

Identity Change Before and After the Regeneration Project of the Waterfront Area Based on Industrial Heritage—A Case Study of Yangpu Waterfront (China)

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Abstract: This paper takes Yangpu Waterfront, a famous industrial heritage belt in Shanghai (China), as the research object, with the purpose of sorting out the identity transformation that this waterfront industrial area has experienced in the past century. Taking the comprehensive development on both sides of the Huangpu River carried out in Shanghai in the early 21st century as the dividing line, Yangpu Waterfront has also been reborn after the waterfront regeneration projects that have been in full swing in recent years. This identity change is reflected in physical settings, observable activities, and meanings. The article is based on historical research and current situation analysis, including a part of user satisfaction evaluations.

Keywords: Waterfront regeneration; Place identity; Industrial heritage

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1. Introduction

The renewal of waterfront industrial areas is a process that Shanghai and many waterfront cities are undergoing. In 1883, British merchants built the Yangshupu Waterworks on the Huangpu River, followed by the Shanghai Weaving and Paper Machine Bureau, the first machine and light textile industry in China^[1]. This industrial layout, which relied on easy access to waterways for transport and adequate water resources, was the development model of the industrial era. Driven by the riverside industrial belt, in the 1970s and 1980s Yangpu's total industrial output accounted for a quarter of Shanghai.

However, along with rapid globalization, the urban economy has changed from an industrial era characterized by standardized production to a post-industrial era of production characterized by knowledge and innovation^[2]. In the 1980s and 1990s, with the tide of reform and opening-up, Shanghai's urban and social structure has undergone profound changes and industrial restructuring. Yangpu's traditional industries were declining and the proportion of total industrial output value in Shanghai dropped from 25% to less than 3%. In

addition, industrial restructuring has left Yangpu with more than 5 million square meters of dilapidated factory buildings, more than 3.4 million square meters of simple housing in old districts, and more than 200,000 laid-off workers, leaving the city under unprecedented pressure to transform^[3]. Plus, it is time to change the identity of this area from the “birthplace of modern Chinese industry” to “a new thing” adapting the new age.

The industrial heritage of many urban centers around the world has been regenerated through various means of reuse and reinvention. For now, the transformation of China’s waterfront industrial areas is focused on creative industrial parks, art centers, museums and exhibition halls, and ecological green spaces^[4]. Since 2016, the Shanghai Municipal People’s Government has drawn up specific renovation strategies for the eight waterfront areas along the Huangpu River to highlight the characteristics of each area and has coordinated the development positioning of each area from a macro perspective^[5]. The Yangpu Waterfront was strategically positioned to become a waterfront area where history and modernity complement each other and where technology and ecology are highly integrated. This top-down policy guidance has set the scene for subsequent shifts in the direction of development in each region and foreshadowed the fate of historical industrial areas undergoing different identity changes.

2. Research question

As waterfront regeneration progresses, some of the industrial heritage along the waterfront has lost its unique historical appearance and spirit of place, while there are also many successful urban regeneration cases where the industrial buildings no longer retain their original function but their value as former industrial centers is developed, which emphasizes the historic meaning of industry. This kind of identity transformation is common with the different developing demands in changing time and how the identity is changed during this process provides wide experience for other waterfront areas that have not yet undergone urban regeneration.

The research question of this study is “How does the identity of waterfront space change before and after regeneration projects in early 21st century incorporating industrial heritage?” by taking Yangpu Waterfront area as an example. The article will start by making a timeline of industrial heritage of Yangpu’s Waterfront area to figure out the identity of this place before the regeneration project was carried out. Then focusing on the 21st century, especially after the urban renewal project implemented by the Shanghai government on both sides of the Huangpu River in 2015, this paper analyzes the current waterfront identity and make a comparison of Yangpu’s industrial heritage areas before and after the renewal project in terms of place identity. The further goal is to comprehensively evaluate the impact of waterfront renewal on the transformation of identity produced by industrial heritage, and to provide a possible guideline for other cities.

3. Study area

The southern section of the Yangpu Waterfront is selected for this paper, as shown in **Figure 1**. The area is densely populated with legacy industrial heritage buildings and is the launch section of the Yangpu Waterfront public space renovation, which has played an important role as a demonstration for the construction of the Yangpu Waterfront public space and even the entire 45km Huangpu River Crossing Project, providing an effective reference. The “Shanghai Urban Space Art Season” was held here on 28 September 2019, which attracted many artists in different fields to show their understanding and creation of city open space^[6].

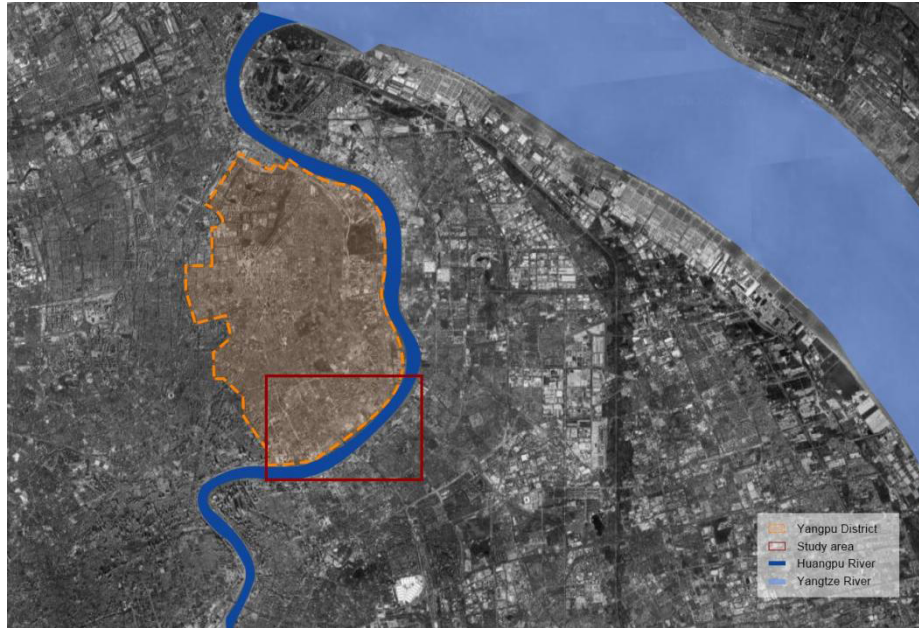


Figure 1. Huangpu River and Yangpu District

4. Theoretical background

4.1. Place identity

The definition of place identity is a complex issue. Kevin Lynch^[7] defines the identity of a place simply as that which provides its individuality or distinction from other places and serves as the basis for its recognition as a separable entity. That means a place makes an impression or resonates because of its own unique characteristics and when put in the urban context, identity is also a trait that sets an area apart from other areas with the same function. Plus, identity is a subjective term without a correct explanation, and in most cases, it depends on our experience of places which both influences and is influenced by those experiences^[8]. According to Proshansky *et al.*^[9], place identity refers to its symbolic significance as a repository of emotions and relationships, providing life with meaning and purposes, and representing a sense of belonging and importance to the well-being of an individual. To evaluate the identity of a real place, some specific components should be clarified. When demonstrating the components of the identity of the place, Edward Relph^[8] used Albert Camus' essays on North Africa to introduce the three significant attributes which are the basic elements of the identity of place: physical setting, observable activities, and meanings. Importantly, these three components work together to give a clue on the identification of a place, otherwise, people will fail to experience it correctly.

4.1.1. Physical setting

According to the essays, Camus described in detail the living environment including sand, sea, climate, trees, and buildings to record his life in northern Africa. These are all apparent physical settings that can provide those who live or visit the space with a direct first impression and basic recognition of one specific place, no matter what will happen or usually happen there. Apart from the landscape elements mentioned above, the physical setting has a broad meaning which contains different aspects. In summary, physical settings are objective elements that consist of the first and most basic stone on the way people walk to a deeper understanding of a place and try to identify it.

4.1.2. Observable activities

In addition to the physical setting, activities organized by people which take place in those physical settings are also significant elements composing place identity. Different kinds of activities including public activities, and private behavior and the people actively involved in these events shape the place identity together. Meaning is born out of daily activities, and out of the people who participate in them.

4.1.3. Meanings

The first two elements are both directly visible and easily appreciated, but the meaning is an abstract element that is hard to grasp. They may be rooted in the physical setting and objects and activities, but they are not a property of them, rather they are a property of human intentions and experiences^[8]. Meanings can change and be transferred from one set of objects to another, and they possess their own qualities of complexity, obscurity, clarity, or whatever. To conclude the meaning of one place, evaluation and experience in physical settings and activities are necessary and conceivably, they differ for everyone. However, there are several criteria to assess the meaning to some extent like historical meaning, economic meaning, aesthetic meaning, and so on.

4.2. Waterfront space

In the past, the preference for waterfront locations for the industry was partly due to the ease of water transport which allowed trade between regions and even countries to take place by water. On the other hand, the high demand for water from factories dictated that building on the river was a way to reduce costs. Today, in the era of neoliberal urbanization, cities are transforming and waterfronts have become the focus of planning interventions^[10]. According to Marshall, waterfronts in post-industrial cities worldwide are frontiers that reflect the complexity of contemporary urban problems, ideas, culture, and society^[11]. Water is a beneficial element for human life, promoting human health in terms of physical, psychological, and social relationships^[12]. The waterfront space, as a space in the city that is closely linked to the water, provides public space along the shoreline. The development of urban waterfronts in recent years has shown that urban waterfronts can help to restore or enhance the vitality of urban development^[13].

5. Findings

5.1. Before waterfront renewal

The Huangpu River runs north-south through Shanghai, dividing it into two major blocks, Pudong and Puxi, and eventually joins the Yangtze River at the mouth of the Wusong River, which is an important waterway for communicating with ships.

The Hai Guan Zong Shui Wu Si Shu^[14] recorded that in November 1843, under the terms of the “Treaty of Nanking,” China officially opened Shanghai as a designated port of commerce for foreigners. Of the 46 ports of commerce, or centers of trade in the country, Guangzhou was in the south, Tianjin in the north, and Shanghai in the center. According to a customs survey, of the total trade volume of the above three places, Shanghai was far ahead of the other two ports of commerce with 630 million yuan^[15]. This shows that Shanghai was the center of gravity of the country’s trade, not only for the foreign countries’ shipping routes to China, but also for the Chinese coastal and Yangtze River shipping routes.

On 29 November 1845, the Qing Government’s and the British Consul George Balfour jointly published *The Shanghai Land Regulations*, which established the British Concession in Shanghai. Since then, the American and French Concessions were established one after another. Yangpu District, located on one of the western banks of the Huangpu River, was historically named after Yangtszepoo, and the term “Yangtszepoo”

first appeared in a written document in 1863 delineating the boundaries of the American Concession with China, when the English term “Yangtsepoo” was used. This refers to the name of the river and is a Latinized spelling with a Shanghai dialect accent ^[1].

In September of the same year, the British and American concessions were officially merged into a public concession, and the Yangtsepoo area has been part of the public concession ever since. In the Concession, foreigners invested in public utilities, set up schools and newspapers, and the Concession became a window for the Chinese to understand and learn about Western culture and institutions, and also laid the foundation for foreigners to set up industries, factories, and form a sizeable industrial base in the area.

In 1870, the Yangtsepoo Road was built, which was a result of the extension of its southern road (Broad Way), and named after the river channel Yangtsepoo near it. With China’s defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, another unequal treaty, the “Treaty of Shimonoseki,” was signed, opening the way for Japan to invest in factories at China’s trading ports. With its natural proximity to the Huangpu River, the low cost of land along the lower reaches of the river, and its easy access to the center of the concession, Yangshupu Road gradually became a preferred location for factories of all kinds, many of which are now recognized as historical heritage sites a century later (**Figures 2 and 3**). With the prosperity of both sides of Yangshupu Road, the whole area gradually became the birthplace of Shanghai industry and even modern Chinese industry.

The real development of industry in the Yangpu district can be traced back to the founding of the Shanghai Machine and Paper Bureau at 408 Yangtsepoo Road in 1882, which was the first national capital enterprise in Yangpu. The following year, the British Shanghai Water Company established the still famous Yangtsepoo Waterworks and opened its water supply. Its predecessor was the water supply company set up in 1875 by the Lide Foreign Company in the southern area of the present-day Yangtsepoo Waterworks, which had water purification facilities such as sedimentation and filtration ponds, and was the earliest form of industry in Yangpu ^[16].

In the next two or three decades, many factories were opened along the Yangtsepoo Road, including shipbuilding, paper-making, machinery, and soap-making, and although most of them were foreign-invested, national industries were also steadily advancing in a wave of rapid development. In 1913, there were already more than 20 paper, water, and yarn factories on the Yangtsepoo Road, and in the 1930s there was the first major industrial development ^[1]. The density of factories along the Yangpu Waterfront already far exceeded that of the surrounding areas, creating a sizeable industrial production base and an area of industrial heritage along the riverfront.

In addition to the scale of industry at the time, the extent of industrialization can also be seen in the amount of electricity generated in the city and the proportion of that electricity used by industry. From the 1910s to the 1930s, Shanghai experienced unprecedented industrialization, with the Shanghai Electric Power Company’s electricity generation rising from 62 million kWh in 1915 to 770 million kWh in 1935 and still rising (**Figure 4**) ^[17]. Additionally, the monthly growth within each year was also significant, with total electricity consumption in Shanghai in 1935, for example, increasing stably from 32 million kWh in January to 74 million kWh by the end of the year. Moreover, the domestic electricity only accounted for one third of this and industrial electricity took up two thirds (66–69%) (**Figure 5**) and this figure continued until the outbreak of war. At the end of 1936, the Shanghai Electric Power Company’s total electricity generation was as high as 813 million kWh, with industrial use still maintaining a high share of nearly 70% ^[18,19].

Since the start of the war (the Battle of Shanghai), Shanghai Electric Power Company’s power generation decreased month by month, from 77million kWh in June 1937 to only 23 million kWh at the end of the year ^[20]. During this period, industrialization stalled, most factories were destroyed by artillery fire, and the remaining industrial plants were at risk of air raids at any time, to the point where the hardship of running factories was

ten times greater than before during the period of isolation*. Instead of being caught in a dilemma, it was better to actively plan for another way out. It was therefore essential to evacuate the industries in Shanghai, i.e., to relocate the factories to the mainland where the population was concentrated and raw materials were abundant ^[21].

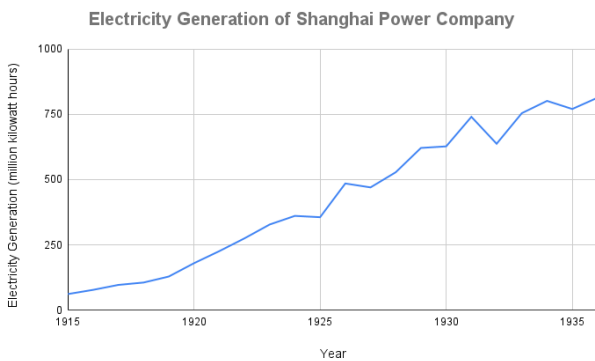


Figure 4. Electricity generation of Shanghai Power Company from 1915 to 1936

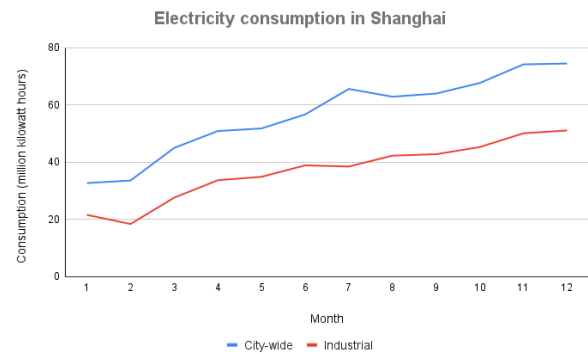


Figure 5. Monthly electricity consumption in Shanghai in 1935

***Period of isolation:** It refers to the fall of Shanghai on 12 November 1937 during the war against Japan, as the center of Shanghai was surrounded by the Central and Western Districts of the Public Concession (the Northern and Eastern Districts of the Public Concession were no longer under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Public Works, but they were not considered to be fallen areas) and the French Concession of Shanghai, and Japan was not ready to go to war with Europe and the United States, so Japanese troops were not yet able to enter, and if they did, it was considered an act of war. The situation was like an “isolated island.” This situation was maintained until 8 December 1941, when the Japanese army launched the Pacific War.

Although Yangtzepoo Road is close to the river, the industrial area, where production is the main objective, does not include the water as a valuable “spiritual material” in the lives of the people around it, but rather as a productive resource and a transport medium. With the rapid industrial and economic development, more and more people came to work in the industrial area of Yangshupu, where workers made up the majority of the population, but only a small proportion of the factories built housing for their workers, and even in some of the housing provided specifically for workers, the streets were in a very poor condition. After the outbreak of the civil war, more and more people fled from Hamanbei to seek refuge in the tenements, adding to the already crowded accommodation, with more than five people living in a small room. Even with the poor conditions of the workshops, there were still workers who did not have the opportunity to live in them, so they had to build shacks and straw huts in the factories and docks, creating a large-scale shanty town ^[22]. With the large amount of people moved in, almost all the sordid evils including disease, gambling, smoking, alcohol, fighting were concentrated here due to the lack of management ^[23]. Even though this was the main industrial base of Shanghai, generating most of the city’s economic income and energy supply, the living conditions here resembled those of a slum.

In addition to this, the air pollution caused by the dense industrial buildings and factory operations, and the water pollution caused by the discharge of harmful substances into the rivers have left the whole area in a haze of industrial smoke, and the noise from the factories is constantly affecting the living experience of the inhabitants. There were outbreaks of plague, insomnia, and other diseases, and the people’s experience of life was not enhanced by the water, but rather more miserable ^[24]. Even though people were aware of environmental

issues, the problem of pollution remained unresolved due to economic constraints^[25].

With the workers' food and material life unsatisfied, they seldom sought the enjoyment of spiritual life. The factories in Yangshupu are like a closed barrier, completely isolating the river from the people who live there, and the water loses its landscape function, becoming a single productive resource flowing there like a symbol.

At this stage Yangpu Waterfront space was not so much a waterfront industrial area as it was a production site that made good use of water resources and happened to be close to the water's edge. The people here witnessed the beginning of industrialization in China, and even though smoke rolled from the chimneys and the water in the Huangpu River was no longer as clear as it once was, the citizens would look at the scene and think of a better future for industrialized society, as in a poem by a folk poet in a magazine^[26] (translated by author):

The city is a whirlwind of metal, the pulse of the city——
It was the madness of iron, a million sinews stretching.
The head of cement is held high in the sky, looking askance.
There are no clouds in the sky, but a frenzy of misplaced electricity.
The wind, too, is only a radio stream, a coal-poisoned sick man
In the writhing of the wind, dancing black gargoyles,
...
They are representative, of the individual factory cells that
gathered in the tense space, ready for the great roar.
Please look down from the smoke burst, down into the heart of the factory.
You will see the flames of purgatory burning with indignation.
The words of the siren will declare when the sun comes.
It is a lyric of iron, a declaration of iron conviction.
...
The wires are the nerve system of the city, running with your stirring stabs.
Burning with light, spreading sound, acting mechanically.
One point, one line, the infinity of your life.
You are the wind of spring, blowing a million silver flowers.
Mercury-like, your authority rushes like a boat falling into the sea.
But thou art only a child born of labor and iron.
...
I look to you, please grasp the flag of Asia
Like an engine, guide him into the future.

The Yangpu Waterfront was the first seed planted by industrialization in China, and tens of thousands of people irrigated it and helped it to sprout, experiencing many difficulties along the way, but these industrial memories constitute a unique treasure of the city, an indelible and magnificent piece of Shanghai's modern history, writing the history of Shanghai's industrial development, and forming a cultural symbol of the city and a cultural form of urban capital. At the same time, Yangpu Waterfront is an important treasure in China's modern industrial history.

5.2. After waterfront renewal

After the end of the war, industry also gradually recovered with the restoration of social order, and in a newspaper in 1948, it was reported that Shanghai alone generated 12.08% of the country's electricity for the year ^[27]. After the liberation of Shanghai in 1949, the factories gradually resumed their previous state of production. With the strategic industrial layout adjustment of the central government, Shanghai assumed an important role in building the new Chinese industrial system and accelerating the industrialization of the country, and 80% of the land in the city center was occupied by factories ^[28].

After China's reform and opening-up in 1978, the country's economic development strategy was once again adjusted with the important goal of convergence with the international community, and in the following two or three decades, China shifted from closed internal development to external development, and its economic development increased at an astonishing rate. At the beginning of the 20th century, the government proposed to adjust the land use structure of the urban area, reducing the proportion of land for industrial enterprises, and increasing the proportion of land for service industries ^[29]. Some traditional industries such as textiles, shipbuilding, iron and steel, machinery, etc., have also changed from weak to strong at the end of the last century, facing restructuring and upgrading. The factories have moved away, leaving behind abandoned and unused factories, and the Huangpu River has become detached from the urban landscape and social life due to the pollution it suffered during the era of industrial mass production.

The 21st century has witnessed the identity change of the Huangpu River and its waterfront area. According to Shanghai Observer ^[30], in 2014, Shanghai's urban development entered an era of tight resource constraints, with the city moving from outward expansion to inward development. The next year, Shanghai Municipal Government issued the "Shanghai Urban Renewal Implementation Measures" which marked the full-scale opening of urban renewal work. This means that urban development is no longer limited to material abundance, and the demand for spirituality and quality has risen dramatically. Waterfront spaces, as a typical type of urban public space, have also gained importance in the urban regeneration segment, with people expecting more possibilities from them. Yangpu Waterfront has been transformed since 2017, when both sides of the river were opened to the public. One of the opportunities for Yangpu Waterfront to become well known is the "Shanghai Urban Space Art Season," which was held there in 2019. The "Shanghai Urban Space Art Season" (SUSAS) is a collaborative effort between the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Planning and Resources, the Bureau of Culture and Tourism, and the district government of the main exhibition area to create an "international, public, and practical" brand of urban space art based on the concept of "culture for city, art for city." The event is held every two years since the first one in 2015, and the third edition was held in Yangpu Waterfront in 2019 with the theme of "Encounter." With the promotion of such urban events, the transformation of the waterfront space is popular among a wider audience and with the increasing visibility, the industrial history and heritage, along with the changing identity are witnessed by more people.

As for how the former Yangtszepoo Industrial Zone, which is today's Yangpu Waterfront, was transformed from an industrial wasteland into a waterfront recreational area that people enjoy participating in and experiencing, and how to understand the theme of "Encounter," Zhang Ming, the chief designer of the renovation project, said: "At that time, we saw that there were companies lined up all over the Huangpu River south of Yangshupu, and there was no space for people to meet each other. Thus, our job was to break down these barriers, to open-up these walls that were once closed to the public, so that people could really enjoy the freedom of the waterfront and 'return the river to the people,' that was the original idea" ^[31].

Under the architect's plan, the waterfront area is no longer a warehouse for industrial buildings, some of the dense housing has been demolished to create green spaces for strolling or staying, running tracks, lanes, and

some gaps left for people to “freely fill in.” The role of the river has changed from being a medium of “isolation” to being part of the urban space in which people participate in their daily lives, with more and more amenities such as street lighting, railings, steps, and staging areas (**Figure 6**). The construction of the two sides of the river has also made the Yangpu Waterfront much more accessible to other waterfront areas.

Returning the river to the people is a way of incorporating water into people’s lives in a physical sense, leading them to form various unstructured relationships with it, such as feeling, appreciating, and participating. Today, the Yangpu Waterfront has shed the haze that once hung over it and has become a popular choice for residents to walk and chat after a meal (**Figures 7 and 8**).



Figure 6. Public facilities and open space

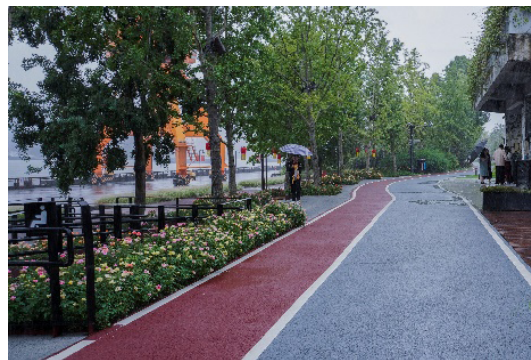


Figure 7. Public facilities and open space

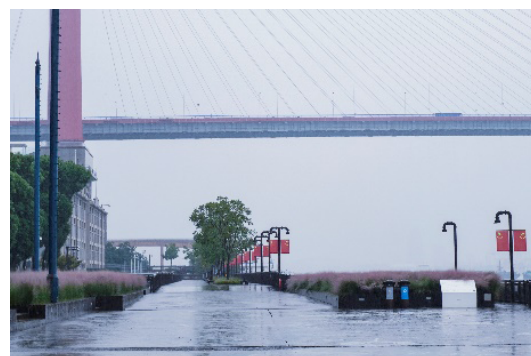


Figure 8. Public facilities and open space

At the same time, as a former industrial base, many of the industrial buildings established over a century ago are classified as national or Shanghai industrial heritage. Although the history of industrial production has passed, this heritage still has its historical significance in the leisure space along the river. In the transformation of the Yangpu Waterfront, the architects have taken into account not only the importance of the river in the public space, but also the promotion of industrial history and culture, giving everyone who comes to the space the opportunity to learn about the history of the area, creating an uninterrupted and diverse industrial exposition zone ^[31]. For the revival of the industrial heritage, the renovation project has taken two different approaches: the replacement of functions, such as the transformation of the former factory into a museum, preserving the architectural heritage while displaying the old production tools inside, and building a basic understanding of the history of the area. Another example is the dockyard space left over from the shipyard, which the designers not only did not demolish but also built stands on top of, so that this industrial space can be used as a stage for art ^[32]. People actively participate in the waterfront public space and at the same time learn about the history of the space. Another approach is to incorporate industrial elements into newly created facilities, such as the pipes that once lined the waterworks, which were cleverly used in the design of the street lamps and railings, and which have become a representative feature of the Yangpu Waterfront ^[33].

Either way, the transformation is reshaping the history of Yangpu's waterfront as a former industrial base. This means that the waterfront, with its cultural and ecological significance, is becoming a popular space for people. Yangpu Waterfront, with its waterfront and industrial heritage status, has truly become a symbolic waterfront space that combines a sense of modernity and history, a leisure camp and a window that speaks of the history of the area on behalf of Yangpu.

5.3. Satisfaction assessment ^[34]

In order to get a better idea of how satisfied people really are with the long-running riverfront renovation project, some online questionnaires were distributed randomly and 55 valid responses were obtained. Among these, 38 people had been to the Yangpu Waterfront, although most of them did not live in the vicinity (30 of them). Among the other 17 people who had not been to this area, 9 had either heard of or knew a lot about the industrial history of the area. Although this is a small sample, it can be said that Yangpu Waterfront space has a certain historical status. Out of those who had visited, 28 felt that going to the waterfront in person and doing some activities there would increase their level of knowledge about the history of the area, rather than feeling that the Yangpu Waterfront was simply a waterfront space as any common one.

Their most desirable activity here was walking along the river or sitting on the steps to relax, and the second thing that drew them to the Yangpu Waterfront was the transformation of some of the buildings that had become popular on the internet, such as the "Green Hill" public space adapted from the tobacco company, which was uniquely shaped to incorporate plants into the building space, without destroying all the original architecture. It is a popular place with more opportunities for people to stop and look at the gardens and river views, and it is welcomed by those who are always fond of combined sense of art and history (**Figure 9**).

Nearly 40% of people come here for study tours or history-related education. It is an effect of the rich history of the Yangpu Waterfront and its nationally renowned industrial background in this new era. People come here to experience the collision of history and reality, and to see how the barges that once served as industrial landmarks have been transformed and revitalized, which is why over 65% of people believe that what sets the Yangpu Waterfront apart from other riverfront spaces is its richer industrial heritage. This uniqueness is something that needs to be preserved, and even today, with its different functions and development orientation, the historical identity is appropriately retained within it.



Figure 9. “Green Hill” adapted from the tobacco company

When they were asked about what could be improved about the Yangpu Waterfront, around 63% chose “recreational activities to be enriched,” while over 40% chose “infrastructure to be improved” and “industrial history to be gained.” The renovation project has evolved so far that perhaps more thoughts are being given to how to activate the area to a greater extent in the long term, and more importantly, regardless of the identity that the users label on Yangpu Waterfront, infrastructure and accessibility are crucial in the process of transforming the waterfront industrial area into a recreational riverfront space with a historical heritage. The infrastructure and accessibility of the area will largely influence the willingness and frequency of people to visit this area. Moreover, even though many of the preserved buildings speak silently of the grand history of this old industrial base, people walking through them are expected to have easier and more active access to the history of the Yangpu riverfront.

All in all, when asked to give the Yangpu Waterfront a general satisfaction rating from 0 to 10, the average of 38 people was 7.92, which can be considered as a positive assessment of the renovation of the industrial waterfront space.

6. Conclusion

In today’s rapidly developing society, any space can undergo a dramatic change of identity in a short period of time, which is closely related to macro policies, development needs, and user demands. The Yangpu Waterfront has undergone a tortuous process of industrial development, from an industrial base under economic pressure and in pursuit of productivity, to a typical recreational waterfront space of historical significance. The driving force behind this was firstly the city’s development plan and secondly the specific designers who intervened in it. However, it is not enough to be a designer and planner, only when the real users are involved can the identity of a space or place be fully glimpsed. It may be grand, it may have great symbolic importance, but above all, the real identity is multifaceted and complex.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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