A Study on the Approach of Sustainable Development on Traditional Cultural Landscapes Surrounding Metropolitan Shanghai

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Geographical Location of Shanghai
Shanghai: The Paris of the East?

The most impressive urban image of Shanghai is largely related to the urban history after Shanghai became a foreign treaty port in 1843. But, Is Shanghai really the Paris of the East?
The Shanghai district in Qin Dynasty, 221 BC

Figure source: Zhao Minhua, Viewing "habitat and water" from the main function changes of river system in Shanghai.

The Shanghai district in Qin Dynasty, 221 BC
Land-forming Changes in Shanghai

The Shanghai district Qin-Tang Dynasty, 221BC-907AD

The Shanghai district in Song-Yuan Dynasty, 960AD-1368AD

Figure source: Zhao Minhua, Viewing "habitat and water" from the main function changes of river system in Shanghai.
Image of Qinglong Town (青龙镇) in Song Dynasty
Land-forming Changes in Shanghai

Figure source: Zhao Minhua, Viewing "habitat and water" from the main function changes of river system in Shanghai.

The Shanghai district Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644AD

The Shanghai district in Qing Dynasty, 1636AD-1912AD
City Map before Shanghai Port Opening

Figure source: Zhao Minhua, Viewing "habitat and water" from the main function changes of river system in Shanghai.

The Image of Shanghai County in Qing Dynasty, Early 19th Century
City Map before Shanghai Port Opening

Shanghai County in Qing Dynasty, Early 19th Century
Map of Shanghai Concession Age (1913)

Figure source: tushuo.jk51.com.
City Image after Shanghai Port Opening

Figure source: Zhao Minhua, Viewing "habitat and water" from the main function changes of river system in Shanghai.

Suzhou River and Huangpu River in Shanghai, Early 20th Century
Figure source: www.duitang.com

Image of Shanghai in Nowadays, Early 21th Century
Where is “the rural Shanghai”? 

Figure source: Shanghai Master Plan 2017-2035
The Concept of Cultural Landscape

- fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group.
- Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result.

Carl Ortwin Sauer (December 24, 1889 – July 18, 1975 ) -- American geographer

“The Morphology of Landscape”(1925)
Types and features of Cultural Landscape in Shanghai

“combined works of nature and of man”

- Vast Rural Area of Shanghai

Figure source: https://www.lngd.net/dltkjsj/2018/0508/186337.html
Types and features of Cultural Landscape in Shanghai

“combined works of nature and of man”

- Waterway System in Shanghai

Figure source: Google Earth
Types and features of Cultural Landscape in Shanghai

“combined works of nature and of man”

● Traditional Water Town in Shanghai

Figure source: Google Earth
Types and features of Cultural Landscape in Shanghai

“combined works of nature and of man”

- Traditional Water Town in Shanghai

Figure source: the author
- Shanghai in Continuous Growing Land Area
- Urban development space is strictly controlled
- Protection of Agricultural Land
- Protection of Waterway system

Figure source: Shanghai Master Plan 2017-2035
Protection of historic sites and parks
- enhancement of Waterfront, Coastal and island Landscape Areas
Conclusion and suggestions

• Shanghai is not the Paris of the East. It is rooted in the rich soil of Jiangnan culture and enjoys characteristic geographical and cultural features. The spirit of Shanghai should be viewed with a larger scope which takes the city’s history and geography into consideration.

• The cultural landscapes surrounding the built-up areas of Shanghai emerge from the city’s natural and cultural basis, known as “the base color” of the city. The development of Shanghai cannot proceed without its background and base color.

• The countryside and water towns are the largest cultural landscapes in Shanghai and are interconnected with a huge network of water systems. These landscapes bear wisdom of traditional production and lifestyle and are a key to understanding “the rural Shanghai”.

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Conclusion and suggestions

• Although these cultural landscapes were once neglected and damaged during the process of rapid modernization, they are still the important foundation for ecological protection and cultural development in the future and can shed light on building future human habitations. Therefore, the wisdom and value of these cultural landscapes are worthy of deeper exploration and study.

• Cultural landscapes are indispensable resources for a city. In order to “plan for balance” in Shanghai, several types of unbalance need to be tackled with, including unbalance of the city and the countryside, unbalance of conservation and development, unbalance of men and nature, and unbalance of history and modernity.
Conclusion and suggestions

- Since conservation and sustainable development of cultural landscapes can greatly help in solving these issues, it is necessary to rediscover the value of cultural landscapes. This can help to incorporate historical, natural and cultural elements into people’s daily life, to create a charming “rural Shanghai” and to revive the countryside. During this process, cultural landscapes can be viewed as a holistic methodology of heritage conservation and of sustainable development of urban ecology and culture.
Open Questions for Discussion

• The water system: how to rebirth and revival?

• The countryside: a pastoral life at home?

• The water town: a poetic habitation?