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## 'One City, Nine Towns'. Search for ideal suburbia in China

Huang Xiang Ming

'One City, Nine Towns' project is a scheme to promote social and economic development in suburban Shanghai, with a focus on ten existing or newly built towns. The origin of this project came from one of Shanghai Municipal Government's six key topics "developing strategy for urbanization of suburbs." It was first issued as *Suggestions for Shanghai to Promote the Development of Experiment Cities and Towns* in 2001, which could also be seen as an implementation of the central government policy embodied in *Several Comments for the Promotion of Healthier Development of Small-sized Cities and Towns*. "During the Tenth 5-year Plan, and according to the entire requirements of Shanghai's national economic and social development, the government will enforce the policy of breaking through at key points and advancing steadily, try its best to form a super urban system for all international economic center." From the text above, a message is expressed that the government has made a decision to take strategic measures and to shape a new urban-rural framework in China's social structure, at least, as an experiment. If this is more on a policy level, then, on a more realistic level, it's worth wise to have a try to regulate the urbanization taking place in suburban Shanghai with an overall policy of social and economic development. This is almost the first attempt of its kind since the founding of the People's Republic. Because of the central planning economic nature of

China from 1950's-1980's, a unique urban-rural framework is deeply rooted in its social and economic system.

Population was divided into two major categories: farming and non-farming. With a household registration and food rationing system, the government was able to prevent largescale migration from countryside to cities. Together with birth-control policy, thus, it was possible to stop unexpected growth of urban population. However, for the past two and a half decades, China's economy has been growing rapidly and sliding towards a free market orientation. This tendency fueled a large-scale urbanization, not only in major cities, but also in rural areas. Market force, like that in the other part of the world started to play an important role in China's urban system. People virtually are free to move, to live and to work in almost any place they want. Farmers left their lands to work in factories, or to build buildings throughout the country. This was not expected when China's urban policy was made half a century ago. As the reality goes beyond the existing urban-rural policy framework, social and environmental impacts became obvious. Thus, to restructure the out-of-date urban-rural policy gradually emerges as a national priority in China's process of modernization. 'One City, Nine Towns' is an effort to open new possibilities for urban-suburban interaction and to form a new urban system, which will enhance Shanghai as a metropolis of international importance.

### Traditional urban system

Chinese population was basically divided into two major categories: farming and non-farming. Farming population used to live in

rural areas. It should be self-sustained in terms of food supply. And the non-farming population lived in urbanized areas with an access to food provided by the state. In 1954, to stop unexpected migration from countryside to cities, a household registration system was established. Limited resources were distributed in conjunction with this system until 1980's. Without proper household registration, one had no access to many highly subsidized and otherwise unavailable consumer necessities such as soap. Although the food rationing system virtually vanished in early 1980's when the economic started to boom, the traditional discrimination of urban and rural population still exists. The household registration system keeps on affecting farming population's access to public services such as medical care and education, in large cities. The urban system of China consists of cities and towns, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs governs the designation of them. The criteria of designation change in different time-periods, reflecting urbanization policy, economic development, and political ideologies. Among the towns, there are two main types: designated towns (*jianzhizhen*) and market towns (*jizhen*). The population in designated towns is reported in the statistical yearbooks of China as part of the urban population, but that in market towns is not reported. In the period between 50's and 80's of the last century, China's policy over non-farming population varied, but mainly very tight, as the government was to minimize the size of the population to whom the state had to supply grain. After the adoption of the open-door policy and the

reform in rural areas, especially in 1983, when the decades-old people's commune was abolished, the number of towns increased sharply. In the year 1984 along, the number of towns jumped from 2,781 of 1983 to a historical height of 6,211. This reflects, to some degree, the reality of urbanization happened before 1980's. Nowadays, after another two decades since then, major shift from farming to non-farming took place in urban and rural areas. However, the Chinese definition of 'urban' and 'rural', 'city' and 'countryside' that was used over the last 50 years is still influencing the decision-making process of the provision of urban infrastructure and public services.

### Suburban Shanghai

Shanghai sits at the middle of China's eastern coastal line, at the mouth of the Yangtze River. It has become China's largest commercial center since the beginning of the last century. Shanghai occupies an area of 6,344 km<sup>2</sup>, out of which 93% is considered as suburban or rural parts. Registered population amounts to 13 million according to government records of 1998. 26% of them are with a household registration of farming, although in reality, only 14% of the total population are involved in farming activities. Most parts of Shanghai are flat, with abundant water resources and products. It enjoys a climate of obvious subtropical monsoon, with clearcut seasons, longer winters and summers, and shorter springs and autumns. It appreciates abundant rainfall, long frostless season and sufficient sunshine. Shanghai is constituted with

central urban and suburban areas. Suburban Shanghai consists 1 county of Chongming, 8 districts (Nanhui, Minhang, Baoshan, Jiading, Jingshan, Fengxian, Songjiang and Qingpu), the suburban part of Pudong New District, excluding 6 townships which was already put under the administration of central urban part.

By the end of 1998, there were 204 towns and 8 townships, with a total area of 5,900 km<sup>2</sup>. Registered population in suburban Shanghai counts at 5.84 million, which constitutes 45% of the total population of Shanghai. Among the suburban population, 42% of it is holding a non-farming registration while 58% is farming. However, in reality, only 31% is involved in farming activities, the other 69% is working in other sectors. Suburban Shanghai contributed one third of the total GDP. However, only 7% of the overall output was from the primary sector. The secondary and tertiary sectors generate 56.1% and 36.9% of the total out-put. Morphologically speaking, except for one or two main towns of each district or county, most of the towns are spontaneously grown based on natural villages or settlements.

Population sizes are usually small; most of them are less than 5,000. Number of towns and settlements is intensive. Average distance between settlements and towns is no more than 5 km. Many people still live in villages and settlements, even after they work in factories of towns. Settlements and villages take shape from the land pattern and canal system derived from water field rice growing. Among them, those geographically better located attract more residents and grow into towns. However, in most of them, infrastructures and

public services are seriously insufficient. Quality as an urban space is relatively low.

In suburban Shanghai, a typical Municipality-District-Town 3 level hierarchy of administration is applied.

#### **Trend of urbanization**

By mid 1970's, China became the world's largest urban nation, although only 20% of the population was urbanized at that time. In the past two decades, this process became dramatic. It is predicted that over the next 10-15 years, half of China's population will live and work in urbanizing areas.

In Yangtze Delta, urban population amounts to 54% of the total, while in Shanghai it reaches a high level of 74%. And in reality, by putting the household registration system aside, the real figure is over 85%. A megalopolis stretching from Ningbo to Shanghai and Nanjing is taking its shape. In this largest urban system of China, the population goes over 30 million in a network of numerous cities and towns within a band of land longer than 500 km. As transportation and communication networks improve between multiple centers, 'urban-rural' boundaries disappear in a rapidly changing web of economic linkages. People live and work in different cities; manufacturers are able to absorb competitive inputs from multiple suppliers over a much broader area; cities and towns develop specialization; and higher level services begin to concentrate within those key metropolitan areas which best provide for regional, national and international market transactions.

While the main site of urbanization in suburban Shanghai remains positive, problems are obvious.

Shanghai has more than 200 towns. Only 10% of them have a population of more than 10,000, while most of the rest (more than 71%) have less than 5,000 residents. In average, a town normally serves an area, which is smaller than 5 km<sup>2</sup>.

Because of the existing urban-rural system, interaction between the inner 'built-up' part of city and suburban has been restricted. Movement of people, capital and economic interests are somehow limited.

Therefore, the input to upgrade the infrastructure in suburban Shanghai remains low. Especially, as the towns and villages are too much spread, the efficiency of input is even much lower. Lack of planning and coordination results in low level development.

Consequently, impact on environment becomes serious and quality of life in suburban areas is relatively poor.

To resolve these problems and to achieve higher level and sustainable development, those issues still remain as the major constraints.

Industrial development acts as a key factor to support the urban development in suburban Shanghai. Compare to the population and the speed of urbanization, development in secondary and tertiary sectors are much left behind.

Shanghai has a three-level government system and related financial policy. Most of the local infrastructure development is to be financed by the local government at town level. These governments usually have very tight revenues if only take the premier sectors into account. However, to develop secondary and tertiary economic activities, the land use policy becomes a major constraint.

At the policy level, household registration system, farming and non-farming population, land use and distribution and social security system have been far behind the social and economic realities.

In the megalopolis, governance between provinces, cities and towns constitutes the major burden in the effort to maximize efficiency of public service delivery and effectiveness of urban and regional management.

#### **One City, Nine Towns**

'One City, Nine Towns' is a project focusing on the future development in suburban Shanghai. As a test of new policy, one central town was chosen for each district of the city. They are: Song Jiang New City of Song Jiang District, Hai Gang New Town of Nanhui District, An Ting New Town of Jia Ding District, Gao Qiao New Town of Pudong New District, Feng Jing New Town of Jin Shan District, Bu Town of Chong Ming County, Pu Jiang New Town of Min Hang District, Feng Chen New City of Feng Xian County, Luo Dian New Town of Bao Shan District and Zhu Jia Jiao New Town of Qin Pu District.

As the new millennium came, the central government made up its mind to take strategic measures to promote urban development. To implement the new urban-rural policy, Shanghai municipality elaborated a new project of 'One City, Nine Towns' as an experiment of a strategic adjustment of decades-last urban system and patterns of social and economic development. The municipal government determined, during the tenth 5-year Plan period, to move infrastructure construction priorities from urban regions to suburbs, and aim to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas in

terms of cultural activities, education, employment, consumption and social security. Planning has been given great attention. The local authorities were asked to make comprehensive and strategic plans for social and economic development. Based on that, the government called for master plans for urban development of world standard. As an experiment, international firms are invited to make blue prints for the ten new towns. In the project, a new land use policy is tested. The local government is allowed to exchange the usage of land for input of industries and infrastructure. The economy of the towns is for the first time considered as a part of the overall economy of the municipality. To promote specialty of economy in each town, according to the strategic planning of the city, makes it possible that the local economy be well developed at a higher level. The new towns are to create a new mechanism to attract people to move in and live there by adding certain flexibility to the existing household registration system. A new policy of social security system will be made to unify the urban and rural parts of the city as a whole. A much higher standard of urban and social development will be applied to provide better infrastructure, public services and cultural facilities. Therefore, a higher quality of life is to be achieved to make the towns more suitable and desirable places. Financially, the municipal and district government will provide more support to promote the development of the towns. The new policy is also encouraging capital movement into the new

town from different sectors including state, private and international investors based on a market-oriented mechanism. 'One City, Nine Towns' project, at the policy-making level, can be seen as an attempt to establish a new urban-rural framework of tomorrow. In this sense, it will also be made a model for thousands of towns all over China, if the project succeeds. The Municipal Government set up a very high standard for the master plan of the new city and town. On the one hand, they found the ongoing urbanization and planning for the rural part of the city are not comparable to those of the central city of Shanghai, while on the other, the international level of planning is a good reference for the fast growing Chinese towns and cities. International competitions for the master plan of the ten city and towns were organized by the Shanghai Urban Planning Administration Bureau and the local governments. For each town, 3-4 design firms of international level were invited. Some of them were recommended by the diplomatic representatives of those countries which is presented. The competition was usually conducted in two phases. A interim presentation was organized to have better communication between the client and the planners. After the interim report, a written comment was delivered to each firm as a guideline for the further development. After the finalist was selected, Shanghai Urban Planning Institute, as the government planning agent, was involved to further develop the concept and to act as a mediator between the foreign planners and the local government authorities.

The approved master plan then became the principles for the development of these towns for the next 20 years. For many of the towns, a committee composed by planning officers, local experts and foreign planners was set up to monitor the execution of the master plan. This was in the history the first large scale involvement of its kind of foreign planners in the master planning of Chinese cities. It was widely seen as a step of open up for foreign services in the Chinese market and also the hope of importing modern urban concepts. However, for the local policy makers, local planners and future inhabitants of those new towns, the consequent effects are still expected. In Search of Utopia: A Case Study of two Towns The Dutch design for an expanding Chinese townis related to the Conceptual Master planning of the Gaoqiao District and the New Town of Gaoqiao in Shanghai. Located between the river mouth of the Yangtze River and the Huangpu River, the peninsular shaped Gaoqiao in Shanghai is an important port town in the north of Pudong. Based on Shanghai's development concept of 'One city, Nine towns' Gaoqiao will become a modern Dutch-style town in which the local architecture is incorporated. It will use the Dutch model of urban planning concepts as reference. Kuiper Compagnons won the bid in the international tender in 2001 and is now proceeding with the detailed planning and design, commissioned by People's Government of Gaoqiao (Shanghai). The main purpose of this project was to create a Dutch city in China. A city in Holland means per definition a complex of spatial and functional

structures. It is complex, divers, multifunctional and multicultural. It is built up of many different urban typologies. Thus, to incorporate the Chinese way of living with Dutch urban design becomes a fundamental challenge. Moreover, the multifunctionality and flexibility of the new city should offer good opportunities for different ways of living and integration of new habits. Kuiper Compagnons made a conceptual master plan to control the development of the city by drawing a line of ecology and a line of economy. The line of economy will be the outer ring of Shanghai, and will extend into the peninsula. The line of ecology will consist of the old sea dike and the road. The San Lin Yuan Tree Nursery will be extended into a recreational and holiday area that will extend into the northern part of the newly built Gaoqiao district. Part of this area will be dredged into a lake that will have some artificial islands. Low-rise houses and holiday villas will be built on the islands to create a pleasant living environment surrounded by water. The future town of Lingqiao will be developed into a new port in the direction of the river mouth of the Yangtze Kiang. A few small to medium-sized office buildings will be built into the large fields in the centre of Gaoqiao to create harmony with surroundings. The centre of Gaoqiao will be remodelled, rebuilt, renovated and extended within an area of 5.6 kmq to create a town in which will enjoy living. The objective of the conceptual planning is to respect and protect the valuable Chinese architecture and urban space and to rearrange the distribution of the water basin network. Green spaces and water



have been included in the plan to prevent the buildings from becoming too populated. The form and the size of the buildings are in harmony with the size of the green and water areas, creating a pleasant living environment.

For the New Town itself, Kuiper Compagnons' plan is based on a few important structural lines and zones, which connect the Dutch City with the rest of Gaoqiao town. At first there is the Classical and Modern Dutch Strip which is situated parallel at the Gaoqiaogang River and connects the historic Chinese centre with the new Dutch centre. The second one is the Pu Xing road, which connects the four quadrants of Gaoqiao Town with each other. By this a cross of important infrastructure, spatial and functional lines is formed and there will occur a sustainable basis for the development.

Looking at the area on a lower scale, the plan is based on a geometrical system of green and water lines, which are based on the existing situation and partly continue in the rest of Gaoqiao. In-between these lines seven different and interlinked areas are situated, which all have their specific urban typology, character and appearance. The northern part contains the Classical and Modern Dutch Strip, with the new city centre Central Square that leads to the historical centre. The strip is surrounded and divided by small canals and built after the classical Dutch towns and architecture. The middle part is wider and contains three different typologies: the Green Gardens (a green area with strips with low-rise housing), the Harbour (wide canal with warehouses and restaurants aside) and the Waving Gardens (landscape and dwellings integrated). In the southern part, Leaves

Holt is situated, a combination of a forest landscape and dwellings. Along Pu Xing Road urban blocks are located, with facilities on the ground-floor and dwellings on the top. The Pu Xing Blocks make a front to the main access Road.

*International Automobile City* is an initiative related to the *Conceptual Master Plan of Shanghai Automobile City and the New Town of Anting*. The planning was commissioned in 2001 by Shanghai Urban Planning Administration Bureau and People's Government of Jia Ding, Shanghai to Albert Speer and Partner GmbH (Frankfurt-Main, Germany), and Fichtner GmbH and Co. (KG Stuttgart, Germany). Anting Area is located in the western part of Shanghai. It is the gate for the highways leading to Jiangsu Province and further on to Beijing. Since 1984, when Volkswagen moved in and established the first modern autoindustrial base in China, Anting's major industrial sector has long been centered at car manufacturing. As one of the major towns, known as 'One City, Nine Towns', which will enjoy the special privileged policy of development, Anting is expected to be built into the most important automobile manufacturing center in China, as well as a new town with modern living comforts and amenities. The planned size of the town shall have a potential to host 200,000 inhabitants. Since Anting was designated as a German style area, possibly because of the existence of Volkswagen, a competition was organised to propose a master plan for the future urban development of Anting. The entry done by Albert Speer and Partner of Frankfurt and Fichtner and Co. of Stuttgart, won the project. The master plan divided the

area into four major functions:

- *International Automobile City*. The IAC is located in a large piece of land between Cao An Road, a major highway, and Wusongjiang River, a major geographical feature in the area. It is composed by the functions of Automobile Exhibition, Automobile Trade, Automobile Duty Free Service, Automobile Research and Technology, Management and Training, Urban Services.

- *Anting Central Area*. As an important complementing function to the International Automobile City, Anting New Town is to be built as a town very suitable for living, with the following qualities: low-rise and open in volume, mixed in function, intimate and cozy in scale and urban and lively in mood.

- *Residential Areas*. The planners foresee a potential development in the area. Therefore, in the master plan, they propose a new residential area between the Wusongjiang River and the Shanghai-Nanjing Highway, the south boundary of the New Town.

- *Automobile Manufacturing Areas*. The Automobile Manufacturing Area will be basically focused on the existing VW Shanghai and extended to the east boundary stopped by the green-lined Wenzaobang River. The total area for manufacturing will reach 234 ha, with an additional area of 377 ha reserved for accessories manufacturing to the north of the area. The International Automobile City, the New Town of Anting and the proposed future residential area are bonded by the rivers of Wusongjiang and Wenzaobang and the large scale public green space. In fact, the park becomes the center of the area, with man-made lake, surrounded by entertainment, catering, leisure, sports and

recreational facilities, while cross the Wenzaobang River, a leisure park, a golf course and possibly a automobile themed park will be built.

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