

An Exploration of the Relationship between the City and Residents: The Case Study of Yongling

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Abstract: *This paper argues that the public space plays an important role in enhancing the relationship between the city and its residents or potential residents in addition to providing living or working space and promoting physical and mental health. Thus, this new function shows the symbiotic relationship between the city's development and residents' own happiness. The case of Yongling also shows that public space construction is a dynamic process which needs the contributions from all citizens rather than only that from city managers or governors.*

Keywords: *Yongling; City and Residents; Relationship*

1. Introduction

Yongling is a public space that integrates a historical relic, a park and a cultural exhibition hall in Chengdu, Sichuan province, China. It shows the stone carvings arts and history of Kingdom of Former Shu in ancient China and also provides the citizens and visitors a place for recreation and education.^[1] Many urban planners and designers have realized the important role of public space in increasing residents' activity space, psychical and mental health in an individualistic perspective. However, the relationship between the city and the residents influenced by the public space and its effects has not been paid much attention. This paper focuses on analyzing how the designers of Yongling use the cultural elements and green space to change people's cognition and attitude towards the city, thus improving the relationship between the city and the residents. This paper also discusses the drawbacks in the design of Yongling and then shows the implications drawn from the case of Yongling for urban planning and public space design.

2. The Origin and History of Yongling

In Chinese imperial history, Tang Dynasty was established in 618 and ended in 907. At the end of Tang, the unified regime gradually disintegrated, and multiple regimes existed at the same time. One of the regimes was the Kingdom of Former Shu, which was established by Wang Jian and located in the present-day Sichuan, part of Shanxi, Gansu and Guizhou provinces. The Kingdom of Former Shu lasted for 37 years. Even though the whole China was in great turmoil and chaos during that period, Former Shu was relatively prosperous and stable, and was a state that advocated etiquette, culture, and arts. Yongling is the name of the mausoleum that was built for Wang Jian, the founder of Former Shu, after his death.

According to archaeologist and ethnographer Hanji Feng, some workers excavated a brick wall when they were preparing to construct an air-raid shelter in Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province in 1939. Hanji Feng believed that the wall was the evidence of an ancient tomb; then he and other archaeologists organized to gradually completed the excavation of the tomb from 1941 to 1943 (Feng 83-84).^[2] The tomb has a huge coffin chamber above ground and is shaped in semicircle. Over the next 70 years, Yongling was repaired for more than five times. In 1961, it was listed as an important national cultural relic site to be protected. It was opened to the public in 1979. In 1990, the site was renamed the Wang Jian Mausoleum Museum and finally was renamed Chengdu Yongling Museum (Yongling of Chengdu).

The museum, which was built on the foundation of Wang Jian's mausoleum, preserves historical relics excavated by archaeologists since the tomb's discovery. The main relics include the red lacquered wood doors decorated with gilt and bronze ornaments, the coffin bed with dragon patterns and gilt ornaments, stone carvings of ancient palace performers who specialized in playing musical instruments

and dancing, Wang Jian's stone statues, one jade seal, one jade book, and some utensils (Feng 84-86) [3]. A 3.18 meters-high (about 10.4 ft) stone statue, which symbolizes the guard on the tomb path, was found later in 1971 (Yongling of Chengdu). Although many jewels and jade pieces were stolen by tomb robbers in the past, the tomb decorations, stone carvings, statues and instruments that remained still reflect some art forms, characteristics and conventions of the Kingdom of Former Shu.

3. Later Expansion and Current Structure of Yongling

After the excavations and construction of the former museum, the municipal government of Chengdu decided to build the Yongling Park and the exhibition hall around the mausoleum. The park adopts the Chinese ancient garden style, which is built with many delicate ponds, rocks, stone steps, small pavilions and corridors, and with a large number of pines, cypress, ginkgo trees, as well as wintersweet, camellias, peony and other flowers. Maybe the most attracting part of the park is the small square at the park's edge that is adjacent to the outside road. The square is decorated with 24 bronze sculptures based on the appearances of the stone carvings of palace music performers found in the tomb. They circle around the enlarged version of the jade seal that was used by the emperor in the center. In addition to the Yongling Park and the mausoleum itself, the exhibition hall, which was built in 2012, replaced the function of the former museum. The ground floor is used for the regularly demonstration of the relics excavated from the mausoleum and is divided into three different themes. The first floor is used for temporary exhibitions, cultural salons and activities that are freely open to the public.

4. Stone Carving Elements in the Design of Yongling and Their Effects

Stone carving art crafts present a large number of relics that were excavated from the tomb. The most representative stone carvings include the relief of the 24 performers around the coffin bed, Wang Jian's stone statue and the 3.18 meters-high guard statue on the path towards the tomb. Some of these forms of stone carving art are also used and highlighted in the whole appearance of Yongling.

One example is the use of the 24 music performers' figures in the design of the square. Two researchers Hui Feng and Huaiyu Zhang studied the characteristics and history of stone carving in Chengdu and the factors that influenced these aspects of stone carving in Chengdu. In their article "Preliminary Study of Ancient Stone Carving Art in Chengdu", they argue that the stone carving art in Chengdu gradually absorbed the style of art in central China when many people immigrated from central China to Chengdu after the fall of the Tang Dynasty. Therefore, the figures in Chengdu's stone carving art transformed from thin and weak to plump and magnificent (Feng and Zhang 61). This new style is shown in the relief of the 24 performers and is also used in the design of the square. The appearances of the 24 sculptures of the performers on the square imitate the relief of the performers found in the tomb. Their bodies are relatively plump, and they have delighted expressions on their faces. Meanwhile, each of them plays different instrument, sitting in two concentric circles (see fig. 1 and fig. 2). Both the theme, namely the music performing activity, and the expressions and gestures of the figures, show a dynamic and a sense of movement. The two circles they form also make visitors feel surrounded, increasing a sense of participation. Altogether, the 24 sculptures on the square show a joyful, vivacious and cordial atmosphere, improving the relationship between visitors and Yongling itself. Some evidence of this purpose of design and its effect is that many elders come to dance on the square almost every evening after dinner. The square is also full of people day and night. It is clear that this area's high frequency of use is influenced by the sense of affinity that was created and built by the designers of the square.



Figure 1: The Sculptures of 24 Performers on the Square



Figure 2: The Expression and Motion of one Performer

Another important stone carving element used in the design of Yongling is the tall and heavy guard statue found near the tomb. According to the introduction on the official website of Yongling, guard statue was an unavoidable part of ancient emperors' mausoleums. The guard statues in Tang Dynasty are usually composed of two civilian officials' figures, two military officials' figures and two pairs of different celestial beasts. The statues of these figures symbolize the emperor's guardians who protect his majesty even after his death. However, the introduction on the website explains that people only found one statue near the tomb. In order to create the historical and cultural atmosphere, Yongling museum built the other 7 statues based on the characters of other emperors' guard statues in Tang and set them on the path to the tomb (Yongling of Chengdu). The general view of the 8 statues are shown in figure 3. In terms of the characteristics and style, the stone statues have simple and bold lines to outline the figures' faces, bodies and clothing. The expressions of the figures are dignified and solemn. The material of gray stone adds a sense of heaviness. In general, instead of the lively and approachable characters shown in the 24 music performers' sculptures, the style of these statues is simple and grand, and has a sense of rigidity and peace combined with the abundant green plants. As Feng and Zhang mention in their article, very few stone statues used as the symbol of etiquette and guard are found in Yongling (61). However, the designers still used and highlighted this element in the construction of Yongling. In my personal experience, I still remember the first time when I came to these huge statues. I never saw this form of art before, and they were visually shocking. It seems as if the purpose of these duplicated statues is to give the visitors a deeper first impression of the site, increase a feeling of deterrence and people's respect to the relic.



Figure 3: The General View of the Guard Statues

Feng and Zhang argue that the objects of stone carving art in Chengdu are mostly human figures, compared to the animals or religious objects appeared frequently in other regions. Thus, the themes of stone carving in Chengdu are closer to people's normal lives (61). This characteristic of stone carving in

Chengdu could also be seen in the relief of 24 performers and other unearthed statues from the tomb. Even during the modern period, the designers of Yongling still paid more attention to the stone carvings about human figures when designing the appearance of this public space. The purpose or intention of this decision might still be that they want to show the cultural relics that have the objects or themes that people are more familiar with, thus making a closer relationship between the visitors and Yongling.

The stone carving elements can be found not only in the relics and large sculptures that were built in modern time, but also in some details that might be ignored. These details include the small stone piles outside the door of the mausoleum, which are used for both decoration and as boundary with the streets and roads. The details also include the stone tablets that are on the side of the park paths. These stone tablets are carved with lines and words to introduce the basic information of some cultural relics found in the tomb. These details seem to remind people the history and culture of Yongling even when they are just walking by.

5. Green Space and Garden in Yongling and Their Effects

In the article “A Preliminary Study on the Management of the Historical and Cultural Features of the Yongling Royal Garden”, Shunan Li et. al discuss their plan of reconstructing Yongling, specially how to collocate and arrange the plants and garden facilities. The plan they made provides a good resource to understand the reasons and purpose of designing the environment in this way. In terms of the green space and garden facilities, different areas have different characteristics. In the mausoleum area, for example, the common trees they use are tall pines. The pines are behind the 8 guard statues. The area is also combined with uniform low shrubs on the two sides of the other roads (Li et al. 80).^[5] As a result, the arrangement of the vegetation in the mausoleum area is neat and uniform but not without layers. The purpose of this planning is to complement the solemnity and simplicity of the area.

However, in the art gallery area, which is located in the west side, they combine large-scale lawn with a small number of bonsais, rockeries, and fountains. The different kinds of facilities and vegetation with the art gallery creates an atmosphere combined of both dynamic and static (Li et al. 80).^[5] The purpose of this arrangement of vegetations and facilities is to create more variety and enjoyment, and to promote the visitors to be more immersed and engaged in the exploration of traditional arts.

Another different way of coordinating the green space and facilities is shown in the yards that exhibit calligraphy and poems from Former Shu. The designers understand the symbolic meanings of some flowers and plants to the ancient literati. They grow these flowers in this area to amplify the sense of poetic flavor and elegance. These flowers and plants include wintersweet, tall bamboo, ginkgo, and orchid, which all have the meaning of nobleness and integrity in the eyes of ancient poets and literati (Li et al. 80).^[5] By using these elements, the designers hope to let visitors feel the environment where the poets did creative work in history. When reading the calligraphy and poems in the yards, the distance between people who live in modern society and the ancient literati’s spiritual world seem to be decreased.

In addition to the areas mentioned above, the recreation area is the place that residents use most in their daily lives. It provides wide space for people to do various fitness activities. However, the space is still surrounded by many trees and shrubs, which provides more oxygen and helps people to relax. At the same time, there are many winding paths shrouded in green trees in the park, which form a secluded and mysterious atmosphere.

6. The Purposes of the Design of Yongling for Visitors’ Mentality

Based on the above observations of the design of Yongling, I found how the designers or the planners want to use the new constructed Yongling to influence both residents’ and tourists’ minds. First, the stone carving arts and sculptures that people created based on the relics increase people’s perception of the history and culture of this place. Second, the green space also increases people’s sense of pleasure of this place in a large extent. According to Igor Knez et al^[4], naturalness could activate and adjust our cognition and memories of one place, thus increasing positive moods. Thus, the dense vegetation provides an ease and natural environment, facilitating people’s impression and memories of Yongling. Although different areas have different themes, the solemnity and majesty that are shown in the mausoleum area, the joy and lively that are shown in the square, and the diverse and dense vegetation that are shown in the park, are all intended to increase people’s interests in this place, their reverence and respect for its history and culture, and a feeling of attachment.



Figure 4: The Paths and Vegetation that Surround the Above-ground Tomb

On the other hand, the cultural and art elements and green space used in the design of Yongling play an important role in attracting tourists or potential residents for the city. Joaquim Rius Ulldemolins argues in his article “Culture and Authenticity in Urban Regeneration Progresses: Place Branding in Central Barcelona” that using cultural heritage and diversity to brand cities on both local and international levels has become a popular strategy for many cities in order to bring more business and tourism activities and opportunities to the cities (3028-3039).^[6] This strategy is also shown in the designing and construction of Yongling. The planners set and protect the historical relic in a modern city, showing that the city has both modern facilities and rich history and culture. Meanwhile, the careful design of naturalness and protection of historical relics in Yongling increase tourists’ good impressions to the city, which might attract more professionals or skilled people to settle there.

To sum up the above opinions, the designers of Yongling want to use it to introduce the uniqueness of the city to others and demonstrating Yongling as part of the city’s image. At the same time, the history, culture and naturalness shown in Yongling are intended to bond the residents to the city and people who share the same culture more closely.

7. The Gap between Planners’ Expectation and Visitors’ Expectation

Even though the planners of Yongling made specific plans and measurements to design and build Yongling, and it indeed includes many historical, cultural and artful elements, this place still does not play its role very efficiently. Some evidence is that most people there are elders who come there regularly to play chess, cards, do exercise or just sit in the corridor near the river. The people who pay attention to the cultural and art relics are fewer. Visitors often just scan the word introductions to the relics and pass by. In other words, its cultural function does not work well. One reason for this maybe that, besides the art and cultural relics themselves, the only form of introduction to the history and culture is words. The information boards with word introductions are in many areas, however, the words on them are not easy to digest because of the broad historical context of Yongling and because of some uncommon language. Therefore, even though many visitors want to learn more about Yongling, they might not have the patience to read all of the words that are located in many areas.

At the same time, Zenghui Wang points out in his article “Evaluation and Comments on the Culture of Yongling Park” that Yongling park lacks a record about the reasons and process of building Yongling, which might make the visitors feel confused about why people do so much work in designing and building this place (77). In other words, a short essay or written record about the history of Yongling park could let the visitors have a clearer concept and cognition about this place.

Another gap between planners’ expectation and visitors’ expectation is that Yongling is still not familiar to many residents in other districts of Chengdu or the visitors from outside Chengdu, compared to other famous historical sites such as Du Fu Thatched Cottage, Temple of Marquis and Mount Qincheng. Compared to these places’ visitors flow volume, Yongling is still not the very desirable place for people to visit. Maybe it is because the influence of some famous historical figures on the other places mentioned above exceeds the influence of Yongling, and also because the advertising of these places is more than that of Yongling in recent decades.

8. The Implications of the Design of Yongling

Based on the observations and analysis of the elements used in the design of Yongling and its drawbacks, I will draw the implications. First, I found that the urban public space does more than implementing the practical functions for people, such as providing living, working and recreation space, or increase the users' wellness. Some urban public space planning now pays more attention to build or enhance the relationship between the city and its residents. On the one hand, the diverse cultural relics, arts and parks in the city increase residents' pride on the city because of the positive image the city shows and increase residents' respect and admiration to its history and culture. On the other hand, residents' love of the city promote their enthusiasm for contributing more to different aspects of the city, such as economy, culture, and environment. Through visiting Yongling, residents learn the culture and history of the city more, and also experience being in an environment that combines culture with nature. The positive effect of this process on their mind and body will in turn promotes their contribution to the city. This interaction or relation shows that the built environment and people who live there could promote each other. The city will achieve more development from the residents' support while the city's efforts to create better environment promote residents' happiness. These mutual supports show the symbiotic relationship between the city and its residents.

On the other hand, the drawbacks or the gap between expected effect and actual effect of Yongling show that the public place construction usually cannot be finished in one attempt. The construction of public space is always a dynamic and has no end, because people's expectations are always changing. During this process, the designers cannot only consider their expectations, instead, they have to hear more voice from the public to understand what's their real needs and expectations. In the case of Yongling, the most people who often come here are elders and their major activities are recreation. The cultural or educational function does not work well, which means the actual effect of this function does not meet the expectations of people of different ages, genders and occupations. The planners and designers need to listen to different people's suggestions about Yongling's functions. Therefore, public space construction is not only an achievement of city managers or governors, but an achievement of all citizens from various fields.

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