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Abstract

Caused by the aging problem and other social questions of China, the using conditions of open spaces are presenting a special phenomenon——the elder constitute almost whole users of open spaces, squares and parks turn out to be old clubs, especially in some big cities whose aging problem are relatively heavier. Although we can't deny that those open spaces are lively and have different kind of activities, this ambience of 'old club' excluded most potential users of other age group. In this context, what should architects do to change the proportion of users in open spaces? Taking this as the starting pointing, several design strategies will be proposed for improving existing open spaces and designing the new open spaces, basing on the analyze of existing examples and theoretical research.

Key words: Open Space, Aging Problem, and Urban Design of China

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Introduction

Aging population has been a problem of China, since the Chinese government implied a 'one child' policy from 1980 to curb the quantity of population. By the statistic of 2011, the population over 60 has reached 13.3% of the total population; in those most developed cities along the east coast, the proportion of 60+ would be higher (17.53% in Hangzhou, 20% in Nanjing, 25.7% in Shanghai). The elders have the welfare of free urban public transportation, have ample time and, in most of the cases, are very lonely. Due to the demographic reason as well as the social reasons, a universal phenomenon could be observed that in most of the cities, the elder constitute most of the users in the Chinese open spaces. These open spaces that occupied by the elders cannot be called inactive ones, since there are lots of users and variety of activities. The problem is the ambience of 'elder club' excludes the potential users of other age group.

The research objects of this paper are civic squares and parks. Squares are designed as the images of a city are not included, since the existence of them is for showing rather than using. The methodologies of this study are behavior mapping, time-lapse photography and first-hand observation. Proposals will be given based on theory study and case observation, for the purpose of creating open spaces attracted by different age groups.

**The Description of using Condition though Case Studies**

Gulou civic square is located in the very center of Nanjing (the capital of Jiangsu Province, the second-largest commercial center in the East China region after Shanghai and the formal capital of the China), surrounded by high-rise buildings using as offices, including the central post office of Nanjing, Nanjing television, Nanjing telegram and *Zifeng* Tower (the highest building of Nanjing, 450M). Theoretically, these kinds of squares are supposed to be used mainly by office workers in vicinity, but actually this square is very popular among the elders. In the morning, this square is mainly used for exercising; (Figure 1) in the afternoon, playing chess and poker will be the choice by most of the man while most of the women are chatting;(Figure 2) office workers only appear when they are on their way to work or home, they would come here to take a short cut. (Figure 3)

This phenomenon could also be observed in other open spaces, like *Heping* Park of Nanjing. This little park has beautiful view and peaceful atmosphere, the elders enjoy playing chess or poker, dancing in the morning and evening. Another example is *Luxun* Park of Shanghai, this is a huge and very active elder club with people exercising, chatting, dancing, playing instruments, contemplating and, in a secluded corner, prostituting.

Figure 1. *Activities of Morning*

Figure 2. *Activities of Afternoon*
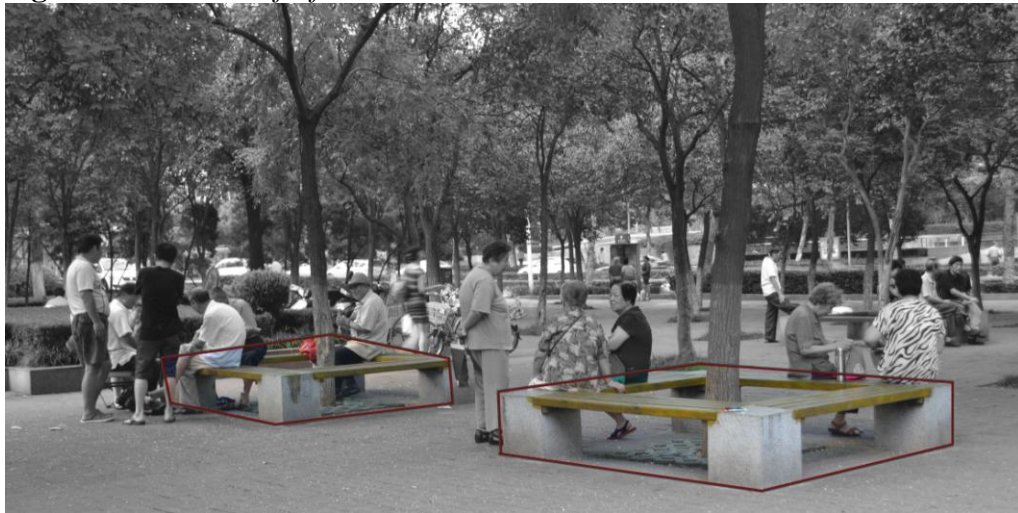
Figure 3. *Behavior Mapping at 2:00pm*

If that markedly higher proportion of elder users is only being found in open spaces near nursing houses or some aging neighborhood, this is quite

usual. But all the open spaces I select in this case are in CBD area and near universities. Theoretically, they are among the categories that would not be mainly used by the elders. What's the problem of them?

Problem and Corresponding Proposals

Except that the social reasons that caused this phenomenon, like the elders have much more time than any other age group and they care about a place to stay than a good place to stay, there are lots of designing or planning problems as well. The problems and the corresponding proposals will be presented though case studies. To avoid the problem that young people need to work and do not have time to use the open spaces, half of those study are conducted at weekends.

Create Mini Open Spaces

Mei'an

The first case is a corner space in Nanjing called *Mei'an*. It is an active space in some aspect for there are people playing pokers whenever the weather condition permit, but nobody would go there except the elders. Located in a corner of an intersection and adjacent to a university, the using condition of this mini open space is out of expectation. There are several reasons for its currently using condition.

The first is location (Figure 4). Although it is in the intersection of a main road and a secondary road, but there isn't many pedestrian would be led to this space since the motor traffic is very heavy and the side work is not existed on the side of this corner space. Therefore this place is relatively secluded.

Figure 4. *Mei'an's Location*

Food facilities would be the second reason. 'If you want to seed a place with activity, put out food', as William H. Whyte pointed out, vendors will make a space flourish. If there is not food or beverage supply, it will be difficult for people to linger here. At least a food cart should be at service. Those old people who come here for a whole day always carry food and drinks by themselves. Since other age groups do not have the custom of taking food and drink when they are not going to picnic or hiking, this place is unattractive to them even they passing by or see it from another side of the road.

The last reason is seats.

Torensluis and Paley Park

Torensluis of Amsterdam (Figure 5) is an enlarged bridge using as a mini square connecting a residential area and the famous Dam Square, it is not adjacent to the main road with heavy motor transportation but have a block between them. Because of its original function of bridge and its location, there are a great number of pedestrian passing through it everyday. When people passing through this space will probably attracted by the beautiful view of the cannel. And then if they want to stay, a famous café will at their service. All of this reasons formed an active space.

Figure 5. *Torensluis*

The famous Paley is located in the most prosperous area of New York, near the 5th Avenue. This mini park is enclosure 3 side, offers an feeling of isolation; its entrance is quite inviting, with visual and psychological accessibility; the sound of the waterfall weakens the noise of the road. Lots of the office workers would come here for a break.

Though this three case study, three points could be summarized for creating active mini open spaces witch will attract all age groups: a certain number of people should be led there, food and beverage supplies, visual accessibility and psychological isolation. These kinds of open spaces could be designed in the 'corner spaces' (Figure 6) formed by urban planning and would not need highly investment, if could be realize and formed a net work, they might be the compensate for the inadequate of open spaces in Chinese city.

Figure 6. *Corner Spaces*
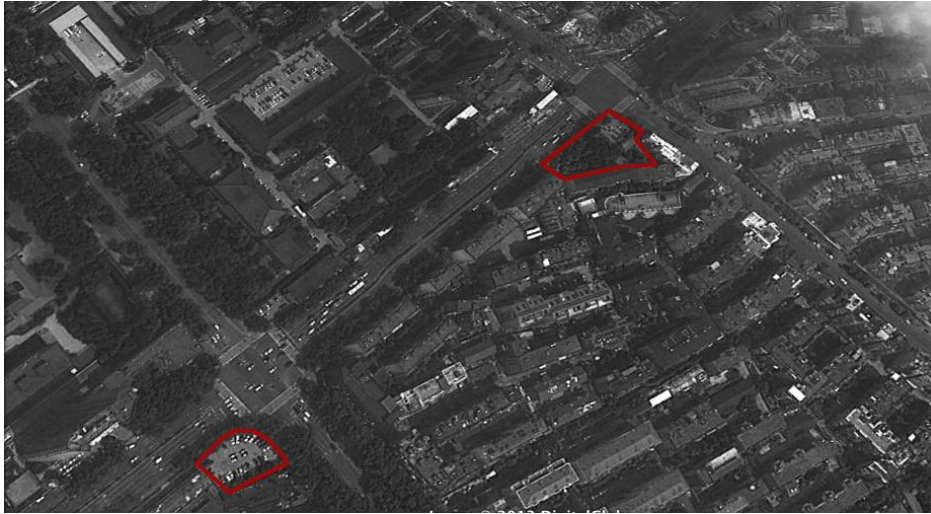
Create Active Parks

As a notion transplanted to China, parks are always designed as an imitation of the central park in New York or English landscape garden, but sometimes combined with traditional Chinese style. These kinds of parks are usually constituted by hills, lawns and lakes or fountains and most of the time are huge elder club. The little hills of some parks even have the problem of prostitution.

But different with United States or Europe, most of the lawns in China are forbidden to step on. Therefore a large area of lawns would be nothing more than a barrier for people's movement. In this circumstance grounds with pavement should be designed instead of lawns. Especially play grounds for children and cycling or jogging routes. In a park with playground and cycling or jogging routes, children with their parents or grandparents and people who are passionate with cycling or jogging will definitely come.

If lakes or fountains are not properly managed, they will disturb people's activities more than lawns. The water in a park should be a trigger of activities than a barrier. Like the fountains in *Parque das Nacoes* (Figure 7) of Lisbon, the wave of this fountain is imitating the sea wave. When the water is moving, lots of kids would run with the flow, while their parents may stand aside and sometimes talk with each other. Another case is the fountain of *Superkilen* in Copenhagen, this fountain is a very ordinary one, but the management of it is appropriate, so people could play with the water instead of just watch it.

Therefore 3 points could be proposed for more active parks could also be accepted by young people: playground with pavement instead of lawns, fountains for using instead of showing and cycling or jogging routes.

Figure 7. *Parque das Nacoes*

Conclusion

Whether these proposals could be helpful cannot be answered at this moment, it should be examined through practice. Since there are so many differences between Chinese cities and European or American cities, we cannot copy any mode from them. Analyzes and decisions should always be made under the context of the unique China.

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