Problems and Countermeasures in the Construction of Characteristic Towns—Take Shanghai as an Example

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Abstract. As an important breakthrough to speed up the new-type urbanization, the characteristic towns are conducive to solving the problem of developing kinetic energy transformation in the current supply-side structural reform in China. Shanghai, as a global city, will create several distinctive towns with characteristics that highlighting local culture, which will contribute to the further improvement of regional development and the overall improvement of urban competitiveness. Based on the overall development in Shanghai, this paper fully evaluates the existing resource endowments and development status of Shanghai’s existing characteristic towns through empirical research. Based on this, it sorts out the major bottlenecks and the goals and directions of the construction of characteristic towns from the perspective of "people-oriented", coordinating the residents’ life, creative talents’ work as well as tourists’ travel. Finally, it gives specific direction and policy initiatives from the layout, characteristics, resource, industry, policy and other aspects to promote the construction of characteristic towns.

1. Introduction

With the economic transformation and the upgrading of urbanization, the construction of characteristic towns has become an important measure to speed up new-type urbanization under the “new normal”. Shanghai, as a global city, has given full play to its radiation effects. Creating small towns with resources-intensive, environment-friendly and flexible development that are "adapted to local conditions" is an important measure to enhance the industrial levels and urban value. However, at present, the overall urban development in small towns in Shanghai is still uneven. The core competitiveness remains to be tapped and the resource concentration has not yet taken shape. The system of differentiated coordination among cities still needs to be constructed. Therefore, it is necessary to sort out the status and the key issues those towns are facing, and put forward the countermeasures and suggestions on how to promote the construction of characteristic towns from the perspective of "people-oriented".

2. Theoretical Backgrounds

2.1. The connotation of characteristic towns

Characteristic towns are neither "towns" in the sense of traditional administrative divisions nor "districts" of industrial parks, but feature a new type of economy in which special industries, entrepreneurial innovation, various economic elements and cultures are aggregated. It forms a platform for industrial upgrading and economic transformation that integrates the entire industrial chain and
various innovative elements (Li Qiang, 2015; Li Gan, 2017; Glaeser, et.al., 2001). The distinctive features of characteristic towns are reflected in four aspects: geographical features, ecological features, industrial features and historical and cultural features (Ahn, et.al., 2015; Qin, 2015; Long et al., 2015).

| Features              | Explanations                                                                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Geographical features | Resource complementation and information exchange with central cities, relying on the latter especially in transportation networks and business services |
| Ecological features   | The location is mostly beautiful and is designed to provide local residents with comfortable ecological and living environment, reflecting the harmonious coexistence between man and nature |
| Industrial features   | Mainly focus on high-tech services or traditional key industries or key links in the industrial chain, not intended to pursue the integrity of industrial clusters or the extension of industrial chains |
| Historical and cultural features | Different from the iconic style of the big cities, it forms a new cultural trait to enhance residents' cultural identity, spiritual belonging and identity accumulation |

2.2. The status quo and development initiatives of characteristic towns

After entering the middle-income stage, some towns in developed countries become characteristic such as Greenwich and Davos, which are characterized by modern service industries and knowledge-based economy. Some scholars have made useful researches on the problems of the development of those towns.

According to the study of Orbasli (2000), for those historic towns, the development of tourism is an important part of rejuvenating the local economy, but at the same time it faces the risk of cultural heritage being destroyed and the disadvantages of poor protection. Yigitcanlar (2007) pointed out that one of the focuses of the development of high-tech towns is how to rely on public services to attract and retain knowledge workers. According to Liu et al. (2013), some Chinese characteristic towns are under heavy construction and light management, emphasis on input but neglect output. Zhou (2017) pointed out that the characteristic towns nowadays mainly face the following problems: the distinctive image is not prominent, the main business is dislocated, the industrial level is not high, and the construction progress is greatly different. Fan et al. (2017) argue that under the new economic normal, the original business practices of small towns must be upgraded. Through the summary above, the existing research still has the following deficiencies:

1. The research object mainly focuses on the three elements of the characteristic town construction: the government, the industry and the residents separately, there is seldom systematic study of the three;
2. The content of the current researches mainly focuses on the economic and industrial development of the towns, little amount of attention was paid to the micro-level—the real "people". For example, how to achieve personal attribution and identity agree through coordinated development of "livable, pleasure for travel and suitable for work" is still lack of researches.
3. The existing research has little suggestions on the status quo and problems as well as how to enhance the construction of characteristic townships systematically.

3. The Status Quo of Shanghai Characteristic Towns

3.1. Morning Bird Construction

There are more than 20 small towns in Shanghai which have formed their own unique resource advantages in the long process of development. For example, Fengjing, Jinshan, as the gateway to the southwest of Shanghai, started the construction of characteristic town from 2010 and explored a unique development path that fully tapped the ecological, cultural and industrial features to gradually stimulate the vitality and core competitiveness of the town. In 2016, as the first nationwide new-type urbanization pilot area in Shanghai, Jinshan took the lead in introducing the “Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Characteristic Towns in Jinshan”, targeting itself as a "pilot city with traffic nodes, industrial integration, service collaborative and resource agglomeration ". Through financial support, Jinshan intensify the transfer payments through the policy of "replaces subsidies with rewards" and
explore the PPP model and actively explore diversified investment and financing channels so as to give full play to its functions.

3.2. Radiation Effect
Following the approval of the first batch of characteristic towns, namely, Fengjing, Chedun and Zhujiajiao in October 2016, six new towns such as Xinchang were approved the second round. Overall, all nine towns are forming a spatial layout around the city, taking on each other functionally, forming a full radiation effect of urban development, as well as easing the pressure of big cities and promoting the integration of urban and rural areas. In the meantime, these towns form their own characteristics in their respective development goals, resource endowments, industrial features, industrialization and development as well as construction methods and operation, and have some differences in development prospects.

3.3. Scientific Distribution
The construction of characteristic towns in Shanghai is based on a multi-point layout and regards the development of small towns as an important focal point for enhancing the city's quality, enriching the connotation of cities and perfecting the urban functions. It has become an important carrier for promoting industrial upgrading and developing a new economy in the region. At present, there has formed Dongping agricultural eco-town in the east, Cheduan cultural and creative town in the south, Zhujiajiao town as "Shanghai Venice" and "Shanghai Hollywood" in the west, Wujing Town in the north as the first bend of the Pujiang River. Moreover, Shanghai International Automobile City is in the Anting Town, and cultural and creative industries are rising at Zhujiajiao Town. Through the accumulation of capital, ecology, talent, culture, tourism and industry, these characteristics town clusters have formed a livable ecological environment with resources that are complementary with each other.

4. Key Problems in the Construction of Shanghai Characteristic Towns

4.1. Weak Infrastructure
Starting from cracking the bottleneck of land resources and the goal of urban-rural dual structure, most of the existing featured towns are located in suburbs, and there is a big gap of infrastructure between rural and urban areas to meet the needs of modern people. Due to the relative lack of public infrastructures and service facilities, the functions such as residence, production, transportation and service in the characteristic towns cannot be effectively integrated, resulting in the lack of attractiveness for talents and projects, which in turn further restrict the updating and supporting of service and facilities. Therefore, at present, the characteristic towns in Shanghai have not formed a strong competitive advantage and have a limited effect on population densification in the process of Shanghai's cosmopolitan construction.

4.2. Lack of Integration of Industry and Town
Due to the differences in resource endowments and development paths, some distinctive towns have obvious innate advantages but make insufficient use of them. These towns often lack characteristic industries with potentials or lack the further development potential in existing industries. On the one hand, industries are small-scale with many categories, dispersed in development and less industrial relevance; the other hand, due to geographical and resource constraints, these industries lack leading enterprises, thus the industry chain is short with little high-end industries and less supporting and cannot form obvious agglomeration effect. Due to the lack of impetus for industrial development, the rate of urban renewal and the improvement of service facilities is relatively low, which in turn causes the failure to achieve sustainable development among industries, towns and people.
4.3. Insufficient cultural background

Some characteristic towns have little long-term planning, as the main characteristic is not obvious and with little cultural heritage. For example, the Thames town and the Netherlands style town engage in a simple fetishism, copy the exotic architectural features, did not retain the original location style, the regional culture and reflect the characteristics and functions of the town its own, resulting in no highlight of ecological and architectural culture. Traditional culture and original flavor were lost in the construction of towns and cities, resulting in the general identity of residents are not high.

4.4. Lack of Overall Coordination

In the process of development, characteristic towns pay attention to becoming a relatively independent and prominent area, lacking overall consideration in strategic coordination and optimal allocation of resources. At present, the key industries in the towns in Shanghai are relatively duplicated. For example, there are overlaps in areas such as cultural and creative industries, ecological agriculture and tourism, which easily lead to waste of resources and low level of regional agglomeration. Therefore, how to achieve the coordination of planning and resource optimization of construction will be one of the key issues to be solved. For example, the development of center towns in suburbs of Shanghai is relatively lagging behind the development of central areas and new towns. The functions of residential, production, transportation and service in those towns are not effectively integrated as comprehensive service systems such as transportation, commerce and trade, medical care and education are still not complete.

5. Initiatives for the Construction of Shanghai Characteristic Towns

According to the people-oriented perspective to integrate the residents, tourists and talents for their life, travel and work, we put forward five proposals from the aspects of the government guidance, infrastructure input, industry and town integration, cultural precedence and coordinated development.

5.1 Government Guidance

The construction of characteristic towns should adhere to the principle of "market-oriented operation under the guidance of the government", which means that the government should strengthen the guidance and service in planning compilation, infrastructure support, guarantee of resource supply, cultural connotation and protection of ecological environment. The establishment of development fund or PPP projects can be considered to encourage all types of enterprises and individuals to participate in the construction of infrastructure and supporting projects in various types through strategic cooperation. The formation of strategic corporation is an effective force and guarantee for funding and construction.

5.2 Infrastructure Input

The improvement of public infrastructure is the basis for developing characteristic towns. Only by filling the shortcomings of infrastructure and public services, small towns can form sufficient resource concentration effect. First, we should strengthen the infrastructure construction of roads, water supply, power supply, communications, waste water treatment and logistics in small towns and strengthen the connection of urban areas with major traffic and transportation hub to form a multi-level transit network; Second, focusing on the construction of projects such as people's livelihood and basic courses, it will continue to improve public service capabilities such as education, medical care, old age support and culture facilities.

5.3 Integration of Industries and Town

The development of characteristic towns fully depends on the development of industries. Only by accelerating the development of dominant industries with advantages can extend the industrial chain, enhance the value chain and promote the industrial integration and development can we realize the establishment and promotion of towns by distinctive industries. Shanghai suburban towns inherently possess the geographical advantages of central cities and metropolitan areas. They are important areas for strategic emerging industries and urban functional transformation and are conducive to attracting
high-level industrial agglomeration and should vigorously develop advanced manufacturing and modern service industry.

5.4 Cultural Precedence
Culture is the soul of the characteristic town, only the town with high cultural value is the real value embodiment and long-lasting charm. Therefore, the construction of characteristic towns in Shanghai should insist on highlighting the culture and its connotation. By preserving and inheriting of customs and cultural heritage, it fully demonstrates the unique historical and cultural charm of the area. Only by letting native and vivid culture embody the "meager exquisiteness of big cities" and let culture become an important development force and purpose can the town become a platform with rich cultural heritage, profound cultural atmosphere, distinctive industrial characteristics and refined ecology.

5.5 Coordination with Each Other
The construction of characteristic townships should be rationally laid out and distributed around the city, forming a coordinated development with adjacent areas. First it is rational to fully rely on and utilize the advantage of different resources, climate, geography and humanities, thus form the interaction between regional characteristics and advantageous resources in different towns to create a town cluster with strong characteristics. Second, the synergistic development of regional advantages in small towns is also needed to establish a linkage mechanism based on the interaction of people, town and nature. In the future, Shanghai should focus on the construction of cultural and creative ecological town in Xinchang, science and technology fashion town in Wujing, the riverside town of Anting, the cultural and creative agricultural tourism town of Dongping, the Luojing leisure agriculture tourism town, and so on.

6. Conclusion
The development of characteristic towns is an important measure taken by Shanghai as a global city to further promote overall economic development and enhance urban image which coordinates the development of big cities and small towns. Based on the empirical study of the existing characteristic towns in Shanghai, this paper explores the resource endowments that the towns are relied on and explores the major bottlenecks in the construction of characteristic towns. From the concept of "people-oriented", this paper put forward measures of the future construction of towns in the layout, characteristics, policy, resources and other aspects.

Overall, the construction and development of characteristic towns is a long-term systematic project that requires joint effects by the government, industries and communities. Only by this way can characteristic towns truly form their own sustainable features. The conclusion of this paper also provides an effective basis and reference for the construction of other characteristic towns in the future.

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