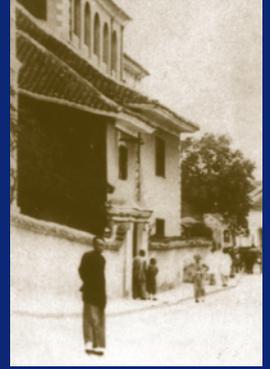


CitySpace



**Christopher Choa looks at the uncanny
fragments of the past concealed beneath
the city's shining surface**

By Christopher Choa

In Shanghai, we all walk on water. Amazingly, if you superimpose a modern day plan of Shanghai over a 13th century map of the same scale, you will discover that the city's current neighborhoods, highways, and subway lines were already clearly outlined in the marshy landscape of the Early Yuan Dynasty.

The present pattern of Shanghai reflects the original position of all kinds of waterways. Since the earliest times, canals transported commerce. Deep ditches drained marshes. A delicate network of waterways defined the boundaries of major planting fields. Any self-respecting Yuan Dynasty tourist map will clearly show the major transverse canals running east/west through the populated area. These canals linked outlying western districts and the Huangpu to the administrative center of the original old city.

Of course, as the value of Shanghai's land increased, agricultural property was incrementally shifted to other uses. But even today as we push through crowds on Shanghai's big avenues, or motor along in smoggy splendor, we are tracing the lines of the channels and conduits of Shanghai's ancient past.

There was a Shanghai before Shanghai, and it was defined by the center of a thriving port town and four major canals that connected its extended population to the Huangpu River. Get out a map, and you walk around without getting your feet wet.

The center – a wall and its moat

By the mid-1500's century, Shanghai was already a thriving coastal town attracting the unwelcome attention of marauding Japanese pirates. To protect itself, the local administration built an impressive fortified wall and moat around the town's center, punctuated by 11 gates for roads and canals. In 1907, with the old pirates no longer a factor, the wall was torn down and its rubble was pushed into the surrounding moat to create Shanghai's very first ring road. Next time you go hunting for something in the Old City, look for Renmin Lu and Zhonghua Lu and you will see the unmistakable outline of the old, filled-in moat. Think like a pirate, and you can dive right in.

The divider — Yangjiabang

By the early 20th century, virtually all of the foreign communities had coalesced into the International Settlement. The French, always aloof, chose to remain apart. Yangjing Creek formed the northern boundary of the French Concession and the southern boundary of the International Settlement. In 1914, Yangjing Creek was filled in to create a larger, centralized road that continued to form the International boundary. Renamed Avenue Edward VII, we would eventually know it as the Yan'an Road, which to this day, as it rolls eastward towards the Bund, follows the original aquatic meander.

Like many of the other waterways in early, rapidly urbanizing Shanghai, Yangjing Creek became increasingly fetid, with desperately impoverished, immigrant shanties encrusting its banks. Interestingly, the term "Yangjiabang" is colloquial Shanghainese for non-standard speech and scruffy behavior, reserved for people clearly not in the know (which you, dear readers, are not).

Still underwater – Zhaojiabang

One of the main transverse waterways through the Old City, The Zhao Family Creek (*Zhaojiabang*) eventually morphed into the southern boundary of the French Concession. Further westward, we also know it as Zhaojiabang Road, the zoomy avenue with Xujiahui as its dizzying exclamation point. Beginning in the 1950s, this creek



was progressively filled in and developed into the double-barreled, centrally forested avenue that is now familiar to us.

The old Zhaojiabang is also the path of the current Fuxing Road tunnel. Soon, the planned extension of the #9 subway will also run along the old riverbed. Another reason to hold your breath the next time you go underground.

Still shopping – Fangbang

Want to take out-of-town visitors on a trip down Shanghai's memory lane? Looking to float your way towards good luck and bargains at the Beggars Market? Pretend you are bobbing down the old canal that would have flowed under the present-day Fangbang Lu. Even during the 13th century, it ran past all the good temples and markets.

The big way in - Lujiabang

Still my favorite way to come in to the city from Pudong Airport, the Nanpu bridge crosses the river and starts to swirl clockwise, draining its cars onto ground level once it arrives in Puxi. Below the bridge's trestles, the current Lujiabang ferry terminal marks the spot where the Lujiabang canal opened onto the Huangpu. Lujiabang Road now runs above the position of the original waterway. Like its predecessor, it still carries humanity into the city on a flood tide.

ArchitectureEvents 建筑活动



June 12

Architecture in Shanghai

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RMB 50 (includes a drink).
4pm, Glamour Bar (6350 9988)