

# Hutongs and Ai Weiwei ?

*Thinking about China*

Rita Kranidis, 3/16



## What is happening to hutongs?

The same thing that is happening to China at large:

- New construction on a sky scraper begins every 8 minutes
- Authentic hutongs are destroyed and replaced by “modern” ones that are clean, gentrified, and do not reflect the function or character of traditional hutongs– these are the government’s attempt to re-present Chinese culture in appealing ways. The new hutongs are not affordable for working class Chinese.





# Remaking China





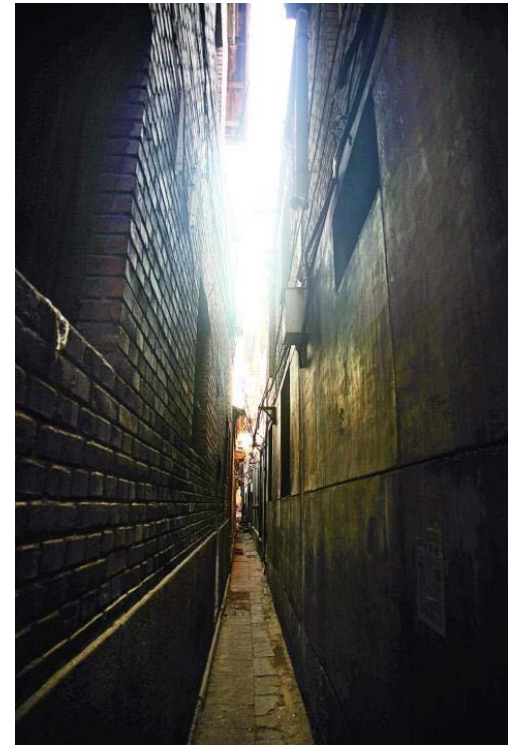
Hutong are traditional housing structures that are intergenerational and permanent, sites traditionally centered on a water source but also the locus of social exchange. It is often difficult to find one's way in a hutong; they are all narrow labyrinth-like alleys that follow no particular design. Hutongs require neighbors to live in very close proximity and to be interdependent.

*It may soon become impossible to see an authentic hutong.*





# Gulu Hutong Redevelopment





# What does Ai Weiwei have to do with this?

The artist drops a Han Dynasty urn,  
1995



Sculpture, "Straight," Reinforcing  
Steel Bars used in construction





# “Colored Vases” 2006

[Neolithic Vases, 5000-3000BC]



“Map of China” 2006  
Ironwood from dismantled Qing Dynasty Temples  
[1644-1911]



15.75x36.5x31.5



“Han Dynasty Urn with Coca Cola logo” [silver] 2007



## Other demolitions

Ai Weiwei Studio in Shanghai  
Demolished, January, 2011





## New construction from the old



A replica Anhui-style house, an embodiment of local customs, community, and society



“Moon Chest” 2008,  
Huanghuali Wood



126x63x31.5”

Huanghuali wood:

A member of the rosewood family, huanghuali stands for rarity, beauty and in today’s Chinese furniture market, high prices. It is believed that there are less than 10,000 pieces of huanghuali furniture left in the world. Because the wood is nearing extinction, and is now a protected species, supply is very limited. Matched with the rapidly increasing demand for Chinese antiques, prices for huanghuali furniture have skyrocketed over the past five years. Huanghuali is possibly the hottest category of furniture in the world today.

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