



Hangzhou - Old views (1912-1949): from the late Qing Dynasy to the Republic of China.

Leisure Life and Space of Contemporary Hangzhou

From 1980 to 2014

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Abstract: Hangzhou is an outstanding city for its widely recognized leisure development. This paper attempts to give a brief introduction of leisure life in contemporary Hangzhou, focusing on the shifts in many aspects through three decades, when enormous economic, social, and culture changes have taken place in China. Are there any newly emerged contents of leisure life associated with those rapid transformations? Moreover, what are the notable changes of leisure life in the spatial dimension? Collecting 58 senior citizens' personal memory of their leisure life in Hangzhou by in-depth interviews, these questions are answered and the results are visualized on maps.

Key words: leisure, contemporary urban space, Hangzhou, individual memory.

Introduction

Hangzhou is the capital city of Zhejiang Province and one of the seven ancient capitals of China. It covers an area of 16.596 km² with a population of 6.60 million. A recent research has selected Hangzhou as one of ten most outstanding cities around the world for their leisure development.² This might be a slightly exaggerating finding; however, Hangzhou's leisure life looks attractive to most of its visitors if they are invited to have a cup of tea in any public space around the West Lake (Fig.1). In the authors' own experience, every foreign designer or researcher coming to these places would be touched by its civic atmosphere. A PhD dissertation conducted a survey of 626 local citizens of Hangzhou.³ It claims that, more than 72% of the citizens describe themselves as "happy", which represents high level of satisfaction with their social life. Most citizens (more than 85%) think Hangzhou hosts various types of leisure activities, has well distributed leisure facilities, rich atmosphere of recreation and a safe environment, and leads the trend of leisure life around the country. In a word, local citizens' perception of their life is coherent with the government's slogan: this is a city of elegant life. However, it is with a gradually improving process that Hangzhou achieved such great success in providing recreation opportunities for its citizens. This paper attempts to give a brief introduction of leisure life of contemporary Hangzhou from 1980 to 2014, focused on two topics: shifts in leisure content and changes in rankings of leisure venues. From literature reviews, it is found that currently available records of Hangzhou's contemporary history are mostly about social, political and

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2. SONG 2012.

3. CHEN 2013.

economic changes in the form of abstract description or statistic data. Therefore, finding high-resolution spatial information of leisure life in this city is very difficult. Due to the lack of data, the authors decided to collect vivid descriptions of urban public life by conducting in-depth interviews with individual senior citizens. This method, a.k.a. the oral history method, is well used in historical studies. These interviews were structured around two sets of questions. First, in the past three decades, enormous economic, social, and culture changes have taken place in China. Are there any newly emerged contents of leisure life associated with those rapid transformations? Second, are there any notable changes of leisure life in the spatial dimension? The four sub-questions are as follows: 1) Has the ranking of important leisure sites altered significantly? 2) Has the commercial core of the city shifted? 3) What is the impact of government's recent key projects on this ranking order? Are the high-profile projects equally welcomed by the citizens? To answer these questions, we collected 58 citizens' personal memory of their leisure life in Hangzhou. Each of them has been continually living in Hangzhou for more than three decades, which means they are either middle aged people or elders. They were asked to report their personal leisure life in three periods: 1980's, 1990's, and now. Both preference and location information are collected. Government documents and other literature are used as secondary source of information. To ensure the reliability of data, we pick subjects from 17 public spaces evenly spread in five districts of Hangzhou. A total of 100 samples were selected, among which only 58 was valid, resulting a sample efficiency ratio of 58%. The reasons for the low efficiency ratio are multitude. Some of the interviews were terminated because of privacy issues; some of the interviews are not included because some key information cannot be recalled. The "free listing" method is used to organize the oral information. It is a technique being used regularly in recent years by ethnography researchers to find key contents out of certain questions.⁴ The frequently mentioned sites and places from survey records will be picked out for statistic analysis. And the results will be visually categorized on maps afterwards.

What is different in terms of leisure style and content?

Background knowledge: two key shapers of leisure life shift

The first shaper is the gradual increase of leisure time. In March 1994, P.R. China's six-day work week was changed to five and a half work days per week. In March 1995, the working hour was reduced further into five work days per week, which is on par with the global average. In September 1999, a new holiday system was adopted, creating a new style of leisure life, which is referred to as the golden week tour effect. By combining official holidays and swapping weekends, three continuous seven-day holiday periods per year were created. In December 2007, the golden week in May was canceled but three other traditional holidays are brought in, which makes a total of 11 official holidays per year. These changes are significant for citizens.

4. CHICK AND DONG 2009, p. 31.

They have more time off from work for leisure activities. A case study collecting data from Shanghai, Tianjin and Harbin found out that after the implementation of the five working day policy, the structure of time distribution has been greatly changed: compared to 1990's, in 2000's the time allocated to leisure exceed the time for work⁵. The second shaper is the rapid multiplication of leisure spaces along with the massive expansion of built area in the city. Talking about open space, statistically speaking, the amount of green space per person has been increasing dramatically (table 1).

Table 1: green space data⁶

year	population (million)	total green space area (hectare)	Green space area per person (m ²)
1985	5.4305	417	0.077
1995	5.9796	657	0.110
2005	6.6045	2564	0.388

Meanwhile, many key projects, led mainly by the government, were completed.⁷ The first one is West Lake. It is the first free-of-charge AAAAA Scenic Area in China starting from 2002. It was also inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO World Heritage Centre as cultural property in 2011. The second one is Xi-xi Wetland. This wetland protection project, launched in 2003, started a new type of leisure space: leisure tourism integrated with ecological protection (Fig.2). The third is the Lakefront sub-district of Hangzhou with a development concept called CRBD (central recreational business district) (Fig.3). As this district is in an especially sensitive place, in between the West Lake's best scenery and the downtown area, many firms were involved in its design, which started in 2000, such as the Tongji University Urban Design Group, SWA and JERDE. It is a pedestrian oriented development featured with a tunnel underneath the lake to free the streets along the lake for visitors. The fourth is Mei-jia-wu, a rural settlement located at the west side of the lake with hilly topography and originally functioned as tea plantations. The concept of its development is outskirts leisure space integration, which promotes an alternative way of scenery protection and tourism design. Instead of moving the natives out of the scenery area, it transformed the villages into a good place for catering the visitors. Starting from 2003, it gradually became a famous catering and leisure venue for out-of-towners such as Shanghainese to spend a cozy weekend. Other area around the West Lake, such as the Qin-zi-wu area, imitated its development model and achieved equal success (Fig.4). The last project the authors would like to present is the riverside of the Great Canal. Hangzhou is the beginning point of China's Great Canal, and it has recently been inscribed on the World Heritage List in June 2014. The improvement of its riverside also started in 2005. The water quality and linear green spaces has been tremendously improved (Fig.5). However, most of the old buildings along the canal

5. WANG 2003.

6. HANGZHOU CITY BUREAU OF STATISTICS 1980-2005.

7. LI 2007.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

(mainly industrial and residential buildings) were demolished in 1990's and only a few have been kept and cherished by today's citizens. A great deal of culture buildings were also built in the last ten years. Some of them have keen relation with local culture, such as the China Umbrella Museum (Fig.6), the China Knives, Scissors and Swords Museum, and the Hangzhou Cuisine Museum. Most of them are integrated with the key open spaces we talked about above. One exception is the public building cluster in Qian River New Town, which is a new CBD located in the southeast of downtown, on the north bank of Qian-tang River. The cluster contains a new library, an opera house, a museum, a youth centre and other key facilities (Fig.7). And the centre of this cluster is the new City Council building, while it may change its function into a regular office building for political reasons.

Main changes of leisure style and content

At home or go outside?

We are going to discuss three issues here. The first question derives from the classification of leisure activities. Based on the types of supply places, the leisure activities have been divided into three kinds:

- (1) self-supplied activities, such as listening to music or playing cards.
- (2) Socially supplied activities, e.g., the ones that benefit from the non-profit public leisure facilities and services provided by the public sector, such as museums and parks.
- (3) Commercially supplied activities, which refers to the ones that rely on the facilities and services provided by the private sector, such as dinning out.⁸

This division can be further distilled into two types in perspective of place: at home or go outside. Therefore, we collected the following information in the interviews: "please identify whether you spend more time at home or outside for leisure for the time periods of 1980's, 1990's and now". For statistical purposes, we designate "spend more time at home" as 1, "equal" as 0, and "spend less time at home" as -1. Therefore, by calculating the mean value of each period, we can make a judgment about the place preference across time. It is found that generally speaking, people who prefer staying at home is the majority group. However, the mean value decreases across time, which means more and more people prefer to go outside for recreation nowadays compared to past (table 2). This is a good sign that reflects the great improvement of leisure venues in Hangzhou.

Table 2: Leisure space preference: at home or go outside

preference	80's	90's	now
at home (1)	45	41	37
go outside (-1)	11	13	14
equal (0)	2	4	7
average value	0.586	0.482	0.396

8. Li 2003.

Fitness as an important component of recreation

From casual life experience, the authors believe fitness is gradually becoming an important component of recreation. The public sector's "National Fitness Route" projects starting from 1996 spent a large amount of money each year to create new places in public open spaces with fitness equipments. According to the national economic and social development statistical bulletin, by 2001, 100% neighborhoods and 98% of outskirt villages/towns in Hangzhou had set up sports institutions for the mass. In the survey, we asked people to recollect their fitness behavior, also in three periods. From table 2, we found that the proportion of people who exercise regularly has gained a significant growth. The frequency of fitness activities has also been increasing. This small sample report reflected the influence of fitness spaces on people's lifestyle. Meanwhile, besides doing exercises in the open space, hill hiking is also a popular way to exercise in Hangzhou. Hiking maps which indicate the passes around the northern and southern hills around West Lake are very popular among local citizens (table 3).

Table 3: fitness habit and frequency data

fitness habit	80's	90's	now
no habit	43	40	20
have habit	15	18	38
percentage of people who exercise regularly	25.90%	31.00%	65.50%
total frequency every week	45	78	242
mean frequency every week	3	4.33	6.37

New contents of leisure activities across time

When analyzing the survey records, we also paid attention to the content change of leisure activities across the time. When comparing the 1990's activities with 1980's, we discovered that having tea by the West Lake became popular; theatres and cinemas started to become common destination places for recreation. When comparing today's activities with 1990's, we found leisure activities have become more diversified. Two important new activities emerged: dinning out in the villages near the West Lake, and shopping in department stores and shopping malls.

What has changed in rankings of leisure venues?

Background knowledge: three main episodes urban transformation

Before going through our key findings, it will be helpful to describe three main episodes of Hangzhou's urban transformation as background knowledge.

First, Hangzhou experienced a huge expansion in the last three decades (Fig.8). Major construction projects started after the Reform and Opening-up of China in 1980's all over mainland China. In the case of Hangzhou, the urban transformation can be divided into three phases. (1) The reconstruction in the old downtown area (inside the old city wall on the east side of West Lake). (2) The expansion from the old downtown to its surrounding districts, which enlarged the built area of the city greatly. (3) Two surrounding towns merged into the built area of Hangzhou. They are Xiaoshan district



Fig. 7

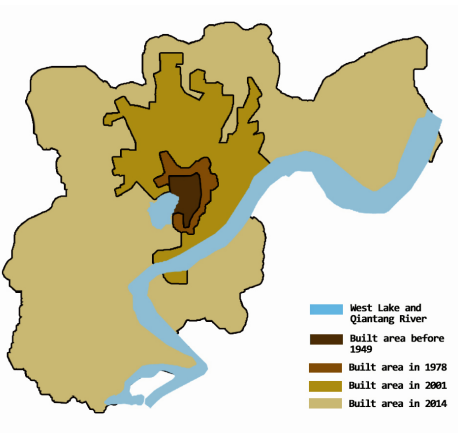


Fig. 8

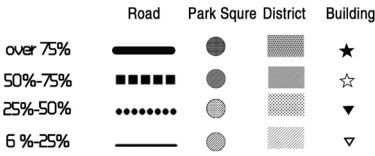


Fig. 10 Legend for the ranking maps

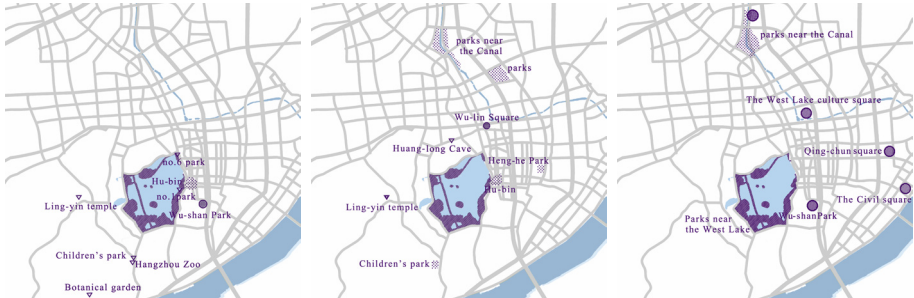


Fig. 9 Outdoor space ranking maps. 1980 - 1990 - nowadays.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12. Public building ranking maps. 1980 - 1990 - nowadays.

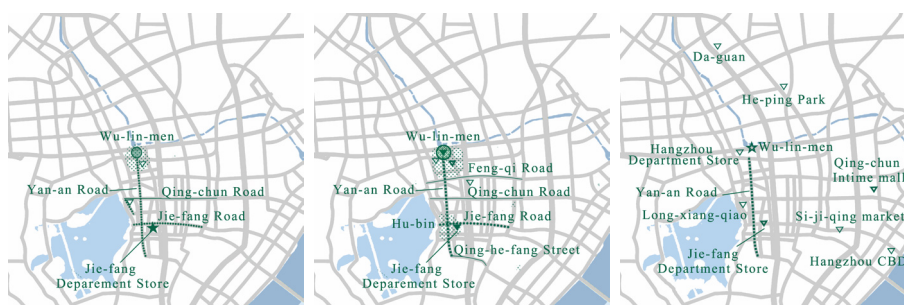


Fig. 13. Public building ranking maps. 1980 - 1990 - nowadays.



Fig. 12. Public building ranking maps. 1980 - 1990 - nowadays.



Fig. 13. Public building ranking maps. 1980 - 1990 - nowadays.

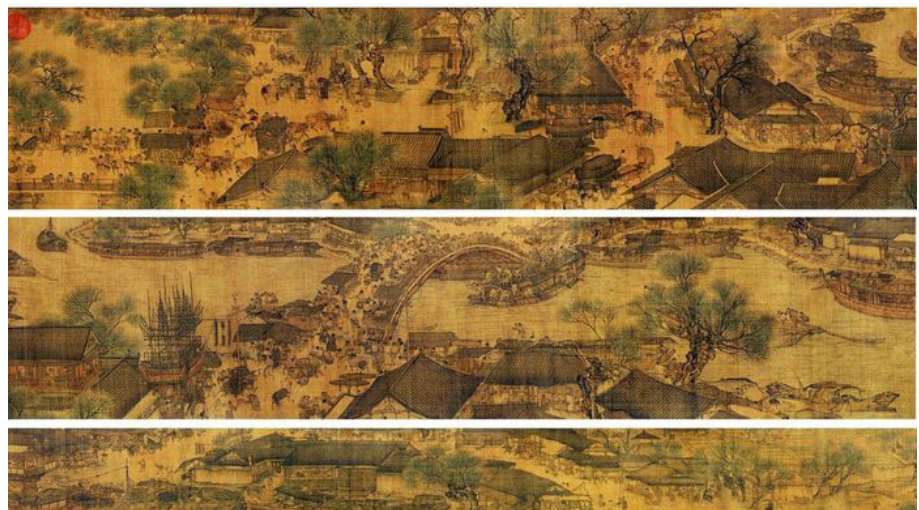


Table 4: ranking shift through time

in the south bank of Qian-tang River and Yuhang District in the east and west of Hangzhou. This great expansion of city in a relatively short period has led to two significant results for leisure life: amenity places became sparser; travel time sharply increased for everyone, prompting an urge for new sub-centers to emerge.

The second episode is the transition of relative location of West Lake. It was situated at the west of city wall in the beginning of 20th century as a suburban recreation area. However, with the growth of the city, it gradually became a part of the inner city core, resembling a pearl surrounded by the flesh of a mussel. This affected the use pattern of West Lake deeply, giving Hangzhou a distinct city image, while also bringing congestion to its transportation system. It can be regarded as “L” shaped grids, with the lake and hills surrounding it becoming huge obstacles for cross-city traffic.

The last episode is the evolution of its water system. Actually, the cities and towns in the Yangzi river delta have a common geographical morphology: its densely distributed water channels. During the process of expansion, some river channels disappeared for various reasons, such as lack of space for a new road, or severe pollution of the water. Start from 2000's, the vision of government has changed from exploiting water source for economic development to protecting and cherishing the water system. In the 2010's Shanghai Expo, the achievement of Hangzhou in water management was summarized as the “Five-Water Landscape System”. The five waters were referring to Qian-tang River, Great Canal, West Lake, Hangzhou bay and Xi-xi Wetland.

Main changes in rankings of leisure sites

The following findings in this chapter are derived from analysis of our survey data. According to the frequency of being recognized as main sites for leisure activities in the three aforementioned time periods, we rank the places in four categories: open space, public building, retail place, and water body. To visualize the site rankings with location information, maps are drawn with the same method as in “the Image of the City”⁹, with labels reflecting the frequency of the elements (Fig.9). It is found that not all the major projects led by government are equally well accepted by the citizens.

Open Space

By reviewing historical records, we found that the number and total area of green parks and squares have been increasing dramatically. So it's not surprising that the well accepted open spaces of Hangzhou also show an expanding trend through time (Fig10). The open spaces near the West Lake have always been popular leisure venues. Other recently constructed parks and squares along the Great Cannal and Qian-Tang River are also welcomed by citizens (Fig.11).

Public Building

A similar expanding trend applies to public buildings (Fig.12). The most recognized public buildings spread from the old downtown area to the surrounding parts

9. LYNCH 1960.

of the city, providing citizens many cultural places to visit in their leisure time, such as libraries, museums, and cinemas. A special type of public buildings has been favorably received in Hangzhou, which is the tea house around the West Lake. It has not only been used by the citizens, but also been a popular destination for tourists from nearby cities.

Retail Place

We divide retail places into two sub-groups: streets and buildings. Generally speaking, the once concentrated retail layout became dispersed along with the growth of the city (Fig. 13). Recently, many shopping malls have arisen and are well accepted by citizens. There are obvious ranking changes in this category. The old commercial core was Jie-fang Road in the southeast of the old downtown area. It has now shifted to the north. Yan-an Road and Wu-Lin-men Square become the new commercial core. Qing-he-fang Street is also a special case of ranking change. It was an important site for citizens' everyday life in 1990's, but has now become a commercial street for tourists only. Since the launch of this government-led renovation project in 2002, the effect of this intervention has been negative instead of positive.

Water Body

For the last ten years, the local government has been making great efforts to integrate the water system into public open spaces. There is a worldwide trend to transform riverside lands from industrial into recreational uses. In the "Five-Water Landscape System", four elements are within the main urban area of Hangzhou: Qian-tang River, Great Canal, West Lake, and Xi-xi Wetland. Which one has benefited most from government's renewal program through the past three decades? We found that the West Lake has always been the most important water in Hangzhou¹⁰. However, the Great Canal has experienced a great lift as the main leisure site and caught up with the West Lake (table 4). Qian-tang River and Xi-xi Wetland's image as leisure sites goes up slowly and steadily, but their images are much weaker than the former two elements. Possible reasons to explain this difference might be: Xi-xi wetland is a park where visitors need to pay entrance fees, which may deter its users; the riverside of Qian-tang River are vehicle lanes with heavy traffic, so compared to the Great Canal, it does not have a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Summary

This paper gives a brief introduction of leisure life in contemporary Hangzhou, focusing on the shifts in many aspects through three decades. It is hoped that this case study is able to depict the great transformation of Hangzhou's contemporary leisure life with sufficient social and culture background information, so that western readers will not only get a better understanding of Hangzhou but also gain some knowledge on

10. Another paralleled research shows that West Lake is the dominant image elements of Hangzhou - the frequency of it in mental map is more than 83% from 66 samples. From: Xiaoling Dai, *City Image of Contemporary Hangzhou in the perspective of timeline*, Architecture and Culture, 2015/2 (forthcoming).

the special characteristics of the public life and public spaces in contemporary China.

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