



People enjoy the scenery of the Xujiahui commercial hub from a skywalk. — Wang Rongjiang

Shanghai's skywalks take 'crossing the street' to new levels

Yang Jian

Shanghai's skywalks, an intricate web of elevated pedestrian pathways, started as a concept to separate those on foot from those behind the steering wheel. They have evolved into symbols of a modern metropolis.

One standout example is the recently opened Dongjiadu Road skywalk near the Bund, hailed as "Shanghai's most beautiful pedestrian overpass." It links the Huangpu riverside to the Dongjiadu commercial area, featuring a landscaped, flower-like structure.

Every evening, Li Jia, a 28-year-old graphic designer, takes a leisurely stroll on the Dongjiadu skywalk. "It's not just a bridge," she explained. "It's a part of my daily unwinding ritual. The view, the ambiance — it's therapeutic."

American director Spike Jonze once described the circular footbridge in Luji-azui as futuristic. Known as Shanghai's longest skywalk, it connects towering skyscrapers in the business district in Pudong.

Jonze used the overpass in his science-fiction film "Her," which won the 2014 Oscar for best original screenplay.

"Such a scene couldn't be found in Los Angeles," Jonze said, "but it precisely captures the feeling of a 'future city' that was needed in the movie."

To date, Shanghai has 264 pedestrian overpasses, according to the city's transport commission.

The concept has undergone three major changes since the 1980s, including the dismantling of some skywalks and the transformation of others, said Zhang Sheng, a deputy researcher at the

Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

In the early 1980s, Shanghai was grappling with a tenfold increase in motor vehicles, while its urban road network was expanding a mere 1.5 times. For pedestrians, getting from one side of a road to the other could be difficult and even dangerous.

To address the problem, the city began building pedestrian bridges, starting with the iconic Bund Yan'an Road E. overpass in 1982.

The bridge quickly became a popular viewing spot, drawing 22,000 visitors during rush hour on the first morning it opened. Shanghai's Jiefang Daily reported that many people came to the site to enjoy views of the Huangpu River and to watch the traffic flow on a major thoroughfare.

In 1985, the new oval-shaped

pedestrian bridge on Nanjing Road E. unexpectedly increased customer flow to the nearby No.1 Department Store, as people stopped by for snacks and enjoyed the view.

The first-generation bridges, purely functional in design, marked the onset of a citywide initiative to separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic, Zhang said.

In the heyday of the 1980s, nearly 100 skywalks were built across the city at key intersections, such as Siping, Tianmu, Nanjing and Xizang roads. About 10 percent of them were subsequently dismantled to make way for urban redevelopment.

"Those skywalks were makeshift solutions to congestion that came to mar the evolving urban landscape by obstructing pedestrian views and