

Shanghai: From a Common County Seat to an International Megalopolis

Ge Jianxiong

Institute of Chinese Historical Geography, Fudan University

“From a small fishery village to an international megalopolis” has always been a miracle describing the history of modern Shanghai. But in fact, the process of the development of this megalopolis is far more complicated and the starting point of the modern city is not a fishery village, but a common and somewhat prosperous county seat.

A common county seat town in the Yangtze River Delta

One of the shortened form for the place name of Shanghai is *hu* (沪), which derives from the name of a bamboo fishery tool *hu* (扈) in ancient China. That means this area had been well known for its fishery or fishers, or at least had fishery as one of its main productivities. But this legend traces back as early as the Eastern *Jin* (东晋) Dynasty (AD317-419)¹ and we can hardly find any effects of the fishery at that time on the development of early Shanghai localities.

The 10th century saw the emergence of the earliest localities by the riverside in this alluvial plain. The name of the locality took from a small river—one of the numerous tributaries to the *Wusong* River (吴淞江)—*Shang Hai Pu* (上海浦). In Chinese, *Shang* means upper and *Hai* means sea, while *Pu* is the native name for river. The first evidence of Shanghai as a name of a settlement was recorded as *Shang Hai Wu* (上海务), the seat of an office for wine-tax collection in early 11th century. That means people in the area with Shanghai as its center had enough surplus grain to produce wine as a commodity. But it was not until the decline of the nearby *Qinglong Zheng* (青龙镇), that Shanghai became a main harbor in *Huating* County (华亭县). Situated on the southern bank of the *Wusong* River, *Qinglong* had been an important harbor for the county for many years. But since late *Tang* (唐) Dynasty, the *Wusong* River shrank continuously. At the same time, owing to the expanding of land and the eastward moving to the coast line, the *Qinglong* harbor became further and further to the sea. *Qinglong* was finally replaced by Shanghai and *Zheng* (镇) was established in Shanghai at the end of the

1 The place name of Hu Du (沪渎) was mentioned in *The Biography of Yu Tan*, the 76th Volume of *The History of Jin Dynasty* (《晋书》卷76《虞潭传》) and *The Biography of Yuan Shansong* (《袁山松传》), the 83rd Volume of the same book. No evidence supports the determination of the place which was made by the local scholars or the authors of local history of Shanghai as late as Ming.

Southern *Song* (南宋).² The favorable situation for navigation and commerce provided the town prosperity and development. As a result, a new county of Shanghai was established on the base of the *Zheng* in 1292.³

The silt of the *Wusong* River was so serious that the width of the river became as narrow as three *li* (里). A heavy flood in 1403 gave the river a hard blow and a new river course was formed in the next year as a result of a water control project. From then on, *Huangpu* River (黄浦江), once a small tributary to lower *Wusong* River, held the main volume of water from *Taihu* Lake (太湖) to the sea and *Wusong* River became its tributary.⁴ Fortunately, the town of Shanghai where the county seated was just by the side of *Huangpu* River and not far from *Wusong* River. While keeping the convenience of inland navigation through *Wusong* River, it benefited from the sea routs connecting by the *Huangpu* River. In 1553, as a reaction to the furious raids of “*Wuo Kou*” (倭寇, Japanese bandits), a circle wall as high as 5 meter was built in order to defend the city. 1684 witnessed the establishing of a new custom house in Shanghai, which took in charge for the coastal line from *Zhapu* (乍浦) to *Huanghe Laokou* (黄河老口, the formal mouth of the Yellow River in northern Jiangsu).

But Shanghai remained a traditional county city before its opening up as a trading port. Surrounding by the city wall, its main part, such as the *Yamen* (衙门), temples, schools, guest houses, market, shops, was limited in this closed area. It was not until mid 19th century that the new market and some professional trading lanes took its shape along the *Huangpu* River out of the city wall.⁵ Compared with the other county cities in the *Yangtze* River Delta, you can hardly find any specific characteristics in Shanghai. Even *Yiyuan* (豫园), a private garden built by a local gentry during 1559 to 1577 in *Ming* Dynasty which is still a proud of Shanghai, is but a common scenic site in other cities. The reason for the establishment of the Custom House was mainly its favorable situation—the connection of the *Yangtze* River and the sea, the center of the coastal line—but not the real importance in trade.

An International Megalopolis without Unified City Plan

As a result of the Opium War, China was forced to sign *The Treaty of Nanjing* with the

2 See Tan Qixiang (谭其骧): *The year of the emergence of the place name for Shanghai and the establishing of Shanghai as a Zheng* (上海得名和建镇的年代问题), published on *Wen Hui Bao* (文汇报), Nov. 15, 1962.

3 Map I: *Shanghai during Yuan Dynasty*, from *Historical Atlas of Shanghai*, published by Shanghai Renmin Publishing House, 1999.

4 *Biography of Xia Yuanji* (夏元吉), the 149th Volume of *History of Ming Dynasty; Records of Rivers and Irrigations* (河渠志), the 88th Volume of the same book.

5 Map II: *The City of Shanghai County during late Qing*, from *Shanghai Xian Zhi* (*Gazette of Shanghai County*, 上海县志), 1872 ed..

Government of the United Kingdom on August 29, 1842. Art II of the treaty dealt with opening of the five ports to British subjects, their families and dependents, and the appointment of consular officials as the “medium of communication.” Three years later, the first British Consul in Shanghai, Cap. Balfour, forced the *Taodai* (道台, the prefecture-level supervisor above Shanghai) *Gong Mujiu* (宫慕久) to sign the Land Regulation, in which the demarcation of the first British Settlement was determined. All the lands held by the foreigners should be at a uniformed rent or tax, 1,500 copper cash per *mu* (亩, 7,260 sq.ft.). The Chinese owners in the settlement were forbidden to rent lands to any Chinese or build houses for renting for the Chinese merchants from then on. This settlement enlarged in 1848 as 2,829 *mu* while the original was 839 *mu*. As a rule, the sphere of the French Settlement which had been determined in 1849 enlarged several times to 15,136 *mu*. On June 25, 1863, the American Settlement which covered 8,865 *mu* was divided but combined with the British Settlement and formed the International Settlement on September 25 the same year.

The Land Regulation of 1845 contained all the elements, which made Shanghai the more unconventional municipality in the world. Local municipal control was to be exercised by the foreign community as a whole, but was still vested in the Chinese authorities theoretically. The Settlement became a sovereign, self-ruling, international body politic. Its fate was in the hands of its people—making the settlement a republic—and, as its people were admitted as “land renters,” the right to vote depended on a certain minimum amount of land rent actually paid each year—making the settlement a plutocracy. A committee of land renters was to be the municipal government, the Shanghai Municipal Council. Exterritoriality was enjoyed by the foreigners in the settlement.

New buildings mushroomed up on the farmland out of the Shanghai city, population increased sharply and a modern city developed swiftly. In 1852, ten years after the establishment of the international settlement, the urban part of Shanghai, include the international settlement, had a population of about half million. At the beginning of the 20th century, the population doubled thus made Shanghai a megalopolis of one million.⁶ Fifteen years later, in 1915, another double had been made and the population reached 2 million. 1942 saw a population of 3.92 million while in the spring of 1949, just before the liberation of Shanghai, the population reached a new peak of 5.54 million.

In less than one hundred years, the net increase is as large as 4.9 million. That means most of the increase were immigrants and their descendants but not the natural increase

6 Population statistics in this part based on Zou Yiren: *Researches of Population Changes in Old Shanghai*, published by Shanghai Renmin Publishing House, 1980.

of the native population. According to the statistics of 1946 and 1949, the non-native population shares 79% and 85% respectively, the immigrants and their descendants are about 4 million. Among the immigrants, those moved from *Jiangsu* (江苏) and *Zhejiang* (浙江) Provinces occupied the largest proportion. According to the statistics in 1951, the both surpassed one million. Immigrants from *Anhui* (安徽), *Guangdong* (广东) and *Shandong* (山东) were more than 100,000 and those from *Hubei* (湖北), *Hunan* (湖南), *Fujian* (福建), *Jiangxi* (江西), *Henan* (河南) and other North China provinces were more than 10,000. There were also immigrants from all corners of China and from all the main national minorities as well.

There were only 26 foreign residents in Shanghai when it opened in 1842. In 1915, the number of foreigners was more than 20,000. The climax as high as 150,000 appeared in 1942, on the eve of the Japanese occupation. Right after the Communist takeover, there were still 28,000 foreign residents. They were from Britain, the United States, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, India, Portugal, Italy, Austria, Vietnam, Korea and other European countries. During the World War II, Shanghai opened its door to the Jewish refugees deported by the German fascists and their followers. Many Jews settled down in Shanghai and formed their own community.

In 1950, the immigrants and their descendants from *Jiangsu* and *Zhejiang* covered 79% of the total population. Most of them moved from Southern *Jiangsu* and Northern *Zhejiang* on the *Yangtze* River Delta which had become an area of most densely populated and with most advanced economical and cultural level in China since the tenth century. In this area, in spite of the lowest personal average farmland and the heaviest taxes and levies burden, people there had usually the highest level of living condition. The reason is that there were well-cultivated agriculture, advanced business, service and handicraft industry. At the same time, many people moved away from their hometown to make their new life. The folk customs there was neither so strong like those in *Guangdong* with intense concept of native and ancestral idea, nor like those in the North China which had usually been conservative and refused to accept new things. Generally speaking, the quality of the emigrants from this area is the best and highest.

The multi ethnic groups and multi cultures at home and abroad made Shanghai a real international community and a new Shanghai culture formed, not only a mixture of east and west, traditional and modern. Different architectures and different ways of life formed a panorama of living museum. The Shanghai dialect itself is a mixture of different dialects of the immigrants based on local dialect. No wonder *Chinglish* (洋泾浜英语) prevailed over and was once the useful media between the Chinese and the foreigners. The unique position of the international settlements provided Shanghai unprecedented

favorable condition in realizing a political, economic, commercial, financial and cultural center in China, as well as in the East Asia.

On the other hand, this megalopolis had never been unified and well planned or designed. Even in the international settlements, each authority had its own consideration. For example, the voltage in the British settlement differed from that in the French. In order to expand its sphere and seize more profit, the international settlements did not stop in building new roads out of their boundaries. The northern region of the International Settlement occupied by building roads out of the boundary was as large as 1,700 *mu*, while its western region was 45,840 *mu*.

Sharp contrast existed between different districts of the city, rich and poor, old and new, even paradise and hell. Slums might be found in downtown. Factories ran in a resident house. Railway intruded into inhabitant region. They are all common sense in the city. This is why people usually have utterly different impression, memory or record for Shanghai.

The Unsuccessful Grand Shanghai Plan⁷

Right after the founding of the Nationalist government in *Nanjing* April 1927, the formation of Shanghai Special Municipality was declared. As an extraordinary measure, its administrative division was enlarged to 495 *skm.*, the whole Shanghai County and parts of the neighboring four counties were included. Considering its great importance, the *Nanjing* government and the Nationalist Party pledged to build Shanghai as a most advanced modern international megalopolis much better than the international settlements. But the reality was quite unsatisfactory because of the existence of the international settlements as the central and main part of the city. The municipality was separated and the Chinese settlements were almost on the edge of the megalopolis not considering their backwardness and shabby.

In July 1929, the municipal government divided a land of 7,000 *mu* for the construction of the new downtown. The Committee for the construction formed next month and then put forward a series of constructive projects which consisting of the Grand Shanghai Plan or Construction Plan for New Shanghai. The plan includes:

I. The central part

The central part will be divided into three regions of political, commercial and resi-

⁷ Based on *History of Shanghai* (上海史), chiefly edited by Tang Zhengchang, published by Shanghai Renmin Publishing House, 1989, Vol. VI, pp. 650-664; *Mayer Wu's Address to the Residents of the Municipality on the New Year's Day of 1936*, *Year Book of Shanghai Municipality, 1936*; *Business Report of the Construction Committee of the Downtown of Shanghai Municipality, Aug. 1929 to June 1930*.

dence where the government departments, National Party organizations, municipal council, museum, library and the main public buildings were designed. A radicalized road system was planned to connect the *Wusong* (吴淞) Port, *Qiujiang* (虬江) Harbor, the railway station and the other part of the city.

II. The harbor and railway

The new harbor will build along the lower reach of the *Huangpu* River out of the international settlement and a canal will be dug in the future in order to link the *Wusong* River and newly developed harbors. New stations and connecting railway will build to separate passengers and cargoes and avoiding pass through the downtown.

III. District division

The whole municipality will be divided into five districts: administration, industry, commercial harbor, business and residence.

IV. Municipal road system

20 main streets were designed to establish the road system and their total distance will be 500 km.⁸

This plan is no doubt the most advanced, modernized and creative city plan in China. But owing to the complicated situation and uncovered difficulties, it was utterly beyond the capacity of the municipal government as well as the *Nanjing* government. But still, the municipal government building, stadium (a gymnasium and a swimming pool included), museum, library, hospital and the public health laboratory were accomplished up to 1935. The new *Qiujiang* Harbor was also finished building in 1936 in spite of the dilemma caused by the December 8th Incident. The plan was finally stopped by the Japanese invade since the August 13th Incident.

After the Anti-Japanese War, the international settlements, which had been a main consideration to inaugurate the plan, were not existed and thus its necessity and importance reduced. As the result of the Three-year Civil War, this plan together with the Nationalist government was finally ended. Unfortunately, the new government considered nothing about the continuation of the plan.⁹ Otherwise, Shanghai would already have been a new outlook.

8 Map III: Map of Road System in the Downtown of Shanghai Municipality, from *Business Report of the Construction Committee of the Downtown of Shanghai Municipality, Aug. 1929 to June 1930*.

9 In fact, the work of the designing group headed by a foreign professor under the Urban Planning Committee of the Municipal Government had never stopped since October 1946 and finally finished the third edition of the draft General Map of the Urban Plan of Shanghai Municipality June 6, 1949, right after the liberation of Shanghai. See *Historical Records of the Urban Plan of Shanghai Municipality, 1949* selected by Feng Shaolei & Zhang Rongrong, published on *Archives and History, No.1, 1996*. But we can hardly find any record of the consideration of the new municipal government.

The Comprehensive Plan of Shanghai (1999-2020)¹⁰

Shanghai had witnessed a rapid and sharp progress and finally had its first comprehensive plan (1983-2000) which had been ratified by the State Council in 1986 since the opening and reform. With the implementation of this plan, the society, economy and urban construction have greatly developed. Especially after the 1990s, in order to adapt economical development of the city, meet people's living needs and improve investment environment, according to the Comprehensive Plan, infrastructure was the emphasis of urban construction and a series of major projects such as mass rapid transit, elevated roads, expressways, cross-river tunnels and bridges, sewage treatment facilities have been completed. The opening and developing of *Pudong* (浦东) New Area, Shanghai established Master Plan for *Pudong* in time. *Lujiazui* (陆家嘴) Finance and Trade Zone, *Waigaoqiao* (外高桥) Bonded Zone, *Jinqiao* (金桥) Export Processing Zone, *Zhangjiang* (张江) Hi-Tech Park and a group of modern residential districts have been successively built, so that favorable conditions were created for opening up to the outside world, development to industry, urban construction etc. in Shanghai.

The Comprehensive Plan of Shanghai (1999-2020) was given the ratification by the State Council on May 2001. The Guidelines of the Plan are:

To further open up the cities along the Yangtze River, to build Shanghai into one of the international economic, financial and trade centers and thus bring along new leap of regional economy in the Yangtze River Delta and the whole Yangtze River Valley.

Reflecting sustainable development strategy and to promote coordinate development of economy, society, population, resource and environment.

Reflecting the functional requirement for an international center of economy to rationally arrange distribution of industry and population and infrastructure construction.

Reflecting the aim "on the basis of human being" to create a fine environment for living, working and relaxing to citizens.

Designated function of the city:

Shanghai is an important economic and shipping center, a famous historic city in China, and will be constructed progressively into a modern international metropolis and one of the international economic, financial, trading and shipping centers.

Scale of city development:

To limit the scale of population and land use in central city, and to guide population and industry from central city to suburban cities. By 2020, the actual residents in the city will be about 16 million, 13.6 million of which will be non-agricultural residents, the ur-

¹⁰ Based on *the Summary of the Comprehensive Plan of Shanghai 1999-2020* provided by the relative government department.

banization level will reach 85% and the land used for construction of concentrated urbanized area will be 1500 km². The planned population in Central City will be 8 million, and the land use for city construction will be 600 km², the planned population in suburbs will be app. 5.6 million.

Main features of the Comprehensive Plan:

Serving the whole country and facing the world.

Simultaneously developing urban areas and suburbs to enhance comprehensive competitive power. Covering an urban area of 6340 km², it defines the “Multi-level, multi-centric, Multi-axe” urban layout pattern.

Organic unity and coordinated development.

On the basis of human being and improving environment.

Inheriting tradition and reflecting features.

Structure of the urban space.

In accordance with the guidelines on integration and coordinated development of the urban and rural areas with the Central City as a major part, a “multi-axes, multi-levels and multi-centers” urban spatial structure will be formed.

“Multi-axes” are composed of the Shanghai-*Nanjing* development axis, the Shanghai-*Hangzhou* development axis and the development axis along the riverside and seaside, also a key component of the Yangtze River Delta cities’ belt.

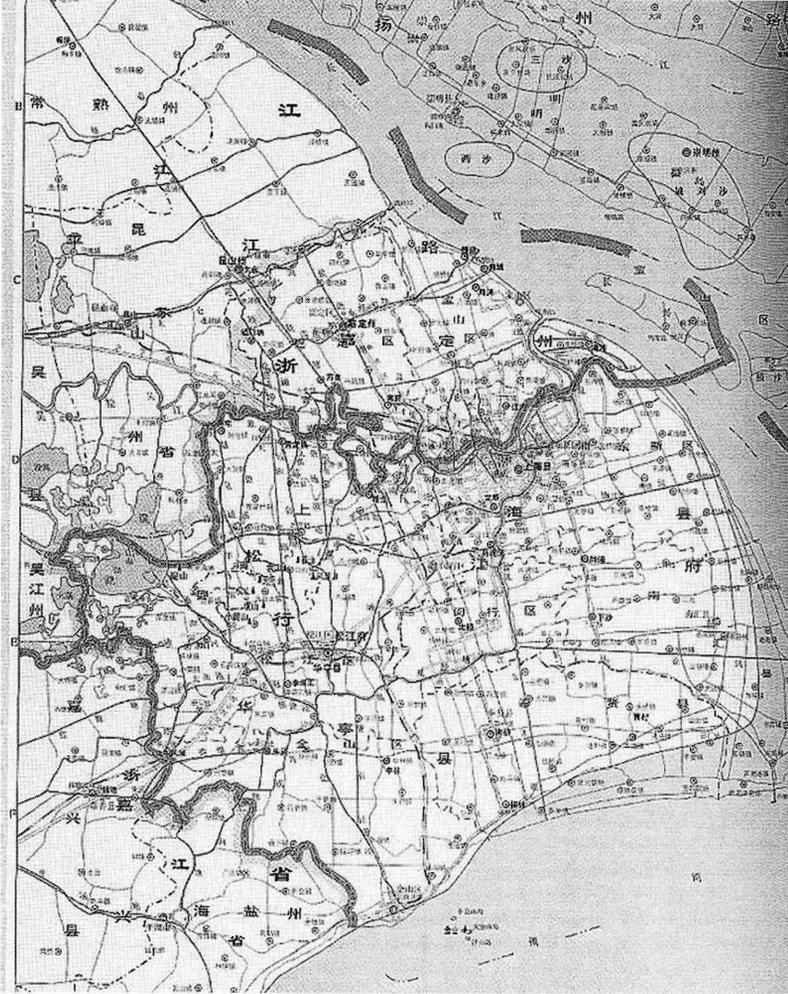
“Multi-levels” refer to the five scales: the urban system composed of the Central City, New City, Central Towns and the Ordinary Towns, and Central Villages. This means a multilevel urban space distribution structure with the Central City as the dominate part, with the highways and mass rapid transit as support, with rational influence area of the cities and towns of all scales, and with balanced layout and integration of large, medium and small-sized cities and town.¹¹

“Multi-centers” are mainly composed of the Central City and 11 New Cities. New City is where the district or county government is located or a medium-sized city based on development of important industries and urban major infrastructures. Central Town is a small sized city developed from a relatively big and systematically organized rural town with rational layout, superb geographical and economic development conditions. Central Village is a new type of modernized rural settlement with distinguishing local features, beautiful environment, rational layout and relatively perfect infrastructures and service facilities.

By the accomplishment of the plan, an utterly modern international megalopolis will

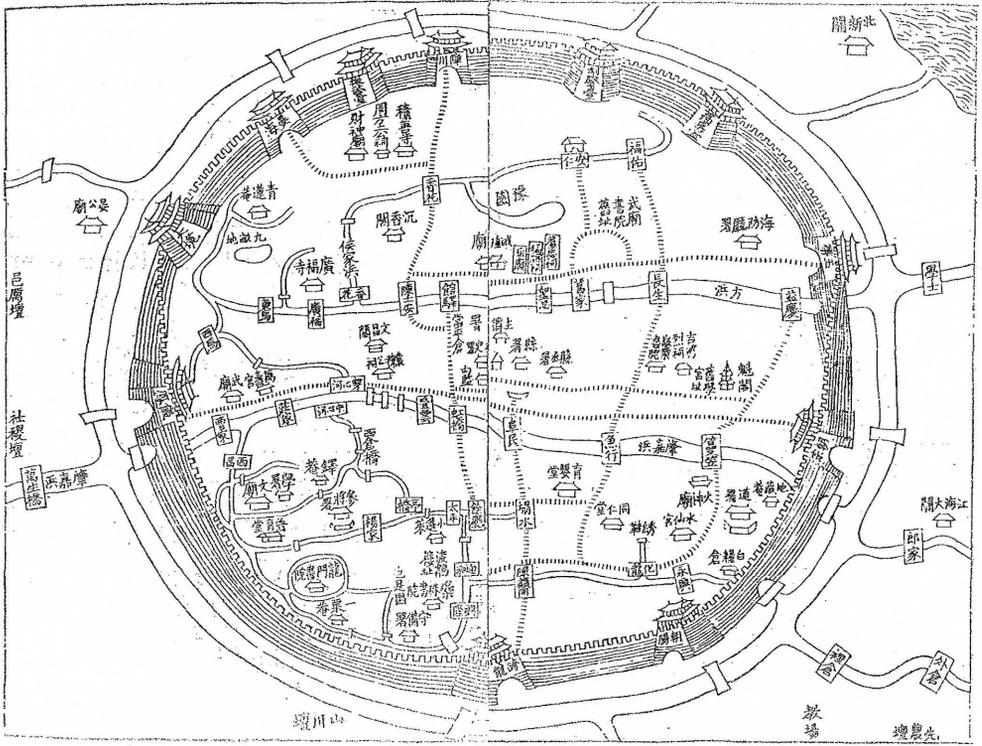
11 Map IV: Map of the Urban Structure of Cities and Towns, from *the Summary of the Comprehensive Plan of Shanghai 1999-2020*.

come into being. But what kind of forms the cities and towns in this megalopolis will be still remains uncertain.¹²

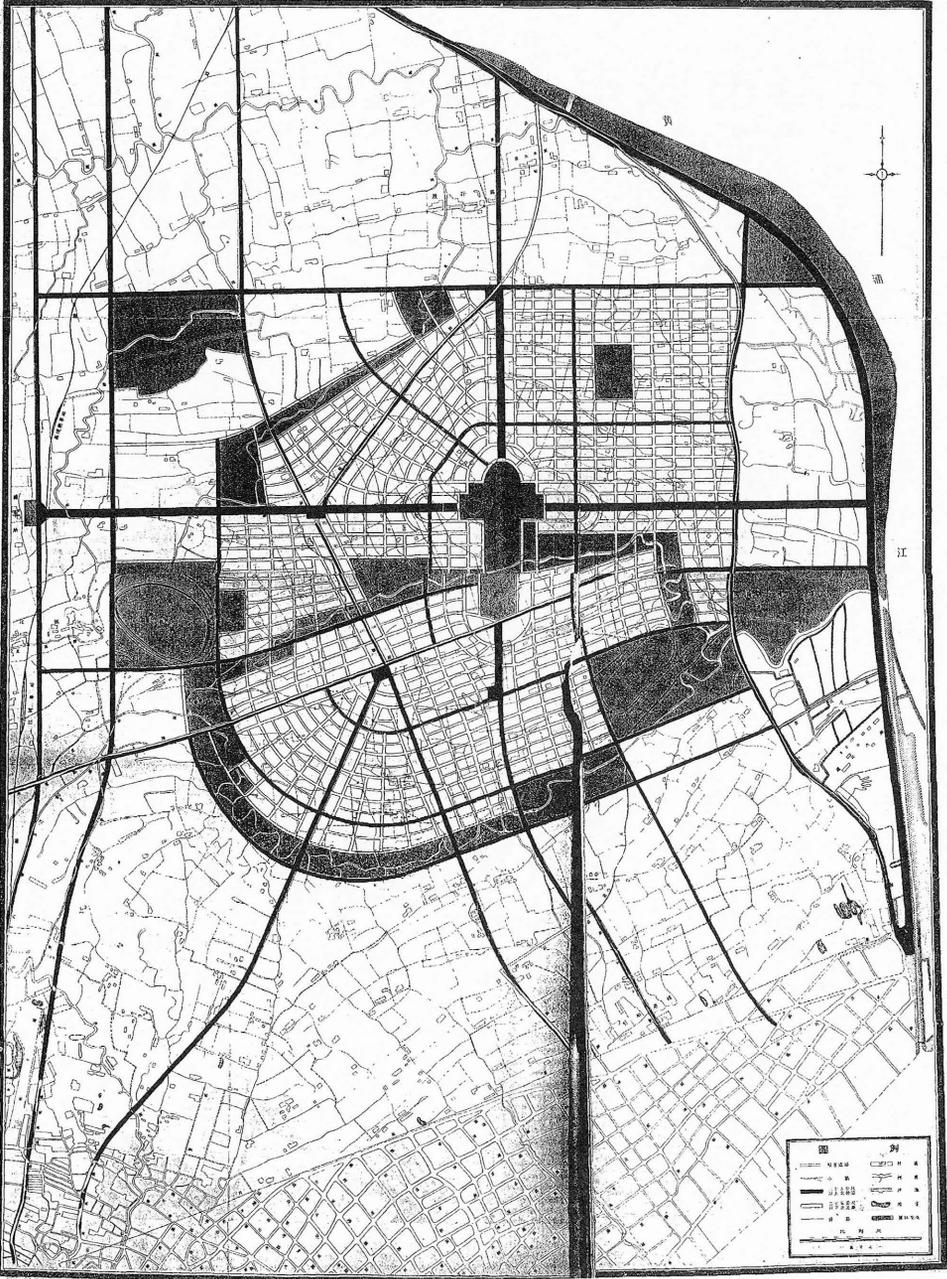


Map I

12 The detail of the plan has not been officially published by the municipal government. According to a report by *Nan Fang Zhou Mu* (*South Weekend*, Nov. 7, 2002), some of the new cities and towns will be designed in foreign styles, such as British for *Songjiang*, German for *Anting*, Swedish for *Luodian*, Spanish for *Fengchen*, Dutch for *Gaoqiao*, North American for *Fengjing* and Italian for *Pujiang*.



Map II



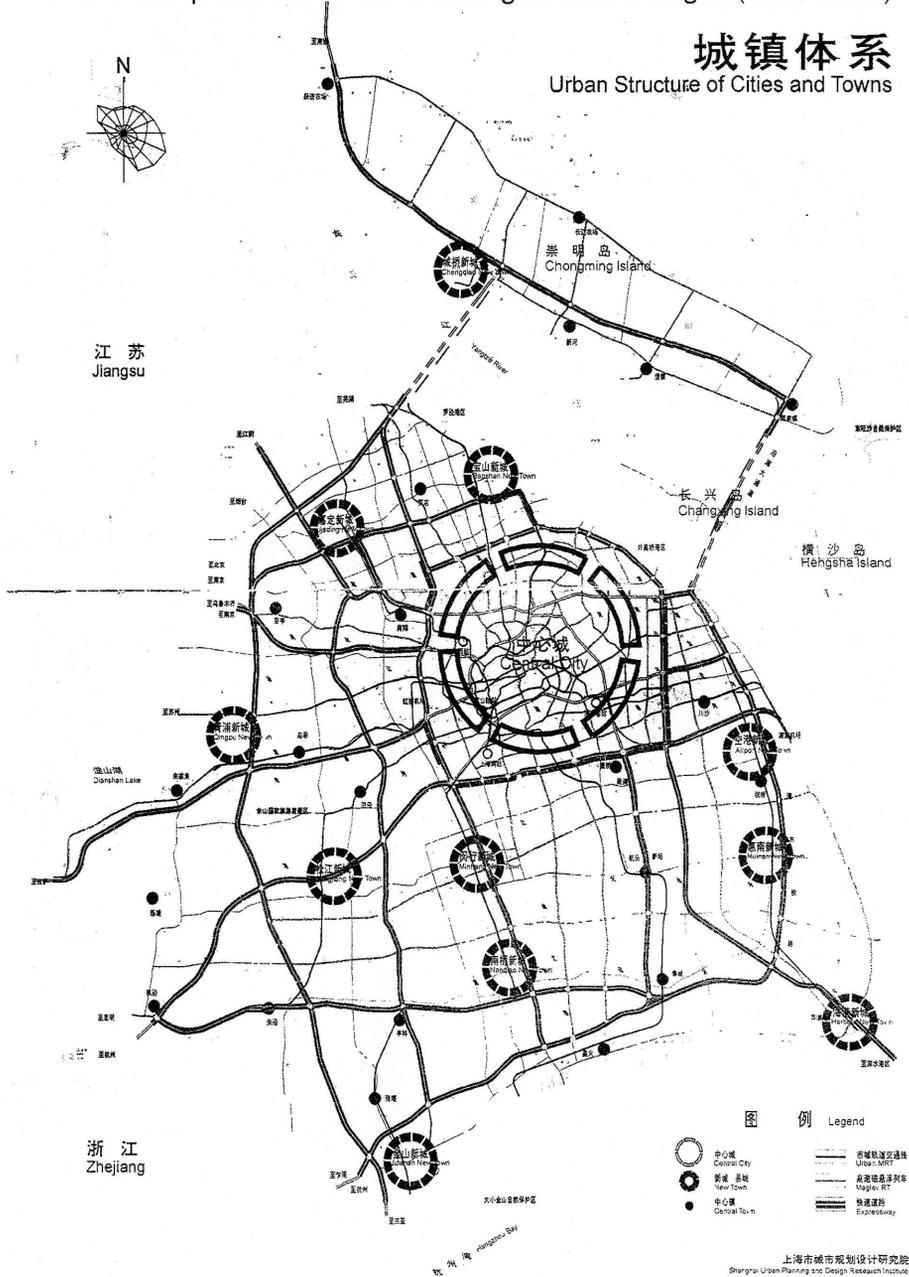
Map III

上海市城市总体规划图

The Comprehensive Plan of Shanghai Metro-Region(1999-2020)

城镇体系

Urban Structure of Cities and Towns



Map IV

[Abstract]

The 10th century saw the emergence of the earliest localities by the riverside in the alluvial plain of Yangtze River Delta. *Zheng* was established in Shanghai at the end of the Southern *Song* and then was lifted to a county seat in 1292. It remained as a common county town until early 1840s, the only exception was the establishment of a custom house in 1684.

Shanghai became an opening port as a result of the Opium War. Three years later, the first British Consul in Shanghai, Cap. Balfour, forced the local official to sign the Land Regulation, in which the demarcation of the first British Settlement was determined and then was enlarged in 1848. The French Settlement established in 1849 and expanded several times. In 1863, the American Settlement was determined but combined with the British Settlement and formed the International Settlement the same year. The International Settlement consists of the main part of the new megalopolis of Shanghai.

In less than one hundred years, the net population increase is as large as 4.9 million. That means most of the increase were immigrants and their descendants which had already been about 4 million. The climax of foreign residents as high as 150,000 appeared in 1942. The multi ethnic groups and multi cultures at home and abroad made Shanghai a real international community and new Shanghai culture formed, not only a mixture of east and west, traditional and modern. The unique position of the international settlements provided Shanghai unprecedented favorable condition in realizing a political, economic, commercial, financial and cultural center in China, as well as in the East Asia. On the other hand, this megalopolis had never been unified and well planned or designed. Even in the international settlements, each authority had its own consideration. Sharp contrast existed between different districts of the city, rich and poor, old and new, even paradise and hell.

Shanghai Special Municipality was established by the Nationalist government in *Nanjing* April 1927. In order to build Shanghai as a most advanced modern international megalopolis much better than the international settlements, the Grand Shanghai Plan was put into practice in 1929. Owing to the complicated situation and uncovered difficulties, it was utterly beyond the capacity of the municipal government as well as the *Nanjing* government. The plan was finally stopped by the Japanese invade in 1937.

Shanghai had witnessed a rapid and sharp progress and finally had its first comprehensive plan (1983-2000) since the opening and reform. The Comprehensive Plan of Shanghai (1999-2020) was given the ratification by the State Council in May 2001. By the accomplishment of the plan, an utterly modern international megalopolis will come into being. But what kind of forms the cities and towns in this megalopolis will be still remains uncertain.