

disrupting the city's esthetic harmony," Zhang explained.

In 2008, the demolition of the Hainan Road-Sichuan Road N. skywalk came on the heels of large commercial development in the area, which hindered pedestrian movement.

By the early 2000s, a second generation of skywalks emerged. They were no longer just stand-alone structures, and their more rational designs complemented the esthetic vision of the city.

The Huashan Road-Yan'an Road skywalk, built in 1999, is a circular steel-framed structure, while the Yan'an Road E.-Xizang Road S. skywalk is supported in the middle by elevated pillars, facilitating pedestrian flow in all four directions at the intersection.

Today, the third generation of skywalks represents a paradigm shift. The walkways have become multifunctional spaces, blending commerce, leisure and esthetics.

"The transformation of skywalks mirrors Shanghai's urban development trajectory," said Zhang. "They have emerged as vibrant public spaces, hosting art installations and cultural events, and offering panoramic city views."

In addition, they have become integral to the city's commercial fabric, linking shopping districts.

Xujiahui's overpass, bridging multiple shopping malls, has revitalized the area by facilitating easy access for shoppers, with its sweeping curves and glass-paneled sides mirroring the flow of the city below. At night, the overpass is transformed into a luminous ribbon, its pathway lit by a gentle glow provided by energy-efficient LED lights.

In the city center, the theme of the Chongqing Road S. skywalk reflects the city flower, the magnolia. Its vertical greenery and LED-lit magnolia patterns enhance its night-time appeal. Taikang Road's overpass has become a canvas for artists, with its colorful staircase art.

Shanghai's skywalk evolution parallels global trends. Cities like Calgary in Canada and Minneapolis and St Paul in the United States have developed extensive skywalk systems, patterned on the Chester Rows in England, which were built in the 13th century and are believed to be the earliest elevated sidewalks.

However, critics have voiced concerns that skywalks draw life away from street-level activities. Renowned architect Jan Gehl and urbanist Gil Penalosa have chided such designs for creating a "defensive posture" toward urban life.

In response, US cities like Cincinnati and Baltimore have dismantled parts of their skywalk systems, seeking to

revitalize ground-level urban activity.

Unlike its global counterparts, Shanghai's skywalks are being designed to fuse both vertical and horizontal urban spaces in utilitarian harmony.

"They enhance, rather than replace, the street-level experience," said Wang Lei, who oversees the Xujiahui skywalk project.

The third-generation pedestrian bridges in Shanghai, known as sky corridors, are revolutionizing urban commercial spaces, Wang added.

Designers are integrating green spaces, public utilities and interactive entertainment into these structures, combining sightseeing, leisure and business, said Wang.

The Lianhua Road sky corridor, for instance, connects key commercial facilities both on and below ground. It also directly links with the Lianhua Road Metro station.

Similar projects have been created for other rising commercial hubs, such as the Caojiadu area in Putuo District and Xinjiangwancheng in Yangpu District.

Since its opening in 2013, the Lujiazui skywalk has seen daily average foot traffic of more than 200,000 people, reaching up to 500,000 on holidays. It has largely boosted access to adjacent shopping centers, such as the SIFC and Super Brand malls.

Looking ahead, Shanghai plans to expand its skywalk network, integrating elevators, smart technologies and green spaces. Last year, 38 existing pedestrian bridges across the city were upgraded with the installation of 106 elevators.

The renovation of pedestrian bridges on Zhaojiabang and Wanning roads to make them more "age-friendly" has started, marking the beginning of a citywide campaign.

Plans include smart lighting systems that adapt to natural light conditions and interactive digital installations for public engagement.

Sustainability is also a key focus, with proposals for solar panels and rainwater harvesting systems on new skywalks.

The 4.5-kilometer North Bund skywalk in Hongkou District, the city's inaugural double-decker skywalk, unveiled its demonstration section last month.

Over 200 programmed lights on the skywalk create a rhythmic "North Bund galaxy" effect at night, enhancing the ambiance of the waterfront.

"The emphasis is on making skywalks more than just pathways — transforming them into hubs of urban life and interaction," an official with the transport commission said.



The circular footbridge in Lujiazui. — IC



The Xujiahui skywalk. — IC



The double-decker skywalk on the North Bund. — IC