

BUILDING SHANGHAI – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN AN INCOMPARABLY DYNAMIC SETTING

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INTRODUCTION

The safeguarding of cultural heritage, in the context of townscapes and landscapes, in a country as ancient and vast as China, rarely evokes the consideration of heritage assets little over a century old. Shanghai, in the ‘modern’¹ sense, though one of China’s youngest cities, is today one of the largest cities on earth, boasting a rich, multi-layered texture that reflects myriad international events and influences. After four decades of virtual isolation, Shanghai has enjoyed unprecedented growth since the early 1990s which has seen much of the downtown, suburbs and surrounding rural areas fundamentally transformed. This process of change has imposed unparalleled strains on the city – its citizens, neighbourhoods and physical fabric. Owing to Shanghai’s youthfulness, its tangible and intangible heritages have attracted only moderate attention internationally and from an administration focussed on economic development. Consequently, the attrition of Shanghai’s heritages and their critical relationship with their broader setting has threatened to alter irrevocably the city’s unique character and degrade the standard of living of its current and future residents.

The underlying premise of this study is that a firm understanding of the evolution of a city is essential if urban environments and the integrity of their relationship with their setting are to be safeguarded. This paper therefore deals exclusively, albeit briefly, with an examination of Shanghai’s historical development and how this has affected the city’s physical form and its social character.

An Overview Of Shanghai’S Evolution

Historically, Shanghai was not significant among Chinese imperial cities nor was it a colonial city. The city is founded on trade and was forged by its quasi-colonial past. Trade is central to Shanghai’s make-up and is the primary influence in shaping its physical form and social character.

¹ ‘Modern’ here applies to the urban form that has developed since settlement.

Trade is what attracted Chinese and foreigners to Shanghai, whose subsequent interdependent settlements were also defined (and often encumbered) by their mercantile predilection. The relationship between the development of these settlements that collectively form an urban whole and the city’s surrounding setting is one characterised by persistent disrespect: Shanghai has never been confined by natural or self-imposed boundaries and therefore has continued to grow further outwards from its core, unperturbed by the continued erosion of its setting that began over three centuries ago and continues today at a faster pace than ever.

Shanghai’s Origins

Shanghai stands approximately 12 miles south of the mouth of the Yangtze River, at the intersection of two important waterways, the Whuangpu River and the Woosung River (now known as Suzhou Creek), which provide access to the sea and the hinterland respectively. The traditionally affluent neighbouring provinces of Jiansu and Zhejiang, containing the opulent commodities of silk and tea, enjoy auspicious geographical and climatic conditions, which have created a region that, characterised by abundant agricultural activity, has been described as ‘the Garden of China’².

The first record of Shanghai dates from the Song Dynasty (AD 960-1279), but its illustrious recent history began in AD 1291³ when it became a ‘Xian’, or district administration, making it an important centre administratively, culturally, and commercially, and ‘a large town, celebrated for its press of business, and not for its sea port alone’⁴. This ascendancy also attracted unwanted attention, such as the attacks between April and June of 1553⁵ by Japanese and compliant Chinese pirates. During

² Carlos Augusto Montalto de Jesus, *Historic Shanghai*, Shanghai Mercury (Shanghai), 1909, p.xxvii.

³ Some records put this date at 1279, 1292, and even 1366.

⁴ *General Description of Shanghai and its environs*, the Mission

⁵ Some sources state this date to be 1543.

this time, Shanghai ‘was set on fire and burnt to the ground’⁶. The residents of Shanghai responded by contributing generously to the construction of a city wall.⁷

The city wall was among the most significant changes to affect the relationship between Shanghai and its setting until foreigners arrived in the mid 19th century⁸. Six gates⁹ and, later, four water gates¹⁰ provided the only link to the surrounding area via paths and waterways (see figure 1). Shanghai’s setting beyond its wall, excluding the Whuangpu, was entirely agricultural with scattered hamlets or minor settlements interlinked by waterways. The many waterways in and around Shanghai served as the city’s lifeblood, providing defence and a means of waste disposal, drinking water and transportation to neighbouring villages and settlements.

The first significant expansion outside the wall occurred after 1681, when an Imperial ban on using the sea was lifted. This resulted in the development of some of Shanghai’s most important streets along the riverbank outside the city wall, where commercial activities flourished. The abundance of trade was noted by early foreign visitors, who described the scene on the Whuangpu as a ‘forest of masts’¹¹.

The city’s relatively minor political status, reflected by its annular wall and irregular street plan¹², contrasted with China’s larger imperial cities, with their rectilinear form. As Johnson observes, the pattern of Shanghai’s development

before the arrival of foreigners ‘was one of organic growth rather than structured design’¹³.

Shanghai’s organic growth was a result of its commercial character and cultural diversity, both of which continued to be leading traits following the habitation of foreigners in 1843. Its physical characteristics reflected the city as a melting pot of new ideas – its buildings, their function, style, and setting were often an amalgam of regional influences created by merchants from around China and further afield.

The Arrival of Foreigners

The start of any formal delineation of foreign settlements in Shanghai occurred after the ‘Treaty of Nanking’¹⁴, following the British invasion of Shanghai on 16th June 1842. International trade at Shanghai began on 17th November 1843 and thereafter dominated life, relegating civic development to a lesser role than would be the case in most cities. The concept of creating or even planning a city was virtually absent. As one foreign resident later noted, ‘Commerce was the beginning, middle and end of our life in China’¹⁵.

Most foreigners lived within the walled city, while the acquisition of appropriate land in the area of the proposed British Settlement, situated north of the walled city, could be negotiated. This represented the first foreign encroachment into Shanghai’s formally rural surroundings. The first British Consul to Shanghai, Captain George Balfour, defined the criteria for the British Settlement’s boundaries as ‘lines of country creek and river, which might, if necessary, be rendered easily defensible’^{16, 17}. Many a tussle ensued between foreign merchants and local residents who were

⁶ Carlos Augusto Montalto de Jesus, *Historic Shanghai*, Shanghai Mercury (Shanghai), 1909, p.xvii.

⁷ There remains some ambiguity as to when the city wall was actually built. C. Montalto de Jesus, p.xviii. and Diamond Jubilee state 1544, General Descriptions of Shanghai and its Environs states 1552, J.W.MacLellan states 1555, and H. Lang states 1570. It seems likely that most dates may have some measure of accuracy, as the wall was built in haste following the attacks in 1553 and would have been improved thereafter.

⁸ The annular wall was two and a half miles in circumference,

⁹ Chaozong (Big East Gate), Baodai (Small East Gate), Kualong (Big South Gate), Chaoyang (Small South Gate), Yifeng (West Gate), and Yanghai (North Gate).

¹⁰ Baodai water gate across the Fang Bang, Chaozong water gate across East Zhaojia Bang, Yifeng water gate across West Zhaojia Bang, and Chaoyang water gate across Xiujia Bang, which, in 1598, was the last of the water gates to be added.

¹¹ Robert Fortune, *A Journey to the Tea Districts of China*, John Murray (London), 1852, p 12.

¹² This plan descended from age-old methods of transportation along rivers and creeks.

¹³ Linda Cooke Johnson, *Shanghai: from Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074-1858*, Stanford University Press (California), 1995, p.71

¹⁴ The Treaty outlined the ports to be opened to trade: present day

¹⁵ Charles M Dyce, *Personal Reminiscences of thirty years' residence in the Model Settlement, Shanghai, 1870-1900*, Chapman & Hall (London), 1906, p.95

¹⁶ J W Maclellan, *The story of Shanghai from the Opening of the*

¹⁷ The Yang Jin Bang to the south and the Li Jia Chang, were the first two Settlement limits, delineated in 1845. The Whuangpu was not designated the eastern boundary, as the towpath remained a public thoroughfare. The western boundary was defined as Barrier Road (now Honan Road) on 20th September 1846. The purchasing of the Li Jia Chang by the British Consulate extended the Settlement to the south bank of Suzhou Creek, followed by an extension of the western boundary to Defence Creek (now Tibet Road) on 27th November 1848 increasing the Settlement from 180 to 470 acres.

resistant to foreign occupation of their ancestral land. Consequently, the appropriation of land required for foreigners ‘went on very slowly’¹⁸ and was a source of considerable resentment.

The American Settlement

France and America, who quickly followed the British into Shanghai, further added to the rapid expansion of Shanghai into its rural surroundings. The American Episcopal Mission settled in Hongkou, on the north bank of Suzhou Creek in 1848, from which the informal American settlement ‘just grew (sic)’¹⁹. Hongkou was then very rural, where ‘wild duck, teal, and snipe were found in the ponds and marshes out of which rose squalid Chinese villages’²⁰. By the early 20th century, it was Shanghai’s most densely populated suburb, accommodating much of the city’s industry, as well as Shanghai’s lower classes and thousands of factory workers. In 1862, the unofficial American Settlement, comprising over 1000 acres of land in Hongkou, was agreed²¹, and, the following year, was combined with the British Settlement to form the International Settlement.

The French Concession

The French settled in the area between the British Settlement and the walled city and formed their own ‘Concession’. The evolution of this settlement followed a different path from the British and American areas, not least because the original priority of the French was religious propagation rather than trade²². The ‘French Ground’²³ was officially created on 6th April 1849²⁴ with the acquisition of 164 acres of land²⁵. It was small in comparison to the British

Settlement, but although ‘neglected for many years’²⁶ and ‘almost exclusively Chinese’²⁷ in appearance until well into the 20th century, it was strategically important for occupying a large portion of the river frontage and for its location in relation to the adjacent settlements.

Although the administrative structure of these settlements varied over the course of foreign occupation, Shanghai comprised three distinct, albeit ill-defined, areas: The walled city and Chinese suburbs, the French Concession, and the International Settlement (see figure 2). These areas were bound by the Whuangpu River to the east and south, and agricultural land to the west and north.

Expansion of the Foreign Settlements

From 1843, foreign trade and development were largely confined to the British area, which attracted a diverse international population, but where Chinese were forbidden from being domiciled and where both foreigners and Chinese were forbidden from building houses to rent to Chinese.

The first foreign buildings were built on prime sites along the riverfront, which became known as the Bund²⁸. The acquisition of land from Chinese occurred in an unregulated manner, starting in the north, farthest from the walled city, and extending south to what became Canton Road. The Bund was once a towpath reserved for towing junks and dumping sewage and refuse, but the Chinese official representative insisted that it should remain a public right of way, preventing it from being developed or obstructed as subsequently occurred in the American and French settlements. Today, this ‘billion dollar skyline’²⁹ overlooking the Bund foreshore, the symbol of pre-liberation Shanghai, is characterised by its irregular layout, narrow streets and awkward position of buildings – all a result of the ad hoc purchasing of land titles in its first days.

By 1850, ‘the Bund lots were pretty well built upon’³⁰, forcing subsequent development westwards, away from the Whuangpu. This necessitated the construction of roads and

¹⁸ H Lang, *Shanghai considered socially*, Shanghai American

¹⁹ H B Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, Volume 1*, Longmans, Green and Co. (London, New York), 1910-1918, p.349

²⁰ *Shanghai – 1843-1893, The Model Settlement: its birth, its youth*,

²¹ These boundaries were contested by the Chinese and not formally delineated until May 1893.

²² In 1847, the Jesuit missionaries had purchased a site in the hamlet of Xu Jia Hui several miles southwest of the foreign settlements, and another important French religious institution was the St Francis Xavier Cathedral in Dong Jia Du.

²³ The ‘French Concession’ was bound to the south by the moat of east by the Whuangpu from the Yang Jin Bang Creek to the Canton Guild, and to the west by the creek adjoining the Temple of the God of War (Guan Di Miao).

²⁴ (MacLellan says June)

²⁵ 23 acres were added on 29th October 1861.

²⁶ H Kounin and A Yaron, *The Diamond Jubilee of the International Settlement of Shanghai*, Post Mercury Co. (United States), 1940, p.84

²⁷ Arnold Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Hong Kong, Shanghai and other Treaty Ports of China*, Lloyds Greater Britain

²⁸ The word ‘Bund’, originating in India and Pakistan to describe a famous skyline.

²⁹ R Barz, *Sketches of present-day Shanghai*, Centurion Printing

³⁰ J W MacLellan, *The story of Shanghai from the Opening of the Port to Foreign Trade*, North-China Herald (Shanghai), 1889, p.30

paths to link the Whuangpu with the dispersed houses, businesses and recreational areas, such as the Racecourse. Responsibility for the development of a system of roads in Shanghai rested with a hastily established Committee of Roads and Jetties, who, championing the line of least resistance, 'did not plan much for the future' and 'saw no great need for roads'³¹. The policy of these visionless merchants was largely responsible for creating Shanghai's 'narrow and tortuous streets'³² that exist to this day.

The first significant event to influence Shanghai's subsequent form and impact upon its rural setting following the arrival of foreigners was the 17-month occupation of the walled city by the Small Swords from 7th September 1853³³. 20,000 Chinese refugees fled to the foreign settlements, proving decisively the impracticability of excluding Chinese from the foreign areas.

On 11th July 1854, the three treaty powers approved a new set of Land Regulations omitting any restriction on Chinese residing, renting or building in the foreign settlements³⁴. From hereon, Shanghai's development was reliant on and defined by the inclusion of Chinese residents inside the foreign settlements and their free movement into and out of the foreign areas.

The Taiping Rebellion and Early Urbanisation

This new policy had lasting consequences in 1860 when the Taiping Rebellion threatened Shanghai's invulnerability. On 18th August, the Taipings arrived at the gates of the walled city and for nearly four years wrought havoc in the surrounding countryside. 'Vast numbers'³⁵ of Chinese refugees bringing with them all their possessions caused a construction boom in the foreign settlements and an unprecedented escalation in land prices, covering former rural areas of the settlement in 'a maze of new streets and

alleyways with thousands of new tenements'³⁶. The Land Regulations of 1854 had become 'defective, inconsistent and inadequate'³⁷. Meanwhile, a new Municipal Council was formed³⁸, which comprised the system of government with which Shanghai would muddle along until the early 1940s³⁹. The Taiping Rebellion, although the result of exceptional circumstances, unleashed Shanghai's nascent real estate market and illustrated the impracticability of the confined foreign settlements.

A gradual process of encroachment into the hinterland defined the remainder of the 19th century, as the residences of foreigners spilled out beyond the settlement boundaries and developed along 'extra-settlement roads'⁴⁰ to escape the increasingly densely populated foreign settlements. Shanghai's rural setting was transformed under the pressure of urbanisation.

In response to this pressure, the Chinese approved an extension of the International Settlement boundaries in May 1899 from 1779 acres to 5583 acres. The French Concession too was extended to 358 acres in January 1900. The considerable increase in size of the International Settlement was its last extension, despite persistent pressure on the Chinese government through the early 20th century for further extensions. The French Concession was increased by a substantial 2167 acres on 20th July 1914 (see figure 3). The relationship between Shanghai and its setting was altered dramatically, as vast areas of formerly rural land were now incorporated by the two foreign settlements. This land was quickly developed, as Chinese continued to move into the foreign settlements to escape the lawlessness that

³¹ II Kounin and A Yaron, *The Diamond Jubilee of the International Settlement of Shanghai*, Post Mercury Co. (United States), 1940, p.90

³² W R Carles, *Some Pages in the History of Shanghai, 1842-1856: a paper read before the China Society*, East & West (London), 1916, p.16

³³ The Small Swords were a band of rebels claiming allegiance to nonetheless caused considerable problems for the Imperial administration in Shanghai.

³⁴ They also established the Shanghai Municipal Council, the first of which was made up of five Councillors: Messrs Kay, Cunningham, King, Fearon, and Medhurst.

³⁵ Estimated to be 500,000. J W Maclellan, *The story of Shanghai Herald* (Shanghai), 1889, p.51

³⁶ C A Montalto de Jesus, *Historic Shanghai*, Shanghai Mercury

³⁷ George Lanning, *The history of Shanghai*, Kelly and Walsh (Shanghai), 1920, p.69

³⁸ The new Council was composed of nine members, who were elected land-renters.

³⁹ The number of Councillors and national representation varied throughout this period. In summary: it originally consisted of seven members (five British and two American), and was increased in 1869 to nine members (seven British and two Americans). One German member replaced an American before World War One, then, after 1914, the British seats decreased and a Japanese Councillor was admitted. Until 1928, the nine members consisted of five British, two Americans and two Japanese. In 1928, three seats for Chinese were added, followed by two more in 1930, bringing the total membership to 14.

⁴⁰ Extra-settlement roads were roads built by the Municipal Council beyond the boundary of the foreign settlements. Foreign residents built houses along these roads and their properties were considered part of the settlements, but the Chinese strongly resisted this policy, which amounted to an annexation of Chinese land by stealth.

characterised much of China's provinces at the time, and foreign residents moved to Shanghai to seek wealth or sanctuary⁴¹. Improvements in modern transportation further contributed to the urban sprawl, as railways, trams and the motorcar impacted on the ability of the residents of Shanghai to travel further afield, making Shanghai 'one of London's remote suburbs'⁴² via the Trans-Siberian Railway.

These innovations applied increasing pressure on Shanghai's setting. This was demonstrated clearly by Japan's growing influence in China towards the end of the 19th century. In 1894, China and Japan went to war over Korea, and the consequent signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki allowed Japanese subjects to 'carry on trade, industry and manufactures' at any of the treaty ports⁴³. From hereon, industrial growth in Shanghai was unstoppable and the city became the industrial capital of China. In the first three decades of the 20th century, hundreds of factories and mills were built in Shanghai's suburbs, particularly in Hongkou, Pudong and north of the International Settlement.

The rapid development characterised by this epoch heralded several distinct phases of Shanghai's architectural prime, which today constitutes the core component of its physical heritage. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese residences, known as lilong, covered much of the city to accommodate the growing Chinese population. These inexpensive terrace houses, whose origins date to the Small Sword and Taiping Rebellions, are arguably the single most important element to define the physical and social character of Shanghai since the 19th century. Meanwhile, from the late 1920s, the architectural design of foreign buildings, formerly rooted in neo-Classical or 'neo-Renaissance' styles, gave way to Modernism, which coincided with the introduction of entirely new forms of building, most notably the high-rise apartment building⁴⁴, but also cinemas, theatres, hotels, entertainment complexes, department stores and factories.

With the foreign settlements enjoying unprecedented prosperity beyond the jurisdiction of the Chinese Government, the newly established Nationalist Government in 1927 made plans for a new Civic Centre located north of Shanghai, which was designed to draw influence away from

the foreign areas and build a strong, independent Chinese settlement nearer to the mouth of Yangtze (see figure 4a&b). The plan consumed a huge area of formerly agricultural land and several villages to the north of the International Settlement, but it failed principally because of Japanese aggression in Shanghai in 1932 and 1937. The latter razed the new development and plunged Shanghai into the frontline of the war between China and Japan. The foreign settlements were once again inundated with foreign and Chinese residents fleeing the carnage outside the settlement boundaries, which were defended by the armies and navies of the various nations with vested interests in Shanghai.

War, Contraction, and Resurgence

Shanghai's capitulation finally arrived in 1941 with the Japanese occupation of the foreign settlements, after which the city lay practically dormant for half a century. Liberation by Allied forces in 1945 saw a united Shanghai⁴⁵ handed to the new Nationalist Government, who then lost it to the Communists in 1949.

The Communist government's urban planning policies caused considerable disruption to the natural pulse of China's most powerful city, as its prowess began to wane. All property was nationalised and foreign businesses and residents were forced to leave. The city declined and its relationship with its setting was affected only by the construction of Soviet-styled workers' communes in and beyond its suburbs.

China's 'open-door' and economic policies from the 1980s have increased the pace of urbanisation in Shanghai with a fourfold increase in population to what is believed to be approximately 20 million. The rescinding of China's nationalised housing policy has revived Shanghai's formidable private real estate market, but the greatest transformation recently has been the planned development of Pudong, on the eastern banks of the Whuangpu. Intended to be the financial hub of China, Pudong's deliberately idiosyncratic skyline reflects a physical and conceptual severance with the city that evolved on the opposite bank, but shares the same trend for devouring land and eroding Shanghai's setting further.

⁴¹ Thousands of White Russians fleeing the Revolution arrived in Europe. Jews fled to Shanghai from Nazi Germany and neighbouring countries.

⁴² J.O.P. Bland, *Houseboat days in China*, Edward Arnold, (London), 1909, p 5.

⁴³ The article automatically applied to other Treaty nations through the 'Most Favoured Nation' clause

⁴⁴ By the late 1930s, Shanghai had the biggest number of high-rise

⁴⁵ In theory, Shanghai became a Chinese city for the first time in a century in 1943. America and Britain rescinded their extraterritorial rights to the Nationalist Government exiled in Chongqing on 11th and 13th January 1943 respectively. The French Vichy Government followed suit on 30th July, by revoking France's rights to China's puppet government. France formally abandoned extraterritoriality with the Nationalist Government on 11th February 1946.

The pressures of urbanisation are beginning to weigh heavily on Shanghai. The agricultural land on which the city's growing population has always been dependent for its survival is rapidly shrinking and retreating, and this requires food and other vital resources to be transported greater distances to their point of consumption. The sheer quantity of water tapped from Shanghai's infamously boggy subsoil is causing the city's 4000 high-rise buildings to sink by up to one inch a year. The city's urban heritages are being erased by widespread and financially driven land clearance and redevelopment. Vast swathes of lilong houses are being bulldozed or sanitised, and their residents moved to the distant suburbs to live in high-rise apartment buildings and communities devoid of the social cohesion and structures that once defined the city. These and many other indications suggest that the balance between Shanghai and its setting has reached a critical point at which the survival of both is in jeopardy.

Conclusion

Shanghai's rapid development over the past two decades represents both a continuum and a divergence of historic trends. The city's formidable economic prowess has caused a persistent, yet ad hoc urban expansion into the rural hinterland, while unique evolutionary processes over several centuries have created a complex and exceptional urban heritage. While recent development has undoubtedly complimented and modernised many facets of the city's character, the sheer scale of this development, particularly in relation to the city's setting, is threatening to undermine it critically.

The physical transformation and modernisation of large areas of the historic portion of the city are contributing to the erosion of suburban and formerly rural land on which the city depends, while the removal of physical structures and dispersal of communities are damaging the city's character permanently. The constantly shifting relationship between Shanghai's urban form and its setting has always been a strained one – the pressure on the latter always yielding to the former. Today, the two most critical distinctions from this constant process of change are the scale of recent development and the economic pressure imposed on the redevelopment of ill-defined historic areas.

Interdisciplinary approaches aimed at addressing these unprecedented changes occurring in Shanghai are essential if urban transformation and its effect on heritage assets and their setting are to be defined, engaged with and safeguarded adequately. This study calls for a greater synchronicity between related parties: professionals, urban administrations

and institutions, and the public. The purpose of this broader study has aimed to encourage this process by providing a detailed examination of Shanghai's evolution, including the shifting relationships between the city and its setting, in order to improve the wider understanding of the city's unique heritage assets and encourage informed debate and participation among these related parties.

Abstract

The task of managing dynamic change is always a complex, multi-faceted process, but in environments facing unparalleled transformation, this process becomes intractable.

Establishing the right tools to help define and safeguard threatened urban heritage and its setting in the context of Shanghai's growth over the past decade, which reflects one of the most intense urban transformations in history, presents many exceptional challenges and opportunities. This paper aims to provide an overview of the evolution of Shanghai's inimitable character and its unique setting. It has been extracted from a far more detailed analysis of its physical development that will be available in the form of an international publication in 2006. The purpose of this broader study has been to help define Shanghai's physical heritage and thereby contribute to supporting its preservation through this current period of dynamic change. Lessons learned from this exercise can help establish a practical framework and appropriate tools which can be used in comparable urban environments for similar purposes.

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Fig.1

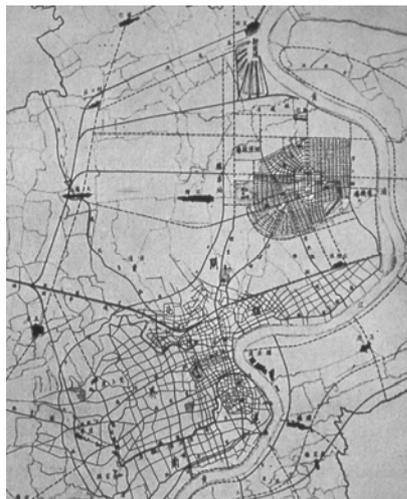


Fig.4a



Fig.2



Fig.4b



Fig.3