

# *Historical Changes of Urban Landscape in the Field of Visual Culture: Take the Bund as an Example*

Yu Bai<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of Journalism and Communication, Hunan Institute of Science and Technology, Hunan, China*

*a. 1910841120@mail.sit.edu.cn*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** In modern society, with the rapid development of technology, visual communication based on visual images is one of the most important ways of transmitting information. This study is based on the development of urban landscape from the perspective of visual culture, based on the reception effect of sensory vision, to conduct a comprehensive study on the historical and cultural changes of landscape displayed by visual images of urban landscape in different periods. Taking the Bund area as a research case, using the methods of literature analysis and content analysis to interpret the visual images of Shanghai Bund from the pre-opening period, the concession period, to the modernization period, and explore the historical change information conveyed by the visual images and the visual image itself, The history of technological innovation. The study found that visual images, as a means of conveying content, are more intuitive than text and discourse, and the development of media with the advent of modernization makes it a faster and more convenient mode of communication. As the subject of research, the urban landscape not only conducts historical and cultural research as a visual image observed by vision but also can react to people's cultural awareness, visual cognition, and aesthetic values according to its own shape and cultural core. Therefore, urban landscape development under visual culture interacts with the means of communication based on visual images. With the advancement of the times and continuous technological innovation, it will face more challenges.

**Keywords:** visual culture, urban landscape, Shanghai Bund

## 1. Introduction

Visual culture is a cultural form based on the visual senses, and its ideology is mainly composed of images, showing a perceptual image of the information it conveys. When discussing the effects of visual culture, in addition to focusing on the visual effects brought about by modern media can also deeply discuss the visual culture before modern development, deconstructing the simple "history of images".

As the most common daily thing in people's lives, urban landscapes have a long history of development after the birth of images. Shanghai in modern China has experienced special social changes. With the invasion and spread of foreign cultures, a unique historical urban landscape has been formed. It has value worthy of in-depth study. In modern times, although the visual image recording of urban landscapes is relatively backward compared with modern media technology,

black-and-white photos taken on the basis of cameras can still be used as precious documents. It shows the specific features of the urban landscape and the historical changes in the medium of visual culture.

Based on the visual image, combining the historical changes of the urban landscape to explore its historical value and the visual culture to focus on the impact of the visual image on the development of the urban landscape is the theme of this paper. This paper uses literature analysis and content analysis as the main methods. After summarizing the concept of visual culture and urban landscape, it expounds on its historical influence on the urban landscape and the interaction and development between them based on visual images. The historical change of the urban landscape on the Bund is described and analyzed in detail, showing the historical evolution process of the urban landscape under the image, studying the historical information brought by it, looking for profound historical and cultural value, and combining it with modern media technology to create new developments and changes.

## **2. Application of Visual Culture in the Urban Landscape**

### **2.1. Definition and Development of Visual Culture**

Visual culture is an important emerging interdisciplinary research field in postmodern culture with sufficient visual experience and dialectical observation ability [1]. It is an ideology that deals with the information received by the visual senses, focusing the dissemination of information on the nature of visual images and the process of their transmission. The current visual culture is a cultural form of visibility. It breaks away from the traditional language-centered ideology and, to some extent, belongs to the collection of mainstream values, which can give people mainstream ideology through visual images. It will focus on the visual image while conveying the subjective and emotional image, it can also bring objective information transmission.

In modern society, the maturity of mass media is an important symbol of visual culture entering a new era. Different from the traditional medium of visual recording "photography", the social media formed by the mass media have expanded the scope of visual culture communication and are an important carrier for the transmission of visual information. In the information age, with the rapid development of the Internet, social media has accelerated the development of visual practice, and a lot of information is presented in visual form, which makes people have to follow the trend of cultural development and carry out "visual experience on the screen". The in-depth development of visual culture in the information age has formed a "visual trend", and image content has gradually replaced the original text content. In the visual communication of recording social life through media, landscape and its specific concepts have undergone strong and profound developments and changes in the visual society derived from technology [2].

### **2.2. Development Characteristics of the Urban Landscape**

The result of human perception of different dimensions of city life forms an urban landscape, whose physical form, behavior, and meaning are an objective-subjective phenomenon [3]. Humans use different senses to acquire information about urban landscapes as a perception of reality [3]. Therefore, urban landscapes can be regarded as an objective product centered on human subjective cognition. At its core, it is an objective material developed based on human visual perception. Compared with other landscapes, the urban landscape is one of the centers of human activity, so it is most deeply affected by human activities.

To talk about the urban landscape, it is necessary to combine its development characteristics with the history of the city, and these are inseparable from the development of human civilization, which

involves social changes such as political changes, economic development, and decline, wars, and colonization, etc. A common conceptual domain encompassing multiple disciplines.

The urban landscape is not created overnight; it will be changed due to human activities, resource replacement, and the impact of the natural environment. In terms of the cultural nature of urban landscape development, the ancient urban landscape is an important basis for highlighting the development of human culture and history. Their development presents historicity and uniqueness and is mainly based on the regional culture of the city itself.

### **2.3. The Embodiment of Visual Culture in the Urban Landscape**

Vision is the perception ability through which the senses mainly receive external information. While people receive a large amount of information through visual channels, they can also produce objective effects on themselves and the external environment. Their subjective perception and experience constitute the diversity of visual culture. Urban landscape is a collection of results formed by human visual perception and is the product of human cognition of urban history, environment, and structure [3]. On the premise that the urban landscape itself is a visual product, its change process has rich visual effects in visual culture. Studying the historical changes in urban landscapes under visual culture can explain the macroscopic significance of historical and cultural development and social environment changes with the microscopic effects of visual activity changes. It is a comprehensive, interdisciplinary study of multiculturalism.

The construction of landscape is inseparable from the embodiment of aesthetic value, and it is an important project in aesthetic design. Visual comfort is a key element in the field of visual communication, and it is also the main content and basic variable that constitutes an artificial environment such as an urban landscape, and it is also an important display of aesthetics [4]. In the construction of urban landscapes, the visual-centered cultural perception constitutes people's good-demand experience, which satisfies people's spiritual life needs to a certain extent.

Mitchell believes that there is no "visual medium", and film, television, and radio are all complex "mixed media", which are not visual-centered main products but a kind of tactile media [5]. But in Internet media, where the screen is the main form, the visual information perceived from the screen undoubtedly occupies a dominant position, which makes the visual culture present more diverse content. The urban landscape shows its degree of discussion and daily life under the visual culture of the media. It is a public thing that everyone can touch and perceive. There is no doubt that whether it is an old urban landscape with historical research value or a modern urban landscape that has been transformed into a modern urban landscape with historical changes, mass media can further visualize them and increase the collective memory of people. A society's values and collective memory and how they are expressed contribute to the transmission of its cultural heritage [6]. It has historical significance and value.

## **3. The Historical Development of the Urban Landscape in Visual Culture**

### **3.1. Urban Landscape Changes under the Influence of Visual Culture**

In the inner space of the city, the urban landscape is inseparable from the influence of cultural values and the social environment [4], which are related to the needs for social and cultural development, the status quo of the social economy, and the historical reasons of the city. In many works on historical urban landscapes, scholars talk about the historical changes of landscapes based on recorded written materials and photographed pictures, and image-based visual materials are usually more convincing than words. The visual images recorded by age-old cameras cannot intuitively convey clear enough visual images under the condition of insufficient technology, but they can still draw historical and cultural connotations from the visual content displayed and show the process of technological change.

Despite the rapid development of the current virtual technology, the images taken by modern equipment can present the specific characteristics of the urban landscape with clear visual effects in most cases, and both they and historical visual images can make people perceive things in a different way.

In this paper, the historical change of the urban landscape on the Bund is taken as an example, based on visual culture and its traditional or modern visual technology, to show the process of urban landscape change:

As the largest city in East China and an international metropolis, Shanghai's ever-evolving historical urban landscape has unique cultural value in modern history. Shanghai's colonial experience of being invaded by other countries in modern times has led to the historical urban landscape it presents having a leaping historical significance in terms of cultural transmission, cultural integration, and cultural differences. The Bund area of Shanghai, as a former concession area, with its invasion of culture and capital, while promoting the modernization process, also has an important impact on the modernization of the city. From the perspective of visual culture, the development process of the urban landscape in Shanghai's Bund area can be based on intuitive images and related literature surveys, and the connotation and significance of the historical and cultural development of Shanghai's own visibility can be excavated. Its urban landscape not only belongs to the historical urban landscape with cultural heritage value but also develops a new modern landscape with a blend of local culture and foreign culture along with modernization.

### **3.1.1. The Historical Change Process of the Shanghai Bund Urban Landscape**

Since the opening of Shanghai, modernized urban land use has changed the original rural landscape pattern [7]. Since the division of the concession in 1845, the new urban space of Shanghai has continued to expand to the rural areas around the city, and the river system on which the rural landscape depends has changed due to conflicts of economic interests [7]. The rapid disintegration of rural landscapes under the impact of new institutions accelerated the expansion of urbanization. During this period, changes in the social environment and the invasion of foreign cultures were important reasons for the changes in Shanghai's urban landscape.

In 1845, after the establishment of the British Concession in Shanghai according to the "Shanghai Land Regulations", the United States and France also successively established their own concessions and formulated a series of exclusive laws and management treaties within the concessions. Due to the "colonial" and "culturally aggressive" nature of the concession, Shanghai's economy, politics, and culture have all been strongly impacted by the Western civilized world. Analyzing historical images of urban landscape changes from the perspective of visual culture represents a strong visual impact on local culture, turning basic cultural concepts into concrete sensory projections. Occupying people's senses from a visual perspective is the most prominent feature of cultural colonization.

On the basis of perceiving the historical and cultural value and historical change process of urban landscapes through visual images, this paper analyzes the visual communication effect of the content displayed in combination with the background of social development and focuses on selecting urban road landscapes, urban architectural landscapes, and urban green landscapes. Space Landscape Three important urban landscapes are analyzed as specific urban landscape cases of the Bund in Shanghai.

Road landscape is a supporting frame within an urban landscape system and generally plays the role of an axis in a city's landscape space structure [8]. It can give people the most intuitive visual impression, show the basic style and regional culture of a city, and reflect the level of local urban municipal construction and modernization processes. Before the establishment of the French Concession in 1849, someone once described the urban roads outside the British Concession as "muddy, dirty, and gloomy" [9]. Before being colonized, most of the roads built in Shanghai were dirt roads, which would make the ground unsightly and untidy in dry or rainy weather. Westerners

who came to Shanghai later adopted a modern municipal management model, building roads by laying soil and sand, crushing stone bricks or paving small ashlar, and pouring concrete [10] (Figure 1), making the city's roads spacious and tidy. Since this step, Shanghai's urban landscape construction has moved towards modernization under the influence of colonial culture. From the beginning, urban landscape construction got rid of the backwardness of the past and ushered in a modern urban construction model of specialization and legalization.

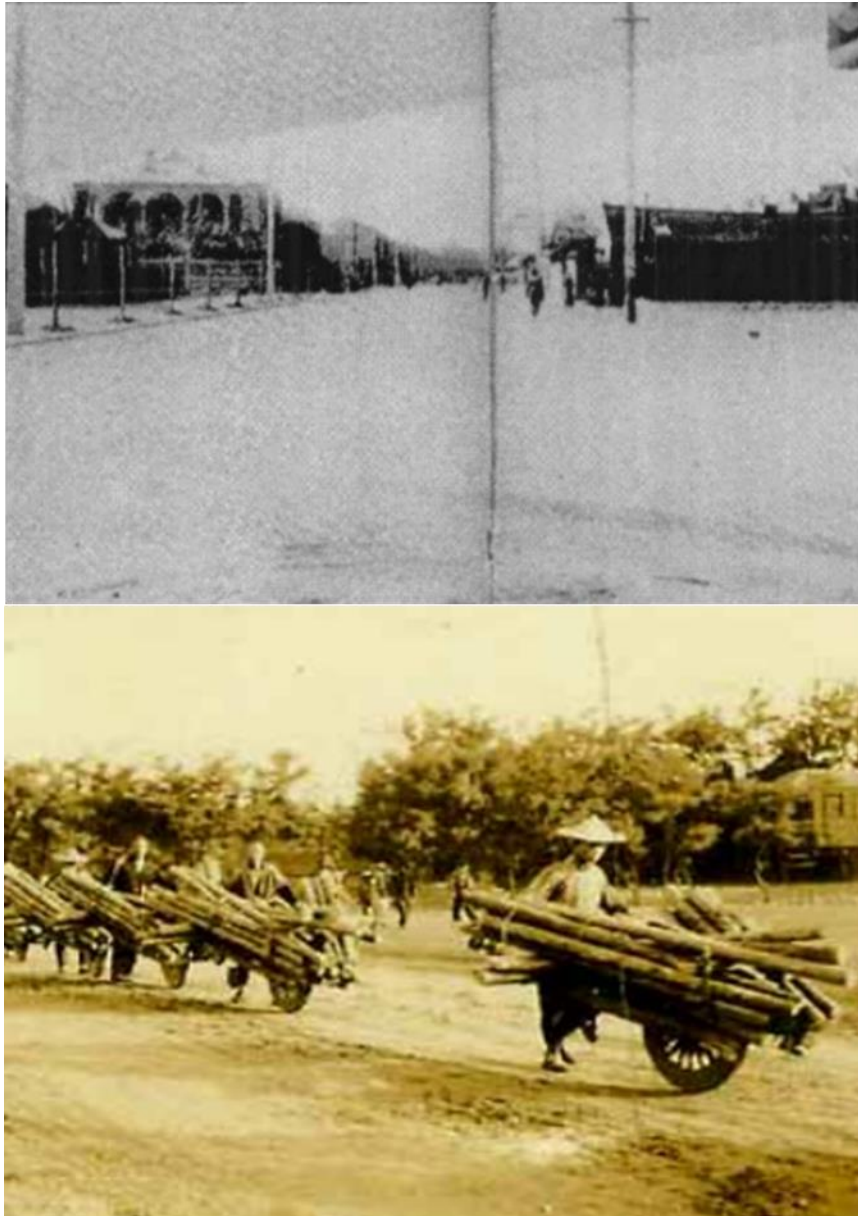


Figure 1: Comparison of dirt roads in Shanghai and concession roads.

The road construction on the Bund in Shanghai was deeply influenced by the Shanghai culture during the concession period, and it was the urban landscape that was heavily planned in the concession. Today, the roads on the Bund are spacious, flat, and tidy. Under the operation of the modern transportation system, the continuous flow of vehicles on the road is in an orderly manner, and pedestrians walk on the paved sidewalks on both sides of the road. By accepting visual image information through mass media platforms, you can easily browse the road landscape images of the

Bund in Shanghai today (Figure 2). Compared with the muddy roads before the port opening of Shanghai, the visual images of the two different eras show strong differences after comparison, which can intuitively show an advanced sense of changing times. Although the Western-style culture brought about by colonization impacted the old order, it also laid the foundation for the development of Shanghai's modernization. From the perspective of urban construction and development, it has made a reasonable guide for Shanghai's future modernization.



Figure 2: Modern Bund Road.

During the municipal construction of the French Concession, the French Bund was established in imitation of the Bund in the British Concession. The three major wharfs specially built by the French Bund played an important role in the foreign economics, trade, and communication of the concession at that time, and the surrounding buildings of the wharf section are one of the representatives of the urban landscape of the French Concession. The more representative ones are the regional buildings of the Company Wharf and Taikoo Wharf. The company wharf on the north side of the French Bund is adjacent to the French Consulate, and most of the interior of the area is made up of office and commercial buildings [9].



Figure 3: Comparison between the first generation and the second generation of the French Consulate [9].

It can be seen from the black-and-white photos that the early French Bund buildings were built in accordance with the urban planning of Paris in France, and the style of the buildings was biased towards the French Renaissance. The French Post Building is a French Renaissance building with three floors and a sloped roof of brick and wood structure [9]; while the French Consulate is a French classicist building completed in 1867. With a square appearance, the building is four stories high and still uses brick and wood structure, but the area of the building was expanded during the second-generation renovation in 1894, and a Renaissance-style building was built (Figure 3) [9]. The French Concession in the 19th century still retains the traditional architectural style, and the magnificent landscape construction of European civilization, with historical and artistic value, was implemented in the Shanghai Concession, creating a unique historical and cultural landscape.

In the first half of the 20th century, the rapid development of society brought about great changes in the construction of various civilizations. The French Post Building changed the architectural style that inherited its own historical civilization and chose to focus on a simple and practical modern style when designing buildings (Figure 4) [10]. The purpose of modern-style architecture is to allow people to have more space for activities in the original area of the building. Therefore, the technological changes in the construction industry, its steady development, and the rapid expansion of capital in various places are the result of the gradual increase in the floors owned by modern-style buildings. One of the main reasons that Compared with the first-generation French Post Building, the second-generation building has higher floors, a square, and a simple appearance, and also pays attention to the practicality of the interior of the building, showing a distinctive Western modernist architectural style.

As the political situation changed in the 1940s, Britain, France, and the United States successively returned ownership of the concession to the Chinese government. The French Post Building has been repaired several times in the following 60 years and was rebuilt in 2003. Now the French Post Building has been officially renamed the "Pujiang Building" by the government and is used as the new Shanghai Archives. Name replacement is a symbol of the return of sovereignty and an inevitable process of national cultural development. It represents the local cultural standpoint of the building itself and is a remarkable phenomenon of historical and cultural change with profound social significance. The historical changes of buildings have witnessed technological innovation, social change, and the change of the times, always complying with the needs of human beings and moving towards a new form of civilization in the revolution.

Today's Shanghai has already stepped into a modernized model and has become an international financial city. The buildings on the Bund have been continuously added and repaired over time, and now they are showing prosperity and development (Figure 4). After the reform and opening up in 1978, the development and revitalization of the Pudong area led to the formation and expansion of the Lujiazui financial district. Numerous skyscrapers have sprung up in the Bund area (Figure 5). The city has once again entered a new stage. The high-rise buildings with clusters of steel have had a strong visual impact on people, and they also allow people to use their most direct sense of information acquisition—vision—to show the great changes in the urban landscape. With the development of the Internet and the rise of mass media, clear visual images captured by portable electronic products can convey information more intuitively (Figure 6). Compared with Lujiazui, a new building belonging to the Bund, the historical buildings in the former concession are still properly protected and repaired today, and together with the modern skyscrapers, they have become an important representative of the Bund's urban landscape. The completely different forms and cultural connotations of the two show a sense of history and culture across the ages and a strong sense of difference in the times. It is an important epitome of the turning point of modern Chinese society and history, social development, and the changes of the times.



Figure 4: Night view of the modern Bund.

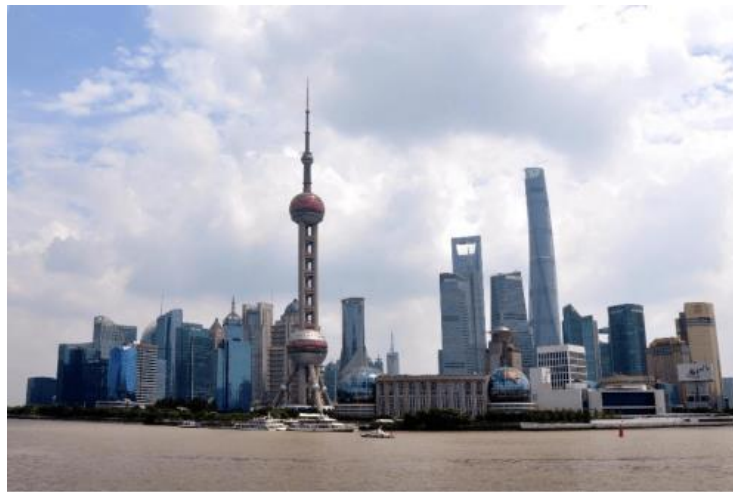


Figure 5: Pictures of Lujiazui during the day.



Figure 6: Photos of the Bund in Shanghai captured.



As a basic urban landscape, green space is of great significance and immeasurable value to the construction of urban landscapes, human urban life, climate change, and the survival of wild animals. Green space includes urban road greening, parks, and open green spaces. In addition to its important environmental benefits and functions in maintaining the ecosystem, green space also has aesthetic value worthy of study in terms of landscape aesthetics. It can visually relieve people's stress, improve mental health, and potentially enhance social protection and social security. It is also one of the criteria for judging the degree of modern urban appearance and urban landscape construction [11].

The urban landscape of green spaces on the Bund of Shanghai also has a long history of development. In 1865, the Anglo-American Concession carried out urban road planning on the premise of the "Shanghai Land Regulations", and initially planted street trees [12]. In 1886, the French Concession Public Directorate France selected 120 saplings and planned to plant them on both sides of the French Bund. Planting is used to construct and maintain the urban landscape and beautify the urban construction [13]. After basic road planning, the public concession has fully developed the green space along the Huangpu River and built green spaces and parks along the river. In 1868, "The Bund Park" was born as the first concession park in Shanghai. It is the conception and display of Western aesthetic standards and garden concepts (Figure 7). In 1869, American Edward Cunningham (1823–1899) further proposed the modern idea of turning the Bund into a "green landscape in 1869, American Edward Cunningham (1823–1899) further proposed the modern idea of turning the Bund into a "green landscape area" [12]. The banks of the Huangpu River will be developed into a public space with open scenery, spacious roads, and beautiful greenery for people to take a walk, so as to satisfy the inner spiritual needs of viewing the scene and relieving stress.

The urban greening landscape planning for the Bund of Shanghai impacted the traditional Chinese gardens to a certain extent, brought the western garden parks and open space into Shanghai, and laid the foundation for the construction and development of green space on the Bund in Shanghai. Since then, Bund Park has undergone corresponding changes in different development periods (Figure 8), and the coast of the Bund has also become one of the most representative green spaces in the concession under the concept of a green landscape area. With the time, according to the different urban landscape planning at that time, it was constantly repaired (Figure 9). Today, while maintaining the western green landscape planning mode, it can also adapt to the modern landscape mode (Figure 10). The rise of the Internet and mass media and the convenience of electronic devices allow people to easily search for images of the green landscape of the Bund today. People have accelerated the speed of visual image dissemination of information through new technical means. While promoting the fast-paced processes of the times, they can also achieve higher communication efficiency and meet people's more spiritual needs.

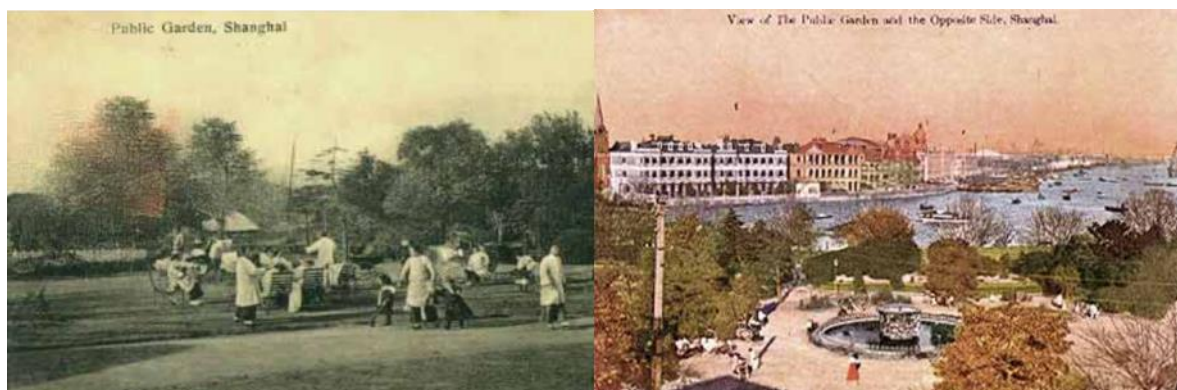


Figure 7: Comparison between Shanghai Public Garden in late 19th century and in 20th century [12].



Figure 8: Modern Bund Park.

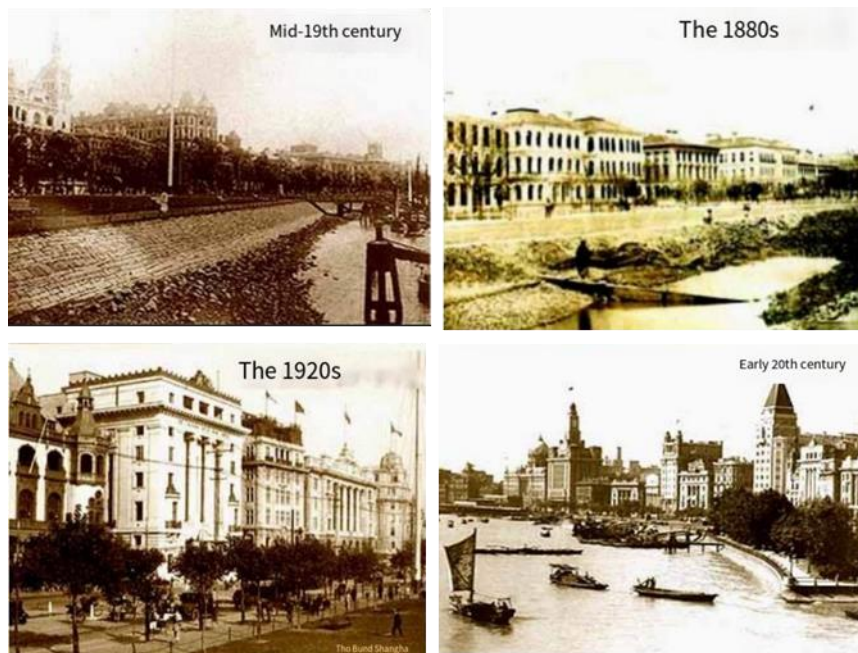


Figure 9: The Comparisons on environment of different times in Shanghai Bund [12].



Figure 10: Green landscape of urban roads in Shanghai Bu.

#### 4. The Impact and Development of Visual Culture on Urban Landscape Changes

The urban landscape will undergo inevitable changes along with social changes and historical progress. At a time when there was not enough technical equipment to record data, people usually relied on written records and human-to-human discourse transmissions that were not sufficiently accurate and authentic. With the advent of the camera in the 19th century, visual images broke through the means of information transmission dominated by words and discourse and became a precious and new communication method with high authenticity. The form of image dissemination has undergone a fundamental change. The analysis of the historical changes in urban landscapes based on visual images can make historical facts more convincing and show authentic historical scenes on the basis of written materials. With the advancement of the times, documentary-based visual image communication has gradually become the mainstream means of information transmission, relying on the continuous innovation of advanced equipment, making visual culture occupy an important position in the communication methods of the current information age.

Visual images are important witnesses of urban landscape changes and the real basis of research fields, which have indispensable research value in various disciplines. Today, visual culture has become an important ideology that cannot be ignored. In the case study, the historical changes of the urban landscape of the Bund in Shanghai can be clearly shown based on visual images. From the perspective of sensory vision, the development of the modern urban landscape in the concession, its landscape form, and its connotation of exotic culture have profoundly affected the subsequent modernization process of Shanghai.

Today, the rapid development of social technology and the economy allows people to have more media to accept the changing mainstream ideology. Most of modern visual culture relies on the mass media to transmit cultural information, and the technological change of the media promotes the diversification of media forms. The production of images has also become more convenient due to the upgrading of electronic equipment. The mass media based on the Internet have made sufficient contributions to the development of visual culture in terms of image sources and transmission channels. Compared with the nineteenth century, when there were only cameras, the visual images displayed today are clearer under the technological revolution and have the same colors as those observed by the naked eye. It is more direct in its effect than visual communication.

Therefore, while the current visual culture is witnessing the development of the urban historical landscape, it should also play the role of the current mass media to allow people to participate in the construction of the urban landscape. While adapting to the simplicity and practical functions of the modern model, the construction and development of urban landscapes should also pay more attention to the needs of people on the premise of following economic development. The historical landscape of the city should also follow the model of modern urban construction and carry out reasonable repairs and maintenance on the basis of maintaining the original historical and cultural properties.

#### 5. Conclusion

This research shows the cultural connotation and historical and cultural significance behind the visual images of the urban landscape in different historical backgrounds and shows that the visual images have been endowed with the continuous innovation of technology along with the historical process. The importance of historical and cultural research Through the analysis of visual images, the study found that urban landscape is not only a change observed by vision but also allows people to know its information content and profoundly affects people's aesthetic orientation, cultural awareness, and cognition based on sensory vision. development side. While the visual image of urban landscape conveys information to people, it also affects people's orientation in visual. However, with the advancement of the times and the advancement of science and technology, media technology is

developing rapidly, and the birth of virtual technology means that visual images no longer have a high degree of authenticity. Therefore, to a certain extent, the dissemination of visual images is facing a crisis of visual effects related to authenticity. People no longer trust the authenticity of the information conveyed by images as much as they used to. This is a long-term potential problem. But it is undeniable that more imaginative and virtual visual images have also brought a new cultural form, which will be full of research value and significance.

## References

- [1] Nicholas M.(1999).*An introduction to visual culture*.Routledge, Londo,pp:4-7.
- [2] Stokes J, Price B.(2017). *Social media, visual culture, and contemporary identity*.11th International Multi-conference on society, cybernetics, and informatics. IMSCI: [https://www. is.org/CDs2017/CD2017Summer/papers/EA876TF. pdf](https://www.is.org/CDs2017/CD2017Summer/papers/EA876TF.pdf).
- [3] Karimi M, Bemanian M R, Ansari M, et al.(2023) *Recognition of the Components of the Urban Landscape Visual System Elements and Values*. MANZAR, the Scientific Journal of Landscape, 15,62, 72-85.
- [4] Sadegh N.(2014). *The Role OF Visual Communications in The Identity of the Urban Landscape*.
- [5] Mitchell W J T. (2005). *There are no visual media*. *Journal of visual culture*, 4,2. 257-266.
- [6] Ginzarly M, Roders A P, Teller J.(2019) *Mapping historic urban landscape values through social media*. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 36,1-11.
- [7] Wu J.(2012). *Changes of Shantytowns and Social and Cultural Mentality in Shanghai from the Perspective of Urban Landscape*. *China Famous Cities*, 01,36-42.
- [8] Peng X., Sun B., Zhou J., etc.(2023). *Landscape design is based on the sustainable concept of flatness combined with road greening*. *Modern Horticulture*, 46,10. 88-90.
- [9] Bai C., Qian Z.(2020).*A Preliminary Study on the Formation and Development of the Bund in the French Concession of Modern Shanghai*.*Journal of Tongji University (Social Science Edition)*, 31,06.103-111+124.
- [10] Zhang H.(2008).*The Concession and Modern Shanghai Municipal Modernization*.*Journal of Jiaozuo Teachers College*.01,37-40.
- [11] Wu J. (2008).*From Water Village to City: Modern Shanghai Urban Road System Evolution and Environment (1843-1949)*. Fudan University.
- [12] Shengyun Xie.*The research on the park and open space of Shanghai concession*.
- [13] Alizadeh B, Hitchmough J.(2019). *A review of urban landscape adaptation to the challenge of climate change*. *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management*. 11,2,178-194.