Historical and Cultural Values of the Modern Historic Parks in Tianjin  
- the British Concession

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Abstract

This paper takes the British concession in Tianjin as an example, trying to clarify the historical and cultural values of the first parks. The first park, Victoria Park, was built as a memorial facility. It received many visitors including Chinese, with numerous outdoor concerts providing the citizens with great enjoyment. Although there were conflicts between the Chinese and British, objectively, it greatly improved Tianjin’s landscape and provided a much healthier environment. The other parks in the British Extra Rural Extension were endowed with specific roles in creating an ideal city with light, air and spaces for recreation. The planning theories behind these parks pushed the modernizing process of Chinese cities. Besides, the parks brought new materials and new styles to Chinese traditional gardens, so they have high historical, cultural and academic value. Therefore, we suggest the government carry out a basic investigation and create a database of modern parks. The value of a park should be evaluated from both an urban planning aspect and the park itself. As for park conservation, the natural landform, spatial structure, visual organization, building, entrance space, wall, pavement, plants and relationship with its surroundings needs to be well evaluated.

Keywords: historic parks; values; ideal city; urban-scape; people's lives

1. Introduction

Parks are an essential element of modern urban planning theories. They are planned in many forms and endowed with a significant role to create healthy, livable and ideal cities. Understanding the planning theories behind parks and the role parks play in people's lives helps us understand the historical and cultural values of modern parks. However, in China, people regard modern parks with complicated emotions, and the value of modern parks has not been fully realized, which is because most of the first modern parks were constructed by the British colonists. Therefore, for a long period, they were considered as symbols of enslavement. For this, and some other reasons, conservation for these modern parks is of low priority when compared to conservation of modern buildings. Thus far, no modern historic park has been listed as an important or significant cultural property within China.

What should be noticed is that, in recent years, as public concern about green space has rapidly grown in China, some scholars have started to pay attention to the history of these parks. The forming process of some famous modern historic parks like the Victoria Park in Tianjin (Sun, Aoki and Zhang, 2011), the Luxun Park in Shanghai (Zhang A., 2012) and the Zhushuishan Park in Qingdao (Jiang, 2012) have been clarified. There are also several studies on the history of the parks in some famous modern cities such as Qingdao (Jiang, 2014), Hangzhou (Ke, 2011) and so on. These studies will become important references to the conservation of modern parks. However, these researches only focused on the history of the parks themselves, and the relationship between them and modern urban planning theories or their impact on people's daily lives has not been mentioned. That is why the historical and cultural values of the parks have not been illustrated clearly.

By contrast, in Japan, the first parks that experienced a similar development process to their counterparts in China were discussed and have been treated as cultural properties since the 1990s. For example, Yamate Park in Yokohama, Higashi-yuenchi Park in Kobe and Kailakuen Park in Hokkaido were constructed by colonists in their settlements. They are considered as modernization heritage (Ono, 2005), and their cultural values are evaluated from both the landscape itself and the local people's viewpoint. Those parks with high cultural, historical and aesthetic values, are preserved as cultural properties in various forms. As of 2012,
there have been 29 gardens, seven parks and three avenues designated as places of interest (Monuments Division of Cultural Properties Department, 2012). It is considered that the efforts to preserve modern parks made by Japan may provide some insight concerning their counterparts in China.

This paper takes Tianjin as an example, aiming to discover the significance of these modern historical parks by clarifying: 1) the connection between the first parks and urban planning, 2) how they affected the urban-scape and people's daily lives, 3) the significance to Chinese garden history and city planning history. Based on the results, this paper would like to summarize the historical, cultural, and academic values of the first modern historical parks, and to discuss how to establish a conservation system for them.

2. About Tianjin

Tianjin is located about 125 km southeast of Beijing, and serves as the gateway of Beijing to the sea. It was established as an open treaty port in 1860 as a result of the Beijing Convention. At the beginning of the 20th century, the number of concessions in Tianjin reached its peak of eight (Table 1.). The political connection with Beijing was a significant reason for so many countries to establish their concessions in Tianjin (Association for Tianjin Regional History, 1999, 2-3). Most of the concessions existed for more than 20 years, and some for over 80. The long concession period left Tianjin with numerous modern buildings, railways, ports, parks and other modern facilities.

Among these concessions, the British Concession, existed for the longest time from 1860 to 1945, and developed into the largest and most prosperous one. It enjoyed a high reputation for its safe and excellent living conditions. Houses there were designed with front gardens; streets were lined with trees and several parks provided recreation space to the residents. At that time, the British Concession was described as a "garden city" by Rasmussen, a reporter who worked in Tianjin (Rasmussen, 1924). This honor should be attributed to the gardens and parks, which significantly improved Tianjin's urban-scape and shaped its characteristic as a modern city. Even nowadays, this area, now called Wudadao, is still enjoying a high reputation for its pleasant residential environment. Most of these parks still remain in the old town of Tianjin, while several of them have been replaced with buildings.

In 2011, the Tianjin Planning Bureau created a Conservation Plan for the Famous Historical and Cultural Towns and Villages, aiming to balance conservation and the economic development of Tianjin. In this plan, the British, French, Italian, and Japanese concessions were designated as historic districts. Unfortunately, the conservation plan only focused on the historical buildings and streets, while the significance of the historical parks and the conservation of them have rarely been mentioned.

3. Research Method

This paper used first-hand materials such as official documents, planning maps, pictures and videos, personal memoirs and newspapers to investigate the original state of the parks and attempt to provide an accurate evaluation of them. Table 1. shows the names, published years and properties of the main materials utilized in this paper. These historical materials made it possible to analyze the parks from the plan, their implementation, and from both governmental and residents' viewpoints.

To understand the relationship between the urban planning and the parks' formation, the authors referred to the Reports of the British Municipal Councils, and Minutes of the Annual General Meetings (reports for short), which recorded the urban construction progress in all aspects. To know how the parks were used by the residents of the day, the authors referred to some personal memoirs and old pictures and films. What should be mentioned here are the silent films taken in the 1930s, which have not been used in any other research. These films presented the appearance of Tianjin and the activities being held in the parks.

4. The Formation of the British Concession

The British Concession was set up in 1860, immediately after Tianjin was opened as a treaty port. The Original Concession was situated in a low swampland along the Hai Ho River, to the southeast of

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Table 1. Main Materials Used in this Paper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Material Names</th>
<th>Published Year</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reports of the British Municipal Councils</td>
<td>1860-1940, 1929-1940</td>
<td>Annual reports, budgets and plans made for Tianjin each year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The growth of Tianjin</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>History of the concessions in Tianjin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tianjin: An Illustrated Outline History</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Documentary</td>
<td>A book describing the most interesting events happened in Tianjin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Life in a China Outport</td>
<td>around 1910</td>
<td>Documentary</td>
<td>A book based on interviews by McLean W. A diary of the British Municipal Councils of Tianjin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tianjin</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Silent film</td>
<td>Silent film taken by André Bontempny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Amnesties Franco-British</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Silent film</td>
<td>Silent film taken by André Bontempny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Postcards</td>
<td>1930s-1950</td>
<td>Photoalbum</td>
<td>Postcards mainly produced by Japanese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Fig. 1. The Concessions in Tianjin and the Three-Time Extensions of the British Concession.
the native city (Fig.1.). The area was 74 acres, which was then extended three times, until it finally reached about 1,013 acres in size. Table 2. shows the names, dates and the areas of each expansion.

Although the area of the concession expanded more than 10 times, the population increased very slowly before the 20th century. Until 1867, there were only 112 foreigners living in the British Concession (Liu, 2015). Most facilities including the British Embassy, barracks, hospital, and commercial facilities were still located inside the native city or concentrated in the area between the native city and the Haiho River (Liu, 2015). The reason for the slow increase was probably that the British Concession was quite far from the native city, besides construction on the low swamp area was extremely difficult. The situation dramatically changed at the beginning of the 20th century. Chinese domestic rebellions like the Boxer Rebellion made both foreigners and Chinese feel that their lives and properties were threatened, and consequently started to move into the concessions. These people, including Chinese ex-bureaucrats, military personnel and merchants formed a complicated, international society in the British Concession. In 1942, the population in the British concession reached 92,820, 15.4 times as that in 1906, while Chinese made up over 90% of the population.

Table 2. The Three-time Extensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area (ha)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Original British Concession</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>460 (50.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>British Municipal Extension</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>1630 (180.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Southern Extension</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>131 (8.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>British Extra Rural Extension</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>3928 (262)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. The First Plan and the First Park

The first plan for the British Concession was made by Charles George Gordon, who was a royal engineer rather than a planner. No original documents about this plan can be found, so it is difficult to know how Gordon considered the present condition and what kind of future he had imagined for this place. According to a report by John Innocent, a social observer with trained powers of observation, "the site of the British Settlement was a long stretch of vegetable gardens, with here and there a cluster of squalid mud houses to a little west of the present Victoria Road; and thence to the Taku Road, chiefly fields of kaoliang and pools, with a few burial grounds." This rough area Gordon penciled out into bund, roads, and lots for buildings, and on the plan he carefully elaborated on the lots that were subsequently sold to the highest bidders in August, 1861, on conditions precisely defined." (Rasmussen, 1925, 37-38).

Fig.2. is a map of the British Concession in 1865. Main roads, a prison lot, consular lot, and various buildings were planned on this land, and some of them had already been completed. However, at this point, no park can be found on this map. In fact, it was considered stupid and a waste of money to plant trees and create parks in a concession at that time. People who came a long way to China were not seeking a healthy life, but commercial profit. That was why when Gustav von Detring, the chairman of the British Municipal Councils, started to plant street trees in the concession, his behaviors were laughed at and were called "Follies" (Rasmussen, 1925, p. 95).

The first park constructed in Tianjin is the Victoria Park (Fig.3.). It was opened on 21 June, 1887, to commemorate the first jubilee of Queen Victoria (Mcleish, unknown, p. 18; Rasmussen, 1925, p. 63). On that day, a big ceremony was held there. The fireworks attracted many people to the park (Sun, Aoki and Zhang, 2011). In 1921, another big memorial ceremony was held in the park to commemorate the soldiers killed in the First World War (Sun, Aoki and Zhang, 2011). Therefore, to the government, it can
be said that the Victoria Park was originally built as a memorial facility rather than a healthy living or recreation place.

The site selected for Victoria Park was located between the British Municipal Council and the British Consulate, a place which used to be the political core of the concession. This location coincided with the political initiation of the park. In contrast, numerous memoirs and travel notes mentioned this park. It also appeared on many postcards and picture albums published by both the British and Japanese and many visitors took a commemorative photo there. These points indicate that Victoria Park's existence was extremely important both to Tianjin's urban- scape and the lives of the Tianjin people.

5.1 Victoria Park and the Urban-scape

Tianjin was described as the dirtiest and poorest place (Olyphant, 1860), and as mentioned above, the site of the British Concession used to be swampland. Wooded areas cannot be seen either within or outside the city, only a few scattered trees like willow and poplar can be seen along the riverbank (Headquarters of Garrison in Qing, 1909).

The location of Victoria Park, namely the west side of Victoria Road was generally regarded as a stinking puddle (Sun, Aoki and Zhang, 2011). After considerable landfill work, the site was transformed into a beautiful park. Fig. 4. is a picture of the park. In the center was a monument, which was built in 1921 to memorialize the soldiers who died in the First World War. Most of the flowers planted in the park were imported from Britain, America and other countries (Sun, Aoki and Zhang, 2011). By 1896, fuchsia, sunflower, clematis, rhododendron, carnation, orchid, violet, petunia, pansy, gloxinia, delphinium, primrose, garden balsam, passionflower, lobelia, mignonette, mimosa, nasturtium, phlox, geranium, lilium japonicum and so on had been cultivated in greenhouses (Sun, Aoki and Zhang, 2011). They were transplanted to the park according to season. In the center of the park, there stood a Chinese-style pavilion that was often used as a bandstand.

The building standing at the rear of Victoria Park was the City Hall. It was named Gordon Hall to memorialize Charles George Gordon. What should be mentioned is that this was the first City Hall built in the British Concessions in China (Association for Tianjin Regional History, 1999, p. 239), indicating the significant status of the concession in Tianjin. The City Hall was a magnificent building and was designed like a castle. In the following decades, the castle-shaped Gordon Hall and Victoria Park became landmarks and formed the core space of the British Concession.

5.2 Victoria Park and People's Social Life

Before Victoria Park was constructed, recreational life in Tianjin was quite tedious. According to Sone Toshitora's observation, a Japanese Navy Sub-lieutenant who came to Tianjin to collect information in 1875, "In this place, there were few trees and much wind. Besides, there was no park or walking space to amuse eyes" (Sone, 1878, p. 38). Victoria Park changed this situation and provided a walking and amusement space to the residents in Tianjin. According to Zhang Tao's observation, a Chinese citizen who lived in Tianjin for over 30 years, every day before sunset foreigners walked in the park with family and children. Chinese were also allowed to walk in the park (Zhang T, p. 300).

Some precious films made in the 1930s recorded the residents' daily social and recreational lives in the park. Figs. 5., 6. and 7. are screenshots from the films. In the films, we can see some European people sitting around a table on the lawn, chatting and drinking. They were probably having a party. Not far from the European group, there stood several Chinese women wearing Chinese dress, chatting with each other. On
the other side, three Japanese in Kimono, walking with umbrellas, seem to be leaving the park. Children were riding bicycles or playing on the playground. Scenes taken in this film are so peaceful, it is difficult to imagine it happened in a colony whilst wars were being waged in other parts of China.

In addition to these daily recreational activities, there were also regular events. The most popular event at the park was the outdoor concert that was usually held in the bandstand by the British military band (Fig.8.). These concerts provided so much fun for the residents. According to Rasmmusen, programmes for weekly al fresco concerts in the Club and later in Victoria Park, were printed a week in advance, and residents "used to scan them with all the eagerness of astronomers on the lookout for a new planet." (Rasmmusen, 1925, p. 86-87). There was a picturesque description about the concerts in Mr. McLeish's memoir: "The presence of these sea divers and diverse troops during the last 17 years has added much to the amenity of life. It has ever been pleasing and instructive to attend the living ceremonies of a popular Office-in-Command, and to note the difference in the physique, drill and equipment of the guards-of-honour". "Our children as well as the soldiers have loved to swarm into Victory Park to hear the 'Retreat' by our bugle-bands, drums-and-fifes, and by the pipes of the Scottish and Indian regiments (McLeish, unknown, p. 17)". Victoria Park brought the residents many pleasant times, which makes it easy to understand why the park was mentioned in numerous people's memoirs including those written by both British and Chinese.

In the beginning, there was no rule forbidding Chinese people from entering the park. As the number of Chinese visitors increased rapidly, the foreign residents started to protest. A writer named "Another Mother" wrote an article in the Peking and Tientsin Times, saying that the park was overrun with lower-class Chinese, and this caused mothers' panic (Another mother, 1895). This article indicates the conflict between Chinese and foreign residents. As a result, the British Council made a public announcement in August 1895 that: from August 1st Chinese visitors need to go to the foreign affairs office and get a ticket one day ahead of schedule. After five o'clock, Chinese citizens were not allowed to enter the park (Sun, Aoki and Zhang, 2011). This rule clearly shows that Chinese citizens were being treated unfairly in the British Concession, especially the lower class. However, there were no similar rules to restrict other foreigners’ visiting. This can explain why the parks are somehow considered as a symbol of disgrace by some Chinese.

6. The British Extra Rural Extension and the Neighborhood Parks

As mentioned above, the British Concession expanded three times. The biggest expanded area, called the British Extra Rural Extension, was gained in 1903. This 262 ha area was designated as a residential zone, and a formal plan was made in 1918, by H. McClure Anderson. Anderson was born in Edinburgh and came to China after having accepted some architectural training in an architectural office (Fedwick, 1917).

Anderson's scheme for this area was included in the Reports of the British Municipal Councils. His scheme carefully considered the traffic, sunlight and ventilation, drainage and risk from flooding, recreation, and exact road widths. Part of the original text concerning parks and recreation was as follows:

(4)-To adjust the widths of the roads to the traffic requirements. This is an economic point which calls for very careful consideration. It is suggested that, while, main thoroughfares should be wide and ample, unnecessary width in residential streets, where no through traffic has to be provided for, is wasteful and will retard development by increasing the rental of the property without giving a corresponding benefit. The economic loss is represented by increased municipal outlay for paving and maintenance and by the greater area withdrawn from the building land to supply the needless street space. Considerations of light, air, and recreation can be satisfied more economically and to the greater benefit of the inhabitants by the provision of more open space about the houses and by public gardens. It is an essential part of this proposal that the space between the frontage lines of the houses be ample (Anderson, 1918).

Light, air, recreation, and parks became essential elements of modern urban planning theory since Ebenezer Howard published the To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform and Garden Cities of To-morrow. Anderson was probably affected by the Garden City movement in his homeland, and in this respect, was the first modern urban planning theory practiced in the British Concession in Tianjin. His idea was well illustrated by the public gardens and boulevard system included in this plan (Fig.9.). However, according to the map of British Municipal
Area Tientsin (1925), the number of parks was reduced to three (Fig.10.). This was probably caused by the increasing need for houses, most of which came from the Chinese immigrants. Compared to the previous plan, where parks were mainly planned in the lower left part, the parks in the implementation plan were distributed much more evenly.

Fig.11. is the plan for the park located in block No. 52. The park was designed on a triangular site, centering on a swimming pool and an artificial hill. On the hill, there was a Chinese-style pavilion. To the left side of the pool, there were a slide and a swing for children. This park was quite different from Victoria Park, which was mainly initiated as a memorial place. It was probably designed as a neighborhood park, aiming to provide the residents with a daily recreational space.

Thanks to these green spaces, Tianjin became more and more attractive to both residents and visitors. Rasmussen, who was born in the county of Kent in England and worked as a reporter in Tianjin, experienced the dramatic change of this area, and described the change as follows:

*And yet here in prosaic Tientsin the really marvelous work goes on in the British Extra Area, where a great waste tract of swampy land is being turned into a garden city, with modern homes, parks and avenues of trees (Rasmussen, 1924, p. 288).*

7. Discussion

In Japan, conservation measures for modern parks and gardens have been well considered. The first step of conservation is to master the locations and present the status of important modern parks. Based on the investigations, value evaluations should be made and the national or local government needs to carry such designation or registration forward. Even before this step, consensus on conservation for essential elements of a park is desirable.

After designation or registration, a conservation plan is supposed to be developed for those historic parks. The conservation plan should include how to handle activity that will have an impact on maintenance and management, or change the present status or hinder conservation. It should also determine which regular management would not need permission or notification from or to either local or national governments. (Monuments Division of Cultural Properties Department, Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2012, p. 28).

Different from buildings, materials in parks change with time. For example, plants and animals have a life span, and when they die, they must be replaced by new ones. Besides, the requirements of a public space also change over time. Therefore, it is difficult to preserve a park in a static condition. Experts should determine the essential elements in the park according to its original plan and make a conservation plan that will not affect these essential elements (Monuments Division of Cultural Properties Department, Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2012, p. 28).

To a park which has been evaluated as a scenic beauty, the conservation plan should not only consider the park itself, but also its surroundings. For example, according to the Regulation of Tokyo Landscape, in order to preserve the view from a garden which has been designated as a cultural property, colors of the buildings planned within one kilometer from the garden should be guided (Monuments Division of Cultural Properties Department, Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2012, p. 27).

These measures are of great reference to establish a conservation system for modern historic parks in
China. The authors suggest that the national and local governments first carry out a basic investigation on all the historical parks and create a reference database. The investigation should include buildings, structures, water, plants, walls, pavements, spatial structure and vision organization. Not only the current situation, but also the original form of the parks, especially their original design idea. This calls for a large amount of historical materials, and usually, as there was no specific plan for a park, original information can only be gained from postcards, old pictures, newspapers and some literature. According to original plans and historical changes, the outstanding historic values of parks can be understood and the essential elements of parks can be listed. Generally, natural landform, spatial structure, vision organization, building, entrance space, wall, pavement, plants and their relationship with the surrounding areas need to be well studied.

As mentioned above, many foreign flowers were one of the most important elements in the park. The flowerbeds around the monument and the cypress wall, pavement, plants and their relationship with the monument has been ruined, due to patriotic sentiment. And the flowers imported from foreign countries. The pavilion was arranged in the center of the inner circle. Western style garden, although there stood two Chinese style pavilions. First, the old picture shows the park had a specific geometric center, and a Chinese style pavilion was arranged in the center of the inner circle. Therefore, this circle should be firstly preserved. In addition to the spatial structure, there were also other elements sending out British tastes, such as the monument, the lawn, the pergola, the flower containers and the flowers imported from foreign countries. The monument has been ruined, due to patriotic sentiment. The flowerbeds around the monument and the cypress behind it should be retained or restored. Flowers were one of the most important elements in the park. As mentioned above, many foreign flowers were cultivated in a greenhouse in the park. These flowers such as canna, dahlia, verbena, petunia, pansy are the main ornamental elements, and should be restored to align with the seasons in the park.

8. Conclusions

Regardless of the limitations placed on Chinese citizens, these first parks, especially Victoria Park built in the British Concession, should be considered as a turning point in the history of Chinese gardens, because before that there were only private gardens built for emperors or the wealthy class. These parks brought so much enjoyment and pleasure to people's lives and are reflected in many people's memories about Tianjin. Furthermore, they also enriched the styles and materials of Chinese gardens. From these aspects, these first parks have high historical and cultural values.

To the city, the parks are an important cultural heritage. They greatly improved the area towards a healthy environment, and changed Tianjin from "one of the dirtiest cities" to a "garden city". The plan made for the British Extra Rural Extension considered public gardens as essential elements, in other words, without public gardens the plan would be considered incomplete. Besides, the plan was the first practice of modern urban planning theory in Tianjin, which added high academic thinking to the first parks. From this aspect, it is necessary to maintain the completeness of the plan, especially after the British Concession was designated as a Historical and Cultural District of Tianjin.

As for the conservation, there are similarities and differences between parks and buildings. First of all, a management department needs to be created and a general investigation needs to be undertaken throughout the country. After that an evaluation standard and registration system should be established. When a park is registered as a cultural property, specific conservation plans must be made and significant elements must be listed to ensure the historic parks can be conserved in their original form as much as possible.

References

Fig.12. Flowers and Flower Containers in the Victoria Park (Source: http://www.virtualtianjin.net/)


