

Planning and Design of Qingming Shanghe Park in Kaifeng

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ABSTRACT

Covering an area of about 39 ha, Qingming Shanghe Park is located in the northwest of Kaifeng, formerly the capital of seven dynasties in China. It is intended to serve as a tourist attraction based on a painting "Qingming Festival at Riverside" by Zhang Zeduan of the Northern Song Dynasty, which vividly illustrates a real life on the both sides of the Bian River as well as in the urban area, Kaifeng, in early Spring. The park is a collection of varied buildings such as shops, restaurants, tea-houses, theaters, and hotels in the North Song style. With an introduction of the history of Kaifeng, this paper examines design philosophy and methodology of the park, and discusses the creative design of the first stage development known as The South Area of the park. Marked by the Rainbow Bridge and the City Gate, the South Area is divided into three parts, the rural, suburban, and urban parts which are organized according to the spatial order showed in the painting. The South Area proves to be very successful because of its amazing sense of history and interesting folk performance. Furthermore, the preliminary planning of the second stage development known as The North Area is presented with references to culture, history and customs. The North Area is proposed to include the Old Sports & Games Garden, the Exhibition Garden, and the Hot Spring Garden with an appearance of the imperial gardens in the Northern Song, integrated with participation of old sports and games, display of old science & technology achievements, and enjoyment of hot spring bath.

Key Word : Qingming, The Bian River, The Rainbow Bridge, Amusement theme park

I. BACKGROUND

Covering an area of 100km² and with an urban population of 0.8 million, Kaifeng is located in eastern Henan Province, a fertile, alluvial plain of the Yellow River, the riverbed of which is over 10 meters higher than ground level in Kaifeng. With about 630 mm of rain a year, Kaifeng is a temperate city. The mean annual temperature is 14.24°C, the

highest is 43°C, and lowest -16°C. The prevailing winds are northeast and south winds. Once one of the most elegant and prosperous cities in the history of China, together with Beijing, Xian, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Anyang and Luoyang, Kaifeng is honored as one of the seven famous ancient capitals in China. The 2700-year-old Kaifeng is distinguished by its previous glory, serving as the capital of several dynasties including the Wei,

Liang, Later Jin, Later Han, Later Zhou, Northern Song, and Jin. Owing to effective polices and rules the Northern Song (960-1126 AD) was an extremely flourishing time when great successes were achieved with efforts in such areas as agriculture, handicraft, water conservancy, commerce, medicine, architecture, science and technology, which is marked by the invention of gunpowder, compass and typographic printing. At its height under the Northern Song, the city named Dongjing enjoyed great prosperity with a population of over 130 million. It was an important political, cultural, commercial and communications center, producing textiles, metalwork and porcelain. Kaifeng was also well-known for its dozens of bridges and four rivers, the Bian River, Cai River, Jinshui River and Wuzhang River which run through (Figure 1). Particularly the Bian River linked the Yellow River to the north and the Huai River to the South, which finally went into the Yangtse River. Up the Bian River, each year over 300,000t of grains were transported from the south into Kaifeng. Old documents says that numerous boats went up and down the channel day and night all year round. The Bian River as well as the other three promoted both water transportation of grains and local agriculture. Just based on the Bian River a famous painting "Qingming Festival at the Riverside" by a court painter Zhang Zeduan vividly depicts the elegant and prosperous ancient city including the urban, suburban, and rural areas. Although associated with Qingming Festival specific activities such as sweeping graves and visiting relatives, the painting itself has more than artistic interest: it is absolutely a scroll of varied, colorful aspects of life in Kaifeng more than 800 years ago. Unfortunately due exclusively to frequent floods and wars, few relics of that time survived and the above four rivers do not exist. However the local

spirit of steadfast and persevering remains. Today's Kaifeng has been constructed just on the top of silt-buried old city. In 1992 in order to further local tourism and stimulate the performance of the economy, the municipal government decided to build a theme park now known as Qingming Shanhe Park (the South Area, Figure 2) based on "Qingming Festival at Riverside". With an area of 23 ha the park was sited in the northwest of the city, close to existing urban water system. The project was finished in 1998 and opened to the public. Since then average amount of visitors to it has increased by about 20% each year. It is estimated that in 2001 visitors to the park will be over 700,000, and the total ticket income alone will be over 21 million yuan RMB. Such a large amount of money will be of great significance to this comparatively poor area. Owing to its outstanding achievements Qingming Shanghe Park has been ranked among four A tourist attractions throughout China by China National Tourism Administration. Currently the local government has given top priority to enlarging the present park to the north. The newly-decided site (the North Area, Figure 3) is 16 ha. The major objective of it is to create a land of dream "walking into the painting in the morning and experiencing the true life of the Northern Song in one day" and win much more money.

II. PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGY

1. Strategy

Following Protection Planning of Kaifeng as a Historic and Cultural City, it is intended to make full use of the conditions including existing water and underground hot spring, based on "Qingming Festival at Riverside", artistically demonstrate the

former charm and achievements, creatively imitate old buildings and landscape, rationally organize water system reminiscent of the old water city, carefully employ art pieces and garden furniture, largely use those plants which grow well in saline-alkali soil, flexibly integrate folk performances and traditional sports and games, encourage positive participation so as to create a place of dream, leisure and amusement.

1) The South Area

The design of the South Area made references not only to the painting but also to other old materials about Kaifeng. It is a marvelous combination of reality and imagination. "Qingming Festival at Riverside" is a delicate scroll, 24.8 cm in width, and 528 cm in length, which shows a linear landscape well-ordered from rural (east), suburban (middle) to urban area (west). Thus the main entrance is placed in the east, connected with urban street. The minor entrance is in the west close to the old city wall in Kaifeng. The rural and suburban occupies 6/7 of the whole picture and the urban 1/7. Following almost the same order and same proportion the park was designed in such a way that the important scenes in the painting are well-organized in a curved order because of functional requirements. As a result the design included the wharf, the Rainbow Bridge, the suburban business part, rural house part, City Gate, and urban business part. In the rural area the wharf with various shops functioning as an introduction element constitutes one of the two important focuses of the Bian River. The other one is the Rainbow Bridge. Thanks to the astonishing details by Zhang Zeduan, engineers have found a very special invention of beam-arch structure of the bridge which could let big boats of goods go under it without damaging (Figure 4; Figure 5). On the large island, the suburban business

part is characterized by a L shape street and T shape street formed by almost all kinds of facilities such as "Shiqian Jiaodian" where Chinese wines could be sold but not allowed to be brewed by the rule, the Post Hotel which provide accommodations for visitors, antique shops where Chinese painting, calligraphy and porcelain are available, restaurants offers a large variety of local traditional foods and snacks, handicrafts shops which sell various souvenirs ranging from paper cuts, maltose figure, clay figurine, fans to Bian Embroidery, and even a hall in memory of Zhang Zeduan. The rural house part is situated on the peninsula in the south, which is a quiet, tranquil place. Visitors are encouraged to go fishing, roast meat, and stay there for the night.

The urban area is designed as a small island characterized by the City Gate with a moat in front of it. The gate was carefully copied in details demonstrating the delicate, colorful structures and decorations according to the painting. The urban area part was also imitated with references to the painting, marked by a crisscross street. The most important place there is Sunyang Zhengdian frequently visited by businessmen in the past, now offers imperial foods. Besides a medicine shop named after a famous doctor, a house of Wang Yuanwai who asked for his son-in law by throwing a colored ball, are also transplanted there.

In order to vividly exemplify the true life of old Kaifeng terrific folk performances based on history and literature of the Northern Song are well incorporated into the park, such as the grand reception ceremony at the main entrance hosted by the Northern Song Prime Minister Bao Gong, wonderful Kaifeng drumbeats, the ancient group bell music, old acrobatic and Gongfu shows, etc(Figure 6).

2) The North Area

The North Area, bordering the South Area is now in the process of preliminary planning. The South Area was constructed mainly on a basis of the painting, reflecting the magnificent appearances of former Kaifeng, whereas the idea for the North Area is to romantically fit into the present park a place of amusement with Song imperial garden style and integrate it with the Old Sports and Games Garden, Exhibition Garden, Hot Spring Garden and plant gardens such as Peony Garden, Magnolia Garden.

The Old Sports and Games Garden is characterized by the Taiji Lake and a man-made hill called the Happiness Hill topped by Overlooking Tower, surrounded by the Dragon River along which drifting activity is advised. The Taiji Lake with the Penglai Island and the Inviting Moon Pavilion are allusive of the tradition of "one pond with three islands in it". The lake, dug in the lowest part with economic consideration, is a good place for boat racing and water-touring by an imperial boat. Besides, most of the old sports and games sites are organized in a style of "garden within a garden", which is also a tradition since the Han Dynasty. The suggested activities are very interesting, entertaining and easy-doing. They are old soccer, ball-hitting, pot-throwing, horse racing, cock fighting, etc.

The Exhibition Garden includes four small courtyard gardens. The Gunpowder Garden shows how it was made. The Paper Garden gives visitors an idea of process of paper making by hand. The Brocade Garden displays the fantastic art and skill of brocade in that period. The Typographic Printing Garden invites tourists to do the same job as Chinese ancestors did.

There is a river running through the site in a straight line and cutting the North Area into two. The Hot Spring Garden is planned on the north of it because underground hot spring is available there. And the river is proposed to be improved in a zig-zag way with several small islands in it. The garden

is featured by large indoor and outdoor hot spring bath rooms together with Imperial Banquet Hall as well as luxurious guest houses, 110 standard rooms, conferences and dance halls.

III. CONCLUSION

There is a saying that Autumn can be sensed by only one leaf. The painting "Qingming Festival at Riverside" depicts both colorful life and elegant landscape in old Kaifeng; the Qingming Shanghe Park provides us with a very special experience of exploring the history by ourselves. Time and space there are clearly represented. The past and present are mingled. The success of the park offers ample proof that the theme park based on local history and culture is always attractive, interesting and dynamic, because it produces surprise and pleasure, and because it tell us the truth of life. The park itself is actually a piece of fiction, a work of imagination and an expression of love. It also reminds us that urban fringe is always a convivial space on which we must study.

Notes : The South Area was designed by local architectural design office. Some of the improvements in the South Area and Preliminary Planning of the North Area is hosted by the author.

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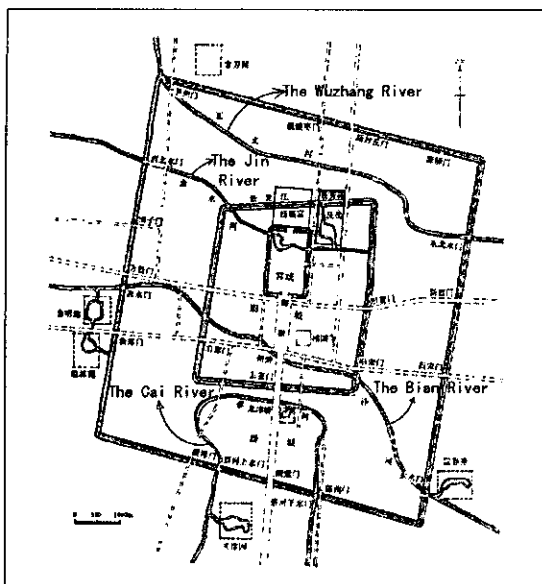


Figure 1. Plan of Kaifeng in the Northern Song

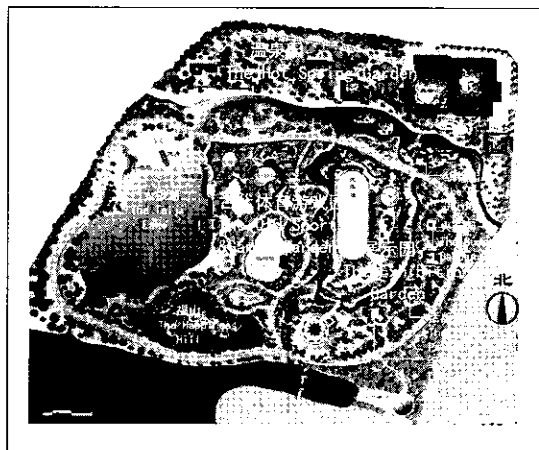


Figure 3. Proposed Plan of the North Area of Qingming Shanghe Park

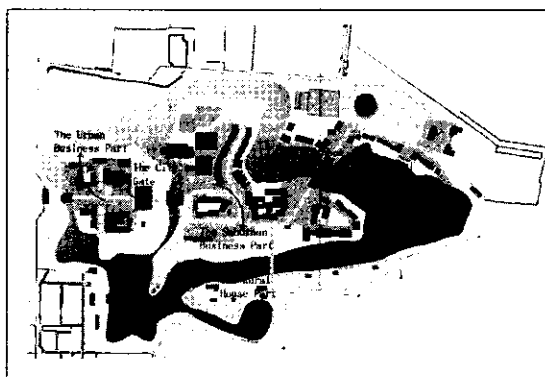


Figure 2. Plan of the South Area of Qingming Shanghe Park



Figure 4. The Rainbow Bridge in the Painting



Figure 5. The newly built Rainbow Bridge



Figure 6. Folk Performances