The Construction of Place Meaning of Historic Parks – A Case Study of People's Park in Guangzhou, China

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Abstract. Historical parks carry the memories and emotions of local people, and have a historical status and research value that cannot be ignored. This paper introduces the concept of place significance, and based on systematically sorting out related literature, selects Guangzhou People's Park as the case study, and empirically explores the construction of place significance of it by using the Q method. It is found that the value perception of the place meaning of the People's Park includes five dimensions: historical display, cultural identity, landscape recreation, physical and mental health, and leisure experience. The study on the perceived value of users of historical parks can provide a reference and some suggestions for historical parks to highlight the city's image and historical culture as well as to meet the needs of urban leisure life in the context of urban construction.

1. Introduction

China's historical parks were born in 1840-1949, which is more than one hundred years of change and renovation, the emergence of urban parks is the medium of the turnaround of the development of China's modern gardens, the transformation from classical to modern, witnessed the changes of local development and carried the memories and emotions of the local people, which has a non-negligible historical status and research value.

Historical parks, as time-honored urban green leisure spaces, have an irreproducible historical value and local connection compared to ordinary city parks, and whether this historical value will be transformed into a local identity has a significant emotional value, which becomes a unique value perception of historical parks. A specific "space" becomes a "place" when it is endowed with value. In the face of the ever-changing "people-place relationship", a large number of concepts have emerged to interpret the interaction between people and the environment, such as Oedipus complex, rootedness, the spirit of place, local identity, sense of place, local dependence, local attachment, etc., which are all focused on the individual's experience of the place, and express a certain aspect of the people-place relationship from their perspectives. This paper introduces the users' perception of the value of historical parks and attempts to explore the emotional connection between historical parks and local users by introducing the concept of a sense of place, which reflects the basic process of human-place interaction in historical parks as a special type of public space. What’s more, the study can provide planning suggestions for the future regeneration and construction of historic parks, which is an important part of city building.

2. Place Meaning and perceived value of the historic park

2.1. Place Meaning

Meaning of place is the basis for understanding other concepts of sense of place, such as place attachment and place identity [1-2]. The development and change of urban space everywhere reflects the interrelationship between the meaning of place and identity, and the construction of place and identity interact with each other, cause and affect each other, and together they define the meaning of urban space [3]. In the 1970s, Relph (1976) had suggested that a sense of place can be constructed in four dimensions: static environmental setting/physical environment, activity, meaning, and spirit of place [4]. Subsequently, the concept of sense of place was further refined. From the residents' point of view, Williams (2010) decomposed sense of place into four dimensions: neighbourhood, community rootedness, community emotion, physical environment and residents' health [5]. Domestic research on the meaning of place has a certain foundation, mainly focusing on the composition of the meaning of place and the influencing factors of the construction of the meaning of place [1, 6-8]. These studies show that the construction of place meaning is closely related to the population and society.

2.2. Perceived value of historic parks

In recent years the value of historical parks by China's growing concern, Tianjin, Qingdao, Shanghai, Chongqing and other modern cities first port city and by the influence...
of foreign construction of the city's historical parks has been a preliminary study. The research mostly adopts typical case studies, big data analysis, behavioral notes, questionnaires, interviews, and other methods to reveal the park visitors' perceptions of their multiple values, and to provide theoretical guidance for the protection and renewal of modern parks [9-10]. These studies show that the value perception of historical parks is in its initial stage, and few of them explore the value of historical parks from the perspective of place meaning.

3. Study Area

People's Park (also known as First Park and Central Park), located in the old city of Guangzhou, with a total area of 44,600 square meters, was built in 1918 and is the earliest comprehensive park established in Guangzhou (Figure 1). The transformation of People's Park in December 2020 as part of the landscape optimization and upgrading initiative with the strategy of "revealing axes, opening up interfaces, improving space, and enhancing quality" has attracted opposition and questions from many experts and members of the public. One of the biggest changes, the most controversial point is its "sparse grassland" design, the project moved 213 trees, and new trees were only 20. Many experts believe that it is only from the perspective of the landscape, does not respect heritage conservation, damages the historical appearance of the historic park, reduces the amount of green and ecological benefits, and the transformation of the original memories of the public for the People's Park. This incident shows that the upgrading of historical parks needs to deal with more complex value perceptions and local relationships. Taking People's Park as an object, this paper explores the users' value perception of the park from the perspective of local meaning, to understand the users' thoughts and feelings, and how local meaning is embodied in the space of the historical park, forming the experience perception through the environment, individuals and interpersonal relationships.

4. Data and methods

Q Method (Q Sorting Technique) is a psychological method with a theoretical exploratory function aimed at exploring human subjectivity. This paper will systematically and quantitatively examine data with the help of it.

4.1. Selection of Q samples

Firstly, the researcher collected 20 papers and journals on the meaning of place and combined them with online comments about Guangzhou People's Park and statements obtained from semi-structured interviews in the field to form 45 declarative statements. Second, to minimize the bias caused by the researcher's subjectivity, three experts and scholars were invited to screen the statements, delete those with low relevance, and categorize and refine them, so that a total of 28 statements were finally identified in six user-perceived categories of place meaning.

4.2. Selection of P samples

The P sample is the main body of respondents. Q method considers that the representative views of a particular issue are often limited, and the views of niche groups can be extended to a larger range, so the P sample size tends to be smaller. In conducting the selection of P samples, a group of people in the range of 15-70 years old with strong recognition ability was selected, and 50 urban residents were selected as the research subjects concerning the gender ratio of China's total population and the distribution of each age structure in the seventh national census. Finally, 49 valid samples were obtained, which met the requirements of the number of P samples.

4.3. Perform Q-sorting

Q categorization is essentially a scoring sorting operation, where the study categorized the scores into 9 hierarchical categories from most disagree to most agree, from -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4, where a higher number indicates a higher level of agreement. The P-sample was then asked to score the 28 Q statements according to the 9 hierarchical categories (Figure 2). To ensure the validity of the Q classification, the subjects were introduced to the basic concepts, categories, and meanings of each Q statement, and the criteria for scoring and ranking were explained in detail before the classification was carried out. In addition, after the Q-sorting was completed, the P-sample's reasons for choosing the "least agree" and "most agree" options were investigated to explore the P-sample's deeper opinions and to supplement the Q-sample.
5. Perceived local significance of People’s Park

5.1. Factor analyses

In this study, factor analysis was calculated mainly with the help of PQ Method software, to derive the eigenvalues of each sample and their explanatory proportions. Based on KAISE law, the first five factors were selected for factor rotation in this study.

Based on the PQ Method software, which provides two types of factor rotation including Manual Rotation of the Factors and Varimax Rotation of the Factors, the number of sample records falling on each factor was obtained. (As in Table 1) Among them, the number of samples obtained from factor 1 is the largest, while the number of samples obtained from factor 2, factor 3, factor 4, and factor 5 are not less than 2 with significant illustrative significance, so all the five factors are saved.

Table 1. Proportion of explanatory variables and number of landing points.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>F3</th>
<th>F4</th>
<th>F5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of sample records falling on the factor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of sample explained (%)</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>340</td>
<td>000</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>175</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the results presented in the factor rotation above, deriving the scores for each proposition (Figure 3), it can be found that the respondents’ cognitive attitudes towards the different propositions in the above five factors are not highly uniform and concentrated, but rather, they show a diversified pattern.

5.2. Factor interpretation

The interpretation of the Q sample needs to be combined with the propositions and scores of the extreme options, and its interpretation principle is based on the content of positive cognition, with low-scoring sentences playing an auxiliary supporting role. To facilitate the analysis of the results, the respondents were selected to focus on the statement statements that they thought they most and least agreed with, and ultimately five basic perspectives were summarized which mainly reflected in historical display, cultural identity, landscape recreation, physical and mental health, and leisure experience.

5.2.1. Historical display (F1)

The first factor, defined as historical presentation, explains samples 3, 4, 5, 10, 17, 23, 30, 33, 34, and 41. This perspective mainly reveals that respondents identify more strongly with the history of the park as well as with its cultural connotations, but perceive the park’s uniqueness and irreplaceability to be weaker.

5.2.2. Cultural identity (F2)

The second factor, defined as cultural identity, explains samples 20, 22, 23, 33, 34, and 44. This perspective mainly reveals the identification of the user groups in the park giving people emotions and the value of the park in terms of cultural construction. The groups that felt cultural identity perceived the park as familiar and inward-looking.
5.2.3. Landscape recreation (F3)

The third factor defined as landscape recreation explains samples 1, 7, 13, 18, and 28. This perspective mainly reveals that the park environment meets the recreational needs of users such as cooling, viewing, walking, and leisure gathering.

5.2.4. Physical and mental health (F4)

The fourth factor, named physical and mental health, explains samples 38, 42, and 43. This perspective reveals that the park can relax users physically and mentally, provides opportunities for socializing with people, and that users are provided with sufficient mental comfort and spiritual rest, but the demographic's participation in the construction of the park is low, and the park's significance is not irreplaceable.

5.2.5. Leisure experience (F5)

The fifth factor, defined as leisure experience, explains samples 6, 27, and 31. This perspective mainly reveals the park's support of personal leisure activities for the user group. The user focuses on negative attitudes towards the cognitive and emotional experience of the landscape, which shows that this group places more importance on activity needs.

6. Conclusion

The significance of parks goes far beyond adding greeneries to the city. For a long time, people's definition of urban parks has included various functions such as "public green space", "recreation", "beautification of the city" and "ecological benefits". The definition of urban parks has long included various functions such as "public green space", "recreation", "city beautification", "ecological benefits", etc., but the value of parks has been neglected from the perspectives of human-land interaction, human local emotions, and individual user needs. This paper summarises five dimensions of the local significance of historical parks, which are historical display, cultural identity, landscape recreation, physical and mental health, and leisure experience.

Firstly, unique historical and cultural resources and experiences can leave a deeper impression on users. The history and culture of the park also make it a place for users to understand the heritage of local history and culture, and to learn and experience. In the renewal and transformation of historical parks, we need to pay attention to the role of historical display landscape protection, such as the park's stone lions, music pavilions, sculptures, etc., these landscape environments may not be modern and follow the trend, but the characteristics of the local history and culture show, but also the continuation of the historical lineage of the carrier.

Secondly, historical parks have a precious sense of time precipitation, where flowers, plants, and various architectural constructions are full of residents' memories of their own past years, leaving traces of historical erosion and the passage of time. These historical and cultural landscapes play an irreplaceable role in increasing the cultural identity of the park and the city.

Thirdly, a charming landscape can attract people to the park. Parks in a variety of leisure areas in different landscapes can attract people of different recreational effects. The small square in the park can be used for people to gather and play, and park trails and small corners can let people enjoy the landscape alone and quietly, in the process of renewal and development should fully reflect the richness of the landscape environment to meet a variety of recreational needs.

What's more, different from the closed environment of the indoor and street atmosphere of the city, the park has fresh air and a relaxed atmosphere, people who come to the park can feel relaxed. Parks are also a platform for people to communicate and provide opportunities for different people to interact, which plays an important role in improving people's mental health.

Finally, historic parks have the basic function of parks for people to relax and unwind. The recreational space of the park provides users with a good platform for activities and exercise and enables them to participate in a variety of leisure and recreational activities, and the park's plaza is a space for users to relax and congregate, giving them a high-quality experience.

The construction of parks is an important way to practice the concept of "park city", which is an important part of building a high-quality city with a beautiful environment and ecological livability. The construction and development of parks reflect the change of thinking and the progress of ideological concepts. At present, China's research on the value of historical parks is in its infancy and still needs more exploration. The construction of park cities not only ought to meet new social demands and improve in scale and quality, but also needs to pay more attention to the contemporary value of the stock of park space, especially historical parks.

References