

Modern Restoration of the Life, Pride and Soul of a Very Ancient

Town: The Shaoxing Story

Summary

Shaoxing, built in 490 BC, is a city full of canals, celebrities, yellow wine and ancient stone bridges. Since its establishment, it has never moved its location. The Ancient Town of Shaoxing City, covering 8.32 square kilometers, is scattered with rivers and historical relics. Its people still keep their traditional ways of living along the rivers.

Since the 1980s of the 20th century, Shaoxing has been rapidly developing. Between 1980 and 2000, the population of the Ancient Town was increased from 147,300 to 290,600 and the number of factories grew from 20 to more than 160. However, the Ancient Town, carrying the characteristics and soul of the city, faced with many challenges:

- Poor living conditions. The quality of more than 95% of housing was very low. Infrastructure such as street lights, drainage and health were not adequate. The population density was very high. For instance, a family of three people normally occupied a living area of less than 30 square meters.
- The disharmony of architectural style. New roads and buildings of differing heights, shapes and colours continuously emerged in the Ancient Town, clashing against the original styles.
- The destruction of cultural heritage sites. 20 out of 31 listed relics in the Ancient Town were damaged or inappropriately used for other purposes to various degrees. Many historical buildings with over one-hundred years of history were demolished in the course of the rapid urban development.
- The damage of some watercourses. Water areas were decreased by filling rivers and building roads. As a result, the 18 remaining watercourses often silt up quickly, causing river banks to collapse. About 85 percent of factories were engaged in heavily polluting industries. Furthermore, the sewage network was not complete. Domestic and industrial wastewater was discharged into watercourses, making water bodies black and smelly, and the quality of the water only at the Level V of the national standard.
- Economic activities were limited. The backward living conditions and infrastructure broadly restricted business investment, and the Ancient Town lacked economic vitality.

The municipal government and inhabitants, facing the difficulties of how to develop the Ancient Town with modernized service facilities—improving the living environment of inhabitants while developing the economy and preserving the cultural characteristics, initiated and implemented a new project named “The Ancient Town Protection Project” in 2001. A total of 15.18 billion USD has been invested, and

remarkable achievements have been accomplished:

- Seven historic communities representing Shaoxing's characteristics have been preserved and restored. Up until now, approximately 1.1 million square meters of historic areas have been renovated, and more than 80% of the historic buildings have been restored.
- Infrastructure, such as water and sanitation, electricity, and telecommunications have been improved for more than 10,000 households,
- The population density has been reduced. About 20% of the inhabitants moved out, leaving more areas for residential houses, cultural and community centers, parks and other public spaces
- Buildings along the rivers of the Ancient Town, traditionally constructed with white walls and black roofs, and the predominant local colors of black, white and grey have been gradually restored.
- 31 listed buildings and 96 historic relics have been protected.
- The quality of the water has been upgraded to the Level III of the national standard for the 18 watercourses after comprehensive redevelopment. This resulted in more ecological space including water areas covering 0.66 million square meters, river bank greenery of 0.6 million square meters, and 8 scenic spots opening to the public free of charge.
- Historic sites have been rationally conserved and used. Between 2001 and 2007, around 100 million tourists visited Shaoxing, and the number of visitors has increased annually by an average of 25.3%. The improvement of the city's overall image also stimulated the economic development. Between 2001 and 2007, the GDP per capita per year was increased by an average of 13.1%.

“The Ancient Town Protection Project” in Shaoxing has preserved cultural characteristics, improved the urban environment and enhanced the quality of living in the process of rapid urbanization. It provides lots of experiences to be shared:

- An integrated and holistic approach consisting of the protection of points (cultural and historic places), lines (waterways and riverbank scenery) and the community areas (historic communities and then the entire city). In May 2006 the overall approach to protection and restoration of this Ancient Town was titled the “Shaoxing Model” at the second international conference on culture and heritage protection & sustainable development, co-sponsored by UNESCO, the World Bank, the National Construction Ministry and the State Administration for Preservation of Cultural Heritage. This model is now being followed by more than 10 cities in China in respect of protection of ancient cities.
- Formulation of local regulations for the conservation and sustainable development of ancient towns in a legal and systematic manner.
- Multiple-channel financing, led by the municipal government, with funds from government revenues, social funds, loans from international financial

institutions, and donations from citizens and civil societies.

- Establishment of an administration structure for ancient town protection with the leadership of government institutions and the participation of social organizations, community groups and individual local residents.

MODERN RESTORATION OF THE LIFE, PRIDE AND SOUL OF A VERY ANCIENT TOWN: THE SHAOXING STORY

1.BACKGROUND

Located in the northern part of Zhejiang Province, Shaoxing covers an area of 8,256 square kilometers with a population of 4.4 million. Urban Shaoxing covers an area of 90 square kilometers with a population of 650,000. In 2007 Shaoxing's GDP reached 27 billion USD, corresponding to an GDP per capita of 6,000 USD ,which is 2.4 times of the national average.

Built in 490 BC, Shaoxing boasts a long history and the location of the city has never moved in that 2500 years. In 1982, Shaoxing was titled as one of the first batch of 24 cultural and historic cities in China by the State Council. Nowadays, the ancient town covers 8.3 square kilometers with a population of nearly 220,000. In the urban district, 18 watercourses runs crisscross, where 31 cultural relics, 96 historic sites and more than 3 million square meters of one-century-old historic buildings are scattered.

Shaoxing city holds remarkable characteristics, and is described as "a city floating on the water", "a museum without walls" and "a traditional folk style of the picture scroll". However, since the 1980s, with the rapid urbanization process, it has faced a great challenge to sustain the characteristics of the city and meet the increasing requirements of service and facilities for urban life. Therefore, Shaoxing commenced exploration and action of the "The Ancient Town Protection Project".

2.PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 Problems

◎**Poor living conditions.** Over 95% of the housing in the ancient town was in bad condition, and lacked proper maintenance. The infrastructure was also insufficient - especially the sanitary facilities. Waste discharge was often slow as the sewage system often became blocked. There was also a high population density in the ancient town. In some cases, there were up to 12 families in a traditional building of as little as 300 square meters, and often a family of three stayed in a place of less than 30 square meters.

◎**The disharmony of architectural style.** Modernized roads and buildings of differing heights, shapes and colours continuously emerged in the ancient town, clashing against the original styles.

◎**The destruction of cultural heritage sites.** 20 out of 31 listed relics in the ancient town were damaged or inappropriately used for other purposes to various degrees. In some cases, many historical buildings with over one-hundred years of history were demolished in the course of the city's construction.

◎**Damage of urban watercourses.** The total length of watercourses was reduced to around 30 kilometers. As a result, the 18 remaining watercourses often silt up quickly, sometimes causing river banks to collapse. Damage to watercourses was also caused by 160 factories crowded in the ancient town. 85 percent of these factories were engaged in heavily polluting industries. In addition to this, the sewage network was not sufficient to meet the demands. Domestic and industrial wastewater was often discharged into watercourses, leading to water in some parts of the watercourses becoming black and smelly, and the quality of the water only reaching state level V.

◎**Economic activities were limited.** The backward living conditions and infrastructure broadly restricted business exploration, and the ancient town lacked economic vitality.

2.2 Objectives

◎The aim of the project was to protect the historic relics, preserve the original outlook of the ancient town and protect the cultural characteristics of the city.

◎Furthermore, the aim was to lift the living conditions of inhabitants and the integrated environment of the city, enhancing its economic vitality and ensuring the sustainable development of the ancient town.

2.3 Measures taken

2.3.1 Restoration and protection of traditional buildings of historic communities

◎Seven historic communities representing Shaoxing's characteristics were selected and have been preserved as well as restored. These communities cover up to 2 million square meters, which accommodate over 17 thousand households, totally more than 50,000 inhabitants. Up until now,

approximately 1.1 million square meters of historic areas have been completed and has benefited over 10 thousand families (over 29 thousand inhabitants).

◎More than 80% of the buildings and historic areas fully presenting Shaoxing's characteristics in historic communities have been maintained following the principles of the restoration as they used to be.

2.3.2 Transformation and improvement of the infrastructure in the historic area

◎Where it was possible to do so without destroying the architectural outlook of the building, houses were equipped with a kitchen and toilet. Pipes linking the houses to the waste sewage system were also laid.

◎Pipes for electricity, telecommunications, internet, cable TV, streetlight and tap water were laid underground throughout the historic communities, to create more space, make it look aesthetically tidier above ground, and to remove hazards caused by such cables. These were done at one time in order to minimise disruption.

◎Traditional bluestone walkways were restored or re-paved.

2.3.3 Reducing the population density and enlarging public areas

◎The households of historic communities living in an area of less than 10 square meters per person were offered 30% discounts from an average house, or currency subsidies to encourage them to move out. In total, 20% of the residents moved out and sold their houses to their neighbors or to the government.

◎After the inhabitants moved out, part of these historic communities were built into 3 landscaped squares, cultural halls, and over 10 green belts and free parks.

2.3.4 Harmonizing the architectural style of the ancient town

◎The "Protection Scheme of Shaoxing as a Historic and Cultural City" introduced strict building regulations in designated areas near to protected cultural relics. These rules put limits on the style, height, size and colour of buildings. It was prohibited to build anything not conforming to these standards, which stated that buildings must be less than two storey's tall, and that the extensive use of glass walls, stainless steel and coloured tiles on the exterior of the building were forbidden.

◎Buildings not conforming to the traditional style have undergone works to bring them in line. The black, white and grey colour theme has gradually been restored in the ancient town, bringing back the white walled and black roofed architectural style.

2.3.5 Protection of cultural scenic spots and cultural relics

◎Thirty-one cultural relics were protected in their original place and state. These sites include ancient buildings, relics, gardens and celebrities' memorial places. Additionally, ninety-six areas holding cultural relics, which were not marked as protected, were also well conserved.

④The protection of some of the major historic relics was expanded. For instance, in the course of protection project, the protected areas of Luxun native place were expanded from 14 hectares to 52 hectares, the surrounding architectural style was complemented and historical information was preserved as much as possible.

④Shaoxing's outstanding traditional culture was protected and promoted. Up till now, more than 10 traditional cultural arts have been listed as state level Intangible Cultural Heritage. These include Shaoxing Lotus Opera, Shaoxing Pinghu Opera, brewing techniques of Shaoxing local rice wine and Memorial Ceremony at Dayu Mausoleum.

2.3.6 Improvement of the water systems in the ancient town

④Actions were taken to improve the quality of the water system in the 18 canals. This included dredging canals, controlling and removing sources of water pollution, repairing riverbanks and preventing roads from being constructed by filling up rivers.

④The underground sewage discharge system and the sewerage treatment plant were developed to ensure that a collection and treatment rate of domestic waste in the ancient town reached 80.5 percent.

④More than 120 heavily polluting factories were either shut down or moved out. The remaining factories were connected to the underground sewage system.

④In 2007, Cao'e River diversion works was launched. Running water from outside the city was introduced into the watercourses in the original city, further improving the quality of the water.

2.3.7 Improvement of the economic situation

④To develop the value of culturally based businesses and activities. For example at Cangqiao Historic Street, a local wine museum, a calligraphy, painting and a drama museum were established. Tea houses and shops both showing historic charm were also opened. In 2007 more than 300,000 tourists visited this area which brought tremendous economic opportunities for Shaoxing.

④Historic and cultural scenic spots were developed. For instance, Luxun Native Place was extensively protected, making it a complete scenic spot representing the traditional charm of Shaoxing. Up to 2007, the growth rate of tourism and ticket revenues was raised to an annual average of 20%, while in year of 2007 saw a reception of 1.2 million tourists, bringing a ticket revenue of 5.43 million USD.

④In October 2007, the World Bank launched a project of "Shaoxing community's participation in tourism activities". Five of the local communities joined this project, which not only gave tourists a deeper experiences of the traditional Shaoxing life, but also brought economic benefit for the locals.

2.4 Achievements

2.4.1 Harmony between the ancient town and the modern city

④ Some areas and architectural relics presenting historic and cultural features were preserved. For example, Bazi Bridge which owns a history of more than 700 years was recognized as the oldest city "flyover bridge" in China. The bridge was protected fully in the course of the ancient town protection scheme, and is still in use today.

④ The proximity of modern-looking buildings to the ancient town was carefully monitored, and now there is a gradual change from old style relics to modern buildings between the ancient town and the modern city by controlling this proximity, cultural relics in the city are now in harmony with other nearby architectural styles.

④ The economic vitality was enhanced. In 2007, tourist revenues in Shaoxing city reached 26.92 billion USD, an increase of 26.7% from the previous year. This increase of tourism and leisure triggered a remarkable development of Shaoxing's tertiary industry. In 2007, the total production value from industries in Shaoxing reached 273.75 billion USD, with the tertiary industry contributing 33.9%.

2.4.2 Harmony between the traditional and the modern life styles

④ The traditional living style of inhabitants—enjoying living along rivers was well kept. When walking through Caoqiao street, which won the Award of Merit of UNESCO Asia-Pacific cultural heritage conservation, people can still feel the living conditions of Shaoxing locals of centuries ago.

④ Modern, clean and convenient living facilities were provided for inhabitants who live in the traditional areas. More than 10,000 inhabitants luckily avoided the embarrassments, such as the whole family sleep in the same room, share one tap to wash clothes and vegetables, and have to empty their Matong (one kind of commode) into the public toilets every morning.

④ A variety of activity places were established, giving the locals places to communicate, sing Yueju opera, practise calligraphy, drink tea and chat etc. Some art groups such as opera, calligraphy and drawing saw a boom.

2.4.3 Harmony between the natural and the built environment

④ The natural form of the ancient town water system was basically restored, and the quality of the water reached state grade III standards, forming ecological space including water areas covering 0.66 million square meters, river bank greenery of 0.6 million square meters, and 8 free scenic spots. The improvement of water quality as well as environment along both riversides made inhabitants' lives more comfortable. Water from the river can now be used to water flowers, and fishes and shrimps have appeared in the rivers again. The Wupeng boat (black-awning boat), a unique method of transport in Water Town Shaoxing- also offers a convenient service for visitors and local inhabitants.

④ The green area of the ancient town has now reached 2.4 square kilometers or close to 30% of the ancient town area. This development represents an increase of 320% compared to year 2001. The green areas bring fresher air and provide space for citizens and visitors to enjoy the ancient town.

3. MAIN PARTNERS

3.1 Financial and Investment Support

| PROJECTS | MILL. USD | FINANCIAL SOURCES | DETAILS |
|--|--------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Cultural Sites Protection | 57 | Government | |
| Waterways Improvement | 714 | Government Companies Citizens | 683 million from Government of which 173 million for the repair of the moat. 31.5 million donations from citizens and companies |
| Cao'e River Direction | 72 | Government | |
| Sewerage Pipes and Plant | 432 | Government, Japanese Xieli Fund | 404 million 28 Japanese funding |
| Historic Streets Renewal Private Residents' Houses | 214 | Government Residents World Bank | 142.2 million 27.7 million 44.1 million |
| Upgrading of other buildings | 29 | Government Building owners | 26.1 million 2.9 million |
| TOTAL | 1,518 | | |

Note: figures are converted using the rate of 7 RMB = 1 USD

3.2 Technical support

☉ Tongji University in Shanghai is in charge of compilation of the "Protection Scheme of Shaoxing as a Historic and Cultural City".

☉ Famous Chinese experts in the field of ancient town protection, Mr. Wu Liangyong, Mr. Ruan Yisan, and Mr. Wang Jinghui gave their recommendations in respect of protecting historic streets, renovating ancient buildings and excavating historic relics and cultural values.

☉ Three international consultation companies financed by World Bank participated in the projects on the ancient town protection and urban infrastructure development.

3.3 Community support

☉ Residents' committees are responsible for street cleaning, garbage disposal and the daily maintenance of small areas of greenery as well as the public fitness facilities.

☉ Around 10,000 local volunteers participated in the work of renovating the canals in the course of integrated rectification.

☉ Over 200 citizens were organized into a volunteer group to participate in the cleaning and security of the historic streets.

4. IMPACTS

4.1 Image improvement

☉ On 25th March, 2007, the "Blue Book of Chinese Cities' competitiveness in 2007" by the Chinese Academy of Social Science showed that Shaoxing ranked number 10 on the list of the most suitable cities for living. Shaoxing was ranked at 8th position out of 41 Chinese cities in a harmonious development index made by "China harmonious development group" of East China University, Fudan University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

☉ After the implementation of the "Ancient Town Protection" scheme, more and more people came to Shaoxing to experience the charm of a city where the traditional and the modern are so beautifully integrated. Between 2001 and 2007, tourists both domestic and international were attracted. The number of these reached 105 million and increased annually by on average 25.3%. In 2007 alone, Shaoxing accommodated more than 22 million domestic and international visitors - an increase of 21.36% compared to 2006.

4.2 Citizens recognition

☉ After the implementation of the project, more than 10,000 families experienced major improvements in their living conditions, with expectations for this number to rise as the project continues into the future.

☉ The promotions of these changes brought good reputation, a good image and economic benefit for the locals. The GDP per capita in Shaoxing increased annually by an average of 13.1% between 2001 and 2007.

©In a survey conducted by Zhejiang University in 2003, 90% of the citizens in Shaoxing said that they were satisfied with the renovation of buildings, restoration of infrastructure and the undertaking of renovation costs.

©In a 2007 survey made by the "Shaoxing community participation tourism" project team organized by the World Bank, 95% of the 300 participants expressed that they were proud of the development and of the opportunity to share their history and culture with visitors to Shaoxing.

5. SUSTAINABILITY

5.1 Institutional support

©Government agencies: Established in August 2001, Shaoxing Historic and Cultural City Protection Management Office is responsible for protection renovation, alteration, management and reconstruction of the project.

©Public agencies: A historic and cultural research committee was set up in March 2006, as a non-governmental organization to consolidate lessons learned, research measures taken, and to make sure that the Ancient Town Protection Project was carried out in a systemic and scientific way.

5.2 Legal support

©"Shaoxing City General Plan" was amended, and "The Protection Scheme of Shaoxing as a Historic and Cultural City" was enacted in December 2001. "Shaoxing Regulations of Protection and Management of Urban Historic Communities" was issued in May 2006.

5.3 Government operational support

©In the recent three years, the government has financed an annual average of 1.7 million USD in the protection of cultural relics, 3.6 million USD in water treatment and 21.6 million USD in the protection of historic communities.

5.4 Citizens support

©The project has changed the attitudes of the citizens in terms of their appreciation of their history and culture. They have a much better understanding of the importance of the history and culture of the ancient town, and more citizens now regard ancient town protection as their responsibility and obligation. Many people work as volunteers to support and participate in this project.

6. TRANSFERABILITY

6.1 Forming the "Shaoxing Model" of Ancient Town Protection

©The aim of the Shaoxing model is to improve the living conditions of inhabitants and the overall environment of the city as well as to maintain the cultural characteristics of the city by using an integrated and holistic approach consisting of the protection of points (cultural and historic places), lines (waterways and riverbank scenery) and community areas (historic community and then the city).

☉ In May 2006, the approach for protecting and developing the ancient town was titled as the "Shaoxing Model" and was promoted to the world at the second International Conference on Culture Heritage Conservation and Sustainable Development, co-sponsored by UNESCO, the World Bank, the National Construction Ministry and the State Administration for Cultural Heritage Conservation.

6.2 The significance of reference and promotion

☉ After the implementation of the project, Shaoxing was invited to give a speech about the model and the experience gained from implementing it at a variety of national conferences and forums at the state level every year.

☉ After the implementation of the project, Shaoxing welcomed more than 40 groups of international and domestic politicians, planners and experts who came (or were interested) to learn about the effects of the model every year.

☉ More than 10 Chinese cities have been conducting protection policies with reference the Shaoxing model.

6.3 Gaining recognition from domestic and international experts

☉ Professor Ruan Yisan, historical and cultural city protection expert from Tongji University, said that Shaoxing set a good example for China in terms of protection of historic communities.

☉ Mr. S.K. Mishra, Chairman of Indian national artist and cultural heritage association and chief advisor for the former Indian premier, expressed that it is fantastic that the historical and cultural communities could be preserved so well during the urbanization, and that many approaches should be used in India.

☉ Mr. Varma, director of the eastern Asia and Pacific urban development department in the World Bank pointed out that Shaoxing did a great job in balancing urban modernization and traditional cultural protection saying: This model could also be named as an excellent model for Asia.

7. INNOVATIONS

7.1 Innovative concepts

☉ During the process, the large-areas of dilapidated housing were not demolished to reconstruct the new city, nor were the residents moving out simply to protect tangible sites. Instead, Shaoxing combined the extension of urban city cultural characteristics with the improvement of the living environment, ensuring the sustainable development of the Ancient town.

7.2 Innovative technologies

☉ The traditional architecture was protected and renovated with modern living facilities being built in. As a result, many technical aspects of innovation were applied.

7.3 Innovative financing

☉ Instead of government funding the projects solely, a multi-financing mechanism that was government-led included financial investment, loans by financial institutions, social capital investment,

and personal and non-governmental organizations and other donors.

7.4 Innovative management systems

©The coordination and implementation of the Shaoxing Model has required the establishment of new managerial mechanisms with the participation of government institutions, social organizations, community committees and individual citizens.

8. RECOGNITION OF THE INITIATIVE

8.1 Media reports

©The "Ancient Town Protection Project" has been repeatedly reported in the domestic media such as China's Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television and People's Daily etc.

8.2 Honors awards

©After the implementation of the project, Shaoxing has received many different titles and awards including the Excellent Chinese Tourist City, China's Environmental Protection Model City, National Health City, National Garden City, China's Excellent Model City in Water Environment Management, China's Habitat Scroll of Honor Award and China's Excellent City with Best Investment Environment.

8.3 Recognition from professional organizations

©Cangqiao Historic Street was awarded the Award of Merit of UNESCO Asia-Pacific cultural heritage conservation. Committee experts indicated that the protection of Cangqiao Historic Street played an important role in the process of the preservation of Shaoxing's unique water town scene, and it successfully represented Shaoxing's historic and cultural vitality as well as displaying the living heritage in China.

©In 2006 Shaoxing was ranked first in Zhejiang Province among 500 cities examined for environmental management by the State Environmental Protection Administration Bureau. It was also ranked 18th in China in the field of urban residents' life quality.

©"The protection scheme of Shaoxing cultural and historic city" was awarded the second prize for urban planning by the National Ministry of Construction.

8.4 The recognition of the experts

©Mr. Zhewen Luo, expert in China's historic and cultural city protection schemes said that the project in Shaoxing was the largest and most accurate in China.

©Mr. Ruan Yisan, professor from Tong Ji University said that the protection of Shaoxing's historic communities contributed to the construction of a harmonious society.

©Mr. Richard Engelhardt, the cultural advisor of UNESCO commended the Cangqiao Street area using the title "Taking a look down memory lane and respecting our heritage", and expressing, "I really love this place. I would like to stay here for a long time."