

# Integrating old and new?



**Often called “Venice of the Orient,” Zhujiajiao lies in the midst of the completely modernized Qingpu district of Shanghai. Here, old and new complement one another, together forming a surprisingly coherent urban entity.**



Many of the older buildings of Shanghai have vanished as a result of the recent construction boom. In the old city center, some of the small row houses that once typified the city have been left standing, but only here and there. Most of them will be replaced by new construction sooner or later. Shanghai is thus threatened with the loss of a crucial aspect of its historic identity.



However, it is possible to understand the character of old Shanghai by visiting neighboring Zhujiajiao, the best preserved of Shanghai’s ancient water towns. As an example of sustainable preservation of cultural and urban heritage, Zhujiajiao exemplifies effective handling of the historic architectural and urban fabric.



Over 1,700 years old, the fan-shaped town of Zhujiajiao is criss-crossed by canals which are spanned by over 30 old bridges of stone, marble, and wood. Thanks to the well-planned water transportation network, a textile industry grew up here. During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Zhujiajiao already numbered 1,000 households, reaching its zenith about 200 years ago, when the flourishing rice trade fueled the economy, and banks and factories sprang up in great numbers.



In 1993, the Qingpu district was completely replanned. With new hotels, cultural and convention centers, and a golf course, the old and the new have been integrated to create a multi-functional recreational zone. In spite of its modernization of Qingpu, Zhujiajiao's gardens, canals, bridges, and houses from the Ming and Qing periods remain tranquil. In this sense, the town stands as an example of how modern urban development can successfully incorporate a significant historic quarter.

The main commercial street, Beidajie, is 300 meters long and only two to four meters wide. Once the business center of the Yangtze River Delta, today it is the best preserved street in the Qingpu district. Seated comfortably at the A-Po Teahouse, one can watch boats go by carrying farmers from their homes to nearby rice paddies, and women washing laundry in the river.

Since water has played such an important role in Zhujiajiao's history, the workshop included a visit to an exhibition on the theme of water.

