



The Lane Houses in *Blossoms Shanghai* —The Origin and Development of Shikumen Culture in Shanghai

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Abstract

This paper selects the lane houses, an important carrier in the novel *Blossoms Shanghai*, to explore the origin and development of citizen culture in Shanghai. The narrative of the novel starts from the 1950s, and the various forms of lives of ordinary people in the lane houses show us that this regional architecture and the living space provided by the lane houses give birth to a relatively conservative and introverted citizen culture (Shikumen Culture), which affects the citizens' diet and living, affection, social communication and other aspects. Since the reform and opening up in the 1990s, Shikumen Culture has gradually been replaced by a new citizen culture (Shanghai Regional Culture) with the change of architecture and society. Shanghai Regional Culture is more open and people in Shanghai are good at learning, pursuing novelty, and are inclusive of the changes.

Subject Areas

Literature

Keywords

Shikumen Culture (Shanghai Ordinary Citizen Culture), Lane House Space, Diet and Living, Affection, Social Communication, Shanghai Regional Culture (New Citizen Culture)

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to *Blossoms Shanghai*

The novel *Blossoms Shanghai* was originally the author's sketches. On May 11, 2011, Jin Yucheng (the author) anonymously posted on a Shanghai dialect web-

site called “Lane Houses”. After writing over 1000 words, he realized that it should be a lengthy work. In 2013, during an interview with Liberation Daily, he recalled in detail the original intention of his writing: “The initial draft is still online, and the first part is all rambling, which is really the practice of Shanghai dialect writing, a gradual process. Previously, I had always accepted Mandarin storytelling, but this time I integrated Shanghai dialect writing into local websites. The reader is an ordinary citizen, I am also an ordinary citizen, and the whole process is very different from lonely writing. Most of the considerations are completely non-utilitarian. The response is instinct on how to write well, how to be interesting, and how to be unconventional. It wasn’t until I realized it was a lengthy piece that I became vigilant. Encouraged by netizens, I squeezed out time and wrote the first draft of a 330,000-word novel in 5 months, which became *Blossoms Shanghai*. [1]” It is precisely the platform www.longdang.org that determines the form, content, and aesthetic taste of this novel, positioning it as an ordinary Shanghai citizen telling stories about himself to a group of ordinary Shanghai citizen readers. Therefore, the author’s original purpose is not to write a novel but to record the life of people in Shanghai, which is a kind of Shanghai identity and Shanghai memory. The lane house in the narrative has also become an image in the memory. Later, *Blossoms Shanghai* was published in the autumn and winter volume of 2012 in the influential Shanghai literary journal Harvest (long story special issue), and was ranked first in the “2012 Chinese Novel Ranking” by the Chinese Fiction Society. Later, it was published in a single volume by Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, causing a sensation in the literary world.

In 2015, *Blossoms Shanghai* won the Mao Dun Literature Award, and judge Wang Chunlin gave this evaluation: “When it comes to Shanghai narrative, there are about four writers who can’t be overlooked since the vernacular novels...They are Han Bangqing, Zhang Ailing, Wang Anyi, and Jin Yucheng. [2]” Different from Han Bangqing’s “Ten Miles of Foreign Fields”, Zhang Ailing’s “Sea Legend”, or Wang Anyi’s retrospective “Prehistoric Shanghai”, Jin Yucheng uses the entire “discourse ontology” to build a world of lane houses belonging to the ordinary citizens of Shanghai.

1.2. Introduction to Shikumen Culture

At the end of 2015, in *the 13th Five Year Plan Proposal*, Shanghai proposed to “Inherit the essence of Chinese culture, absorb the essence of world culture, promote characters of Shanghai regional culture, focus on improving the appeal of core values, the persuasiveness of theoretical achievements, the influence of publicity and public opinion, and the competitiveness of the cultural industry, and basically build an international cultural metropolis [3]”. Shanghai regional culture, as a proper term, was officially published in official documents. Academic research on Shanghai regional culture mostly starts either from the study of Shanghai urban history or from literary works that focus on describing

Shanghai. Among the numerous literary works depicting Shanghai, Jin Yucheng's *Blossoms Shanghai* stands out in its unique focus on the Shanghai residents and especially the life of ordinary people in lane houses. The author was born and raised in Shanghai, and his heart is filled with identification with Shanghai. Full of memories of past life, he wrote this novel with the perspective of recording the lives of ordinary citizens in Shanghai. Therefore, studying the characters' house space, diet and living, affection, and social interactions in this novel can help us trace the origin and development of Shanghai citizen culture, especially the ordinary citizen culture, which is rarely depicted in such a detailed and vivid way in any other novels.

Professor Chen Sihe, a specially appointed professor of "Changjiang Scholar" of the Ministry of Education in China, believes that there are two kinds of citizen culture in Shanghai: "One is the Shanghai ordinary citizen culture formed under the semi-colonial management system, commonly known as Shikumen Culture. Its vision being relatively narrow, the so-called Shanghai ordinary citizen culture is relatively conservative and introverted; The other is a hybrid culture formed when Shanghai, as the Oriental magic capital, attracted immigrants from all over the world, known as Shanghai Regional Culture (new Shanghai citizen culture), which is more open and Shanghai citizens are good at learning and pursuing new trend. [4]" In *Blossoms Shanghai*, the author uses two storylines to simultaneously advance the narrative, spanning nearly half a century from the late 1950s to the early 1990s. The characters involved are represented by several Shanghai men, with various Shanghai women appearing before and after, from capitalists to merchants, from underground party members to workers, from educated youth to lawyers, covering the changes in various social classes in contemporary Shanghai. It vividly depicts the vibrant life of the ordinary people in Shanghai, showcasing the Shikumen culture (Shanghai ordinary citizen culture) and the gradually developing Shanghai Regional Culture (new citizen culture). At the end of 2015, in the 13th Five Year Plan proposal, Shanghai proposed to "inherit the essence of Chinese culture, absorb the essence of world culture, promote Shanghai style cultural character, focus on improving the appeal of core values, the persuasiveness of theoretical achievements, the influence of publicity and public opinion, and the competitiveness of the cultural industry, and basically build an international cultural metropolis". Shanghai-style culture, as a proper term, was officially published in official documents. Academic research on Shanghai-style culture mostly starts from the study of Shanghai's urban history or from literary works that focus on describing Shanghai.

2. Shikumen Culture (Shanghai Ordinary Citizen Culture)

The lane houses in Shanghai are generally Shikumen buildings. The lane is the most representative of architecture in Shanghai, containing the traces of years, the atmosphere of the city, and the most important is that it hides the vicissitudes and warmth of Shanghai.

2.1. Lane House Space

Jin Yucheng was born in Shanghai in the 1950s and lived in a new lane, a villa, and an apartment in Caoyang Workers' New Village successively. He experienced changes in the times which provided rich materials for his novels, demonstrating his deep understanding of the form and lifestyle of Shanghai's residential buildings. Since the 1980s, Jin Yucheng has worked for Shanghai Literature Magazine, which is located in the courtyard of the Shanghai Writers Association, 675 Julu Road. In his youth, he was quite familiar with this area, and now he knows very well what kind of houses are in the nearby neighborhood, when they were built, and what was demolished. During an interview with The Paper News, the author recalled: "If viewed from the air, the residential form in this area is very unique. I consider it to be seven different types, represented by colors, it is like a garden. Including the early Shanghainese 'local house', the traditional small green tile farmhouse, actually still retains in this central city. [5]" The seven types he mentioned are old-style alleys, Shikumen, new-style alleys, row villas, apartments, old western-style houses, and old public houses, squeezed together. In Jin Yucheng's view, lane houses are the symbol and soul of Shanghai, carrying the memories of several generations. Although Shanghai's urban history is still not long, these Shikumen alleys are very old, as if they have a thousand-year history, containing extremely complex information and revealing details everywhere.

The description of the lane is mainly concentrated in the 1960s and 1970s. When we open *Blossoms Shanghai*, we can see such a paragraph on its first page: "If you don't believe it, head out of the tiger window, ah night! Layers upon layers of roofs, the crying voice of Bentan drama, neon lights pleasing the eyes, rolling light beads, city prosperous, and countless flowers like a sea... There are new tenants across the street, and the small clothes hanging from the window are unfamiliar. On the black tiles, a few white wings are flying. [6]" This description leads us into the lanes of Shanghai, where we can experience the lives of the men, women, the customs and tastes. It records the original state of life in the prosperity of Shanghai, which can be said to be the basis of Shanghai citizens and also the curtain of this novel. Opening this curtain, we see a history of the lives of Shanghai citizens from the 1950s, 1960s to the 1990s. With the development of such a historical space as the background, the novel has a particular sense of Shanghai narrative, so the lane has become a unique architectural symbol of Shanghai. Like Beijing Hu Tong, it is not only a reflection of regional life, but also a cultural symbol. The lane houses constitute the most important architectural feature of modern Shanghai city; The lane houses provide the most common living space for millions of ordinary Shanghai citizens; The lane houses has become the most important component of modern Shanghai culture.

The lane houses originated from the end of the First Opium War, when foreign countries established concessions in China. At that time, the war forced rich merchants, landlords and officials from Jiangsu and Zhejiang to flood into the

concessions with their families to seek refuge. Foreign real estate developers took the opportunity to build a large number of residential buildings, gradually forming lanes with wooden houses inside. The open-lane life has turned many individuals' privacy into public activities, and has also integrated their personal life with society, making secrets between people transparent. For example, Xiao Mao lived in the lane of Xikang Road near the Giant Striking Clock, in a three-story attic with a barber shop on the ground floor. This way of connecting the residential area with the shops also made the layout of the lane house compact at that time. The narrow and cramped layout showed the reality of over-crowdedness in that era, but also let citizens learn to budget carefully and practice life wisdom. This tightly connected and neighboring life also makes each other too close and without boundaries. In the novel, Xiao Mao and Yin-feng's affair, which they consider very secret, is still being watched, that is, the second-floor uncle had already planned to watch. "Watching" and "being watched" have become the fuse for the outbreak of contradictions. In this regard, we can peek into the abnormal psychology of the citizens who were jealous, twisted and vengeful, and then got satisfaction under the living situation at that time. This pattern occurs more than once, Chapter 9 describes the Cultural Revolution as the background of the Four Old movement, Miss Hong Kong is pulled out of the public, surrounded by more and more onlookers, "The surroundings were deserted, and everyone went to the front line to watch the excitement. A series of noisy voices came over. ([6], p 123)" This suspicion and indifference constitute a society that is not only related to the special historical background of the time, but also to the trend of people losing their social boundaries in the lanes due to the narrow space at that time.

The novel also mentioned Shanghai new lane bungalows: "Steel windows and wax floors are quite compatible with Western music...([6], p 229)" The update of home equipment in the lane, such as the emergence of new toilets, is a typical example. In 1937, the Anti-Japanese War broke out, and the population in the urban area increased sharply. Subsequently, apartment-style lanes emerged, which were a type of collective residential building, marking the end of the construction of lane houses in Shanghai. The characteristic of living in crowded lanes is particularly prominent in the novel, whether it is the new Giant Striking Clock Lane where Xiao Mao lived before marriage or the old lane on Moganshan Road where he lived after marriage, all belong to the life of gathering.

Chapter 15 provides a detailed description of the toilet room in Caoyang New Village, the first worker's new village built in China. Ten households share a toilet room, which is separated by wooden boards and lacks privacy. Each toilet room has six to sixteen soybean sized holes on its walls for peeping. Moving to Caoyang New Village not only enriched A Bao's understanding of Shanghai's urban space, but also made A Bao feel the crowded living space and develop feelings of being monitored and spied upon. The author himself had the experience of moving from South Shaanxi Road to Caoyang New Village, so he ar-

ranged the same fate for A Bao, and showed his own memories of Caoyang New Village through A Bao's eyes. Therefore, the reason why we can see the crowding and lack of privacy in Caoyang's New village is inseparable from the author's rich experience in space life, and it is in the difference of space that we can feel a gap. The space of Caoyang New Village not only enriches A Bao's understanding of Shanghai's urban space, but also allows readers to see the complex aspects. If A Bao's grandfather's residence bears the imprint of Shanghai's colonial history, Caoyang New Village represents the living space imagined and put into practice by socialism in the beginning.

The lane is also filled with harmonious neighborhood relationships, including the front door grandmother and the back door uncle. Intimate neighbors, connections, childhood playfulness, as opposed to indifference, are also examples of trust and care. Xiao Mao moved to the old alley on Moganshan Road, and Aunt Xue on the second floor took care of him in every way possible, busy greeting guests for Xiao Mao. This kind of harmonious coexistence has probably gone beyond ordinary neighborhood relationships, so it is also this close range of life that makes people closer to each other. The smoke and fire of the human world soothe the hearts of ordinary people the most. Life in Cao Yang New Village is also lively and extraordinary: The sound of pounding presses and the clattering sound of railways mixed with the stench of manure from the vegetable fields. On the citizens' birthday or New Year's Day, neighbors will send each other a bowl of fresh noodles, Wonton, sweet and salty dumplings, and Zongzi. Every door and window is wide open, life is pure and peaceful.

When describing the 1960s, the author attaches great importance to the depiction of the space of home in which the characters live. From the homes of different characters, we can feel the sense of hierarchy and complexity in Shanghai's urban space, as well as the real living conditions of different characters. In the 1990s, although the location of the character's homes was also introduced, for example, Li Li's home on the ground floor of the old western-style house on Nanchang Road and Xiao Qin's family in a lane on Yanqing Road, however, the modern functional places such as Zhizhenyuan Restaurant, Night Tokyo Restaurant, JJ Ballroom, Xiangrui Teahouse, Hilton and Karaoke Lounge, dilute the portrayal of the space of "home". This external space has replaced the private internal space like "home", and it has also created a sense of estrangement for us. We can only see the surface of every person in the 1990s, and it is difficult to delve into the true essence of life. A rare introduction to the interior of the home reveals the scars beneath the glamorous appearance of urban individuals. Li Li's home has no decorations, only a pile of various broken dolls: "The toys on the shelf, made of various materials, are old and dark yellow, both male and female, big and small, made of plastic and cotton, with eyes that can be flipped up and down, curled hair, bald head, wearing hot pants, or bikini foreign beauties, Barbies, shirtless prostitutes, puppets, night forks, mermaids, cowboys, angels, so-called holy babies, conjoined babies, small tricks, wrapped in old and yel-

lowed clothes, skirts and slits, partially naked, with hands and feet broken, One eyed, with a flattened head and only the upper body remaining, with various disabilities, the protagonist of a horror opera, human head, animal body, monster, arranged in layers ([6], p 248)” In the corner there is a small Buddhist niche for a goddess of Mercy. The dilapidation of the doll corresponds to the heart of the residents in the house, which has been devastated by the past. Only the Goddess of Mercy in the corner serve as her salvation.

The lane has become a symbol of Shanghai’s urban architecture, and the expression of it has become a way for the author to express his love for Shanghai. In the world of the lane, there are no changes or extravagance, only family gossip and trivial matters, ordinary clothing and food. But it fully showcases the normal life, presenting the spirit of Shanghai urban residents through these small details of life. *Blossoms Shanghai* makes the city lively and interesting by showing the cordial and chaotic life in the lane. It evokes a shared memory of a changing era through many seemingly familiar stories.

2.2. Diet and Living

The author boldly adopted the Shanghai dialect for writing and thoughtfully revised it multiple times, allowing readers from non-Wu dialect areas to understand and comprehend this novel. However, it still retains the style and charm of Wu dialect, making the novel read with a strong Shanghai flavor. In addition to retaining representative Shanghai vocabulary, he also retained the tone of people in Shanghai in their dialogues. His improvement of Shanghai dialect is a combination of sound and meaning, for example: “All are New Year’s Eve dishes, two cold pot, four hot stir-fries, a casserole, a dessert, super-dia! ([6], p 23)” Here if we simply choose a modal particle to replace the “super-dia”, it is obvious that there are also many appropriate expressions in Shanghai dialect. But “super-dia” is more appropriate in both tone and form. It can be said that *Blossoms Shanghai* records the deeds of nameless people: food, gossip and dressing, especially with food as the top priority... makes people feel like they are in it.

The novel begins with a small market near Jing ‘a Temple, where Tao Tao sold crabs. Later Hu Sheng drank coffee with Mei Rui. The first climax was to catch adultery. The cuckolded man took three little apprentices to eat pork liver noodles in the Daming restaurant opposite the lane and saw that the egg businessman entered the door, and the four masters and apprentices “... Ran into the lane, looked at the third floor, the curtain had been drawn... ([6], p 10)” In the front and back lane, residents cheered and ran out to watch the play for free. Rice was not washed, vegetables were not cooked, bowls and chopsticks were not placed, and those sitting on the toilet jumped up and ran towards the outside. The desire for food and sex was interpreted incisively and vividly by the author.

The author writes about many dining scenes in the novel, but the focus is on people rather than dishes. Many intimate words are shared after drinking, and the scene is explained in a few words, very brief: in a small restaurant, toppings

with three beers or a large pot of sliced cold chicken with ginger seasoning and a bottle of rice wine; in Night Tokyo Restaurant, curry beef or a plate of rice served with meat and vegetables on top; in Spring All Year Round Restaurant, two bowls of small wontons, two fried pork chops, and two bowls of scallion oil mixed noodles; or two bowls of frozen mint and mung bean soup in Yi Xing Restaurant. How nice it is to eat and talk idly! The restaurant across from the bus terminal sells fried meat, chicken and duck blood soup all night long, under dazzling lights. To eat instant-boiled mutton in Yunnan Road, only a basin of mutton, a guest of lamb liver, with egg dumplings and spinach. No more than three tables at a time. Food is magical, and using food to study people is the most interesting perspective. It is particularly like a key, assuming that you may not know what a person is like, but you can roughly tell from the food he likes to eat. His childhood, where he is from, his habits, his character are soon revealed in the food.

For example, in the Giant Striking Clock Lane, where the lower-class citizens live together, every family, except the bourgeois Abbess Pu, eats congee, potato flour or six grain flour. Xiao Mao's mom is especially good at running a family. In addition to buying a large pot to cook Congee, she even delay their meal: "Wait, hot Congee costs a lot of dish, and you can eat it when it's cold. ([6], p 21)" before the whole family are so hungry to start. In addition to the savings carved into the bones, neighbors often share the stove, each cooking their own hometown dishes. Especially in the novel's depiction of the 1960s, food fills the lines with warmth.

A Bao's grandfather had several large factories. After the public-private partnership, he had a fixed interest rate every month. He often drove A Bao to Chenghuang Temple to eat Dim sum. When food was scarce, they bought potato flour and six grain flour and asked the servants to cook a pot of popular Congee, which was just a pose on the surface. Actually, their family members still cooked: "pure cake, roasted chicken breast, curry roll, bacon and fried eggs...([6], p 27)" The chicken, duck, fish, meat, eggs, etc. which the big house consumed every week, included the most scarce supplies from the black market and food continuously mailed to Shanghai by overseas relatives. After the Cultural Revolution, A Bao's family moved to Caoyang New Village, and the destitute uncle visited them as a guest. Five people sat down enjoying such home-style cooking as red sausage, sweet and sour pork ribs, stir-fried beans, and egg soup. A few home-cooked dishes actually left the uncle who had eaten all over the fine restaurants stuffed to stomachache, still can't help chewing, constantly swallowing. The ups and downs of life are vividly demonstrated by a few dishes.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the descriptions are mainly focused on banquets. Lingzi had been in Japan for many years and recently returned to Shanghai. She opened a small restaurant called Night Tokyo Restaurant on Jinxian Road in the city center. A small restaurant with an open storefront and a lowered interior with an attic. "As usual, the shop hung a television set and set up six or seven

small tables, each for three or four consumers. If there are more guests, the table is open to six people. To make a *dojo* in a snail shell, the circular table is pushed out to entertain even more guests. ([6], p 165)” The lane houses on Jinxian Road usually have a small storefront on the first floor, and people live on the second floor. Naturally, its area determines that it can only be small foreign trade clothing stores, boutiques, and restaurants that can only sit a few tables of guests. Because many shop owners own their own storehouses, their per capita consumption does not need to be very high, so they make Shanghai local cuisine and home-cooked food. The large-scale symposium prepared by Mei Rui was held at Li Li’s Zhizhenyuan Restaurant, where all the guests were friends with the prefix “General” and there were also many influential figures. Different from the home-style dishes in Night Tokyo, the night menu is eight cold dishes, ten hot dishes, soup, two dim sum and dessert. This banquet, from cups and plates to dishes, from decoration to atmosphere, showcased luxury and taste.

The rise of the socialist economy with Chinese characteristics in the 1980s and 1990s was accompanied by a transformation in people’s material lives. The dinner party showcases the various aspects of the human world. The conversation between characters is like a script, with the ups and downs of the world and the desolation of the world vividly portrayed on paper. What cannot be discussed on the desk, continues on the dining table and at the dinner party. Huanghe Road is a treasure trove for many people to negotiate business, and it is also a microcosm of the era in Shanghai. Shanghai is a land of crouching tigers and hidden dragons, with countless talented people and magnificent stories often condensed on the dining table, making people experience a mix of sadness and joy, broadening their horizons, and bringing endless joy to them. During an interview, the author provided a cultural explanation of the rich and colorful atmosphere of the dinner party in the novel: “*Blossoms Shanghai* focuses on the interpersonal relations of the 1980s to the 1990s, which is not written much. Men and women in civil society, the changes in relations brought about by changes in the times, people of various identities live and eat together, this content is not shown before. Personally, I think the dinner party of the 1990s is still going on. The gathering of such a folk dinner party is quite Chinese characteristic. The family does not receive guests, and it is a dinner party for everything. This is Chinese... When Chinese people eat together, they are willing to sit at a large table, and everyone takes turns talking and sharing. [7]”

2.3. Affection

The lane house architecture encompasses the lives of Shanghai people and also embodies their emotions. The life inside is complex and diverse, and the living conditions and spiritual temperament of citizens are adapted to their living space and activity range. Residents from all walks of life have influenced each other over the long term, gradually forming a unique citizen culture, which has given rise to special choices of family, love, and friendship.

Blossoms Shanghai revolves around the lives of three boys from different backgrounds: A Bao from a merchant family, Hu Sheng from a military cadre family, and Xiao Mao from a worker family. The three boys with vastly different social statuses got to know each other through buying movie tickets, and their stories opened like a movie.

The protagonist of the novel, Husheng, comes from a family of air force officers and lives in a luxurious apartment in Shimen Road. In his first love, he developed a different emotional attachment to Shu Hua, a literary girl who liked to copy ancient poetry. In the 1960s, that dark time quietly arrived, they depended on each other, discussing current affairs and human nature, and their emotions deepened with each deep conversation. However, even Shu Hua, a member of a cadre's family, could not escape the arrangement to go to Jilin for farming and travelled far away. The tide of The Times changed the fate of the two people, Hu Sheng always remembered what Shu Hua wrote in the farewell letter: "We have been separated by thousands of miles...and sorrow fills the ends of the earth...We don't need to keep in touch anymore... Born independently, die independently. When people cannot communicate with each other, the good and bad emotions in the world are no longer worth laughing at. Life is a desolate journey. ([6], p 209)" A few years later, when Hu Sheng saw Shu Hua again at the train station, she had just given birth to her third child. Due to postpartum depression, she fled back to Shanghai in a disheveled state and was mentally unstable. Seeing his first love destroyed, the helplessness and sadness were more unforgettable than the love itself.

The haze of emotional frustration had not yet dispersed, and family changes had given Hu Sheng a heavy blow. His parents were taken away because of their work, and Hu Sheng had to move into a simple and narrow house. Losing his house and status, his life plummeted from the top of society to the bottom. Pessimism and powerlessness about reality discouraged him. Losing the sense of security, Hu Sheng had always been unable to place the desperate heart, he even had become accustomed to breaking up in the emotional world. When someone introduced Bai Ping, who had a house and a good family, to him, and Bai Ping didn't care about his situation, Hu Sheng simply agreed to this marriage. On a date with his girlfriend Mei Rui at a café, "Mei Rui: I can't believe that Hu Sheng has another girlfriend, a foot in two camps. Hu Sheng: Yes, her name is Bai Ping. Merry: How frequent do you meet every month? Hu Sheng: Once. Mei Rui: Are you ashamed? Hu Sheng: Someone introduced her to me. Appearance average, but the advantage is she has a house. Mei Rui: You are too honest. You tell me everything. Hu Sheng: It's supposed to be. Mei Rui: In fact, I also have a boyfriend who has always wanted to marry me. There is a house on Sichuan North Road. Hu Sheng: Good offer. Mei Rui: I don't even want to get married. ([6], p 3)" A few conversations between the two moved from the probing, confession (clarification), to disclosure. It turned out that both of the ambiguous individuals had their own marriage partners. Afterwards, Hu Sheng helped Mei Rui by

introducing her a business partner A Bao. She quickly developed into “only wants to know how A Bao thinks. ([6], p 7)” However, A Bao was neither hot nor cold, and Meirui could only marry the man on Sichuan North Road.

On her wedding night, Bai Ping confessed to him that she had had a few relationships before. Hu Sheng simply said calmly, “I don’t care. ([6], p 277)” Bai Ping wanted to get married, he agreed, and later she wanted to go abroad, she could do whatever she wanted. Hu Sheng was well aware that cherished emotions might not last long. Instead of thinking about life with nostalgia, it was better to leave it casually. Bai Ping won a place to go abroad. Hu Sheng understood and accepted his wife’s long journey. Hu Sheng had encountered despair, therefore, he chose blind perfunctory and indulgent, giving the other party freedom. It was not respect in the name of love, but isolation. After his wife left, Hu Sheng had no intention of guarding their small home anymore and moved back to his simple and narrow house. Bai Ping stayed abroad, and even had a new life and gave birth to a child, but they two insisted not to divorce. Hu Sheng goes to court for others almost every day, including divorce lawsuits, but cannot solve his own marriage problems. He has been living alone, had a lover LAN LAN but eventually do not come together. Hu Sheng’s name means “born in Shanghai”, carrying the memories and emotions of the city. In those days many couples, one in China and one abroad, divorced. Those who do not want to go back stay abroad, those who do not want to go out stay at home, neither want to compromise. In that era, the separation of spouses is not only a personal tragedy, but also a microcosm of social change. It also forces us to reflect on the loyalty and distance issues of modern marriage. The expectations of his family, social pressure, and inner struggles have all become stumbling blocks in his destiny. After his ideals and love are burned by reality, the heavy sense of powerlessness makes him choose to endure adversity and let go at any time. The union not sincere is doomed to fail to save the lonely soul.

Xiao Mao is of the same age as Hu Sheng and comes from a family of workers in the Eighth Factory of Shanghai Iron and Steel Corporation. His family lives on Xikang Road, near the Giant Striking Clock. Xiao Mao has a straightforward and loyal personality and is persistent, dedicated, and strong in his emotions. The novel depicts Xiao Mao shuttling through small streets and lanes, and he is so familiar with every lane. Children who grow up in this kind of lane will be better at socializing and have stronger survival abilities. It is the living environment that has created his spiritual temperament. So, in the second chapter of the novel, it is mentioned that Xiao Mao helped Hyde’s wife Yin Feng queue up to buy tickets, and he naturally met Hu Sheng, A Bao, and Betty.

When Xiao Mao was young, he was seduced by the wife of a sailor on the second floor, Yin Feng, and after having an affair, they established a long-term illicit relationship. Until the matter was exposed, the sailor demanded that Xiao Mao’s mother quickly find a wife for him and move away. So Xiao Mao had his first wife, a devout Christian named Chun Xiang who had been married once. At

first, Xiao Mao was reluctant about this marriage, but he still chose to live with this woman who did whatever her husband liked. Chun Xiang is two or three years older than Xiao Mao, gentle, virtuous, and considerate. After marriage, the husband was unwilling to go back to the old house, so Chun Xiang took his place to visit his mother and greet the neighbors. Xiao Mao arranged the wedding banquet, but his best friends were absent. After the hustle and bustle, Xiao Mao was alone in a daze, feeling dejected. Chun Xiang immediately understood what was on his mind, missing his friends. She told her husband to have close and caring friends to avoid loneliness, and reminded him to find back his good friends and reconcile. Xiao Mao felt the strong love and gradually opened his heart, falling in love with his warm and intimate wife. But life is unpredictable. Two years later, due to a difficult childbirth, Chun Xiang and her child left this world together. The sudden blow shattered Xiao Mao's mental defense, and he tightened his already cold wife with both hands, tears streaming down his face. From then on, Xiao Mao always remembered the two women he had deeply loved and couldn't escape the regret of not being able to love. The heavy emotional trauma locked his heart and made him unwilling to seek love again, losing his passion for life. So, he bought out his working years early, became a janitor, and completely gave up on himself. He even stopped caring for his own body, taking radioactive X-rays under other people's names several times a month to help them get sick notes. Eventually, he became increasingly thin, suffered from stomach cancer, and died alone at a young age. The loss of a loved one is painful; Indulging in the past will only lead to desperate loneliness and a tragic fate.

Due to misunderstandings, Xiao Mao broke off his friendship with Hu Sheng and A Bao, completely leaving his original living environment and friendship. Later, Miss Wang, Xiao Mao's second wife, connected the three protagonists together again, and after restoring their relationship, Xiao Mao, A Bao, and Hu Sheng had close contact. Miss Wang worked in a foreign trade company and got married to him in a fake manner. Her husband, Hong Qing, was a public servant and was limited to one-child policy. As both husband and wife had to work, the child had been raised by grandma, and was very unfamiliar with Miss Wang. The monotonous life diluted the sweetness of the past, and the emptiness in the heart. She was determined to have another child, to add fun, and make her marriage life more lively. In the face of a wife full of complaints, Hong Qing had no choice but to cater. This man, who always listened to the organization at work and listened to his wife after work, decided to fake divorce in order not to affect his position. Miss Wang found a new husband for fake marriage, only ensuring that her child could settle down and still live with Hong Qing. Once the principle is ignored and the bottom line is missing, it will only cause countercharge. At a party after this fake divorce, Miss Wang, who had regained her freedom, indulged in a few drinks. When she met Mr. Xu, who was mature and elegant, she took the initiative to flatter him, using her drunkenness to have a relationship with him. Not long after, she became pregnant. Hong Qing suspected that

the child was not his own, and became angry with embarrassment. Fake divorce turned into real divorce. Mr. Xu also did not want to be responsible for her. Even more sadly, Miss Wang was pregnant with a deformed twin headed monster. She, who insists on giving birth, can only bear everything alone. The originally happy marriage was destroyed by Miss Wang's willful and reckless actions, and her life was completely derailed.

Xiao Mao and Miss Wang should not have had any connection, but Xiao Mao comforted Miss Wang, who was on the verge of collapse, just like what Chun Xiang did to him, as if he was making up for his own regret and fulfilling his husband's obligations that he had not fulfilled before. Like Chun Xiang, Miss Wang has also been married once. But the difference is that Miss Wang stood on the opposite side of nobility. She was pregnant with a double-headed monster and insisted on giving birth, while the child did not belong to any of her husbands. This is retribution, blasphemy, and punishment for disloyalty in love. The whole work ends with this incident, which also implies the ending of other disloyalists in the book. Shortly after the three old friends regained their relationship, Xiao Mao left the world. Just like his evaluation of himself: "In my life, I have nothing but martial arts skills. ([6], p 460)" However, it is such a self-proclaimed man who has achieved nothing that has gone through the scrutiny of onlookers: "The upper class must be false, and the lower class must be void ([6], p 466)".

Tao Tao had a devoted wife named Fang Mei by his side, but he indulged in promiscuity everywhere. He couldn't control himself, nor could Fang Mei. Tao Tao insisted on divorcing his wife and preparing to spend the rest of his life with Xiao Qin. When readers gradually accepted the setting that Xiaoqin deeply admired Tao Tao without expecting anything in return, Tao Tao ultimately witnessed Xiaoqin's death with his own eyes, and the diary left by Xiaoqin forcefully broke the illusion of love, showing readers the true thoughts that Xiaoqin had endured in this relationship. The author narrates the story from the perspective of the two characters, putting the fact and fantasy, as well as the positive and negative aspects together, forming a sharp contrast, tearing the veil of warmth on this relationship, and highlighting the tragic color of Tao Tao.

The title of the work is *Blossoms Shanghai*. The flowers bloom and fail, and the female characters, like the flowers, also experience ups and downs in the story. One owned a thriving businesses, but her mother deceived her into losing all her property and becoming homeless; One carried poetry and distant lands, but hastily married a rough man and became insane; One started from the bottom of society and had just achieved success in her careers, but chose to be a monk when she was at her most energetic time. In the 1990s, Li Li, Mei Rui, Miss Wang, Xiao Qin and other people appeared to be materialistic women in the era of the market economy, but in fact, they all had their own fate that they cannot control. Li Li was deceived by people around her when she was young and was driven into prostitution, and finally had to flee into the temple to re-

deem herself. Mei Rui tangled in the gossip between her mother and her mother's lover Xiao Kai, and even cooperated with Xiao Kai in a daze, and finally ended up financing fraud and homelessness. Miss Wang wanted to have a second child, but unexpectedly became pregnant with a "monster" and lost both her lover and husband. Xiao Qin succeeded in snatching Fang Fang's husband but accidentally fell off a building, ending in a tragic death. The several couples described in the book, under the influence of the changing times, went from the naive pursuit of love in their youth to the desolate ending in middle age. It is heartbreaking to read this novel. The theme, explained by the author in an interview with the journalist of the Shanghai Liberation Daily, is: "Nice flowers do not bloom long." "Cherish life, because time has flowed away unconsciously. Listening to a song from the past or mentioning something from the past is like facing an old videotape. I completely forget it. When I open it, I suddenly come back to life, and the people and things from the past suddenly appear, triggering endless emotions - not happiness or pain, there is an indescribable feeling. [8]"

2.4. Social Communication

The work adopts a multi-line narrative, with the stage jumping back and forth between the 1950s, 1960s, and 1990s, weaving the love and hatred of the characters into a timeless picture. The changes of times and local customs in Shanghai are also vividly depicted on paper. This narrative structure forces readers to retrospectively contemplate the establishment of interpersonal relationships between characters. In the novel, everyone has a network. There are family, friends, lovers, teachers, neighbors, and even strangers in this network. Jin Yucheng takes the time to show it, weaving together everyone's network to form a rich world of citizen communication.

Looking at the people, things, and objects in the lane houses, we can summarize them from three aspects: First, the life history of citizens, from choosing a place to settle down, to working and then forming a family. Lane house figure Xiao Mao is a typical representative of citizens who grew up in the Giant Striking Clock Lane. He became accustomed to the family background and trivial life in the lane, chose his own career, and then married Chun Xiang. His experience was a reflection of the lives of ordinary citizens. Second: the living circle of citizens, starting from their relatives and friends, breaking out of the lane circle is the circle of colleagues, friends, and so on. The introduction of the protagonist and the emergence of numerous characters is led by the acquaintance of Xiao Mao, A Bao, and Hu Sheng, followed by a symphony of life. The third is the life domain of citizens. The domain we define now is mainly in the lane, which is reflected in three aspects: home, friends and work. These three aspects are not clearly defined, there are many overlaps, and these three aspects can form an acquaintance society.

In the urban development of Shanghai, people have always lived in an "acquaintance society", where relatives and neighborhood relationships constitute

the core of civic interactions, followed by love and work interactions that form the periphery of their social circle, and finally the world of strangers. If this world of strangers does not have relationships with people, it is actually meaningless; once in a relationship with someone, strangers will also transform into acquaintances. From Xiao Mao, to Hu Sheng, A Bao, Betty, as well as Ying Feng and Uncle Ye on the second floor, they were concentrated in the 1960s and 1970s, and then to the emergence of Tao Tao, Mei Rui, Miss Wang, and others in the 1980s and 1990s, which was also accompanied by the expansion of social circles. A series of relationships, like a point to a line and then to a surface, gradually form a network of constantly expanding interpersonal circles. The reflection of the establishment process of acquaintance society is that the life of citizens is not established by strangers, but by blood, geography, and their work.

In the novel, there are numerous characters and intricate interpersonal relationships, but we can summarize them with one line: relatives—neighbors—love—work—strangers—acquaintances. It is this clue that allows us to see the gradual formation of an acquaintance society in Shanghai lanes. There are two most representative scenes in the novel: one is that A Bao's whole family moves to "20000 households" in Cao Yang New Village, and was suddenly placed in a world of strangers. But soon, they established a new neighborhood relationship and began to try to get along well and help each other. The second is in the 28th chapter that Mei Rui in communication with Kang General, frequently in contact with all kinds of people in the business, and she prepared a large banquet. General Kang, Li Li, Hu Sheng, A Bao and others related to Mei Rui were invited, reaching a total number of nearly 40 tables. The novel provides a detailed list of the seating arrangements for each table, which is entirely based on the proximity and distance between each other. This seating list is centered around Meirui's acquaintance network in Shanghai. On this basis, it is possible to explore and understand the spiritual world of Shanghai residents. In the previous description of urban sociology, on the one hand, Shanghai was referred to as a "city of immigrants", which was of course based on the fact that there were a large number of urban migrants in the history of Shanghai's urban development, on the other hand, it was considered to be the city with the strongest sense of xenophobia, which means that under the influence of the registered residence system after the founding of New China, the "Shanghainese" consciousness gradually formed, and the controversy between the so-called "new Shanghainese" and "old Shanghainese" was the case. However, the "Shanghai people" portrayed in this novel are a spiritual world without obvious exclusionary consciousness. Many strangers become acquaintances through communication, building a new circle of acquaintances.

3. Shanghai Regional Culture (New Citizen Culture)

The success of *Blossoms Shanghai* cannot be separated from the friendly help from <https://www.longdang.org/>. This website, which embodies the new Shang-

hai citizen culture - Shanghai Regional Culture, can be said to have nurtured and protected the birth of this novel. The local characteristics of <https://www.longdang.org/> endow both the subject and object of novel writing with a strong cultural attribute of Shanghai citizens. As a very niche local website, its positioning is very simple, that is, Shanghai people tell their own stories. It is divided into Shanghai History, Shanghai Dialect, Old and New Photos, Picture Books, Pavilions, Lane Dishes, Golden Age, Antique Stalls and Guest Rooms, etc. Among them, the Guest Hall is the forum section of the website, which is divided into two sub-sections such as I Love Shanghai, and About Shanghai. The text field for publishing *Blossoms Shanghai* is a three-level sub forum in the "I Love Shanghai" section. It is not difficult to see from these characteristics of <https://www.longdang.org/>, it is not a network literature website, so compared with the well-known network literature websites such as Banyan Tree and now Shanda Literature, its goal is not literature, and it does not have a large number of writers and readers committed to network literature writing. Therefore, no matter it is <https://www.longdang.org/>, the author, or the netizens of this forum, they have not fallen into the common clichés of general online literature such as pursuing click through rates, pursuing text volume or sensationalism, nor have they fallen into the strange circle of water flooding literature, pleasing literature, or vulgar literature.

The netizens of <https://www.longdang.org/> has maintained the tradition of not directly exposing their own real identity, but they have still formed a new type of acquaintance society with online anonymity. They collectively recall, share, and refine their personal experiences and memories, savoring the lingering taste of the old Shanghai Shikumen. Therefore, the internet is just like the dinner party that frequently appears in novels (although most people do not know each other, even if they know each other, they still follow the rules of the internet game and do not recognize each other), and the game rules are their kindred spirits. From the beginning of the writing to the present, although the identities of the netizens who have communicated with the author in the forum are not very certain, judging from their speeches, they are mainly literary researchers, publishers and editors, Shanghai cultural people and other Shanghai people with a higher cultural level and understanding level and a strong sense of identification with Shanghai culture. <https://www.longdang.org/> did not immediately immerse this novel in the unknown and anonymous online sea, but instead introduced it into the warm and cozy Shanghai community. This small circle cherishes and loves the Shikumen culture of old Shanghai, but lacks the calculation and narrowness of ordinary citizens. They are good at learning, pursue novelty, and are inclusive of the changes in contemporary Shanghai. They typically represents the characteristics of Shanghai Regional Culture (New citizen culture).

The author's narration of current Shanghai starts from the 1990s, when the reform and opening up began. Compared with the relatively closed interpersonal

communication in the 1960s, A Bao and Hu Sheng now face a broader world of interpersonal communication, which can be seen briefly from the large-scale banquet held by Mei Rui in the 28 chapters of the novel. This group of people gathered together in a lively manner. Although they gathered in various relationships, they each had different backgrounds and identities. We can have a glimpse from the seating arrangements. There are Kang general, Lu general, Han general, Miss Qin from the north, Mr. Lin from Taiwan, Mr. And Mrs. Xiao from Guangdong, aunt in the pavilion, Mr. Meng, a scalper, and Master Zhong, a fortune teller. This work is not entirely dominated by Shanghainese. In addition to Shanghainese, there are also the Shaoxing dialect grandmother, the Subei dialect barber, and the northern Mandarin northerners... Implying the identity background of the characters and returning their characteristics to special places, the diverse dialects constitute the inclusive Shanghai lifestyle. It is through these complex civic classes that we see a different Shanghai.

In addition to the city life and interpersonal communication, the lane houses, the writing background of this novel, has also experienced a history of change. The diversification of architectural styles has made the metropolis of Shanghai more and more integrated into the international orbit, which means the gradual disappearance of this old Shanghai architecture. The places of activity are no longer the lanes, but instead are teahouses, cafes, restaurants, bars, and dance halls, which are scattered all over, changing the life of Shanghai citizens. Shanghai, including the Sinan Road area where A Bao's family lived in the novel, and Cao Yang New Village, is now entering a critical stage of urban renewal. Cao Yang New Village, where more than 200 model workers and advanced workers once lived, has continuously improved the living conditions of residents and gradually developed into a mature, civilized, and harmonious community. It is also the first fully green new village in the city, with a beautiful environment, the green coverage rate of the entire village reached 37%, ranking among the top in the city. Due to the implementation of effective environmental protection measures, the two streets where the new village is located are both smoke and dust free streets and low noise areas. The construction of this global mega city not only aims to solve today's problems but also to make room for tomorrow's development and attract more fresh blood to settle in.

4. Conclusions

When narrating "old-fashioned Shanghai", the novel reveals a longing for the simple and trivial life of the past and a nostalgia for peace and tranquility between the lines. In addition to the development of the story based on the typical old Shanghai architecture of lane houses, it also provides readers with a detailed introduction to the trivial things in the life of "old-fashioned Shanghai". The narrator is not content to stay behind the story, but breaks free from it and introduces the situation to the reader at that time. He not only awakens the collective memory of people who had experienced this era together in the old-fashioned

Shanghai, but also realistically revives the living conditions of the people in the Shikumen era, presenting the Shikumen culture: relatively conservative and introverted.

The novel also showcases the historic changes that have occurred in various fields of economic and social development in Shanghai since the reform and opening up. In the past decade, Shanghai has become more determined, steady, courageous, and innovative in its pace. With an open mind, Shanghai has attracted talents from all over the country and the world. Nowadays, the migrant population has become the main source of Shanghai's population growth, which is having a wide-ranging and far-reaching impact on the social and economic development of Shanghai. It is precisely because Shanghai has attracted foreign and migrant populations from all over the world that the culture behind these people has merged with the Shikumen culture of old Shanghai, forming a hybrid culture. The entire city emphasizes international trade oriented open expansion, and citizens are good at learning, pursue novelty, and are inclusive of the changes, forming a "new citizen culture", commonly known as "Shanghai Regional Culture". There are batches of people traveling from south to north integrating into Shanghai, as well as batches of goods departing from the Bund and drifting across the sea. Shanghai, a city that embraces all rivers, is the starting point of countless lives. People are here, looking forward to the next winter and spring, with blooming flowers.

For a long time, academic research on Shanghai local culture through literary works has rarely focused on ordinary Shanghai citizens. With the help of Mr. Jin Yucheng's vivid records and descriptions of the lives of ordinary citizens in Shanghai, this paper systematically analyzes the Shikumen culture, so as to trace the origin and development process of Shanghai regional culture. The characteristics of Shikumen culture are not accurately summarized in this paper, which is left for further study.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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