qingshe* 轻奢), and suburbia brownstone. The study intends to show how advertisements have become the extended voice and agency of neoliberal cultural capitalism from which “hierarchy of desire” is spatialized through a new understanding of luxury and class identity

in Shanghai [47]. In other words, the re-imagined spatial order in Shanghai renders a kind of location-specific aspirations of social mobility that ties one’s social class to the type of private property that one owns. Advertisement, in this sense, exercises its power through what Pierre Bourdieu calls a “homology,” that is, “a perfect...harmony between... expectations ... and ... dispositions” [48]. Similarly, advertisement entices and aligns the expectations of homebuyers with their cultivated and differentiated taste and dispositions. And taste, according to Bourdieu, is “the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference” [49].

3.1. Downtown Puxi: Global Aspiration and International Branding

Puxi, known as the only synonym of Shanghai before Pudong was discovered and developed into a mega financial district in the 1990s, has always been regarded as the most desirable location when it comes to real estate value, albeit the city’s ambitious expansion to the other side of the Huangpu River. Given the soaring housing prices in the past few decades, owning a piece of property in the heart of Puxi or also known as “within the inner ring” (*neihuan*), often translates into an immediate sense of privilege and social distinction.

Jing’an district whose ambiance known for its “Old Shanghai” charm, former colonial heritage and prime location in Puxi, has welcomed a large number of upper-middle class urban professionals over the years. Jing’an Mushe (静安穆舍) – a residential high-rise complex that appropriates the concept of western-style art and spacious living – becomes a new landmark of Jing’an district. Distinguished from many other contemporary Shanghai commercial residences, Jing’an Mushe advertises itself as a unique residence that offers “innovative artworks of the century” and “100% Shanghai residential property ownership.”



Figure 1. Jing'an Mushe, Shanghai. Source: <https://jinganmushe.fang.com>

Developed by the Mingyuan Group – a renowned Shanghai luxury building developer, Jing'an Mushe made its debut following the company's series of other artistic real estate projects, such as Mingyuan Century City and Mingyuan Xiaonan Bridge in downtown Xuhui district, and Lancui Art Villa in Jing'an district. The recently released marketing statement in 2019 depicts Jing'an Mushe as a dreamland saturated in the poetics and philosophy of the classic Daoist way of living – ethereal, serene, hermitic amidst the urban hustle-bustle. Priced at 88,000 RMB and more per sqm, Mushe promotes global aspirations and international branding. From fascinations with the French modernist Rodin sculpture garden style, to inspirations by German postmodernist avant-garde Bauhaus architecture, Mushe loudly displays its array of “exquisitely constructed material by the world's top brands”^[50]. The featured luxury name brand extends widely from German Miele kitchen finish to Duravit dream bathroom, Hörmann doors to Italian SCIC cabinets, and from French Aldes air ventilation system to American eco-water system and Japanese Daikin air conditioners. The apartments are promised to be a rare find with its incomparable space in the competitive Shanghai real estate market, ranging from 90 sqm to 165 sqm. This kind of large open-space downtown living concept is believed to be visually expansive

that better corresponds to the enhanced flow of the Chinese notion of *chi* – a kind of vital life force to facilitate one's well-being and quality of life.

Positioned at the level of “modest luxury design,” Mushe finds its niche market targeting prospective buyers that adore the revived Shanghai cosmopolitanism and global vision. Interestingly resonating with what historian Paul Fussell explains in his 1983 popular read, *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*, the Mushe homeowners-to-be, without self-realizing, may already have become the piquant sufferers of middle class “status panic.” The yearning for new class distinctions, modern living experience, design and aesthetics is all that matters, thus worth achieving for those anxiously care to climb up the social class ladder in Shanghai.

Mushe is not alone when it comes to selling the so-called “topnotch international living standard.” London Plaza (伦敦广场) – another successful luxury high-rise development in Shanghai Gubei New District has attracted sophisticated buyers since its grand opening in 2004. Recognized as the city's first large-scale high-end international residential community in 1986, Gubei has been a highly desirable and cosmopolitan place for the new Shanghainese and Shanghaianders, including expatriates, entrepreneurs, and professionals from more than 30 countries. The first phase of the development, seen in the clusters of commercial and residential buildings, adopts many well-known Western names and continental European architectural styles. The high-rise apartments are boldly named after various kinds of diamond and jade, among other precious jewelry and stones. And the single-detached villas seem to explicitly showcase a kind of Chinese adaptation of what characterized by John Darlington in his recent analysis, entitled *Fake Heritage: Why We Rebuild Monuments* as “copyist heritage” – a series of replicas of European cities and monuments such as Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Athens, Rome, and

Rotterdam ^[51]. More than 20 luxury apartment buildings and half-million square meters of space have mushroomed ever since, with a touch and feel of the imagined “European outlook.” Sculptures, fountains, gardens, and lawns, all of which tempt to redefine the vernacular architectural space that form stark contrast with the Shanghai *longtang* heritage. By the end of the 20th century, Gubei’s skyline became the city’s new glamorous urban landmark, contributing to the ever-changing cityscape.



Figure 2. Lundun Guangchang (London Plaza), Shanghai Gubei. Source: <https://lundunguangchang.fang.com/photo/1210075942.htm>

The average square meter of London Plaza is recently priced between 58,000 RMB and 70,000 RMB (USD \$8,972 and \$10,829), according to one of the popular real estate search engines Fangtianxia ^[52]. Advertised as an “aristocratic living space” with 5-star hotel service, amenities, European neoclassic exterior and interior design features, and imported brand-name appliances, the 24-storey garden apartments suit the taste of the young urban professionals (“yuppies”). The indisputably convenient location that offers walking distance to neighboring private international schools, the French supermarket Carrefour, Hongqiao Hotel, and Cherry Blossom Vacation Village, are all elegantly highlighted in the sales brochures.

Like Jing’an Mushe and London Plaza, many “upper corner” Puxi real estate developments continue to cultivate consumer aspirations and desires by relying on cultural imaginations in a so-called “global context.” Branding, as Fulong Wu points out, is a status symbol for these residential areas in a competitive real estate market, while localized, imagined and hybrid “western” forms are invented and adopted to exploit the common social mentality that treats the western style as equivalent to a modern and high-quality environment ^[53]. However, by simply associating luxury and modernity with a broadly defined notion of the West, advertising promotes a blind pursuit of commodity fetishism and social status based on name-dropping, kitsch emulations.

3.2. New Pudong: Modern *Haipai* and “Modest Extravaganza”

The native Shanghainese would certainly remember the old saying about Pudong before its drastic transformation since the 1990s – “One would rather prefer a simple bed in Puxi to a spacious room in Pudong” ^[54]. Pudong may be labeled as the underdeveloped countryside (*xiangxia*) built on rice patties 40 years ago, it appears on the world map today as a globally renowned financial center. Developed into four major zones, the New Pudong District is comprised of Lujiazui financial district, Zhangjiang high-tech park, Jinqiao export processing zone, and Waigaoqiao free trade zone. Redefined by the dazzling constellation of the world’s top-tier glittering skyscrapers in Lujiazui, Pudong’s hypermodern and expanding skyline is the story of Shanghai’s post-Mao resurgence as the nation’s economic backbone and a global financial hub. Now home to many Chinese nouveau riche and the emerging middle class, Pudong has become the emblem of New Shanghai in the age of global capitalism.



Figure 3. Feicui Gongyuan, Pudong, Shanghai.

Source:

<https://xf.house.163.com/sh/photo/0SXG.html?name=p035>

Among these four premier districts, Zhangjiang High-Tech Park is widely known as “Shanghai’s Silicon Valley.” Over the past two decades, it has attracted more than 450,000 white-collar office workers and 300 Fortune 500 companies, including the big Chinese real estate name Vanke ^[55]. Among the new homes in Zhangjiang, Jade Park (*Feicui gongyuan* 翡翠公园), developed by the recognized name Vanke in 2017, is an exemplary case as to how the concept of “modest extravaganza” (*qingshe* 轻奢) is advertised and made popular to the middle-class homebuyers. Located on the premise of Zhangjiang High-Tech Park, the 300,000 sqm New Park land caters to those who have studied overseas and specialize in finance, IT, and engineering. Expanded from Vanke’s other American-style inspired residential developments located within the “inner middle-ring” (*nei zhonghuan*), the 25-storey high-rise adds another characteristic to the already matured residential community by introducing medium- to small-size luxury apartment units to accommodate the rising demand. Priced at 75,000 RMB to 90,000 RMB (USD \$11,602 to \$13,923) per sqm, Jade Park competes with those popular addresses in Puxi. Its self-claimed star-character design and architectural style intend to seek balance between modernism and Zen. Its design philosophy claims to be inspired not only by that of the Battery Park

City apartments in New York that advocates the idea of freedom, openness, and innovation, but also by that of SoHo and Fifth Avenue that turns boutique shopping into an everyday lifestyle.

Compared to the ultra-extravaganza design that one usually observes in the Chinese nouveau riche community, “modest extravaganza” in this case is perceived as a low-key petty-bourgeois way of living that well suits the emerging Shanghai middle class. Rather than explicitly flaunting wealth, the pursuit of affordable luxury can be effortlessly achieved through classic minimalism and modernism with a hybrid origin of both the Eastern and Western design elements. According to a popular style-guide newspaper *Kandian Kuaibao*, “modest extravaganza” is depicted as a type of aspirations for nobility that is veiled by seemingly minimalistic interior design. It is a manifestation of self-perfection and personality-building ^[56]. Such an aesthetically appealing appropriation of culture has also become a signature advertising statement for Jade Park through which it envisages the revival of Shanghai *haipai* cosmopolitanism in Pudong, rivaling with the “Old Shanghai” on the other side of the Huangpu River.

3.3. Songjiang: Suburbia Brownstone and Origin of Old Shanghai

Another quintessential architectural motif that is increasingly adored among the new Shanghai middle class is the Euro-American inspired brownstone, or *bulangsidong* in Chinese. Songjiang – a historic prefecture and origin of the modern-day Shanghai has certainly taken a lead in this trend. Officially rezoned as a new suburban district of Shanghai in 1998, Songjiang is known for its development of Songjiang New City – a major part of the “One City, Nine Towns” Initiative passed by the Shanghai Planning Commission in 2001. The “One City” refers to Songjiang New City where its most well-known residential community Thames Town

emerged alongside the Songjiang University Town, 30 km away from central Shanghai. Thames Town is built as a mini replica of the original British town – Lyme Regis, while the other “nine towns” of the initiative adopt Western names and themes from Canada, Germany, Italy, Spain, Scandinavia, and the Netherlands ^[57]. Each satellite town, according to John Darlington, would have a different identity, partly to test alternative models for city living in a country where the new-town norm is one of monotonous, medium-rise uniformity; and partly as marketing device to attract Shanghai’s growing middle class to live there ^[58]. However, the importation of the kind of copyist adaptation of Western architectural and urbanization forms seems to celebrate cultural capitalism without self-reflection and self-critique.

Most of today’s Songjiang, in addition to its growing local population, has observed an influx of new migrants. Many of these new settlers are well-educated young professionals whose relatively modest income finds suburban districts such as Songjiang more affordable and welcoming. The kind of demand for brownstones has created another niche market for real estate developers. Among the recent residential developments, Jindi Zizai City (金地自在城) is a great example of what Fulong Wu calls “transplanting cityscapes” from an imagined global context to the local practices of urbanization in Chinese cities as a conscious and exploitative action by real estate developers ^[59]. Located at the “outer suburb ring” (*wai jiaohuan*) quite distant from downtown Shanghai notwithstanding, Jindi Zizai City is advertised as a new destination to realize the middle-class suburbia dream that otherwise is unattainable for this income group elsewhere.

Completed in 2014, Jindi Zizai City is a brownstone residential community developed by Jindi Real Estate Company in Sijing, Songjiang. The original Chinese name *Zizaicheng* implies financial freedom

and slow-paced leisure. Priced at 25,000 RMB (USD \$3,867) per sqm when first on the market, Jindi Zizai City’s small- to medium-size townhouse-style apartments target at white-collar migrants and young families from other regions who plan to settle down in Shanghai. A convenient stone throw-away from the newly completed Shanghai No. 9 metro line, the community provides convenience to those who commute to the city center for work.

Before zooming into the case of Jindi Zizai City, it is important to find out why brownstone townhouse-style architecture has become a global attraction among the middle class. Charles Lockwood, the late expert on historic brownstones and author of *Bricks and Brownstone: The New York Row House 1783-1929*, notes that by the late 1840s, brownstone became the most fashionable building material for row-house facades in the US ^[60]. The lasting fascination with brownstone rowhouses in New York had much to do with its architectural distinctiveness and cultural symbolism that reflected the mid-19th-century popularity of Romantic Classicism, particularly the adoration of nature. With engrained connection to nature, the visually enhanced ubiquitous monumentality of brownstone rowhouses was seen as a refreshing alternative to the hectic everyday life experienced in cities like New York resulted from industrialization and urbanization. Brownstone material was also made affordable for the American middle class ever since the invention of steam-powered machinery during the Industrial Revolution. Over the years, it is an open secret that for middle-class townhouse and rowhouse owners who desire a taste of luxury, brownstone is undoubtedly their top choice as it has already become a symbol of wealth as both the material and style of brownstone have encountered scarcity in supply with the closedown of the 300-year-old company Portland Brownstone Quarry in 2012 ^[61].



Figure 4. Jindi Zizai City, Songjiang, Shanghai.
Source: <https://www.zhihu.com/question/52066185>

Now this kind of scarcity problem seems to be temporarily resolved as brownstones are reproduced across the globe. By reappropriating the ideals of brownstone through localized real estate advertisement, now brownstones are increasingly occupying a unique place in the psyche of Shanghai. The advertisement for Jindi Zizai City, for example, is visually compelling and poetic. With images of a young, loving, Western-looking couple imprinted on a series of posters, it makes the following statement:

“Shanghai belongs to lovers (*airen*) and warriors (*yongshi*).

The most interesting people in the world, half of whom live in Shanghai, half of whom find ways to come to Shanghai.

Shanghai does not allow conformists. It welcomes those who are unconventional.

There may be numerous places in the world that allow you to find yourself, but Shanghai makes you redefine yourself” [62].

These words seem to strike an emotional chord with eager homebuyers who are determined to “find ways to come to Shanghai” as the advertisement states. Calling them “warriors” in a city that does not favor “conventional conformists,” the advertisement reinvents a type of consumer psychology that encourages a risk-taking, “heroic” mentality by ushering them to embrace a new financially “liberated” self. The statement mystifies the lure of Shanghai, and immediately turns

brownstone into an ideal home for those who strive for a balance between professional success and family-building. It strategically captures human emotions by associating them with a kind of neoliberal self-managing and self-advancing principle. Cultural capital thus plays an essential role in conveying the key message to homebuyers through which a new concept of Western modern living is reappropriated in Shanghai suburbia.

4. REINVENTING BOURGEOIS LIFESTYLE THROUGH INTERIOR DESIGN AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Writing about the notion of “global city,” Saskia Sassen points out that high-salary professionals, managers, and workers become a very visible part of urban life through distinct consumption patterns, lifestyles, and high-income gentrification [63]. This kind of distinct lifestyle-making permeates the great transformation of private living space among the new Shanghai middle class. With more space at play than four decades ago, the Shanghai ordinary urbanites now need new ideas for interior design and home décor that reflect their cultivated taste, cultural capital, and social status. According to a study by the Chinese Business Network Yicai Global in 2018, the Chinese home decoration and furniture market was estimated at \$740 billion, and that market keeps rising and evolving, both offline and online [64]. In the past few years, the number of companies in the interior-decoration industry has risen to more than 183,000 [65]. The growing demand opens the floodgates for both domestic and global furniture brands and lifestyle trend-setters. A large amount of furniture and lifestyle concept shops have debuted in Shanghai and many other metropolitan areas across China, including style and fashion brands that are now adding lines of interior design and home décor to catch the wave.

New interior design concepts and styles are created and marketized to tailor

to the so-called “culturally astute and increasingly discerning taste of urban consumers” in rapidly urbanizing Chinese cities ^[66]. Meanwhile, these transnational and global-local cultural forms are swiftly influencing the subconscious of the emerging middle-class homeowners. Analyzing the art of rent, David Harvey points out that human cognition itself becomes the “product” with a lifecycle, as the structured incentives of competition, law and state police power guide capitalists in their attempts to extract monopoly rents from the “cultural commons” – shared meanings of cultural distinctiveness, authenticity and aesthetic sensibilities produced through the social practices of particular times and places ^[67]. In other words, equipped with cognitive cultural capitalism, ideals of a modern home are not only universalized but also internalized and become a kind of consumer subconscious. In the following section, this new booming industry of interior design and lifestyle-making will be foregrounded through case studies of designer furniture brands and concept stores, such as IKEA, Neri & Hu, Pusu, and Zaozuo.com, to name a few. Social media and design magazines will also be studied as they become key mediums through which the sophisticated middle-class interiority is shaped by the new means of advertising.

4.1. IKEA and Scandinavian Style

IKEA, the world’s leading furniture and lifestyle service provider officially entered the Chinese market in 1998 when it opened its first store in Shanghai Puxi Xuhui district. Adopting the Chinese name *Yijia* (宜家), IKEA symbolizes the dreamland “suited for home” that values minimalist aesthetics. Following the success of the franchise and rapidly increasing demand, in 2011, IKEA invested in its second store in Beicai, Pudong, Shanghai where it occupied more than 49,400 sqm and became the second largest IKEA in the world, next to Skärholmen. This Pudong location is able to showcase 60 sample

rooms and accommodate 2,000 parking spaces. Its canteen can seat 760 people at the same time and serve as many Swedish meatballs as possible ^[68]. Given the high customer flow and popularity among the Shanghai middle class, a third store soon emerged in Baoshan district in 2013. IKEA’s strategic investment plans in Beicai and Baoshan synchronize with Shanghai’s 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) as both districts were envisioned to play an essential role in the city’s exuberant economic development ^[69].

As one of the first large-scale foreign furniture brand names in the Chinese market, IKEA describes its mission as “to provide smart solutions for homes by implementing three criteria: good design, functionality, and low price” ^[70]. By 2014, China had become home to eight of IKEA’s ten largest stores and fastest growing market as the emerging middle class embraces its flat-pack furniture and minimalist Scandinavian design ^[71]. This combination of European design, “do-it-yourself” (DIY) style, and friendly price has attracted many young professionals and families in trend-setting fashion-leading cities like Shanghai. IKEA’s reputation for innovation in design and functionality is well welcomed by the curious and open-minded middle-class shoppers. Its success in Chinese cities confirms Vance Packard’s observation of the advertisers in the 1990s America who speak from consumers’ positions in society – the anxious position of shoppers who try to balance price and quality ^[72]. According to its founder Ingvar Kamrad, the delicate balance seems achieved by IKEA’s endeavor in pursuing a vision “to create a better everyday life for the majority of people” ^[73]. What IKEA sells is no longer just furniture, rather, it reinvents a kind of affordable, minimalist, innovative, and modern lifestyle that was largely absent in the vernacular landscape of Shanghai everyday life decades ago.

The IKEA phenomenon is probably only the prelude to a more comprehensive and sophisticated phase of home design

among the Shanghai urbanites. The continued fascination with the Scandinavian style can be observed by the popularity of brands such as Normann Copenhagen whose Danish designs create immersive spaces within the curated store Harbook in Shanghai rethinks and repurposes the experience of showroom by mixing its functions as a bookstore, café, furniture, and shop altogether ^[74]. In 2016, Normann Copenhagen Shanghai welcomed its grand opening in collaboration with Harbook, marking its first store in China. The outward-looking Shanghai *haipai* cosmopolitanism seems to find itself resonating with the borderless global cultural capitalism as the ever-expanding yearning for sophistication and refinement in furniture selection and home decoration, which has become a definitive attribute of the emerging middle class.

4.2. Neri & Hu and “Living with Design”

Lyndon Neri and Rossana Hu, two leading prominent designers who hold US design and urban planning degrees co-founded the renowned Neri & Hu interior and product design company (如恩设计) in Shanghai in 2004. Over the years, they have won numerous international awards, including the Best of Year Award 2018 by Interior Design Magazine in New York, AIT Award by AIT Magazine in Germany, ELLE DECO International Design Award by Elle Deco in Milan, 2017 EDIDA Designers of the Year, 2015 Maison & Objet Asia Designers of the Year, 2014 Wallpaper* Designer of the Year, and many more. In 2013, they were inducted into the American Interior Design Hall of Fame. The company Neri & Hu has collaborated extensively with global brands such as Agape, Arflex, Artemide, Classicon, De la Espada, Fritz Hansen, Gandia Blasco, JIA, LEMA, MOOOI, Nanimarquina, Offecct, Parachilna, Poltrona Frau, Porro, Stellar Works, Wallpaper* Handmade, Meritalia, BD Barcelona Design, among many others ^[75]. They describe Neri & Hu’s design philosophy as timelessness rather than

trendiness. Their furniture brand “Design Republic” promises to lead an urban revolution through a kind of avant-garde aesthetics.



Figure 5. The Design Republic Commune, Shanghai. Source: <https://www.dezeen.com/2012/11/14/the-design-republic-commune-in-shanghai-by-nerihu>

In 2012, their architecture studio Neri & Hu opened a creative multifunctional space called “Design Republic Commune.” Seemingly reminiscent of the socialist commune in the Mao era, Design Republic Commune presents a completely different idea of commune by combining a design gallery, shop, and event venue in an early 1910s former British colonial police station located at the heart of Jing’an district in Shanghai. Bearing much resemblance to Normann Copenhagen, the repurposed creative space imagines a republic-like constellation of design stores and showrooms, including then new flagship of Neri & Hu’s own name brand Design Republic, as well as a lecture hall, a café, a restaurant, and a one-room hotel. “Commune” serves as a multifaceted creative business platform and social network from which design thinking, product making, and business sales are created, displayed, advertised, and consumed. Artistic and creative energy is engrossed into the aesthetics and poetics of design while discourses on architecture, product, and interior design integrate and interact. In this sense, “Commune” becomes an ideal communal place and

space not only for gatherings of designers, but also for those lifestyle and home interior shoppers seeking knowledge, sophistication, and immersive experience. As co-founder Lyndon Neri states, the concept for the Design Commune is to showcase the best of international design in order to “bring the best of what the world can offer to China and hopefully one day bring the best of what China can offer back to the world” [76].

A new concept to the Chinese consumers, the fascination with more high-end design, style, and taste in furniture and home décor is reflected in multifarious expositions and galas catered to luxury, artistic, and innovative ways of living. The 2014 “Design Shanghai” Exposition, known as Shanghai’s first international design fair, was one of the examples of this trend. During the four-day event, more than 47,000 visitors waited in long lines to view exhibits from 150 designers, which greatly exceeded organizers’ expectation. “The public,” according to designer and co-founder Rossana Hu of Neri & Hu, “showed real interests for the first time...We see a real interest in a more abstract and modern language coming out of China.” Hu continued, “Designers used to be about traditional motifs, forms and colors, but now we’re seeing ways of reading concepts and applying materials that are not stereotypical” [77]. The modern language of design was successfully conflated with the motto “living with design” at the “Design Shanghai” exposition. While the premier European brands were vying for exposure to the Shanghai market, the visitors and shoppers demonstrated evolving understanding as to how design can bring personal characteristics, happiness, and social class distinctions to their everyday life.

4.3. Art, Social Media, and Online Furniture Stores

With the invention of Chinese social media platforms such as the all-in-one super app WeChat (微信) and the country’s foremost

fashion and luxury e-commerce app “Little Red Book” (*xiao hongshu* 小红书) in the past decade, KOL (key opinion leaders) sometimes called influencers, replacing traditional means of advertising, increasingly appear as powerful spokespeople for design, fashion, and lifestyle-building among the tech-savvy generations. Stylish online furniture stores are also taking advantage of the new age of cyber shopping. Zaozuo.com, a Chinese-born online furniture store has developed exclusive lines of furniture with unique contemporary design for its young middle-class consumers. Founded in 2014, Zaozuo advertises itself as a carrier of two distinctive traits – a company that collaborates with 100+ experienced manufacturers (*zao* 造) and 100+ global designers (*zuo* 做) that delivers modern, bright, and exquisite home products. Many of its designers are award recipients of the British design, architecture, and lifestyle magazine *Wallpaper**.

Influencers’ marketing and online shopping in this case have tremendously transformed ordinary Chinese urbanites’ perception of home interior design by presenting shoppers dream lifestyles in a more mundane and achievable way. In the meantime, many private living spaces adopt cutting-edge design ideas that are inspired by combining neo-Chinese style and contemporary Western flavor. Art and fashion are also integrated into interior design to define aspirations for self-expression and social status recognition. Artists and designers collaborate and inspire each other, creating a new epoch of “Design in China.” The revival of the classic and vernacular Chinese elements expands the horizon of home interior design with a more modern appearance and sensibility. Launched in 2013, the annual Art021 Shanghai contemporary art fair is a great example for understanding how art shapes the way in which space, interiority, and lifestyle are perceived. The art fair presents a remarkable line-up of galleries and art organizations and offers one of the

most celebrated international art festivals in Shanghai. Intrigued by the middle class who find themselves constantly seeking validation from the affluent leisure class, this kind of artistic approach is seen prevalent in Shanghai's luxury home décor market. Artist Tu Nan whose work incorporates classic Chinese flair into contemporary minimalistic luxury lifestyle décor captures this growing trend and meets at the intersection of art and interior design. Another example is the Chinese furniture brand Pusu, whose designer Chen Hanfei skillfully combines Chinese Daoist philosophy, nature, and rare-found materials to create a sense of simplicity and grace when designing modern luxury furniture.

4.4. Design and Architecture Magazines

The landscape of middle-class living is also profoundly shaped by a great variety of magazines as the Chinese publishing industry actively embarks on a global digital era in the last decade. Many design, architecture, and lifestyle magazines such as *Home Style* (*Sijia* 私家), *Elle Deco China* (*Jiajulang* 家居廊), and *Ideat China* (*Lixiangjia* 理想家), to name a few, have become style guides and inspirations to the middle-class readers and trend-followers. *Elle Deco China* (*Jiajulang*, “Home-Style Corridor”), for example, was launched in 2004 and is often considered as one of the nation's most influential home décor and design magazines. Partnered with the largest US Hearst Magazines International, *Jiajulang* brings the newest trends of international design product and concepts. In addition to traditional paper prints, it has also developed a significant online presence. Its iPad version was launched in 2011 and since then the downloads have exceeded a total number of one million^[78]. Much of the success of the magazine's digitization can also be credited to its Shanghai-based editor Sugar Lee who at the same time is a popular influencer and spokeswoman of the contemporary design brands curated by the magazine. Sugar Lee

now has about one million followers on China's Twitter – Sina Weibo (@DemonSugar) who is also among the loyal readers of the magazine.

In a comparable fashion, the Shanghai-based *Home Style* (*Sijia*, “Private Home”) was launched in September 2011, known as a bilingual luxury real estate and lifestyle magazine published in both Chinese and English. It is showcased as a stylish home interior exhibition catered to all Chinese-speaking fans across the globe, and an experiential reader for high-end fashion and life stylists, as well as a white paper for real estate investment in the age of “stable money market” (*wenlicai* 稳理财). The magazine states its major missions in its inaugural issue – finding quality homes and emotional connections between dwellers and dwelling spaces while aspiring for a taste of luxury. Advertised through key venues such as first-class airlines, business travels, public reading sessions, and VIP direct deliveries, *Sijia* has gained popular readership among luxury homeowners, capital investors, and growing prospective middle-class homebuyers.

Another tone-defining magazine is called *Ideat China* (*Lixiangjia* 理想家). The name can be read as both “ideal home” and “idealist” in Chinese. Originally a French design magazine first published in 2013, the word “Ideat” is an acronym of five French words, namely, “idées,” “design,” “evasion,” “architecture,” and “tendance”^[79]. Having launched its first issue in Chinese in 2015, *Ideat China* sees itself as a lifestyle inspiration of the “post-iPhone era” that offers readers a wide spectrum of ideas about modern life, interior design, art, fashion, dining, global travel, and future-oriented innovative thinking. Its Ideat Future Award received great success in the “Design Shanghai” exposition in 2018. In its editor's notes, readers can find the ideals behind the magazine, that is, *Ideat China* creates a pathway to the outside world while the relation between people, nature, and space becomes an increasingly curious and soul-

searching topic for the aspired middle class. The magazine's avant-garde outlook and all-encompassing redefinition of design-life as such has attracted a new generation of urban readership.

5. CONCLUSION

A new sensibility of consumption is invented, advertised, and infiltrated into every facet of the emerging Shanghai middle-class everyday life. This time it evolves around the ideals of homeownership and cosmopolitan citizenship. Cultivation of the kind of middle-class art of living is now a medium through which the advertiser and the consumer begin to communicate in a shared language and philosophy that is fundamentally dominated by state-endorsed neoliberal principles and cultural capitalism. When zip codes become a statement of not only one's material wealth, but also social class, taste, lifestyle, and cultural capital, it is self-evident that the neoliberal making of the middle class and building of a so-called *xiaokang* society become a parallel and interchangeable process. Following in the footsteps of those positioned higher on the wealth spectrum, the new Shanghai middle class transforms themselves into status shoppers longing for sophisticated design, luxury landscapes of living and ultimately, homeownership that validates one's cosmopolitan citizenship, only to realize that oftentimes these yearnings are well beyond their means. Sandwiched in between dream and anxiety, the new Shanghai middle class strives and struggles in an increasingly perplexing world that their own limitations are reflected in what Slavoj Žižek calls "prolonging the disease... rather than curing it." Whether this middle class will play a more self-reflective role or simply becomes an economic and political vanguard of the Chinese State still remains to be seen.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

FUNDING

The research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

- [1] *Xiaokang* can be translated as moderately prosperous and reasonably well-off. *Xiaokang* society is a term proposed by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 to describe the aspiration of building a middle-class society. The term has been used by Deng's successors ever since and it is now integrated into Chinese President Xi Jinping's "Four Comprehensives" as part of the "Chinese Dream" and the rejuvenation of Chinese nation. Please also see Lu Hanlong, "The Chinese middle class and *xiaokang* society" in Cheng Li (ed), *In China's emerging middle class: beyond economic transformation*.
- [2] Johnny Ho, Felix Pho, et al. China consumer report 2020: the many faces of Chinese consumer [J]. McKinsey & Company. December 2019.
- [3] Naomi Xu Elegant. "Revenge" buying vs. rational consumption: how China is spending after coronavirus lockdowns [J]. Fortune, May 17, 2020.
- [4] Xi Jinping heralds 'new era' of Chinese power at communist party congress. The Guardian. October 18, 2017.
- [5] Re-envisioning a new China and a new era, Chinese President Xi Jinping, in 2012, called for a "Chinese Dream" that leads the Chinese people to achieve 2 major goals: the material goal of China becoming a "moderately well-off society" by 2020, which marks the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); and the modernization goal of China becoming a fully developed nation by about 2049, which marks the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic

- of China (PRC). The idea of restoring China to its greatness, in other words, “rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”, is a central message of Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream which itself is deemed as the renewed ethos in Chinese society today.
- [6] Mapping China’s middle Class [J]. McKinsey Quarterly. June 1, 2013.
- [7] Mapping China’s Middle Class[J]. McKinsey Quarterly. June 1, 2013.
- [8] China National Statistics Bureau (CNSB). China statistical year books 2005, 2009. Beijing: China Statistical Press. 2005, 2009.
- [9] Huang, Youqin and Chengdong Yi. Second home ownership in transitional urban China [J]. Housing Studies. 26(3): 423-447. 2011.
- [10] Cited in Fulong Wu. Commodification and housing market cycles in Chinese cities [J]. International Journal of Housing Policy. 15:1, 6-26. 2015.
- [11] Stella Yifan Xie, Mike Bird. The \$52 trillion bubble: China grapples with epic property boom [J]. Wall Street Journal. July 16, 2020.
- [12] Y. Huang & S.M. Li. (eds) Housing inequality in Chinese cities. 2014, Routledge.
- [13] J. Lee. From welfare housing to homeownership: the dilemma of China’s housing reform [J]. Housing Studies. 15(1): 61-76, 2000.
- [14] State Council. No. 18. Notice from State Council about Promoting the Continuously Healthy Development of Real Estate Market (*Guowuyuan guanyu cujin fangdichan shichang chixu jiankang fazhan de tongzhi*) 2003.
- [15] David Harvey. The Right to the City [J]. New Left Review. Vol.53. 2008.
- [16] “Accumulation by dispossession” is a term used by David Harvey in his book *The “new” imperialism: accumulation by dispossession* to critique the exploitative neoliberal policies that favor centralization of capital and power in the hands of a few by dispossessing the public and private entities of their wealth or land. “Creative Destruction” is a term coined by Joseph Schumpeter in 1942 in his book *Capitalism, socialism, and democracy* who considered it “the essential fact about capitalism.”
- [17] Jane Duckett. Neoliberalism, authoritarian politics and social policy in China [J]. Development and Change. 51(2): 523–539. 2020. The question of gentrification and class making under state neoliberalism is also studied by Fulong Wu in State dominance in urban development: beyond gentrification in urban China [J]. Urban Affairs Review. Vol. 52(5) 631-658. 2016; as well as in Housing privatization and the return of the state: changing governance in China [J]. Urban Geography. 39:8, 1177-1194. 2018.
- [18] Neil Smith. New globalism, new urbanism: gentrification as global urban strategy [J]. Antipode. 34 (3): 427–50. 2002.
- [19] P Miao. Deserted streets in a jammed town: the gated community in Chinese cities and its solution [J]. Journal of Urban Design. 8, No. 1, 2003. Please also see references from Statistic Yearbook of China’s Real Estate. 2008, Beijing: China Statistical Press. Cited in Luigi Tomba. The housing effect: the making of China’s social distinctions, in Cheng Li (ed). China’s emerging middle class. 2010, Brookings Institution Press.
- [20] Shanghai high-End Residential Market Stable Despite HPRs [J]. Colliers International. 2014.
- [21] Statistical Communiqué of Shanghai on the 2017 National Economic and Social Development. Statistical Bureau of Shanghai. March 8, 2018.
- [22] Helen Wang. The Chinese dream: the rise of the world’s largest middle class and what it means to you. 2010,

- Bestseller Press. What is also worth noting is that in 2018, China's National Bureau of Statistics officially defined what constitutes the Chinese middle class for the first time. Those who earn a monthly income of 2,000 RMB (USD \$295) to 5,000 RMB (USD \$740) constituted as "middle income" earners in China. This is believed far lower than the average in OECD countries and does not accurately reflect the cost of living and housing price differences between first-tier cities and lower-tier cities in China.
- [23] Social blue paper: five relations of development ideas and China's overall deepened reform (*shehui lanpishu: wuda fazhan linian guanxi zhongguo quanju shenke biange*) [J]. Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS). December 24, 2015.
- [24] *Waidi* refers to regions and places outside of Shanghai. Chinese population from other regions are referred by the Shanghainese as *waidiren*.
- [25] Fulong Wu. The state acts through the market: "State entrepreneurialism" beyond varieties of urban entrepreneurialism [J]. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, Vol. 10(3) 326-329. 2020.
- [26] Slavoj Žižek. First as tragedy, then as farce [J]. *The RSA*. November 24, 2009.
- [27] Giovanni Arrighi. *Adam Smith in Beijing*. 2007, London: Verso.
- [28] Lei Ping. Demolition of a distinctive Chinese habitus: controversies of urban sustainability in post-socialist Shanghai [J]. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*. Vol.61, Issue 6, 2019.
- [29] Although the term "New Shanghainese" also refers to foreigners who settle and live in Shanghai in the post-Mao era, this essay uses the term to describe those with Chinese origins.
- [30] Marie-Claire Bergère. Shanghai's Urban Development: A Remake? in *Shanghai Architecture and Urbanism for Modern China*. 2004, Prestel.
- [31] Lei Ping. Survival of Shanghai urbanite culture in the Mao era: bourgeois aspirations and practice of *longtang* everyday life [J]. *Journal of Chinese Urbanism*. Vol.1, No.1, 2019.
- [32] Beijing Launches Point-based Hukou System. *Xinhuanet*. April 11, 2018.
- [33] According to the *Urban Construction Statistical Yearbook 2017*, China has 13 cities with a population of more than five million in their urban areas. Four megacities are known as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou. Nine super cities include Tianjing, Chongqing, Wuhan, Chengdu, Nanjing, Zhengzhou, Hangzhou, Shenyang, and Changsha.
- [34] Further references can be found at State Council of People's Republic of China website <http://www.gov.cn/fuwu/zt/hjrk/index.htm> and Shanghai hukou website <http://www.shchhukou.com>
- [35] Yu-Ling Song. From newcomers to middle class: the social and spatial mobility of new urban migrants [J] *China Review*. Vol 16. No. 3. October 2016:121-147; Li Pei Lin and Zhang Yi. The scale, identity and social attitude of middle class in China (*Zhong guo zhong chan jie ji de gui mo ren tong han she hui tai du*) [J]. *Society*, Vol.28, No.2. 2008:1-19; Li Chun Ling. The development of middle class in China (*Zhong guo zhong chan jie ji de fa zhan zhuang kuang*) [J]. *Heilongjiang Social Sciences*, No. 1, 2011:75-8.
- [36] John Rundell. Strangers, citizens and outsiders: otherness, multiculturalism and the cosmopolitan imaginaries in mobile societies [J]. *Thesis Eleven*, No. 78, August 2004: 85–101; Gerard Delanty. *Citizenship in a global age*:

- society, culture, politics. 2000, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- [37] Saskia Sassen. *Territory-authority-rights: from medieval to global assemblages*. 2006, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- [38] Agnes Heller. *The absolute stranger: Shakespeare and the drama of failed assimilation* [J], *Critical Horizons*, 2000, 1(1): 147–67.
- [39] Liuliu. *Dwelling narrowness*. 2007, Changjaing wenyi publishing house.
- [40] State Council. *A notification from the State Council on further deepening the reform of urban housing system and accelerating housing construction*. 1998, Beijing.
- [41] Aihwa Ong and Li Zhang. (eds) *Privatizing China: socialism from afar*. 2008, Cornell University Press.
- [42] Andrew Jacobs. *For many Chinese men, no deed means no dates* [J]. *New York Times*. April 14, 2011. Similar findings can also be found in research conducted by S.-J. Wei et al. *Home ownership as status competition: some theory and evidence* [J]. *Journal of Development Economics*. 127: 169–186. 2017; L. Fang & C Tian (2018). *Housing and marital matching: A signaling perspective*. *China Economic Review*, 47: 27–46. 2018.
- [43] T. Y. Mathä et al. *Household wealth in the euro area: The importance of intergenerational transfers, homeownership and house price dynamics* [J]. *Journal of Housing Economics*, 35: 1–12. 2017; L. Guiso & T. Jappelli. *Private transfers, borrowing constraints and the timing of homeownership* [J]. *Journal of Money, Credit and Banking*. 34(2): 315–339. 2002.
- [44] G. Chen. *The heterogeneity of housing-tenure choice in urban China: a case study based in Guangzhou* [J]. *Urban Studies*. 53(5): 957–977. 2016.
- [45] William Clark et al. *Can millennials access homeownership in urban China?* [J]. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*. May 14, 2019. “HPF” is explained by the authors as an employment-based housing saving, with a certain percentage of wage deducted from employee’s each paycheck (no less than 5%) and the same amount of matching from the employer. HPF belongs to employees, who can also borrow a loan for housing consumption, with a usually lower than market interest rate.
- [46] Jean Baudrillard. *Selected writings*. Second Edition. 2002, Stanford University Press.
- [47] “Hierarchy of desire” is a term used by L.M. Hoffman to refer to mapping of one’s aspirations of social mobility. Please refer to L.M. Hoffman. *Guiding college graduates to work: social constructions of labor markets in Dalian*, in N.N. Chen, C.D Clark et al. (eds) *China urban: ethnographies of contemporary culture*. 2001, Durham, NC: Duke University Press. References can also be found in L.M. Hoffman. *Patriotic professionalism in urban China: fostering talent*. 2010, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- [48] Pierre Bourdieu. *The rules of art: genesis and structure of the literary field*, 1996. Stanford University Press. Cited in Sharon Zukin. *Point of purchase: how shopping changed American culture*. 2005, Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.
- [49] Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. 1987, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- [50] Sohu Focus, January 30, 2019. <https://sh.focus.cn/zixun/37b033be0a9b51bf.html>
- [51] John Darlington. *Fake heritage: why we rebuild monuments*. 2020, Yale University Press.
- [52] Fangtianxia. <https://sh.esf.fang.com/house->

- xm1210075942, viewed November 30, 2020.
- [53] Fulong Wu. Gated and packaged suburbia: Packaging and branding Chinese suburban residential development [J]. *Cities*. Vol. 27, Issue 55: 385-396. October 2010.
- [54] This saying is read the following in its original Chinese, “宁要浦西一张床，不要浦东一间房。”
- [55] More references can be found via Zhangjiang Group.
<https://www.zjpark.com>, viewed November 30, 2020.
- [56] Kandian Kuaibao, September 1, 2019.
<https://kuaibao.qq.com/s/20190901AZOP1M00?refer=spider>, viewed November 30, 2020.
- [57] Harry Hartog. Thames town, Songjiang district, in Harry Hartog (ed) *Shanghai new towns: searching for community and identity in a sprawling metropolis*, 2010, Rotterdam Publishers.
- [58] John Darlington. *Fake heritage: why we rebuild monuments*. 2020, Yale University Press.
- [59] Fulong Wu. Transplanting cityscapes: the use of imagined globalization in housing commodification in Beijing [J]. *Area*. September 2004, 36(3): 227-234.
- [60] Charles Lockwood. *Bricks and brownstone: the New York row house 1783-1929*, 2003, New York: Rizzoli.
- [61] Elizabeth A. Harris. Bidding farewell to a city's precious stone [J]. *New York Times*. October 22, 2012.
- [62] October 29, 2016.
<https://www.zhihu.com/question/52066185/answer/128920742>, viewed November 30, 2020.
- [63] Saskia Sassen. *The global city: New York, London, Tokyo*. 2001, Princeton University Press.
- [64] Juliette Dubeau and Sophia Dumenil. Three trends fueling China's luxury design boom [J]. *Jing Daily*. January 21, 2019.
- [65] The golden age for interior design business in China [J]. *Marketing to China*. May 22, 2019.
- [66] The term is referred to describe the design philosophy made popular by Neri&Hu's Little B Convenience Store.
<https://www.archipanic.com/portfolio/nerihu-design-convenience-store/>
- [67] David Harvey. *Rebel cities: from the right to the city to the urban revolution*. 2012, New York: Verso.
- [68] Asia's largest IKEA to open in Shanghai [J]. *CNN Travel*. June 22, 2011.
- [69] Shanghai's 13th five-year plan (2016-2020). Refer to the following link:
<http://www.shanghai.gov.cn/shanghai/node27118/node27818/u22ai86811.html>
- [70] Paula Miller. IKEA with Chinese characteristics [J]. *China Business Review*. July 1, 2004.
- [71] Jennifer Rankin. IKEA sales driven up by growing Chinese middle class [J]. *The Guardian*. September 9, 2014.
<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/sep/09/ikea-sales-rise-china-middle-class>.
- [72] Vance Packard. *The Hidden persuaders*. 1957, New York: D. MacKay. Stuart Ewen. *Captains of consciousness: advertising and the social Roots the consumer culture*. 1976, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- [73] Milorad Novicevic et al. Adapting competencies for emerging markets: the case of IKEA's entry into China [J]. *The Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship*. 2012, Vol.17, No.2. pp.8.
- [74] <https://www.normann-copenhagen.com/en/Journal/Events/Harbook-Shanghai>, viewed November 30, 2020.
- [75] <http://www.thedesignrepublic.com/en/about/index.html>, viewed November 30, 2020.
- [76] <https://www.dezeen.com/2012/11/14/the-design-republic-commune-in->

shanghai-by-nerihu, viewed

November 30, 2020.

[77] Ibid., viewed November 30, 2020.

[78] <http://www.hearst.com.cn/en/brand/el>

ledeco, viewed November 30, 2020.

[79] <http://ideatchina.com>, viewed

November 30, 2020.