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## **Suzhou In Prosperous: Representative infrastructure-based-prosperous about Suzhou**

Li Qiu

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# Suzhou In Prosperous

Representative infrastructure-based-prosperous about Suzhou



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Thesis Prep book

Spring 2014

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## “Prosperous Suzhou”

Ideal city, Ideal lives in different scales

Once named Burgeoning Life in a Resplendent Age. Prosperous Suzhou is a hand scroll, a long narrow scroll for displaying a series of scenes. It is twelve meters in length. It is intended to be viewed starting from the right end, by laying it flat on a table and unrolling it. One admires it section for section during the unrolling as if traveling through a landscape, depicting a continuous journey.

*“This idea of making the edge disappear...See if I make the scroll turned and go up here. It’s already gone off the edge of the frame...So in a way it’s nice to remember when we are looking at even details of the scroll...well even on the screen they’ve got edge around them and reality the way you meant to be with, this is not the case. The camera itself moving through the scroll because somebody else is selecting with the eye is going to move because the cameras got edges...It’s also a prime way of looking picture worth and. The real scroll perhaps 2 or 3 feet for a time could see. It would never be displayed in a whole. You just examine 3-4 feet a time on rolling it.”*

David Hockney

The scroll vividly illustrates the visual appearance of the terrain, urban landscapes, and everyday life in an area covering several dozen miles. The middle of the scroll depicts an idealized view of all the activities of the bustling urban center of Suzhou. Viewers can see numerous merchants, traders, barges and passenger boats, as well as dense rows of shops and vendors.

In his inscription at the end of the scroll, Xu Yang wrote that he painted it in order to depict a peaceful and prosperous reign, and to pay homage to the reign of the emperor Qianlong:

Prosperous by canal

The Grand Canal is the longest canal or artificial river in the world. The oldest parts of the canal date back to the 5th century BC, the various sections were finally combined during the Sui Dynasty (581–618 AD). The total length of the Grand Canal is 1,776 km (1,104 mi). With restoration at the beginning of Ming Dynasty, the Grand Canal had settled down its routes till now.

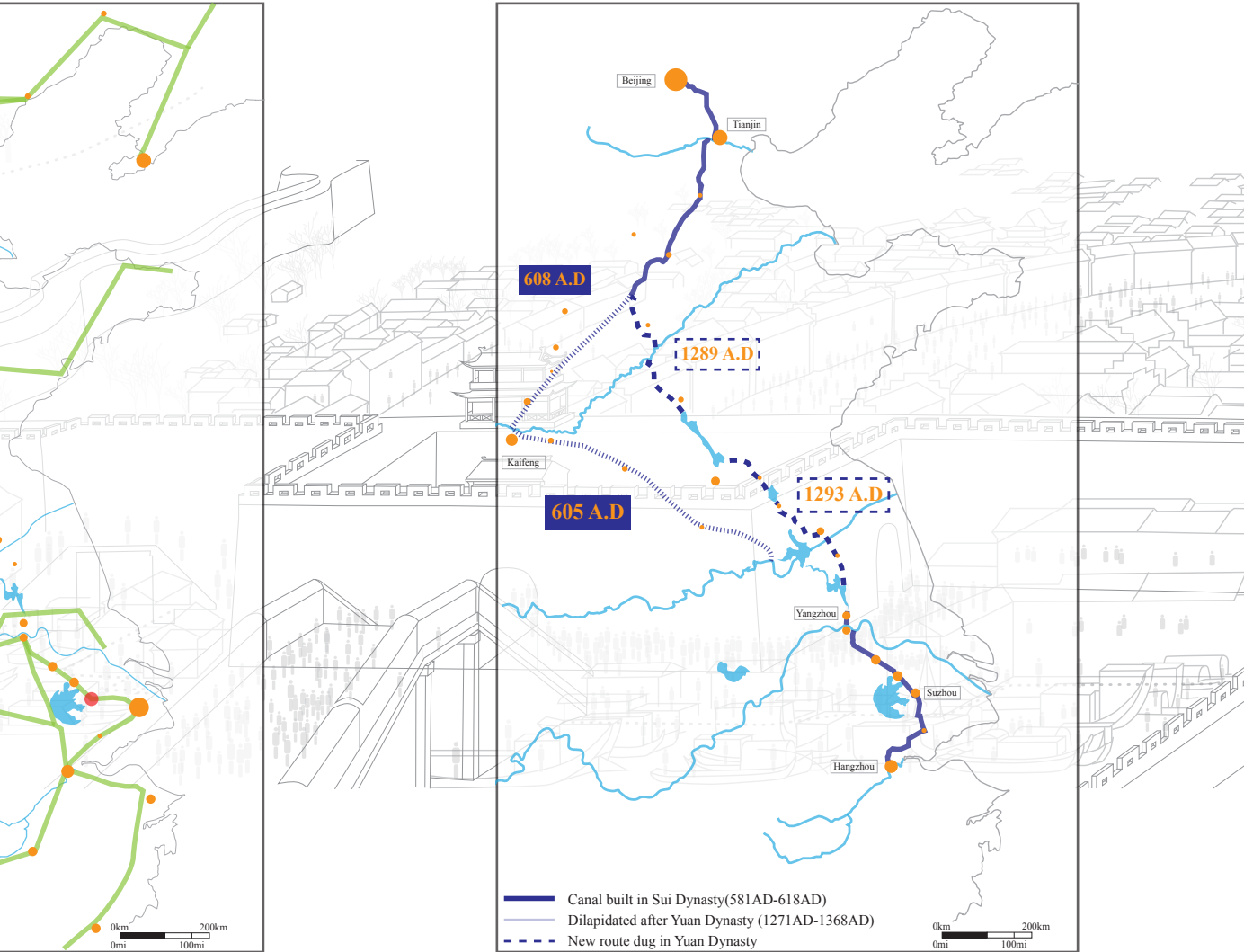
The Grand Canal connected five major rivers across the country, from north to south; it connects Hai River, Yellow River, Huai River, Yangtze River and Qiantang River, where the most populations in China were living. Before ocean carriage and modern transportations show up, inner land water transportation was the most efficient and least cost way for transportation. The Grand Canal took care three quarters of the goods flow all over the country.

Opening Door Policy

Superseding the central Planning politics which was made in in the 50s, the country had changed her mind to opening up policy and in Suzhou the government followed with planning goals and Objectives and Priority Investment Strategy made good senses in response to China’s needs on national level. They showed a great intention about overcoming the mistakes that were made in past decades. Suzhou was the first 14 “opening cities” all around China. This great opportunity started a famous economic model called “Suzhou model” and soon became one of the best developing cities in China.

Suzhou model

Suzhou model is a mode of economic development first established in Suzhou in 1990s. It is also called “foreign investment economy”. Local government offers a leniency environment to attract oversea capital and provides lands and workforce at a fair low price. In this way, Suzhou had a fast start up and impressive growth in last decades.



Suzhou, a secondary city for 2,500 years

Suzhou has over 2,500 years of rich history, and relics of the past are very rich to this day.

- Originally founded in 514 BC by WU Zixu by “reading the territories of earth and water”.
- Circa AD 100, during the Eastern Han Dynasty, it became one of the ten largest cities in the world due to immigration.
- In 589 AD, for the first time the city was named Suzhou and was already a well developed prosperous town at that time.
- In the Five Dynasties (906-960) due to the Buddhist influence from India, hundreds of temples were built.
- Since the 10th-century Song Dynasty, it has been an important commercial center of China.
- In 1275 AD, the invasion by Mongolian army demolished the whole city wall and left the city unguarded for nearly a century till Zhang Shicheng reconstructed the wall in the middle era of 14th century.
- In late Ming Dynasty (17th-century), the Western concept of capitalism raised for the first time in History of China. Retired officials built numerous private gardens during that blooming time.
- In 1759 AD after Emperor Qianlong visited Suzhou for several times, the scroll of Prosperous Suzhou was drawn by Xu Yang and was consecrated to the Emperor.

During the Ming (1368-1644 AD) and Qing Dynasty (644-1911AD), Suzhou was the nation’s economic, cultural and commercial center, as well as the largest non-capital city in the world, until the 1860 Taiping Rebellion. When Li Hongzhang and Charles George Gordon recaptured the city three years later, Shanghai had already taken its predominant place in the nation.

## Background

Regional Development/ History Impact

Suzhou is a major city locates in the Yangtze River Delta region, between Shanghai and Nanjing, Jiangsu, China. To the west of Suzhou is Lake Tai. For 2,500 years Suzhou is acting one of the most prosperous city in the wealthiest region of China. Now Suzhou is a prefecture-level city with about five and a half million habitants living in four hundred and thirty square kilometers of urban area. Suzhou has lots of titles for its rich production, classical gardens, temples motherland of “best scholar” in history, and beauty, therefore Suzhou is praised as “The Heaven on Earth”.

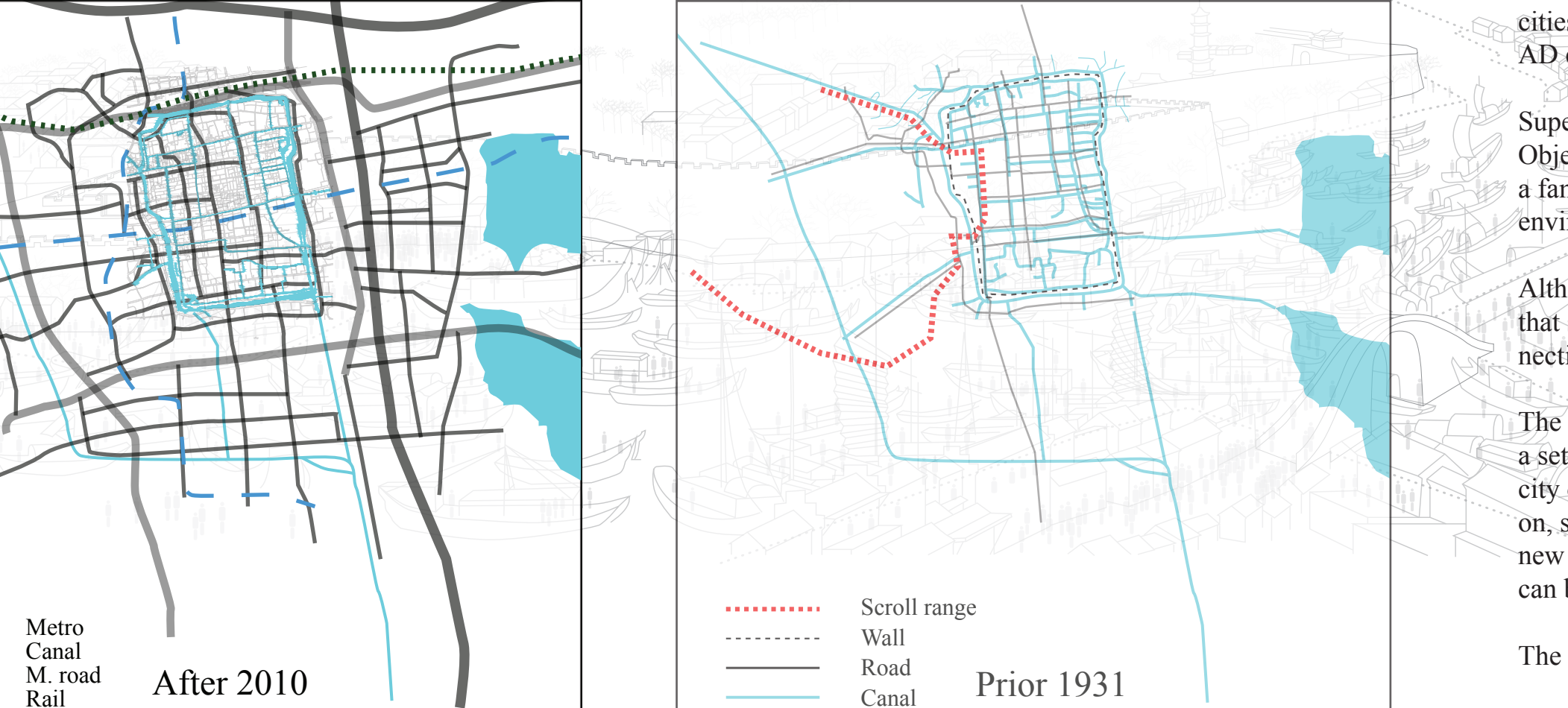
*“Suzhou is a very great and noble city. The people are idolaters, subjects of the Great Khan, and have paper money. They possess silk in great quantities, from which they make gold brocade and other stuffs, and they live by their manufactures and trade. The city is passing great, and has a circuit of some 60 miles; it hath merchants of great wealth and an incalculable number of people. Indeed, is the men of this city and of the rest of Manzi had but the spirit of soldiers they would conquer the world; but they are no soldiers at all, only accomplished traders and most skillful craftsmen. There are also in this city many philosophers, and leeches, diligent students of nature. And you must know that in this city there are 6,000 bridges, all of stone and so lofty that a galley, or even two galleys at once could pass underneath on of them”*

The travels of Marco Polo, the Complete Yule-Cordier Edition

Since Suzhou is one of the greatest canal cities on the world, so it is also called “the Eastern Venice” for its competitive massive networks of canals in the city. Most existing canals in the old city area are built since the very beginning. The length of canals in the city hit 90 kilometers at its peak in 1,500 AD. And now there still have 35 kilometers left currently.

## Contention

Based on the research and analysis about Prosperous Suzhou, with the system according the scroll of ideal life as criteria for testing and exploring contemporary Suzhou. The contention is to critique and evaluate the “Prosperous” that Suzhou is claimed to be today by reading through how the infrastructures work and support the city in many ways.



## Abstract

The thesis is trying to critique and evaluate the production-infrastructure-consumption model that contemporary Suzhou is based on. The model has been set up with the help of reading the scroll Prosperous Suzhou, which, is considered both as a precedent on representation and background of sites.

Suzhou is a major city locates in the Yangtze River Delta region. For 2,500 years Suzhou is acting one of the most prosperous city in the wealthiest region of China. Suzhou is one of the greatest canal cities on the world, and it is also called “the Eastern Venice” for its competitive massive networks of canals in the city, used reach 90 kilometers at its peak. Besides, the Grand Canal first built in 609 AD enlarged the wealth of the city. In other words, the city benefits a huge from both infrastructures of the city and the country.

Superseding the central Planning politics which was made in in the 1950s, the country had changed her mind to opening up policy and in Suzhou the government followed with planning goals and Objectives and Priority Investment Strategy made good senses in response to China’s needs on national level. Suzhou was the first 14 “opening cities” all around China. This great opportunity started a famous economic model called “Suzhou model”, a mode of economic development first established in Suzhou in 1990s or called “foreign investment economy”. Local government offers a leniency environment to attract oversea capital and provides lands and workforce at a fair low price. In this way, Suzhou had a fast start up and impressive growth in last decades.

Although Suzhou shows a strong sense of “Prosperous” both on economic growth data and images she’s been kept sending out to the whole world, she also has to face the side effect from the mode that she has chosen. This project is trying to evaluate and critie the contemporary Suzhou under the production-infrastructure-Consumption model by comparing with the economic system and connection shown in the scroll.

The method engaging this project will proceed by three phases. The first phase is having a comprehensive reading and analysis of the scroll “Prosperous Suzhou” drawn by Xu Yang, which describes a set of coherent scenes of Suzhou in the middle era of 18th century. From the royal painter’s work by the commission from Emperor Qianlong, it’s not only a romanticized story for the wealthiest city of China, but also an idealized society definition via “city of heaven”. The second phase will have a deeper analysis on the scroll by abstracting the model that the representative drawing is based on, show why and how it convinced the audiences that it is representing the idea of prosperous. Then the last but not least phase will move scope to contemporary situation of Suzhou. By producing a new scroll of the contemporary urban narrative with a similar representative method in scales that “Prosperous Suzhou” had used, show how the city is running in same sites 260 years later and why it can be called “prosperous”, or not.

The expectation of this book is to produce a critical scroll about contemporary Suzhou as a diagnosis and at the same time sites ready for future therapy.

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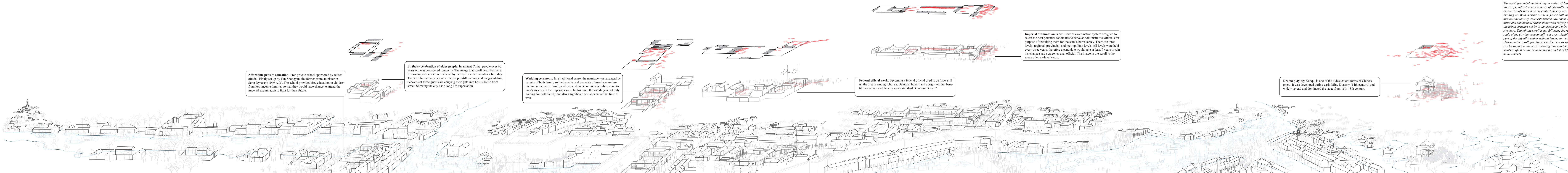
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**Affordable private education:** Free private school sponsored by retired official. Firstly set up by Fan Zhongyan, the former prime minister in Song Dynasty (1049 A.D). The school provided free education to children from low-income families so that they would have chance to attend the imperial examination to fight for their future.

**Birthday celebration of elder people:** In ancient China, people over 60 years old was considered longevity. The image that scroll describes here is showing a celebration in a wealthy family for elder member's birthday. The feast has already begun while people still coming and congratulating. Servants of those guests are carrying their gifts into host's house from street. Showing the city has a long life expectation.

**Wedding ceremony:** In a traditional sense, the marriage was arranged by parents of both family so the benefits and demerits of marriage are important to the entire family and the wedding ceremony is only second to man's success in the imperial exam. In this case, the wedding is not only holding for both family but also a significant social event at that time as well.

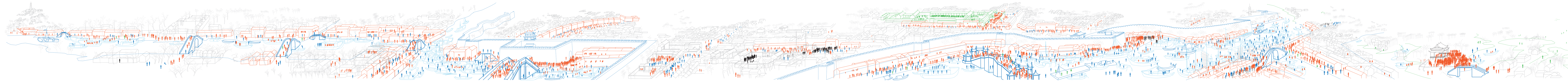
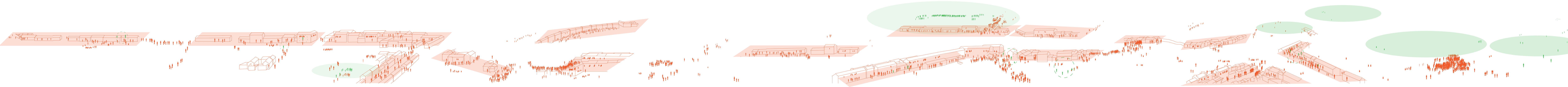
**Federal official work:** Becoming a federal official used to be (now still is) the dream among scholars. Being an honest and upright official benefit the civilian and the city was a standard "Chinese Dream".

**Imperial examination:** a civil service examination system designed to select the best potential candidates to serve as administrative officials for purpose of recruiting them for the state's bureaucracy. There are three levels: regional, provincial, and metropolitan levels. All levels were held every three years, therefore a candidate would take at least 9 years to win his chance start a career as an official. The image in the scroll is the scene of entry-level exam.

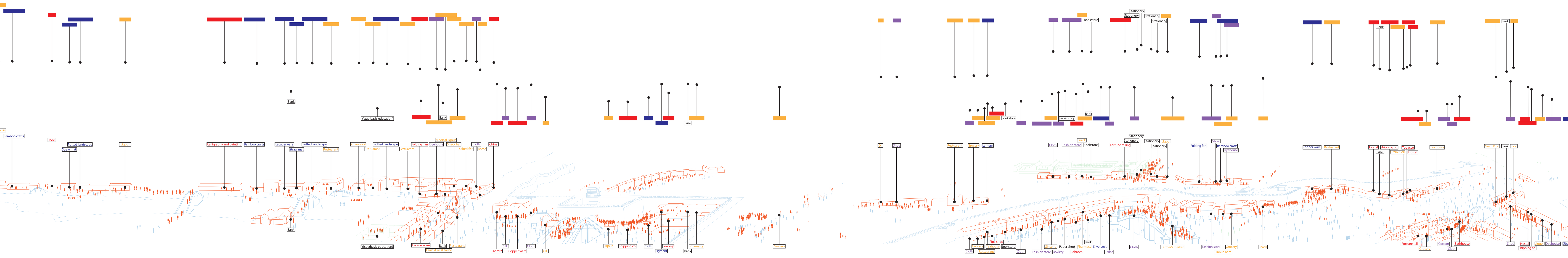
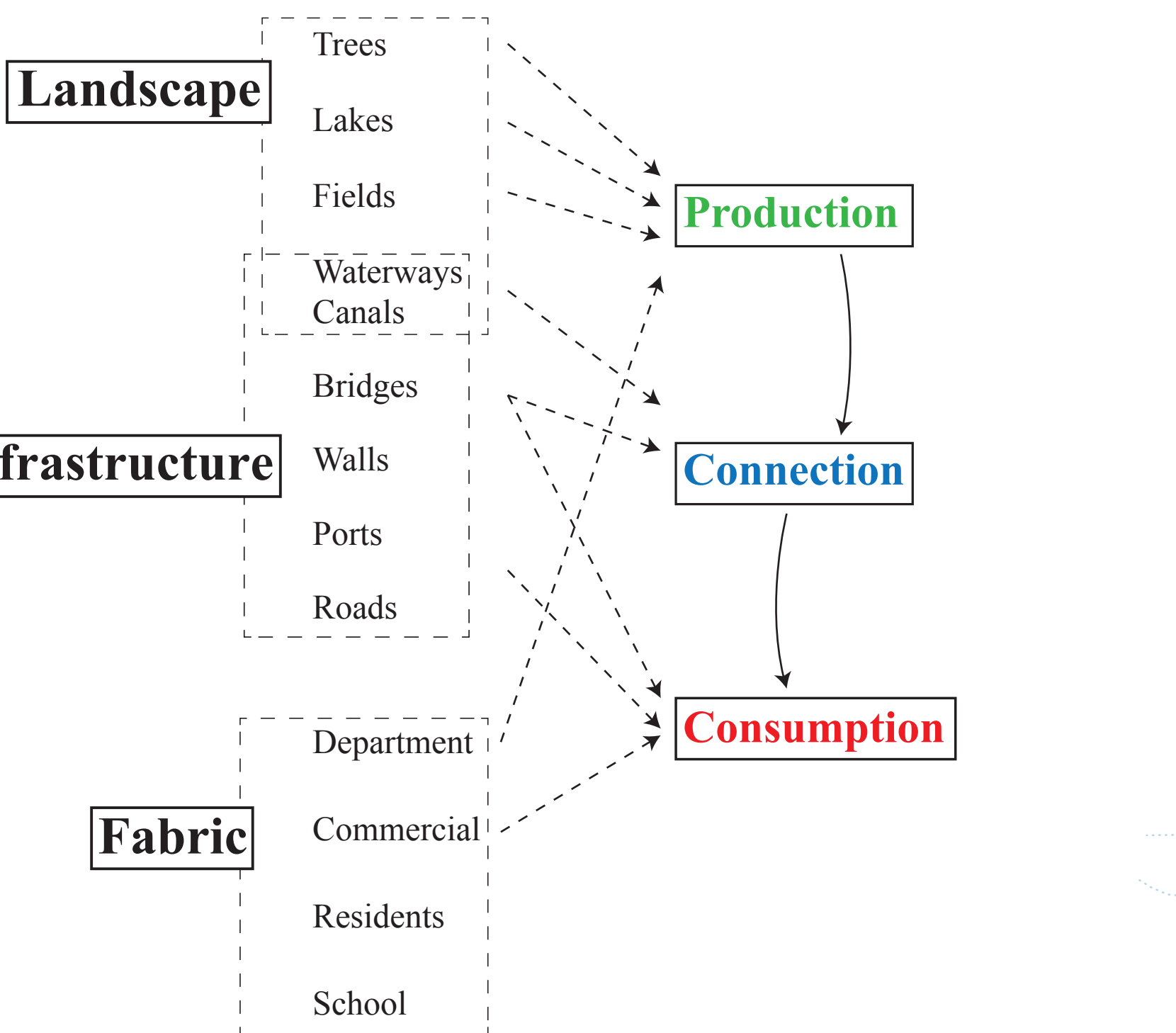
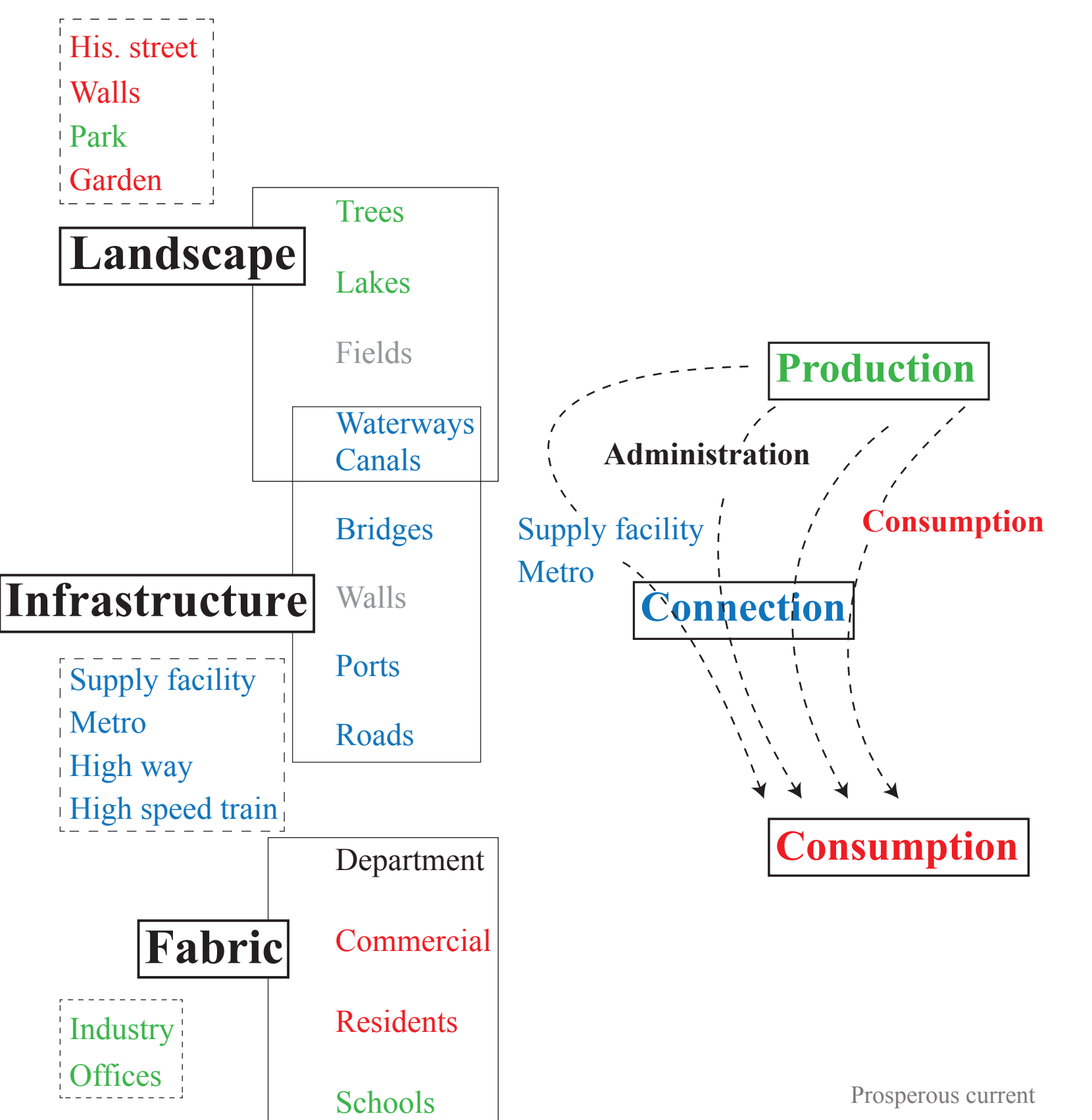
**Drama playing:** Kunqu, is one of the oldest extant forms of Chinese opera. It was developed during early Ming Dynasty (14th century) and widely spread and dominated the stage from 16th-18th century.

*The scroll presented an ideal city in scales. Urban landscape, infrastructure in terms of city walls, bridges over canals show how the context the city was building on. With massive residents fabric both inside and outside the city walls established how communities and commercial streets in between relying on the urban structure set by its landscape and infrastructure. Though the scroll is not following the real scale of the city but conceptually put every significant part of the city all together without having an "edge" shown on the scroll, precisely described events still can be spotted in the scroll showing important moments in life that can be understood as a list of life achievements.*









**“Prosperous 1759”**

Form the comprehensive drawing we received abundance information in scales from the context that the city was sitting on, down to the very detailed activities that people were celebrating at that time. People can easily tell how the city was protected by the wall, how the commercial streets were distributed both inside and outside the city area, what’s the formal ceremony like in the past, and how did people live there 260 years ago. But there is no direct clue or sign that is telling people that the drawing is talking about prosperous. It’s actually typical Chinese way of representation. It was considered a great skill if the artist can explain or represent an idea without literally saying or drawing it. There was a poet from Song Dynasty (960AD-1272AD) wrote a poem named “Happy” without mentioning “happy” in the poem:

“久旱逢甘霖，  
他乡遇故知；  
洞房花烛夜，  
金榜提名时。”

“Raining after a prolonged drought,  
Meeting an old friend far away from home;  
Marrying the true love of the life,  
Gaining success and fame overnight.”

By setting up four scenes letting people to imagine and realize that happiness is the feature that four scenes have in common.

Back to the scroll, in this way, in a common sense, prosperous means having or characterizing by financial success or good fortune, flourishing or successful. So the question turns to: what made the city success financially? When it was 260 years ago, there are three reasons that assure the city wealthy: High production on agriculture, fast and cheap local and regional transportation system, largest group of scholars severing the government. Production on agriculture made a considerable fortune for peasants; fast and cheap transportation canal system brought more and more wealth to merchants; and those retired scholars from the court came back with fame and wealth. Only with this fundamental financial support, together with a complicate but well functioning infrastructure in terms of canals, roads, bridges, the massive consumption can be held in Suzhou.

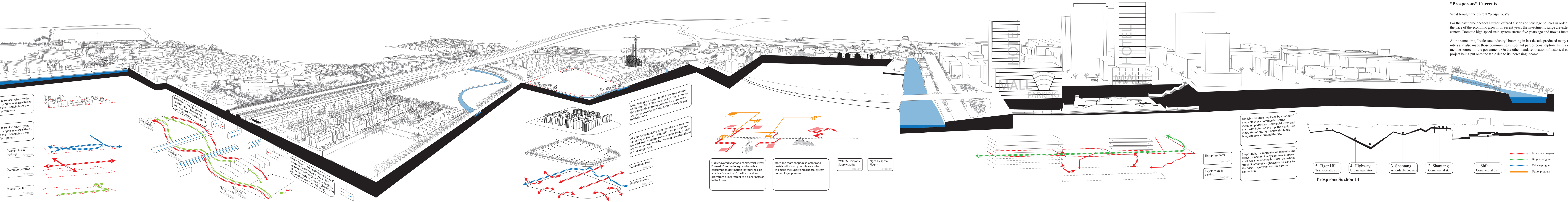


## “Prosperous” Currents

What brought the current “prosperous”?

For the past three decades Suzhou offered a series of privilege policies in order to attract foreign investments accelerating the pace of the economic growth. In recent years the investments range are extend from industrial plantings to commercial centers. Domestic high speed train system started five years ago and now is functioning pretty good.

At the same time, “realstate industry” booming in last decade produced many new well decorated and protected communities and also made those communities important part of consumption. In this way, land selling became one of the major income source for the government. On the other hand, renovation of historical commercial street and affordable housing project being put onto the table due to its increasing income.



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