

A historical perspective on National Spirit and the Shape of Public Space : the experience from the evolution of the Central Park in Chongqing, China (1928-2013)

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Background and sources:

From the the theory of the production of the space which is created by Henri Lefebvre, there is a reconciliation between mental space which is the space of the philosopher and the real space which is the physical and social spheres. Basic on the understanding above the modern public space is not a fixed place but an open and extended system which is continuously constructed by the national spirit, local culture and economic during the dynamic evolution. What is also means, the public spaces are concentrated reflect to the local experiences.

The evolution of China's modern public spaces has a unique process which is closely related to the transformation of the national spirit since modern times. Specifically, the urban park of China did not come out from the functional requirement of modern city but a national landscape in a local context. And the following process of the park also affected by the specific idea of nations. As a physical space which is the representation of local culture and public sphere, the historical perspective on the public park of China can give a general picture of the evolution process of modern China's public spaces since the 20th century.

Objectives :

This research is mainly focused on a typical public spaces of China——Chongqing's Central Park which is the earliest modern municipal park and the most important area during the urban renewal of Chongqing city now. Besides using Chongqing's Central Park as the main case study there will be some more discussion on other modern public spaces of China to give a more comprehensive description. In

this article there are two core concepts which is the physical spaces and the national spirit.

Methodology :

The research on the evolution of spaces should be discussed in the field including country, history, society and culture factors. Using the theoretical model which is created by Henri Lefebvre and Edward W. Soja, this thesis tries to give an analyses on the space from three dimensions including the physical space dimension, social space dimension and spiritual space dimension. Besides the analysis model, this thesis tries to use diversified methods such like looking up history data, interviewing and site investigating to restore the process of the evolution of Chongqing's Central Park.

Main Structures :

The thesis consists of three sections. In the first section the establishment of Chongqing's Central Park in the period of the Republic of China will be discussed. As the first modern municipal park established in Chongqing in 1928, it was not a space that established on the traditional foundation of the national history and the culture. In fact, it was transplanted and imitated from the west following with the first modern park of China being established in the foreign settlement in Shanghai as a medium for showing the advantages of west modern society. On the other side, the Chinese garden also had a strong nationalism consciousness. The War monuments spaces were settled in many park at this time. From the study of typical urban park, it is clear to see the complexity context of Chinese urban park at the initial period and how the special national spirit shapes the urban public spaces of China which is totally different from the western context.

In the second section there will be a deep description on the spatial forms, space practice and spatial control policy of Chongqing's Central Park in the Mao Zedong era (1949-1978) to show the obvious change of public parks following the transformation of national spirit. At this time the understanding of the Chinese urban park also had its own context. Firstly, it was considered to be a dangerous spaces and needs to be tight controlled by the authorities. Secondly, as a physical object which is introduced from the west, the urban park was criticized in the field of ideology

especially in the 1960s. Thirdly, because of the particular country need on agricultural production the urban park was even imagined to be agricultural space which was totally absurd.

In the last section the national spirit was converted to a new state during the post-mao era from 1978. The privatization and commercialization process in Chongqing's Central Park will be analyzed from the visual angle of critical thinking. On the other side a variety of community life had been expressed in the park and the daily life gave more distribution to the park's inner space forms. During this typical Chinese rapid urbanization times there was a new understanding on the urban park and the word of 'park' had diverse meanings which were more related to some business development project to show the metaphor of a natural lifestyle.