

URBAN LANDSCAPE STUDIES
EUPHORIGENIC LANDSCAPES

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LAREG



SUZHOU
31° 18'N 120° 36'E

SIZE	8,488.42 KM ²
POPULATION	10,465,994
DENSITY	1,200/KM ²
ELEVATION	10 M
TIME ZONE	CHINA STANDARD (UTC+8)

THE SUZHOU LANDSCAPE

Xiaoyu Shen

Suzhou has been the economical and cultural center in southeast part in China ever since the middle and late feudal era. The economical center has moved to Shanghai just after the opium war¹. Currently, it could be one of the major cities in economy, foreign trade, industrial, commercial and logistics center in Yangtze Delta region. Over thousands of years influence from Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, the farming civilization and Wu culture in this area has been embodied in the urban landscape, neighborhood patterns, and flourishing modern day civilization, having stayed in shade for 70 years and undergone rapid development for 30 years, City of Suzhou stands tall today, raised from the ancient Helu metropolis which thrived under Wu Kings ruling. Currently, Suzhou has already entered into an era of a big city, meanwhile it continues to transform from the “canal era” to the “Lake era.” Especially during the last 30 years of reform and opening-up, a new scene of city pattern has been formed, which coexisted of the “Old Suzhou”, “New Suzhou”, “Foreign Suzhou”. How the city features

evolution during the process of urban space and time changing and how to grasp the essence meaning and external manifestations have been the hot topic of Suzhou urban construction.

THE LAYER OF NATURAL MORPHOLOGIES AND REGIONAL CULTURES

The hilly area in western part of Suzhou presents the traditional chinese landscape, which consists of the 100-300 meters high mountain and islands. the rest parts are the reclaimed plains, which are belonging to the Yangtze alluvial plain and the water network plain of Taihu lake. The whole plain landform presents a gradually sloping from west to east with 3-4 meters above the sea level, meanwhile, it also forms a complete river net system with about 2 million channels. The complete water system has been playing an important role in transport function before the motorized transport advent. In addition, the convenience irrigation as a necessary condition for Suzhou to develop the agriculture, that's why the region could become the main economic and cultural center. The houses which are built in this river system not only enhance the limitation of the river system, but also create a coordinated dynamic channel-scale space, that's the “Low bridge, running stream,

cottages”² [小桥-流水-人家]. The spatial structure and scale somehow promote the development of classical gardens in Suzhou.

Suzhou is a gathering place for the literati in the history, their chant objects are the”Low bridge, running stream, cottages”² [小桥-流水-人家], which accumulated from the historical culture , wealth and elegant classical gardens, then this kind of landscape ideology is spread through out the country. The most widely spread old saying is “There is heaven, there are Suzhou and Hangzhou”, it refers not only the beauty, prosperity and Wealthy, but also points out their yearning for the city. Nowadays, as a major tourist cities in China, Suzhou has been more and more well-known to the tourists from all over the world. Marco Polo called the city as “East Venice of the World” in 1276.

THE LAYER OF CHANGING EVERYDAY WORLD AND REGIONAL HABITUS

The topography in ancient city of Suzhou appears very flat and common, there is no ideal beautiful landscape, the only salient point is the Gratitude Temple Tower, which lies on the north intersection of north-south axis, this is the best place for overlooking the whole ancient city. The biggest different from other cities

is that the intensive canals are managed 2000 years ago, and the poetic lifes which developed on basis of the structure. Along with the reforming and opening-up, Suzhou has a rapid economic development, on one hand, people living around the suburban are flocking to the city area, on the other hand, these houses which are built along the river couldn't satisfy the rapid life style that caused by the fast increasingly population and industrialization, therefore, large quantity of multi-storey residential buildings are developed and built on both sides of Grand Canal to the west part of ancient city. This kind of new building could be the symbol of new life which consist of the spacious and full implementation of running-water system and sanitary conditions. The running water is so easy that many former outside activities such as washing, laundry are disappeared. There are no traders selling on boat when the water street lost the popularity, instead they gathered in the various living entrance by driving a motor. From then, the new generation of Suzhou residents are getting away from the traditional waterstreet. The left are only the elderly and migrant workers, they are unable to maintain these traditional houses. The original harmony neighbourhood structure is

seriously destroyed by a large number of out-coming people, it is difficult for these tenants to establish the harmonious neighbourhood because of the very frequently changed and the big difference between their culture and other factors. This serious situation makes these old water streets space seem to be decline and shrink. Although later some of street spaces are fixed to retain, the poetic life in this shell was lost forever, instead, coming the noisy tourists .

The majority of multi-layer and several independent houses appear on the outside of these residential areas, and all these residential districts are surrounded by high walls. Corresponding quality and quantity of public green space are existing in the different greens of residential open space, but these greens are not very popular to people because of the fragmented management. They prefer cycling or walking to a nearby city park to enjoy, but these parks are more or less as a larger version of the original Suzhou garden, there are always high walls around, people couldn't get the feelings when they walking in the street. These are not the city open space which on basis of definition of the Landscape Urbanism. Perhaps the cultural awareness of the private gardens have been strongly influenced

in both planning designers and citizens, the designers take the classical gardens as their highest professional pursuit, meanwhile the general public would be happy to enjoy the industrialized classical gardens.

On the farmland around Jinji lake stands a new city, which lies to the east part of ancient city and is full of waterways. Suzhou industrial park presents the modern urban life style and offers leisure and enjoyment of public space to residents around. In addition to the avenue, which is formed by an average daily flow of 5 million people, the city square and the outside Water platform are also regarded as highlights to attract people. It has become a good place for the new couples for their weddings.

The hills from west part of the ancient city to Taihu lake shows the most outstanding natural scenery in the whole region of Suzhou, one can get the panorama of Taihu lake by standing on top of the highest hill of Qionglong mountain, then appear the vast lake, fishing boats combined with so many peaks. This landscape also is regarded as the seclusion place for the literatis, therefor, there are plenty of cultural heritages left for the futures. Along with the convenient traffic more and more people are coming here for sightseeing. These landscape

are not only famous for their beauty, but also rich in agricultural products, such as bayberry, loquat, biluochun tea in Dongting mountain and the crabs in Taihu lake. All these products are very famous in the whole country. Eating has always been the most important thing in the Chinese awareness, so this place will attract a lot of residents and tourists to drive here in picking seasons; what a beautiful thing when you enjoy the landscape while eating.

The biggest influence between every day life and geographical relations is the traffic system change, which is caused by the industrialization. From then, the very closed original poetic life went more far away.

THE LAYER OF GLOBALIZATION, POLITICS AND INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS

The ancient city of Suzhou is not a product with a natural development process just from village, town to city, it generated by the powerful feudal political force in the beginning. In 514 BC, during the Spring and Autumn period, Wuzixu, the prime minister of king Helu, supervised the construction of Wu in the plain to the east part of Taihu lake. The layout marked the beginning of today's city is the original form of a "double chess

board". It obviously shows from the Pingjiang plan that there are mainly six vertical and fourteen horizontal rivers, this number and density is difficult for other cities to match. A more structured chess board which seems like a water network was formed by these channel linears. Because the streets and canals are in paralleled existing, an effective and lively city transport system was formed by these two superposed structures. Also, the defense here is different from other cities because of the dual system: The land gates and water gates are adjacent existing, meanwhile, around the walls there is a moat which belongs to the canal system and flows to the surrounding villages. It can be said that the relative natural dual system in surrounding villages could be the original imitation object of a double chess board. During the past 2500 years, the unique system of the "double chess board" has never been changed. Some buildings which attached to the system changed a little just along with the social structure, particular, because the opening of the Suitang Grand Canal, the economic center moved to south part, Suzhou became the regional economic and cultural center in the middle and late feudal era. Wealth concentration and cultural development make

a big influence on urban landscape changing, some landscape structures such as “Low bridge, running stream, cottages” have reproduced the whole city, then evolved into the thriving private garden. The ancient city of Suzhou is still well preserved under the double promotion of commercial interests and cultural responsibility, especially in the Pingjiang and Shantang areas, they are intact repair and remained very well. Standing on the bridge, scattered old house and passing vessels are all in your panoramic view. The different thing is that there are a lot of tourists on board besides the businessman.

The new district lies to the west part of the ancient city. The development and construction follows the spirit of the state council: “protect the style of the ancient city, speed up the new district” which was executed in 1990. In 1994, the state council issued the “approval of development and construction the industrial park Suzhou” item to develop the Suzhou industrial park. There is a traffic artery named Ganjiang road which crosses directly between the two new major road system and the whole ancient city. This is the direct confrontations not only between the ancient and modern transport systems, agriculture and industry, but also the standoff between

poetry and machine life. Fortunately, there is no more serious damaging road appears because of the protection policy. But the original street space which exists outside the city has been almost removed, and most of the rivers have been cut off and even landfill because of the new road. So far, the old villages are banned, as “compensation”, the detached residence are forced to move into the “living machine”.

Different development models and management structures led to two different kinds of landscape. It obviously shows the development in the east part of industrial park is more successful, it is more attractive to investors, workers and visitors. The planning, design, and management is generated by the mutual consultation of China and Singapore. The overall planning and landscape design of Jinji lake is completed by the company of EDAA, one highlight point which is providing the high quality and open leisure space for free. These above are coming from the globalization, which led to the development of industrialization and urbanization in Suzhou industrial park at the same time. In my opinion, the early development of the western area only is a rational industrial, in the area center, there is a large commercial amuse-

ment park named Suzhou paradise, which is built next to Lion mountain. One should charge the high price tickets then could be allowed to enter the park, which is surrounded by walls. In addition to the global factors, one main reason for these differences is the lack of insufficient funds at the beginning.

Taihu overhead road and light rail systems would narrow the distance between city areas and Taihu lake, at the same time accelerate the new district from “Canal era” to “Taihu lake era”, it also means, form the industrial to the urbanization. Directly presenting the “shanshui”³ [山水] landscape resources from western to the public to improve the quality of living environment.

The new transportation systems have been developed quite well in the five country-level cities around, they greatly reduce the time and space distance between the villages. Therefore, in 2003, the administrative divisions were re-adjusted by the government, the small towns are combined into the large towns, thus the greater resources of the region can be highly uniformed and improved, it is also a preparing work for the industrial production which is coming form the city later. But this change has some impacts to the rural character, for example, some

towns attempt to build a new center between the merger towns, however, it didn't form due to the strong traditional sense of community and the traditional social structure, in fact, it hindered the development and expansion of the traditional center. The only advantage is to bring new infrastructure to the original suburban areas.

The rapid development and improvement of new transport systems result a connection between the build-up area in the city and surrounding towns, directly or indirectly led to the old traffic dual system malaise. At the same time the cultural landscape structure of the water-village system will be disappeared.

THE MEDIATING LAYER, THE FABRIC OF THE CITY AND THE PALIMPSEST OF THE LANDSCAPE

According to the view of Henri Lefebvre, the media layer could be regarded as a middle layer between the every day life and the layer of global and autonomous systems. The middle layer could be not only a city, but also the landscape, it is an organized area of daily life in living, working and leisure areas. This fabric is the space or landscape where people can join in freely. Therefore, it should be the outer contour of the building in the

city, such as streets, squares; meanwhile could be the country road in the countryside.

Suzhou has experienced a long cultivation of 2,500 years, except the western mountain area still remain the natural landscape, the rest parts are all farmland. All these farmlands and villages consist of the the two-systems organization which is made of canals and streets. The basic model is: all houses are built along the dual system, between the houses and farmland exist a village public space, which is consisting of open spaces in front of each house. Every one can go to the farmland by crossing the perpendicular ridge. Since a large number of urban public green spaces are in great demand on trees, farmers can earn more money through planting trees. In addition, they have more flexible time to spend on “Made in China”. Thus part of the farmland has been occupied by the dense forest. Similar to the streets of the town, the original ridge and the country roads have become the enclosed space, since there is a lack of popular cohesion of urban street space, there will be a big security risk during the night.

Almost all roads in Suzhou are planted with trees and corresponding hedges, these rows of the meas-

ures often affect people’s perception of the regional landscape features, for example, one standing in suburbs but couldn’t feel the idyllic scenery. The Green Belt boundary of the ancient city moat continued the elegant style in planning and design, and it should play the role in integrating the public space around, especially for this actual function-missing ancient city canal system, rather than a ring or linear development structure of their own. The same effect also appears in the urban green spaces, for example the West District ought to be a resources shortage of urban public space because of the originally gated communities, but still placed quantities of massive hedge flowers to occupy the activities of public space. The effectiveness of classical gardens has largely increased the fragmentation of public space. Just several nodes of public green spaces have been improved, which exist outside the overhead road in the ancient city: these four greens provide not only the high life quality of local residents, but also take part in the integration of the canal space around. However, the closed residential area around still could be the stumbling block to integration of urban public space. The most popular and successful city open space is the Suzhou industrial park which

lies in east part of Jinji Lake. It offers many different levels of public spaces for all residents and the access, such as square, lake avenue, public buildings and a variety of theme parks. It also creates a variety of functions and structural diversity of a public open space system. Around this open space, the low-density luxury residential and the residential or office construction are built increasingly.

Globalization and politics have a very large impact on Chinese cities. We could say that the Chinese cities have such a fast and efficient development also benefit from this level. Therefore, the influence on every day life and the urban landscape of Suzhou is much bigger than the in European cities, even both of them are caused by layers — landscape of globalization and the infrastructure systems. Then this situation led to a non-uniformed Suzhou: white wall, black tiles, water bridges combined together and formed a quaint old city. West metro seems to be a legacy of the ancient city — commonly known as “the New Suzhou”, the western part of New district could be the only natural landscape area in Suzhou. East part of the city which lies around the lake, presents us a vibrant international city of the face — known as “Foreign Suzhou”. The canal-street dual system

could be found as the common factor in the urban landscape between different districts. The function missing dual system should be a new landscape, which could bear the modern functions and organize the new urban life. Using some interdisciplinary projects, such as the river training and water management in Taihu lake and ancient city of Suzhou. When the four new cities around the ancient have been developed, it will reduce the pressure of the ancient city and bring new opportunities to transform the city’s public space also.

CONCLUSION

The dual system of land and water was the comprehensive and effective infrastructure before the car appeared, it was the artificially constructed which was composed of traffic, flood control and drainage defense, and the poetic landscape of everyday life are formed on it. However, the dual system lost the productive functions completely in automotive rampant, meanwhile, the productive life functions are disappeared. The restructuring of Suzhou industries will inevitably lead to the change of lifestyle. Also a series of problems caused by high-rise residential buildings, such as in different neighborhoods, some health problems caused by environmental

degradation and more free time be obtained by the post-industrial transformation of the city. All these factors will make the residents in a “living machines” to eager for the urban public space. It is a new opportunity for the dual system to enhance the self-improvement. The designer should transform the “second nature” which combined with the city development and demand and make sure it can organize the daily life and revitalization of the past vitality. According to the perspective of Henri Lefebvre and John Brinckerhoff Jackson, in Suzhou, it will cause us to be more comprehensive and objective when we analyzing the complex urban landscape and guiding people to live a new life. More and more rivers are transformed into a high-quality urban open space in the worldwide. With the promotion of ecological concept and the enhancing importance of urban open space, the closed road urban river are excavated once again. such as Qingxi-chuan (South Korea) and Liugong Duct (Taipei). In addition, the city of Valencia has transformed the original river converted into a continuous urban open space, which could link the original partition cities and give more green space to the city. After transformation, the river plays the ecological, recreational and aesthetic functions

and many other effects. The particular dual system in Suzhou is a network of rivers and roads by the myriad of different sizes, the scope of the ecological potential of this network could be larger than other rivers in the city. It is a great potential of healthy and sustainable development for the city when the dual system enhanced like other river road. Water system will help to strengthen the self-cleaning function and play important role in flood controlling. While it connects all the city open spaces, such as parks, classical gardens, sights, and extends to every corner of the city, it becomes a medium which could organize peoples' everyday life. Residents can use the integrated landscape conveniently in the future and the disappeared poetic life will return.

ENDNOTES

¹ The Opium Wars, also known as the Anglo-Chinese Wars, divided into the First Opium War from 1839 to 1842 and the Second Opium War from 1856 to 1860. These were the climax of disputes over trade and diplomatic relations between China under the Qing Dynasty and the British Empire.

² “Low bridge, running stream, cottages”: Suzhou is China’s well-known “city of garden”, which tops all others in both the number and the artistry of gardens. These gardens have their own characteristics in layout, structure and style. Especially, “Low bridge, running stream, cottages” could be the typical elements for garden city.

³ The Chinese ideogram for landscape—Shan Shui—is a compound of the symbols for mountain and water. Even in contemporary Chinese art, which seems so dominated by the figure, there are numerous references to these elements.

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