

Suzhou Historical Gardens and City's Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

Suzhou historic gardens include classical gardens, places of interest and palaces built by hills and waters. They are geographically distributed in the ancient city and the suburbs. Considered as both Chinese and world class historic cultural heritage, these precious tourist resources have been included in the systematic urban planning of Suzhou and they are an integral part of the urban green plan and symbol and characteristic of the urban view. These gardens are also important for tourist industry-one of the pillar industries in Suzhou. Therefore, historic gardens play an especially important role in the city's continuous development and it becomes an important task to make good protection, planning, construction and management of these historic gardens.

Key Words : Historical Gardens, Places of interest, Scenic spots, Planning Development

Suzhou is a famous town of China with historical and cultural values to the whole nation, as well as a major tourist city attraction. It is one of the important central cities of Yangtze River Delta. Geographically, Suzhou is situated by the Lake Taihu, and it is a beautiful city with hills, water. Ever since its establishment 2512 years ago, it has become a most unique historical garden city for rich resources of scenic spots, places of interest and gardens. Suzhou's historical gardens are a complete group system, including those of scenic spots, those with places of interest and Taihu ancient ones. Their locations are widely scattered. On the remote outskirts, supported by the hills and waters of Lake Taihu, there are the picturesque palace gardens of Wu King; on the near outskirts, there are places of

interests, such as Tiger Hill, called the Number One Scenic Spot of middle Wu area, and the private gardens in the ancient city proper represented by the Humble Administrator's Garden and Tui Si Garden (Garden of Retreat for Meditation). These precious historical garden resources are not reproducible, and their role in the city development, in terms of environmental, social and economic benefits, have gained increasing recognition and attention. They can directly affect the nature and feature of Suzhou City, as well as the city's planning and deployment. They have been incorporated as an important content into Suzhou city's general planning, the protection plan of the old city (town) proper, the systematic planning of city greenbelt, tourist planning and traffic planning, etc. By close

protection, scientific and reasonable development and utilization, they will render the city, in its continued development, a precious green space in which the people and the nature will live in a sustained harmony.

The development target of Suzhou city is to gradually build it into a modern city with economic prosperity, social civilization, rational deployment and beautiful environment, bearing the rich historical traditions, and characteristic of that of a water town south to the Yangtze River. With the deepening of reform and opening drive and the rapid economic development and the continuous city expansion, people's living conditions have been steadily improved and they have higher demands for the city environment. Therefore, it is necessary to modify general planning of the city from the original structure of 'east town, west market' in the 1980's to a new city deployment and space design of 'one body, two wings', which includes the eastern park (Industrial Park), western Zone (Suzhou New District), Southern scenes (Wuzhong District and scenic spots) and northern corridor (Xiang Chen District, traffic hub). The city's greenbelt planning takes a circular-plus-cuneate shape, comprising of five pieces, three circles, two belts and four city corners' green landscape, which form a tight integration by spots, lines and areas, and well incorporate into the natural landscape system of hills and waters. By strengthening the construction and protection of the city's greenbelt, scenic spots, places of interests and ecological environment, and by fully utilizing the features of the ancient gardens and natural hills and waters, to build a unique landscape system characterized by 'city in the natural garden of hills and waters; gardens in the city of man-made hills and waters'. Considering that the public green lands possess rich historical garden features, they are divided into four groups, i.e.

ancient gardens, historical relics, modern parks and scenic spots. With the implementation of the plan, Suzhou will develop into a modern national garden city from the original famous historical garden city.

Suzhou ancient gardens, or otherwise called the private gardens, are characterized with the art of garden architecture of 'old, many, small, exquisite, elegant and pretty'. According to historical records, these private gardens originated from the Pi Jiang Garden, the Number One Garden of Middle Wu Area, in the East Jin Dynasty (about 375 A.D.). By the Jiajing and Jiaqing periods of the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1522-1820), Suzhou had witnessed a fashion in building private gardens for 300 years. As a result, a large amount of gardens, big and small in size, spread around cities, towns and country-side. There are 200-plus gardens in Suzhou old city proper, and more than 10 gardens in the small town of Tong Li in Wujiang city. Up to date, these gardens offer rich relics, 29 of which are recognized for their historical and artistic values and are inlisted as the National Cultural Relics Protection Unit (Grade 3). In the proper 28 ancient gardens have been inlisted for protection in the general planning. The newly-reconstructed gardens are Five-Peak Garden, Chang Garden, Yipu Residence, the Xiang Garden of Mudu County in Wuzhong District, Yan Garden of Changshu City, Gengle Garden of Tongli Town in Wujiang City, and the South Garden of Taicang City. Among this galaxy of ancient gardens, the most representative ones are the Humble Administrator's Garden, the Lingering Garden, the Master of Nets Garden, Huanxiu Villa, Cang Lang Pavilion, the Lions Garden, Yipu Garden, Lotus Root Garden and Tui Si Garden, which have respectively been enlisted as the World Cultural Legacy by the UNESCO in 1997 and 2000. Suzhou ancient gardens are a special type of city public landscaping. They are the 'city greens', small

in size, yet large in quantity. They play a considerable role in the green-land ecology. More importantly, they are national relics, and precious cultural legacies, as well as excellent tourist spots, attracting a great many visitors from home and abroad. Therefore, they will be open to public for visit under the pre-conditioning of close protection.

Suzhou historical scenic gardens can be dated back to Wu Kingdom in the Spring and Autumn Warring States Period. He Lu and Fu Chai, the Kings of Wu (514 BC-473 BC) built their summer palace and other royal gardens, such as Gusu Tai, Guanwa Palace, Changzhou Garden, by incorporating the natural hills and waters of Taihu Lake, Shan Island and other lakes. Every year they stayed in the city during autumn and winter time, and visit the gardens in spring and summer. As for the later emperors, they also sought reclusive life in Taihu Lake or regard it as a place for sightseeing in the land of '3,600hectares, 72 peaks and 48 islands', as well as the 'heavenly fortune land, and earthly fairy land'. In the 1990's, Mr. Sun Zhongshan (Yatsen)once wished to establish Taihu Lake as a national public park in his Constructive Scheme of the Country. It was until the beginning of the 1980's that Taihu Lake was listed in the first group of national scenic zones category, and an overall planning began to protect the landscape resources and restore the main scenic spots. The National Taihu Lake Scenic Spot Zone has eight sights in Suzhou city, namely the Dongting East Hill, Dongting West Hill, Guangfu Scenic spot, Lakeside Mudu, Stone Lake zone, which demonstrate the essence of the hill and water integration of Lake Taihu; the ancient water towns of Luzhi, Tongli Scenic Zone, and the relatively geographically independent, yet culturally associated Shanghu Lake Scenic Spot in Changshu that is characterized by 'ten miles of green hills extending half the city'.

Taihu Lake Scenic Zone not only has pretty hills, waters and rich cultures, but also relic gardens of special values, associated with The Art of War by Sun Zi and the War between Wu and Yue Kingdoms.

The places of interest in Suzhou are mostly temples and gardens. Some are situated on the near outskirts of the old city proper, such as Tiger Hill, Hanshan Temple, West Garden Temple, etc. Up to date, they have enjoyed convenient traffic conditions by water and land and received groups of tourists. These places of interest have been incorporated into the scenic zone category of the city landscape system for special protection and development, and by integrating with the surrounding environment, they are taken into the plan of Tiger Hill Scenic Zone and Feng Qiao Scenic Zone of Jiangsu Province.

Suzhou is one of the most famous tourist cities of China, enjoying a reputation as in the saying: 'there is heaven in the sky, and there are Suzhou and Hangzhou on earth; Suzhou, ancient and today, is forever the heavenly paradise'. Suzhou's feature brand for tourism is 'three ancient's and one lake', which refers to the thousand-year ancient town, the ancient gardens, the ancient watery towns and Lake Taihu hills and waters. All these are directly related to the historical garden resources, and have attracted visitors from home and abroad. Statistics show that in 2000 Suzhou received a total of 14,960,000 domestic visitors, and 714,000 foreign tourists. Now that the Suzhou government has decided to develop the tourist industry as one of the pillar industries of Suzhou economy, they worked out 'Suzhou Tourism Overall Planning', first of its kind for the city, and strive to achieve a greater success of the city's tourism.

The orderly road and traffic inside the city provides convenient traffic facilities to tourist

development, which witnessed the construction of Taihu Lake Bridge, the tourist ring routes inside the old city proper and city ring roads around the city, the set up of five special public tourism bus routes and excursion shuttle buses to the ancient watery towns and scenic spots. In addition, the larger external ring of expressway is under construction, so as to link all the main scenic zones around Taihu Lake.

Suzhou historical gardens are a carrier and

embodiment of the ancient civilization. It is not only a famous town of historical and cultural value, a tourist place, it is also, more importantly, a successful accomplishment of the socialist two-civilization construction, fully reflecting the harmony and unity of the ancient and modern civilizations. Here in Suzhou, you can feel the heritage of its 2500 years of history, and see the current China and its future. The paradise of Suzhou will be more and more beautiful.

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