

CHAPTER EIGHT

Urbanization and Nature in China: the example of Lake Tai

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This chapter begins with two publications named *Taihu youji* 太湖游记 [Travels in Lake Tai]. The first, written by Wuxi student Hu Jiansheng 胡健生, was published serially between 1915 and 1918 in *Xuesheng zazhi* 学生杂志 [Student Magazine]. The second, by Ai Xuan 艾煊, who had spent much of his life living on the shore of the lake, was published in 1963.¹ Both writers began their visit to the lake in Suzhou, moved northwest to Wuxi, round to Yixing, and completed the circuit at Huzhou. They described the beauty of the lake in glowing terms. Hu Jiansheng climbed the mountains to the west of Suzhou, where, ‘looking at the clear sky all around opened my heart, while below at the bottom of the mountain, the trees were half hidden in the mist...However, the cold wind was gently blowing. As it puffed in from afar, I felt very comfortable’.² Nearly fifty years later, Ai Xuan set off in a boat one morning. ‘The sun was just rising. Once it appeared, suddenly all the dazzling colours of tangerine yellow, light pink, rose purple and emerald green blended together in the distant cloudy layer. The water on the lake reflected the brightness. The many-coloured morning clouds complimented and shined on each other. It was very beautiful’.³ In contrast to poetic depictions of the natural environment were the nearby cities, especially Wuxi, which in 1915 was expanding rapidly. From the peak of neighbouring *Xi Shan* 锡山 [Xi Mountain], Hu Jiansheng saw ‘a forest of smokestacks’.⁴ Ai Xuan compared Wuxi to Suzhou, which was a beautiful handicraft city, while the former was a ‘modern industrial city. Everywhere large factories can be seen, their smokestacks rising into the cloudy sky’.⁵

Between the natural world and the human world, the city and the countryside, there were many connections. Hu Jiansheng travelled out from the West Gate of Wuxi City along a newly built road, which wound its way out to the town of Rongxiang 荣乡, and was wide enough for cars and rickshaws.⁶ Ai Xuan was less impressed with infrastructure, probably because by the 1960s there were fewer really new innovations, but he noted recent changes. Whereas Hu Jiansheng took the steamer from Suzhou to the east peak of Dongting 洞庭, this was a journey Ai Xuan was able to complete by car in just 30 minutes.⁷ Further south, near Yixing, cadres sent down to the countryside in 1958 had joined soldiers in clearing land for tea cultivation. Over the next two years, a tea-leaf processing plant and dormitories for workers were constructed, and building work began on a new road.⁸ Industry as well as tourism could serve as the catalyst for infrastructure development. The tea plantation also points to how the lake and its shoreline were seen as useful resources. Hu Jiansheng wrote that on Dongting a rich seam of coal had been discovered, and officials estimated that total production could be as much as 240 tons a month. They suggested building a school and police station to provide workers with education and security.⁹ Nature provided far more than fossil fuels. Much of Ai Xuan's account concerns how the land around the lake was farmed, whether for tea, oranges or ginkgo, and there are several descriptions of happy workers singing songs, which given that the book was published on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, is to be expected.¹⁰ These two accounts reveal much about Lake Tai and the complexity of its relationship to the surrounding cities and the urbanizing region as a whole. The lake was a pure natural place with fresh water, glorious sunsets and the gentle breeze rustling the treetops. However, although nature's intrinsic value was acknowledged, the lake's scenery and resources existed primarily for human exploitation. Farming, industrial development, and

tourism all required ever more connections to the city, and this meant that throughout the twentieth century urbanization encroached upon the shores of Lake Tai.

This chapter examines how Chinese saw Lake Tai as a resource that made surrounding cities habitable throughout the twentieth century. If it seems strange that I should be writing primarily about a lake when my focus is the city, then it is worth remembering that historians have long considered the relationship between the built environment and the natural world. Urban environmental historians trace the ways in which the city has affected the natural environment, whether that was the growth of agriculture to support settled populations, the diversion of rivers, deforestation, or industrial pollution. Meanwhile, the natural environment has affected cities, with inhabitants having to deal with the dangers and perceived annoyances of nature such as disease, pests or the weather. This leads to the final interaction, which is how cities have responded to environmental change. Here, the acceptance of environmental issues has been the prerequisite for the adoption of the legal, commercial or political methods that urban populations have used to address them.¹¹

This chapter focuses on the first two types of interactions, and argues that urbanization has significantly affected Lake Tai, while the lake itself has gradually become both physically and discursively part of what makes individual cities and the urbanizing region as a whole habitable. The lake has been valued as an economic resource with the potential to increase the prosperity of cities across the region, and so improve the lives of their inhabitants. An increasingly important element of this value is tourism, and it is because of this that the intrinsic natural beauty of the lake has been seen as important. The emphasis placed on different values ascribed to the lake has changed over time. In the first half of the twentieth century, it was seen as a transport conduit for the region as a whole, although its resources were also ripe for agricultural and industrial exploitation, while tourism was

becoming recognised as a source of income. After 1949, agricultural and industrial production took precedence, but the importance of the lake's natural scenery has re-emerged during the reform era. Throughout, there has been tension between the competing demands on the lake's resources, and it is only recently, as urbanization threatens the very natural environment that is so important to the lake's contribution to urban habitability, that steps have been taken to preserve it.

Seeing the Lake

In his study of Xiang Lake, near Hangzhou, Keith Schoppa highlights how local histories, artistic representations, and other sources have much to teach us about the Chinese relationship to their environment.¹² In this chapter I use municipal and regional plans, guidebooks and travel writing because I seek to tease out the multiple ways in which those who were responsible for thinking about and managing cities were discussing their relationship to the lake. Archival sources show clearly how the state imagined and planned urbanization, but guidebooks and travel writings also reflect elite and official discourses, and this is as true of the Republican and Maoist eras as it is of the late imperial period and the reform era.¹³ I do not deny the value of other representations of Lake Tai such as paintings, poetry, scientific studies or irrigation surveys, and indeed they sometimes touch on the relationship of the lake to the city. Together with histories of the lake and the surrounding region, many of these ways of seeing take an explicitly anthropocentric perspective, focusing on how nature only exists for humanity, a prerequisite for the notion that a lake can be valued for its contribution to urban habitability.

Traditionally in China there was not the same clear distinction between the natural and human world as in the West, but this did not mean nature could not be manipulated or that humanity was not centre stage. Indeed, the development of agriculture and the actions of

the state have destroyed ecosystems over the centuries.¹⁴ The distinct separation of the natural and the human worlds had become widely accepted in Chinese discourse by the 1920s with the adoption of the term *ziran* 自然 [nature] from the Japanese, and this lay behind Nationalist and Communist developmental policies. At the same time urbanization began to re-orient the values of Chinese society towards the city.¹⁵ Discussions of nature increasingly concerned how it could benefit expanding cities, and the natural environment was sacrificed for urban development. However, in the reform period the conversation has come full circle, as following examples elsewhere around the world, Chinese have been developing an environmental consciousness.¹⁶ Despite this, urbanization is still a key objective, and this means that even as policy-makers seek, often in vain, to resolve the tensions between the natural and the built environment, they privilege making life in China's cities habitable.

Lake Tai has long been part of a regional ecosystem, and was a crucial factor in the development of farming practices, the land tenure system, rural handicrafts, lineage relations, and migration. As far back as the Tang dynasty, this supported an urban system, while urban morphology, such as gardens in Suzhou, Wuxi and other cities, and the effect of canals on street layout reflected the geography of the region.¹⁷ Studies of the Lake Tai region in the twentieth century have focused on the living standards of the peasantry, land reform and the impact of the Great Leap Forward, but it was only in the reform era that work began on studying the impact of urbanization on the lake from a wide variety of perspectives, including science, architecture and urban studies. However, just as with West Lake in Hangzhou, and to some extent Xiang Lake, the urbanization of Lake Tai is a process that began over 100 years ago as new technologies and official narratives of development began to transform the regional urban system, and the cities that comprised it.¹⁸

Republican Period

Hu Jiansheng wasn't the only student writing about Lake Tai. In 1925, two students from Jiangyin proposed the establishment of a Lake Tai Special Administrative Area. They listed the detrimental impact of the Jiangsu-Zhejiang War, and the multiple languages and customs of the people living around the lake as reasons for abandoning existing provincial boundaries. The new administrative area would not only bring peace, but would also help to revive transport and commerce, and so contribute to future regional prosperity.¹⁹ References to a wider discussion suggest that there may have also been proposals from local elites and government officials, but I have been unable to find further evidence of these. Either way, despite the ravages of war, Lake Tai was beginning to be seen as important to regional urbanization, a transformation that was most clearly manifested in new infrastructure.

The steamer service between Huzhou and Wuxi, which began operation in 1923, was established by a partnership of investors from cities across the region.²⁰ Xue Mingjian 薛明剑, the manager of the Shenxing Number Three Cotton Factory in Wuxi, and a prolific writer and advocate for the city's development, compiled a short guide to commemorate the steamer company's establishment. In aspirations that would be repeated over the years, he hoped that the new transport link would lead to a forest of factory chimneys along the lake shore. Out on the islands, he envisaged the construction of viewing platforms and villas, with elevators carrying people to the top of mountains so they could see the city lights that would shine like Hong Kong. Finally, the shorelines of Huzhou and Wuxi would be developed as commercial centres to attract tourists away from West Lake in Hangzhou.²¹ Wuxi was to benefit far more than Huzhou from its proximity to the lake, but water transport remained important to the region as a whole. Although railways from Shanghai to Hangzhou and Nanjing were now carrying freight, over half of all trade in the region was still shipped along the Yangzi River, and many boats went via Lake Tai. Since the lake was part of the regional river system,

which in turn connected it to Shanghai, water transport linked newly opened factories in rapidly developing cities such as Suzhou and Zhenjiang to international markets.²² It wasn't only railways that were a new means of transport. By the early 1930s, a ring road around Lake Tai was under construction, which would connect the lake with the regional road system, help the development of commerce and industry, aid in the elimination of bandits and allow easier access to scenery. By 1931, much of the road had been built, and in an indication of how radically urbanization could alter the natural environment, the Jiangsu provincial government hired 600 workers, who had recently been constructing a railway line in Zhejiang, to clear a path through the mountains.²³

War with Japan brought great destruction to the Lower Yangzi Delta, and Lake Tai became a haven for bandits and Communist guerrillas. However, peace meant new plans for a Lake Tai administrative area. Although they were rejected by the government, they illustrate the value of the lake to the region as a whole, as well as pointing to how during times of war safety was a prerequisite for prosperity and habitability, something that is explored in more detail in other chapters in this volume. In July 1945, representatives of several native place societies in Chongqing submitted a resolution to the Nationalist Government's People's Political Council. It proposed a new 43 km road running from the banks of the Yangzi River at Jiangyin to Lake Tai to create a regional industrial city. Factories and warehouses would be concentrated in the north, with the pleasant natural environment around Lake Tai suitable for housing. The road was never built, but commentators compared it to German autobahns and wrote approvingly of the two airports that would connect the region to the global network of cities.²⁴

There is no evidence that the proposal was discussed at the People's Political Council. However, a second proposal from General Tang Enbo 汤恩伯, who was then commanding

officer of the garrison in Nanjing, received government attention. He argued that the geography of Lake Tai had always made this area difficult to govern, and that for many years bandits had been an obstacle to development. The pre-war command post to suppress bandits had been revived, but the problem persisted. For this reason, a special administrative area should be established, which would return Lake Tai to its former prosperity.²⁵ Tang's *Taihu jianshe yijian shu* 太湖建设意见书 [Opinions for the Construction of Lake Tai] noted the lake's value for national defence, economic prosperity, good transport connections and the beauty of its scenery. The proposed area would be administered by the Jiangsu Provincial Government, and cover all the islands in the lake and an area five km from the shoreline. The main responsibilities of the new management bureau should be to register the population, organize water patrols, and set up police stations on the major islands. Once security had been secured, steamer services should be restarted and roads repaired. Ideas to support commerce included a Lake Tai Water Production Company, the construction of docks and the planting of orchards. Scenic sites around the lake should be repaired and new ones constructed, with a Lake Tai Tourist Company established to manage them. Meanwhile, domestic and foreign travel companies would bring visitors to the lake. All this activity should be funded by the provincial government, although the bureau would also collect money from such sources as fishing and shipping licenses.²⁶

Tang's proposals were roundly rejected. However, the replies demonstrate the different ways in which the government valued the lake. The Ministry of Interior noted that water patrols set up by the governments of Jiangsu and Zhejiang were already rounding up bandits. Despite this, it was too dangerous to invest in repairing scenic sites, while the Ministry of Transport and the provincial governments would improve communications infrastructure. The Ministry of Defence argued that provincial funds were insufficient for a

new administrative area, and that while Lake Tai was certainly a haven for bandits, many remote areas on provincial boundaries were similarly afflicted. Funds would be better channelled into existing institutions than used to set up a new administrative area. The Ministry of Transport stated that shipping licenses were already being administered, and that repair of roads damaged in the war was underway. Finally, the Ministry of Finance confirmed that funds were barely sufficient to ensure the security of the region.

The longest response came from the Jiangsu Provincial Government. Tang, like others before him felt that the size of the lake supported claims for a special administrative zone, but this actually made it too large an area to be governed effectively. Moreover, since some cities, such as Wuxi, were close to the lake, extending the zone out to five km from the shoreline would be impossible. Turning to security, both Jiangsu and Zhejiang had long had their own water police forces, which were now co-operating, while towns and villages had their own militia. The provincial government noted the beauty of the lake's scenery, but there were obstacles to improving transport and increasing tourist numbers. The government also acknowledged that more could be done to support fishing and other industries. Finally, it concluded that given the lack of industry in the area, initially government funding would be required to set up any administrative zone, although it might become self-supporting in the future.²⁷ The response to Tang Enbo's proposals are the most detailed government documents available from the Republican period concerning Lake Tai's relationship to regional urbanization. Together with the other plans for regional development discussed above, they illustrate how the lake was primarily valued for its contribution to the economic prosperity of the region. It connected cities in the urban system, and its resources could be used for commerce, industry, and tourism.

In his discussion of Huzhou and Wuxi, Xue Mingjian alluded to the growing importance of Lake Tai to individual cities, and nowhere was this more the case than with Wuxi. I have written extensively about the expansion of Wuxi City and the urbanization of the surrounding countryside during the Republican era, and I do not intend to repeat that in detail here.²⁸ Instead, I highlight briefly how the lake was becoming both discursively and physically part of the city as it expanded, a trend that would continue after 1949. The value of the lake to the city wasn't lost on those responsible for drawing up plans for Wuxi's expansion. In 1929, the new Wuxi Municipal Planning Department advocated the construction of pleasant residential neighbourhoods around Lake Tai, so that inhabitants could take advantage of the fishing, boating and flower gardens. Meanwhile, workers would be housed in new industrial districts to the north, where dozens of factories had been built since the turn of the century.²⁹ Such plans were never realized, but it was during the Republican period that Lake Tai as a tourist destination became more closely linked to Wuxi than any other city along its shores.

By the 1930s, guidebooks to Wuxi included Lake Tai in the list of sites that a visitor could not afford to miss, and many suggested itineraries for a long weekend for those looking to escape the hustle and bustle of Shanghai. The one-day tour, which the guides suggested, could be taken by boat, rickshaw or car, set out from Chongan 崇安 Temple in the centre of Wuxi City and headed towards Lake Tai, taking in Huishan 惠山 [Hui Mountain] and the gardens along the shoreline before returning to the city. For the two-day tour, the author of *Wuxi Daoyou* 无锡导游 [Guide to Wuxi] advised visiting the central elementary school, before continuing out into the countryside. Meanwhile, the writers of *Wuxi: Taihu* 无锡：太湖 [Wuxi: Lake Tai] felt that a trip to the caves of Yixing was appropriate. The three day tours merely added an extra garden or two to the itinerary.³⁰ A favourite destination was

Yuantouzhu 鼋头渚 [Sea Turtle Head Island]. Yang Hanxi 杨韩西, a local industrialist, bought 60 *mu* of land on top of the peninsula and planted an orchard, as well as building a small guesthouse, a lighthouse and family shrine.³¹ In 1934, Baojieqiao 宝界桥 [Treasure World Bridge] was constructed to connect it to other scenic sites along the lakeside. At 1,500 metres long, the bridge spanned the smaller Five Li Lake, linked Li Yuan 蠡园 [Li Garden] with Sea Turtle Head Island, and was, claimed the author of *Wuxi Daoyou*, the longest bridge in southeast China.³²

Visitors' accounts attest to how important Lake Tai was becoming to Wuxi City as a tourist destination. One such was Yu Dafu 郁达夫, who travelled to Wuxi from Shanghai, and put up for the night in the Lake Tai Hotel in Meiyuan 梅园 [Plum Garden]. Woken early by the chiming of a monastery bell, he slipped outside. 'To the south was Lake Tai, but I couldn't make out its shape. However, I felt that the space in that direction was like countless silver threads and that the lake surface was reflecting the bright moonlight back in silver arrows'.³³ Yu Dafu, probably more than most visitors, appreciated the beauty of Lake Tai, but he was not above using the fastest and most comfortable means of transport to get there, eschewing the sedan chair and the boat for the bus.³⁴ As we saw above, Lake Tai suffered during the war, but when peace returned, tourism began to recover. Early one May morning in 1946, Rui Lin 芮麟 took the train to Wuxi, where he transferred to a car that drove along Kaiyuan Road towards the lake. Rather than continue along Treasure World Bridge, he boarded a boat from where he could see the mountains, the sky and the clouds reflected in the clear water. Another visitor, Guo Zhen 国桢, drew attention to wartime damage to Sea Turtle Head Island, since the lighthouse had no roof, the windows in the interior doors had all been broken, and there was no furniture.³⁵

Throughout the Republican period, Lake Tai was being gradually drawn into both the developing regional urban system, and becoming part of individual cities, particularly Wuxi. In doing so, it was seen as a resource that could contribute to commerce, industry and tourism, all of which were increasingly important to urban habitability. As yet industry, infrastructure and molding of the lakeside to create gardens and scenic spots had not destroyed its natural beauty. However the seeds of those tensions that were to lead to its despoilation were sown in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Maoist Era

Despite the development of regional planning in the Maoist era, there were few proposals for the development of Lake Tai. Writing in 1959, scholars in East China Normal University mentioned the existence of a *Taihu liuyu zhengli jihua* 太湖流域整理计划 [Lake Tai area management plan], which may have been the same as that mentioned in a local Wuxi guidebook.³⁶ I have been unable to find any further references to such a plan, but there were numerous irrigation surveys and scientific studies of the lake, which mentioned its infrastructure links.³⁷ As Ai Xuan saw on his travels, these continued to develop. In Wuxi, despite the focus on production during the Maoist period, the natural beauty of the lake remained important to the city's identity, while also becoming valued for its recuperative properties.

Discussions of the value of nature were couched in the language of socialism, but just as during the Republican period, writers of local guidebooks clearly saw the lake as a resource that made Wuxi City more habitable by contributing to its prosperity and making it a nicer place to live. Fewer guidebooks were published after 1949 than during the Republican

period, but two sources provide an insight into Lake Tai's ongoing relationship with Wuxi City. It is worth remembering that they were compiled before the Great Leap Forward, and it is reasonable to assume that with the exception of visits to communes during the Cultural Revolution, tourism ceased in the 1960s. One, *Wuxi daoyou* 无锡导游 [Wuxi Guidebook], was published by the Parks Office of the Wuxi City Construction Bureau, and the other by the Wuxi Gazetteer Office. The office's introduction to what was designed to be a series of publications is illuminating since in collecting sources for the history of Wuxi, scholars had emphasized how, 'under the party's leadership, there was resistance to imperial, feudal and Guomindang reactionary rule, and the valiant efforts to struggle against nature, which ensure that people understand clearly the path that must be taken'.³⁸ Part of the struggle against nature involved the expansion of Wuxi City, and it was claimed that by 1959, industrial production had increased five times since the revolution, and the city had doubled in size. The old city wall had been replaced with a ring road, the roads to Plum Garden and Sea Turtle Head Island had been repaired, and the road to Hui Mountain was now tarmac instead of cinders.³⁹ Scenic sites around the lake were also being transformed. The party had repaired sites on Hui Mountain and neighbouring Xi Mountain, and it intended to create a chain of scenic spots connecting the city to the lake. Indeed, visitors could still see the lake to the west and chimneys of the city rising like a forest to the east.⁴⁰ It might be expected that temples and other vestiges of the former supposedly feudal era would not be mentioned, but both guidebooks describe the history of these sites in some detail, although they no-longer retained their former uses. Part of Hui Mountain Temple was converted into the Wuxi City Museum, in which revolutionary artifacts and local handicrafts were displayed. In 1953, a monument to those who had died in the revolutionary wars was erected. Finally, on Xi Mountain, the pagoda and viewing platforms were repaired and a zoo constructed.⁴¹

Nor was such work limited to scenic sites within the city. In 1952, Li Garden was enlarged with a corridor connecting it to a neighbouring garden.⁴² By this time, Treasure World Bridge, which had been an impressive piece of infrastructure when it was constructed, was now almost part of the scenery, since, ‘no matter if visitors travel on top of the bridge, or take the boat underneath it, they will all feel the beautiful lake and mountain landscape’.⁴³ Crossing the bridge brought visitors to Sea Turtle Head Island, and as before the war, guidebooks recommended the Huashen 花神 [Flower God] and Guangfu 光復 temples as places of interest. A new addition to the peninsula was the *Gongren liaoyang suo* 工人疗养所 [Worker Recuperation Centre], which as one teacher lucky enough to stay there for two weeks in 1955 noted, was very peaceful.⁴⁴ Its success may have been the reason why plans for a second centre were drawn up. Harmony with the natural world was important to the centre’s design, and the architects wanted to produce a socialist landscape that would be like poetry rather than like an essay. However it was incorrect to say that the natural environment was perfect and couldn’t be improved to better service the people. Of course, such improvement could go too far, and for this reason it was important to put planning first and ensure that alterations were in accord with local conditions.⁴⁵ Here we see expressed clearly the tensions between the perceived need to change the natural environment of the lake to make life better for people living in cities, and the threat that these changes posed to the elements of the lake that gave it this natural beauty.

The Reform era

Scholars and planners in the reform era quickly recognized the difficulty of reconciling regional urbanization with the protection of Lake Tai’s environment. There were too few natural resources for industrial development, the population was too dense, and there was too much pollution. Lake Tai was in danger of becoming like other places in China,

where ‘in areas abundant with flowing rivers, there is no clean water to drink, and in a countryside full of fish and rice, there are no fresh fish to eat’.⁴⁶ Since regional planning was now popular, Lake Tai should become an economic zone, which would simultaneously develop the city and the countryside, utilize water resources more efficiently, open up scenic areas and protect the environment and ecological balance.⁴⁷

A similar tension existed in plans for the lake in Wuxi. In 1977, the Wuxi City Construction Bureau produced the *Wuxi Taihu fengjing luyouqu guihua dagang* 无锡太湖风景旅游区规划大纲 [Wuxi Lake Tai scenic area tourist plan], which was amended two years later. The area was to cover 366 square km, and include 115 km of the lake shore.⁴⁸ The plan saw Lake Tai and the surrounding area as a resource. ‘The natural scenery has its own natural form of beauty, but it is a scenic resource that has not yet been opened up. It only needs to be managed properly, and it will serve the development of the tourist industry’.⁴⁹ Beyond this, ‘the city and the scenic area must maintain a suitable distance from each other. However, the arrangement of scenic sites, the chain of the forestry system and the threads of road transport all create close connections between the city and the scenic area. Urban construction should also gradually become more suitable to the nature of a scenic tourist city’.⁵⁰ There was much work to be done. Previously, individual sites in the city, the suburbs, and the countryside had been managed separately, with no thought given to how they formed an integrated whole. Moreover, the army and industrial work units all built haphazardly wherever they could gain access to land, and little thought had been given to the natural environment. The report mentioned four centres for convalescence or retirement, eight quarries, and multiple demands placed on the land for agriculture. Indeed, visitors to the Hubin 湖滨 Hotel complained that the birdsong was drowned out by the cacophony of quarrying, the felling of trees, and other noises. On top of these problems, destruction and neglect during the Cultural Revolution

meant there were no-longer any scenic spots in Xihui 锡惠 Park, much of Plum Garden was barren, and Sea Turtle Head Island was a wilderness. Finally, there were seventy ancient monuments and revolutionary sites, but only thirty could be repaired.⁵¹

Despite this, in 1978, 408,000 people had visited the parks and gardens across the scenic area, 49,000 of whom were overseas Chinese or foreign visitors.⁵² Clearly, the area was of interest to many people, and the committee drew up concrete recommendations for its development. There were several initial urgent tasks. These included reforestation, money for farmers to help them purchase fuel and to prevent further felling of trees. Quarrying should only be allowed in designated areas, and all polluting industries should cease operation. Turning to scenic points and viewing platforms, these should be repaired and new ones constructed as necessary, with priority given to those around Lake Li and Sea Turtle Head Island.⁵³ Plans called for concentration of all services into a few special zones so as not to destroy the scenery. Hotels should be expanded, but there should be no buildings taller than one storey, and the majority should be in the style of villas surrounded by trees and gardens. Nevertheless, it was planned to increase the total number of bedrooms to around 10,000, and to build a visitors' centre to the north of the Lake Tai Hotel. Finally, while many roads were not suitable for widening or resurfacing, some work was required. Projects included improving the lake side road between Li Garden and the Wuxi-Suzhou Road, and building two roads to connect Nanfangquan 南方泉 with the lake.⁵⁴ In connecting the scenic area to Wuxi City more closely and looking to improve facilities for tourists, the authors of the plans were making a conscious decision to emphasize utilizing Lake Tai and its shoreline as a tourist resource.

Their sensitive approach to development was not shared by all. An article in a 1980 guidebook suggested several improvements to the scenic area. These included transforming

Treasure World Bridge into a suspension bridge, with separate lanes for pedestrian and vehicle traffic. It would be lit at night, and so become a tourist site itself. Other plans included a swimming pool next to the bridge and further south an aquarium.⁵⁵ Other reactions confirm the tensions created by the growing importance of being placed on the value of Lake Tai as a tourist destination. One article pointed out that the lake was an example of a natural scenic area, characterized by little human influence as opposed to a scenic area closer to the city, such as West Lake, which had been altered greatly by human activity. However, the recent construction of the multi-storeyed Hubin Hotel ruined the scenery of Li Garden.⁵⁶

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, with more than half of Chinese now living in cities, urbanization poses more of a threat to the natural environment, which in places has become uninhabitable. In response to this, environmental protection has become increasingly valued, at least in part because of the need to make cities habitable. At the same time, nature has also become increasingly valued for its importance to tourism and the possibilities it offers for improving urban life. This is as true of the Lake Tai region as it is of any other part of China. Planning in the Republican era may not have been as professional as it is now, but it still emphasized multiple paths of development. Then, natural scenic sites were just one of several ways in which the lake contributed to the prosperity of the urban system and individual cities. Now, such sites, together with the natural value of the lake, are increasingly important in its relationship with the region's cities. Policy makers and planners at regional and municipal levels talk of developing an environmental consciousness, incorporating scenic sites into master plans, and resolving the continuing contradictions between rapid urbanization and the threat this poses to the lake.⁵⁷

The tensions remain unresolved, as they do elsewhere in China and around the world. Urbanization in all its forms continues to encroach on the lake, and mass tourism now poses a new threat. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in *Don't Cry Tai Lake*, one of Qiu Xiaolong's popular detective novels. Looking out of the window of his villa in the Recuperation Centre, which still exists on Sea Turtle Head Island, inspector Chen saw how far Wuxi City had expanded. On one side there were driveways for private villas, the lake shore at last providing that pleasant residential environment for rich Chinese that Xue Mingjian and other Wuxi locals dreamt of decades before. 'To the other side, there were rows of multi-storey buildings, with identically shaped balconies aligned like matchboxes, as those in a large new hotel'.⁵⁸ Despite such development, the lake still had the power to inspire the same reaction as it did in Yu Dafu. As Chen relaxed in the bath, 'he had the luxurious feeling of becoming one with the lake, as he watched the tiny bubbles rising in his glass of Perrier'.⁵⁹ As in earlier decades, such descriptions stand in stark contrast to industrial development, but whereas Hu Jiansheng and later Ai Xuan had to stand atop Hui Mountain to see the natural and the built environment side by side, now factories 'loomed along the lakeshore, with their smokestacks pouring out smoke against the brownish hills'.⁶⁰ It is not only smokestacks that pollute the lake. In *Don't Cry Tai Lake*, the chemical company, whose boss is murdered, is guilty of tipping untreated waste into the lake in pursuit of profit, and it is a running joke throughout the book that locals and those in the know don't eat fish and shrimp or drink the water from the lake. In this, we see the irony of a century of urbanization. As the city expanded, the countryside was first re-imagined, then gradually encompassed and finally despoiled. Lake Tai, for centuries crucial to the livelihoods of millions in the Lower Yangzi Delta, and throughout the twentieth century, at the centre of plans to make the city a more pleasant place to live, has itself become increasingly uninhabitable for multiple forms of life,

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and this in turn threatens the very values that are seen as making China and her cities habitable for humanity.

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