

The Water Vision for a Water City

- A Case Study on the “Two Rivers and Four Lakes” Spatial Planning Project in Guilin, China

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1 Background and Project Introduction

1.1 Beautiful Lijiang River but Indecent City

Located in the southwest of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China, Guilin is a famous tourism city nationally and internationally. In 1998, at the time when this project started, Guilin received nearly 10 million domestic tourists and 0.5 million overseas tourists. Tourism contributed 3.1 billion CNY for the revenue of Guilin. (Guilin Social and Economic Statistical Yearbook Committee, 2008)

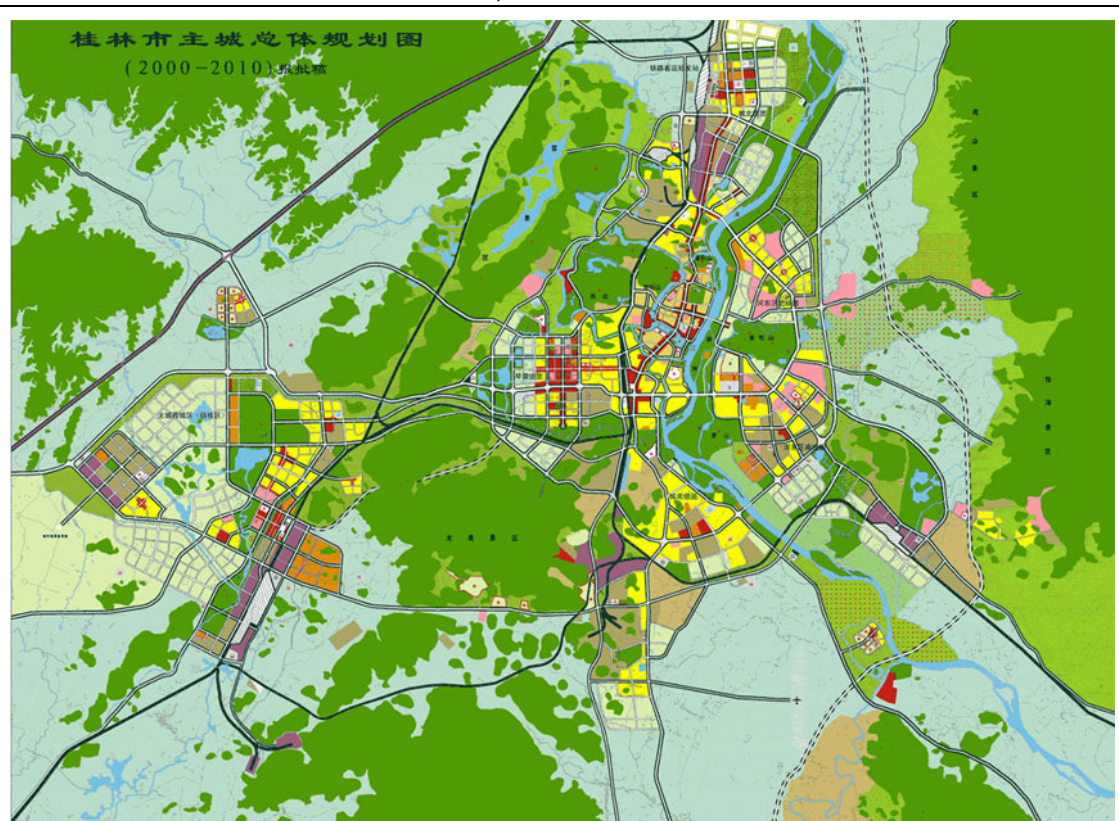


Figure 1: Master Plan of Guilin

But from another point of view, the industrial basis of Guilin was weak, producing a low GDP. Behind the big fame of gorgeous Lijiang River, Guilin (population 611.2 thousand, GDP 7.816 billion CNY) only ranked number 4 in the cities of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Comparing to the other cities with similar size in China such as Liuzhou (population 885.9 thousand, GDP 14.221 billion CNY in 1998) a city in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region,

Zhaoqing (population 311.6 thousand, GDP 36.207 billion CNY in 1998), a city in Guangdong Province, and Shaoxin (population 324.3 thousand, GDP 65.126 billion CNY in 1998), Guilin obviously fall behind.

Actually, as a national famous historic city, there are many extraordinary tourism sites around Lijiang River, including Yangsuo Street West, Ludiyan, Qixingyan, Xingping Wonderland and Jiumahuashan. (CHEN, X., 1999) But contrasting the beautiful tourism sites, the urban environment was really poor.



1.2 The Origin of “Two Rivers and Four Lakes”

Historically, “Two Rivers and Four Lakes” have been existing. “Two Rivers” refer to Lijiang River and Taohuajiang River. Running in the east side of Guilin City, Lijiang River is not only the mother river of Guilin but also shapes the basis of the beautiful city scenery. “Four Lakes” include Rong Lake, Shan Lake, Xiqing Lake and Mulong Lake which were the moat of the City of Guilin in history. (Guilin Yearbook Committee, 2009) Because of lacking maintenance, those rivers and lakes had gradually become natural sewage container, with stink smell and degraded water quality. To make things worse, Mulong Lake was filled with landfills and turned to a dead corner of the city.



Figure 4: “Two Rivers and Four Lakes”

It can also be identified from the city map of Guilin that those water systems are vital elements of the city as well as key components of the urban context. Diverse cultural, historical and landscape elements disperse around those water systems, including the former home of Li Zongren, Guilin Office of the Eighth Route Army (led by the Chinese Communist Party during the War of Resistance Against Japan), Jinjiang Royal Residence, Boating Area of Huang Tingjian, Duxiu Mount and so on. (TANG, X. & XIE, D., 2009)

Obviously, the integrated planning, construction and development of the six water systems can create great benefits of Guilin.



The former home of Li Zongren



Boating Area of Huang Tingjian



2 Foresight and Ambitious Planning

2.1 Shape a Water Vision

Lacking of urban construction budget (even urban planning budget), city renewal ideas and successful samples, was the very difficulty facing Guilin at that time, which actually was also a problem traps many city even today.

On 28 Nov. 1998, Li Jinzao, Mayor of Guilin at that time, published a speech titled *Shape a Water Vision*, which stirred greatly in the society at that time. However, few people could understand the deep meaning and significance of it. Few people realised that as an international tourism city, developing industry is not the advantage of Guilin, while the constraints for tourism development lies in the city construction. Thus, the construction of the city was of great significance to Guilin.

Another point is that there are rich historical and cultural tourism resources around the “Two Rivers and Four Lakes”, which serve as a main tourism site. Thus, focusing on the water in this city means grasping the soul of the city. The regeneration of the waterfront areas would revitalise the whole city. This right decision is of great significance from today’s point of view, although bear many criticism at that time.

2.2 Planning

With the water system in Guilin as the main context, the planning project combines improving the quality and image of the buildings in the waterfront areas and promoting water quality, greening river banks so as to form a new landscape for water tourism. It is planned to ameliorate the water quality of Taohuajiang River and Lijiang River, by which it can promote the urban regeneration and development in the main urban area of Guilin and build a service base for the international tourism city of Guilin. (LI, Z., 2007)

2.3 Mode of Work

The city government established a special leading team and the project management office to coordinate relevant departments so as to facilitate the work. Meanwhile, the project has

launched international planning competition. A Municipal Planning Consultation Committee (later Municipal Planning Decision Making Committee) (MPCC) has also been established.

The establishment of MPCC ensures that all of the technical issues to be managed by the experts while the government just responsible for the administration and decision making. It was very rare that a local government had the courage to convey the technical appraisal rights to the experts.

In selection, the City Government of Guilin invited Wanliang Zhao, vice chief planner of Shanghai Tongji Urban Planning & Design Institute (TJUPDI) and Dr. Jun Wang of TJUPDI to serve as the special consulting chief planners. The two planners were responsible for organising the other experts to form an expert team to provide regular consultation in this project. It was a brand new work mode at that time and achieved great successes. Later, cities such as Zhengzhou, Changsha, Hangzhou, Nanjing and Jinan all adopted this mode of work. Nowadays, it have become a mode of technical service in China.

By way of launching international planning competition and selecting the best planning scheme and agency, the city of Guilin particularly paid attention to the capacity building of the local planning institutes and staff. The local planning institutes and staff participated in nearly all the procedures of the planning and design of the project. With years of practice, the capacity of the local planning institutes has been largely enhanced. A number of local planning staff have grown to be a key strength in the future urban planning and development in Guilin.

2.4 International Planning Competition

In May 1999, Guilin launched the international planning competition for the project of “Two Rivers and Four Lakes” which created a precedent in Guangxi. International planning competitions were also very rare even in cities like Beijing and Shanghai at that time.

Because of careful research and preparation, the international planning competition was not that costly as estimated which greatly encouraged the work team. Later, a number of other international and national planning competitions regarding to landscape greening and lightening have been held which not only gathered a number of internationally famous planning agencies but collected considerable excellent planning schemes. More than 50 planning agencies joined in this project, among which one fourth were overseas.

In order to ensure the progress and the quality of the planning project, the project leading office formulated a work mode called “interim assessment”, that was to guide the planning work by visiting the planning agency. This planning method greatly enhanced the quality of the planning results and made the work more efficient. Nowadays, this work method is very popular.

3 A New Urban Renewal Practice

3.1 A Large-scale Systematic Project: Sub-project and Relevant Projects

There were a number of sub-projects under the “Two Rivers and Four Lakes” project, including greening and landscape project, lightening project, tourism boat system, waterfront commercial stores reallocation, restoration of building facade and water purification. Those carefully planned projects ensured the final success of the whole project.

Take the lightening project for example which was led by Ms. Luoxi Hao, who later hosted the design for Shanghai 2010 World Expo site lightening design. The lightening project won the provincial planning and design award. The project improves the night life of Guilin and helps to boost its night economy.

Besides, there were also many supplementary projects for this project, including Lijiang River water diversion project, Zhengyang Road pedestrian street restoration project, central plaza restoration project, Jiefang Bridge restoration project, Guilin Hotel restoration project and Lijiang Hotel Waterfall project. Those integrated projects promoted the city image of Guilin.

3.2 More than 400 Meetings

It is calculated that there were 400 meetings held by the municipal government of Guilin especially for this project, which indicates how much attention has been paid to this project. In China, meetings are effective ways to coordinate different governmental departments. Urban renewal and development is a government-led systematic project, by which the limited resources can be gathered and united to reach the final success.

Moreover, it is also a good example demonstrating the construction speed of China. Nowadays, many Chinese development agencies are involving in the development projects in Africa (e.g. Zambia, Egypt, Angola and Nigeria). The above experience is also considered applicable in those countries based on different laws and situations of those countries.

3.3 Resettlement and Restoration

Because of situated in the old urban areas, the project of “Two Rivers and Four Lakes” had to resettle many residents and business units. The real estate market in Guilin was underdeveloped. Thus the market mechanism was not able to fully facilitate the resettlement work. Hence, the majority of work needed to be carried out by the project leading office. From this point of view, although the deficiency of laws and procedures existed, the project leading office did promote the process of the project.

With the process the resettlement, more and more residents moved out the awkward buildings to decent apartments. Although the location of the apartments were a little far from the city centre, the residents were generally satisfied because of the larger living area and improved environment. It has been learned that the success of public project lies in the supports from the people and whether the project can benefit the people.



Figure 6: Residence Need to be Demonished

3.4 The Promotion to Real Estate and Tourism

The real estate market was greatly boosted by the change of land use, the optimising of the urban area and the improvement of municipal infrastructure. It was calculated that the average property price in Guilin was between 1,100 and 1,200 CNY in 1998, which climbed to 4,000 CNY in 2004.



The booming real estate market also created large taxes return to the city. In turn, it provides more and more budgets for the development of urban infrastructure and tourism. Since 2001, the boating tourism in the “Two Rivers and Four Lakes” has become a new tourism brand in Guilin. Statistically, approximately 15-20% tourists would like to experience the boating tourism in Guilin. This new type of tourism also contributes to the hotel, restaurant and other entertainment sectors since the elongation of the stay of the tourists.

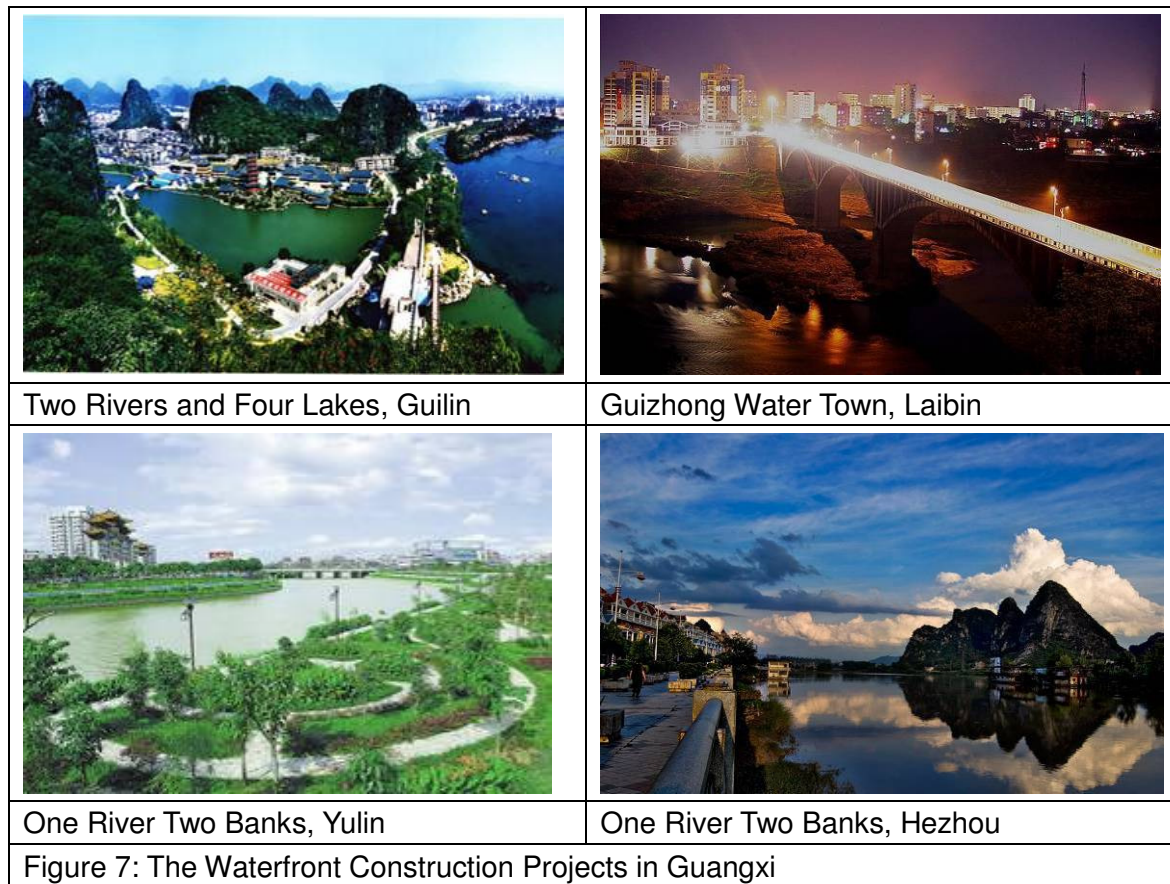
4 A Retrospection to “Guilin Mode”

4.1 A Popular Example

After more than 10 years construction, the “Two Rivers and Four Lakes” project of Guilin has become a typical example regarding to urban water system construction. Besides tourists, many scholars, leaders of construction departments from Guangxi and other provinces of China come to Guilin to study this successful case. In Guangxi, many other cities have also launched similar projects to boost waterfront development and gained some achievements. (See Table 1 for the Waterfront Construction Projects in Guangxi)

Table 1: The Waterfront Construction Projects in Guangxi

	Project	City	Launching Year	Brief
1	China Water Town	Nanning	2010	-to form 5 large theme parks -improve the water quality of “one river four lakes”
2	A Hundred Miles of Liujiang River	Liuzhou	2009	-to form an urban core landscape area with urban image, historical culture, folk life, water leisure and eco-environment along the one hundred miles of Liujiang River
3	Two Rivers and Four Lakes	Guilin	1999	-to connect Lijiang River, Taohuajiang River, Rong Lake, Shan Lake, Gui Lake and Mulong Lake as urban ring water system -to integrate urban water landscape system and the city
4	Guizhong Water Town	Laibin	2010	-to introduce the water from the north to the city and form a city image with Zhuang ethnic minority characters
5	One River Two Banks	Yulin	2004	-to form a eco-corridor of 6.2 km along the Nanliujiang River
6	One River Two Banks	Hezhou	2008	-to construct 8 scenical areas along the 10 km Hejiang River in Hezhou
7	Canghai Project	Wuzhou	2009	-to build a modern eco-town of 30 km ² with 4 km ² water area -to promote the urban development across the river
				
China Water Town, Nanning				A Hundred Miles of Liujiang River, Liuzhou



4.2 Design Focused, Planning Led

Unlike the western developed countries, the urbanisation is under rapid development in China. The development of cities is not only reflected in the change of urban images, but also the keeping expansion of urban areas and the growth of GDP. Thus, few people could understand the importance of urban planning as a vital tool to macroscopic readjustment and control in China

Take Guilin for example, before 1998, the governmental budget for planning was just several millions CNY, which could not afford to high quality planning and design projects, needless to say to invite advanced technical institutes. Since 2000, the budgets for planning increased to 10 to 15 million CNY per year. The large invests in planning also bring high standard planning and design results as well as the satisfaction of the residents and the tourists.

4.3 Urban Construction and Social Awareness Cultivation

“Two Rivers and Four Lakes” Project is also a huge social project. Besides the capacity building for the related institutes, the cultivation of social awareness and understanding is another complex work. Different from the developed countries, the common people are not very warm in expressing their opinions in city development in China. Many citizens criticize the construction sites are too many and too noisy which influences their daily life and even the tourism market.

It is true that the urban area of Guilin was just like a big construction site which really influenced the people's life. Complaints were understandable.

By continues explanation and careful work, most of the citizens understood the work of the government and they became more proactively in forwarding their opinions and suggestions. Although from the public participation was still in a stage of collecting people's opinions, it was a whole society's participation, imaging that the public participation was only introduced as a concept in urban planning at that time in China.

It has been found that the complaints from the citizens changed to dialogue and suggestions. The citizens also joined in the activity held by the government to name new roads and new scenery sites.

People are the centre to the urban space. The change of people's concept goes together with the urban development and vice versa. There are many conflicts occurred in today's urban development in China. A good way of public participation is a wise method to solve those conflicts.

4.4 Different Urban Development Mode

Different cities have their own development rules in different development stages. The "Two River and Four Lakes" project experience may not be applicable to all the cities.

As a developing country, with the rapid improvement of economic capacity, the budget for urban construction seems not to be a key headache. But the power of destroy grows with the capacity of construction. How to choose a scientific development way for cities, how to carry it out and how to reduce the administrative influence become a new subject for most cities in China.

4.5 Shape Local Identity

How to build urban landscape with local identities especially in a short period is always a key issue in urban constructions. Even today, many cities in China still seek the right way to develop their own identities and to preserve and develop their own traditions.

In the project "Two Rivers and Four Lakes", most sub-projects won the high comments from the tourists and residents. But some people also criticise the scale of the two towers in Rong Lake is too large and the western styled bridges are not compatible with the city of Guilin.

Actually, it is very common in urban development, since even project such as the new National Grand Theatre, the new office building of China Central Television in Beijing, Shanghai World Financial Centre and the China Pavilion in Shanghai World Expo 2010 all get different comments.

4.6 Sustainable Operation

Although carefully planned, the project “Two Rivers and Four Lakes” did not set any budget for the future operation. Thus the government bear great burden in later operation.

This is a lesson for other cities in developing similar projects. No all cities have the potential to develop tourism. Actually, the scientific control to construction lands is a very Chinese-styled way of urban development. It is also a source for the sustainable development of the city. In the early stage of project programming, a budget for future operation should set first.

4.7 Persistency

As discussed above, the project “Two Rivers and Four Lakes” is a systematic project benefiting the citizens. But it also bear much pressure from many aspect. If the misunderstanding of the common people is understandable, the criticism from many experts while without careful research was abnormal. Without persistent work, the project would not be successful.

It has been learned that at a special development period in developing countries, the leaders and technical experts should follow scientific rules and keep the principle of people-oriented, by which to promote the urban development.

The great lesson learned in the development of past 30 years in China lies in that scientific attitudes and brave spirit is the best weapon. Only practice and time can tell everything.

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