

SPATIAL STRUCTURE EVOLUTION OF SYSTEM OF RECREATION BUSINESS DISTRICT —A Case of Suzhou City

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ABSTRACT: The growing attention on urban tourism was very widespread. There are two angles to study urban tourism: supply-side and demand-side. And the supply-side of the tourism remains very important. The RBD (Recreation Business District) is a useful framework to understand the components of urban tourism and how they fit together. The paper begins with a review on the RBD and the spatial structure of tourism in urban areas and then attempts to develop a more general understanding of the spatial structure evolution of RBDs in a tourist-historic city—Suzhou. The spatial structures and functions of the RBDs in Suzhou are examined, based on field observations, interviews with city officials and industry leaders, and a review of available documents. The urban tourism of Suzhou has developed in a range of contexts, that various types of RBDs have emerged as a result of different urban development strategies. The spatial structure has evolved from the past "Single-cored Structure" to "Double-cored Structure" at present, and then to "Chain Structure" in the future. The spatial form and evolution of RBD in Suzhou are closely relative with its urban spatial expansion. Urban area dispersal is the prerequisite of the emergence of the RBD. Planning and constructing the RBD becomes a new impetus to urban growth or renewal. Finally, a number of strategies for planning and developing the RBD in Suzhou are suggested. The different RBDs should adopt different strategies. Intensification can be the possible strategy for the RBDs in the ancient city. Accreting with the urban theme park or engrafting on the Jinji Lake is suggested respectively for the RBD in the Suzhou New District and the Suzhou Industrial Park.

KEY WORDS: Suzhou; Recreation Business District (RBD); spatial structure; evolution

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1 INTRODUCTION

City has become the largest tourism origin and destination. Urban tourism is a lasting topic in tourism research. There are two angles to study urban tourism: supply and demand. And the supply-side of the tourism remains very important (PAGE, 1995). Usually, geographers pay more attention to the spatial structure of the urban tourism. According to ASHWORTH (1989), one of the most frequently used approaches towards the supply of urban tourism is the descriptive research by geographers based on inventories and lists

of the facilities and where they are located. A RBD (Recreation Business District) is a useful framework in which to understand the components of urban tourism and how they fit together (PAGE, 1995). The form and evolution of RBD reveals much about the nature of urban tourism and its impact, while the analysis of the planning systems influencing RBD can contribute to concepts and methods for better planning of tourism in urban areas (GETZ, 1993). For this reason, the RBD needs to be considered thoroughly.

The urban spatial structure of Suzhou has been changing continuously. Especially with the planning

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and construction of the Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP) and the Suzhou New District(SND), the urban development in Suzhou is gradually moving from a homocentric pattern to a polycentric one. And in the polycentric cities, generally speaking, different RBDs may emerge and form the System of Recreational Business Districts (SRBD). Consideration of a range of tourist districts within a polycentric city might therefore shed more light on the concept of such districts in general and lead to greater understanding of their spatial structure and function (PEARCE, 1998). As a large polycentric city and a major destination for a variety of visitors, Suzhou provides itself as a very useful focus on exploring the structure and functioning of RBD. Enjoying continuously the reputation of "Paradise on Earth", Suzhou once fostered an ancient urban RBD that is the main component of the modern and contemporary RBD. Despite the importance of tourism in Suzhou and the city's significance as a tourism destination, relative little attention has been directly paid to examining its spatial structure of urban tourism, let alone the systematic examination of RBD.

This paper begins with a review on the development process of the SRBD in Suzhou and tries to develop a more general understanding of RBDs in a tourist-historic city by exploring the characteristics, structure and function of the system of RBDs and examining how the nature and structure of RBDs might vary from one part of the polycentric city to another and how these form part of the broader urban fabric. More emphasis is laid on the evolution of the RBDs in hope of enriching the planning concepts and methods of urban planning and urban tourism planning.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1970, RBD was first brought forward by STANSFIELD and RICKERT (1970) to describe the characteristic, morphology and function of that part of resort given over to tourist spending. That is, there appeared "a linear aggregation of restaurants, various food stands, candy stores and a varied array of novelty and souvenir shops which cater to visitors' leisurely shopping needs" in the downtown of the resort. This study rightly identifies the multifunctional land use of the central areas of cities in relation to the central areas for business (PAGE, 1995). TAYLOR (1975) defined the range of RBD through a case study of East London in South Africa, while PEARCE (1989) offered a useful critique of these studies. Later on, MEYER-ARENDRT(1990) examined Gulf of Mexico seaside re-

sorts and concluded that the RBD is a key component of resort morphology and that the original RBDs continue to be the cores of present RBDs.

The early research on RBD was mainly engaged in beach resorts. It was not until the late 1980s and the early 1990s that the essential ideas in the RBD have subsequently been extended to urban tourism to try to understand the location and distribution of the range of visitor-oriented urban functions in cities (PAGE, 1995). The most notable study is GETZ's comparative research in Niagara Falls (in the border area of USA and Canada)(GETZ, 1993), with particular emphasis on the contrasting planning process and forms of the tourism centres. He also put forward a model of the tourism business districts and appropriate planning strategies for creating them. But the model was paid more attention to functions than spatial patterns of tourism business districts. In 1998, PEARCE Douglas G (1998) sought to develop an understanding of tourist districts in large polycentric urban areas by exploring the characteristics, structure and function of three tourist districts in Paris.

In some studies, the RBD was extended to various terms such as Tourism Business District(TBD)(GETZ, 1993) and Central Tourist District(CTD)(BURTENS-HAW *et al.*, 1991), to describe concentrations of visitor-oriented attractions and services and to explain how to arrange the infrastructure serving the visitors in city. Despite the multiplicity of terms used in the literature, this paper continues to use the term of RBD because of its multi-functions: serving a mix of visitors, both tourists and residents.

The domestic research on RBD began in 1995. BAO Ji-gang (1995) advanced that by planning and constructing RBD, there would be a propelled development of the whole city, and forecasted that RBD would become a new urban functional area. This was the first time that the notion of the RBD was applied to the urban tourism research in China. Subsequently, BAO Ji-gang and GU Shi-yun(1998) reviewed the involvement of the RBD research in Western countries, discussed the difference between RBD and CBD, and analyzed the function, types and the research significance of the RBD through the case studies of Guangzhou and Zhuhai. HUANG Zhen-fang and HOU Guo-lin made a primary research on the form mechanism of RBD in a big city, and brought along some planning rules of the RBD and the system of urban tourism product (HOU and HUANG, 2001; HUANG and HOU, 2001).

The brief historic retrospection of the RBD research

shows that the empirical research on tourist districts, which has been undertaken so far has tended to focus on specific areas within cities, that is, on a single district. While some distributional studies have been carried out in large, polycentric urban areas, the systematic examination of tourist districts in such settings has been neglected. It might be argued that, some functional relationships might be better explored at a city-wide scale rather than at the district level (PEARCE, 1998). Furthermore, there is still a lack of research on the formation and the spatial evolution of RBD, especially in a tourist-historic city.

3 ANALYZING SPATIAL STRUCTURE EVOLUTION OF RBDS IN SUZHOU

3.1 Formulation of "Single-cored Structure" in History

With the completion of the Grand Canal during the Sui Dynasty, Suzhou became a thriving commercial district while items such as silk were transported along the bustling waterways. Suzhou kept on its great richness and popularity in the Tang and Song dynasties. And during the Ming and Qing dynasties, with the increasing concentration of silk manufacture here, Suzhou became one of the most flourishing and prosperous central cities in China. Suzhou fostered a typical ancient RBD based on the traditional retailing area. In review of the history of the ancient RBD in Suzhou, though the location of RBD had changed several times, it showed itself a "Single-cored" spatial structure till modern times.

The downtown of Suzhou had been in a state of flux in history due to the change of the transportation center. In the Southern Song Dynasty the nucleus of Suzhou City was located at Leqiao where the government office was situated. Just like other ancient cities in China, the commercial center (market) tended to coincide with the office area (ZHOU *et al.*, 1999). From the Ming Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty the west of Suzhou City had a dense population and thriving commerce. At that time most residents were engaged in trade. In particular, the Changmen Gate and the Xumen Gate in the northwest of Suzhou City substituted for Leqiao as the commercial center of Suzhou because of its favorable transportation location close to the Grand Canal (WANG, 1998). With the improvement of the waterway transport, the commercial center shifted to the area of Shilu Road-Nanhao Street where the ancient city adjoined the Grand Canal. Later on, along with the rapid development of railway and the

opening of Shanghai harbor, Suzhou gradually lost the superiority in transporting the commodity through the Grand Canal. Consequently, Suzhou was no longer the center city in the Jiangnan Region (referred to the area located in the middle and lower reaches of the Changjiang (Yangtze) River, including Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Hubei, Hunan and Jiangxi provinces). And in the early 20th century, the commercial center of Suzhou moved to the Guanqian Area (ZHOU *et al.*, 1999).

The Guanqian Area stands right at the middle of the Suzhou Ancient City (SAC). It is composed of Guanqian Street traversing from east to west, the Xuanmiao Taoist Temple in the north, Beiju and the Eunuch Alley in the south, and Chayuanchang in the west. Guanqian Street, with a more than 1000-year history, is lined by a lot of old famous stores; the Xuanmiao Taoist Temple with 1700-year history draws large quantities of visitors as a unit of cultural relic under national protection; Beiju acts as a center for culture and entertainment; the Eunuch Alley is noted for its delicious food and snack; Chayuanchang is serving as a tourism hub.

In the 1930s, the Guanqian Area had become a very popular leisure setting for residents. As described in *A Guide in New Suzhou*, Guanqian Street was the most prosperous place of the whole city—stores, tea houses, cinemas, restaurants, hotels, theaters were all crowded in this small area, so it became the recreational district of the residents (FENG, 1999).

Guanqian Street once was rebuilt and widened in 1930. Since 1949, the municipal government has renovated the street many times. And now the width of the street is 9–13m. Guanqian Street became a walking street in June 1982. In its long and complicated developing process, Guanqian Street turned into the most prosperous commercial street in Suzhou.

3.2 Transformation from "Single-cored" to "Double-cored" Structure

With the development of urban tourism, two main tourist districts have emerged in Suzhou City: the Guanqian Area and the Shilu Area. Thus the so-called "Double-cored Structure" of RBD in Suzhou appeared. The two areas feature largely in multi-functions including heritage and in strong shopping and entertainment. By the end of October 1996, the two districts, with an area of 0.78km² (the Quanqian Area, 0.6km²; the Shilu Area, 0.18 km²), had concentrated four fifths of the whole city's retailing (The Policy Research

House of Suzhou Municipal Authorities, 1997). The two districts have surpassed the traditional managing mode and provided various services different customers' multiple needs.

3.2.1 Guanqian Area

The Guanqian Area is not only the destination of tourists, but also the important leisure spot of residents. According to one investigation undertaken in June 1998, the visitor flowing into the Guanqian Street was 109 828 persons/day at weekend, 80 341 persons/day on weekday; 79 120 persons by walk, 24 986 persons by bicycle, and 2 861 persons by car. The percentages, which residents and tourists occupy respectively, are almost the same (ZHOU *et al.*, 1999).

The characteristics of the RBD are described as follows:

(1) A traditional retailing center. The Guanqian Area is well-known for its aggregation of many famous old stores. At the western and eastern ends a number of modern commercial mansions lie in; south to the street is the small park of cultural center and the Eunuch Alley called as "Delicious Food Street". The abundant cultural heritages also strengthen the attraction to the visitors.

(2) A famous center for historic relics and sites. There are 2 places listed as the units of cultural relics under national protection and 3 places under municipal protection. One of the main attractions of the Guanqian Street is the historic and architectural site. The most notable heritage is the Xuanmiao Taoist Temple located in the middle of the street. It was originally built in the Jin Dynasty and named "Zhenqing Taoist Temple", which was later destroyed by war. It was rebuilt in the Southern Song Dynasty and re-named "Xuanmiao Taoist Temple" in the Yuan Dynasty. The extant Sanqing Palace is the biggest timberwork architecture in the whole Jiangnan Region. The Xuanmiao Taoist Temple is not only a famous historic site of Taoism, but also a trading center of small commodities, which is in parallel with the Town God's Temple (Yuyuan Commercial City) in Shanghai and the Confucius Temple in Nanjing.

(3) A multi-function center for tourism, retailing, entertainment, shopping, etc. As discussed above, the Guanqian Street was the first RBD in Suzhou and all through the ages, the status of the district has been little overall change. The Guanqian Street is still a very popular destination alluring both tourists and residents. In the context of tourism in Suzhou, the Guanqian Area is a compact center for concentrated tourist activity.

3.2.2 Shilu Area

The Shilu Commercial District is situated just outside the gate to Changmen (a city in ancient time). The Shilu Road has been a traditional prosperous market. Early in 1912, the road was lined by over 320 various general stores, restaurants and luncheonettes, the most famous ones were the Zhaotianlu Teahouse, the Dujia Laosan Meat Store and the Mutaishan Herbal Medicine Shop. The famous Shilu Small Commodities Market bears special appeal to customers for its rich, small colorful commodities and for its being a night market.

The main characteristics of this area can be generalized as follows:

(1) Possessing many modern shopping malls. Since 1979, a number of commercial buildings have been located in or expanded to the district, such as the Xinhua Restaurant and department stores with names of Shill, Hong Kong-Shanghai, Asia and Venice.

(2) Bearing profound cultural traditions. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Shilu Area once was the commercial center of Suzhou. In this area there are many famous stores with more than 100-year history. And Nanhao Street is such an old commercial street characterized by the embodiments of Suzhou Culture: local food, crafts, consumer goods, flowers, birds, fish, insects, antique, and embroider, attracting lots of visitors with its historic stories and folklores.

(3) Gathering a number of high quality tourist hotels. The RBD has a range of accommodations, dominated by newer or recently renovated hotels. Hotels are clustered as a function of proximity to inner-city businesses and historic attractions. There are many hotels such as Xinhua Hotel, Changmen Hotel, and so on, with about 6000 beds in this small district. These facilities give the district an image of modernity.

3.3 Movement Towards "Chain Structure"

Modern urban growth is changing from agglomeration to dispersion, from a homocentric pattern to a polycentric one (GU *et al.*, 2001). In polycentric city, different RBDs emerge and form complex system of RBD: on the one hand, the RBDs in cities are located in conjunction with traditional urban retailing centers; on the other hand, the widespread development of sightseeing, shopping, entertainment, conference, and exhibition facilities in urban new areas has been a major factor in shaping the new RBDs (YANG and LIU, 2001).

Nowadays Suzhou City development has presented

a spatial structure of "one body with two wings", that is, "Suzhou Ancient City in the middle with Suzhou Industrial Park in the east and Suzhou New District in the west" (WU, 1997). The city has aggressively pursued industrial development in newer areas, and is also seeking renewal of its traditional urban area. So the spatial structure of urban tourism in Suzhou is coming into being based on it: ancient city is the main core, SND and SIP are the sub-cores of urban tourism in Suzhou. The sub-cores are the spatial structure extension of the main core just like the branches of a tree (TAO *et al.*, 2002). The system of RBD (SRBD) in Suzhou is moving towards the "Chain Structure"(Fig. 1): except the Guanqian Area and the Shilu Area in the ancient city, the Shi Mountain-Suzhou Amusement Land Area in the SND and the Central Park-Jinji Lake Area in the SIP will become new RBDs. The three subareas are conveniently connected by the Ganjiang Road and have their own features serving different customers (Table 1).



Fig.1 Chain structure of SRBD in Suzhou City

Essentially, the morphological process of the SRBD in Suzhou differs from those of beach resorts and other tourism destinations. SRBD is composed of several recreational business districts with different characteristics, functions, spatial structures, and histories. As urban authorities and business interests concentrate on creating more livable environments, the planning efforts to foster a RBD or an urban resort image, will become more pronounced. Not all RBDs are fully or even partially planned. Some have developed in a free enterprise environment, while others have been subjected to varying levels of control or regulation with-

Table1 Comparison of four RBDs in Suzhou City

Factor	Guanqian Street	Shilu Road	SND	SIP
Type	Walking street	Walking street	New urban area	New urban area
Location	Ancient downtown	Ancient downtown	West of SAC	East of SAC
Attraction	Xuanmiao Taoist Temple Traditional street Museum Cuisine/snack Embroidery	Traditional street Food Shopping mall	Suzhou Amusement Land	Jinji Lake
Function	Recreation Shopping Heritage Entertainment Sightseeing	Recreation Shopping Entertainment	Recreation Entertainment Central business district	Recreation Entertainment Sightseeing
Service	Souvenirs/gifts Catering/beverage Entertainment Information centers Hotels	Souvenirs/gifts Catering/beverage Entertainment Hotels	Souvenirs/gifts Catering/beverage Entertainment	Souvenirs/gifts Catering/beverage Entertainment
Development strategy	Developing tourism Rejuvenating the old downtown Infilling	Developing tourism Rejuvenating the old downtown Infilling	Catalyst for the economy development	Catalyst for the economy development
Market positioning	Domestic and international tourist Local residents	Domestic tourists Local residents	Local residents Residents in the Changjiang River Delta Investors and employees	Local residents Investors and employees

out strategic planning (PEARCE, 1998). With recognition to the significance of the urban tourism, the intervention of planning comes earlier and earlier.

The formulation of the RBD is affected by many different complex factors. In many cities, especially in

tourist-historic cities, the RBD is shaped by the pulling power of both the natural or heritage resources and the traditional commercial center, resulting in "bridging" developments of spatial shifting as the RBD forms (ASHWORTH and TUNBRIDGE, 1990).

In many towns and cities natural or heritage attractions provide a logical focus of the regulation. As for Suzhou, RBDs tend to formulate nearest to the natural resources or heritage or theme park. RBD is not limited in a linear street, but tends to sprawl to adjacent sites.

In some centers, tourism is viewed as a major catalyst for desired changes, such as to increase attractions, infrastructure, and services; to promote urban visitors and to develop an attractive image; to attract other forms of development/investment. The Suzhou New District and the Suzhou Industry Park are the cases in point.

4 STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP RBDS IN SUZHOU

To achieve mutual flourishing and coordinate development, each unit of SRBD in Suzhou needs a particular development strategy.

4.1 RBDs in the Guanqian Area and the Shilu Area—Infilling or Intensification

Tourism can be the catalyst for major redevelopment schemes and urban renewal programs. Where strong CBD functions already exist, accommodations, attractions, and visitor services can be infilled through planning control, incentive, or by direct public investment (GETZ, 1993).

With urban dispersal, there is more than one node of accommodations and visitor services in Suzhou. The status of traditional RBD declines relatively, and most of the tourist products are "old", including minor attractions and services such as fast-food outlets and souvenir shops. The developing speed is slow down, giving rise to problems for specific businesses and widespread demands for new attractions and upgraded services.

In the tourist-historic city, the attraction is both the preserved heritage and the ambience augmented by leisure services. Reuse and adaptation of old buildings for services and accommodations is a major feature of this strategy. Typically, these will also be multi-purpose areas combining tourist-oriented, CBD, and residential uses.

Suzhou has successfully completed the 1st and 2nd phases of its Guanqian Street renovation project. Buildings with a total area of 89 000m² have been constructed and roads, plazas and parking lots of more than 50 000m² have been rebuilt or expanded. Suzhou authorities recently signed responsibility pledges with

over fifty departments or offices, including the Suzhou Garden Administrative Bureau, marking the formal start-up of the 3rd phase of a renovation program for the Guanqian Street, the commercial hub of the city. The essence of the undergoing project is to set up a city park covering an area of 8000m² where the old houses have been pulled down. The aim of the 3rd phase in operation is to extend and deepen the inspiring results achieved during the preceding two phases of renovation. A comprehensively dynamic and static communication network is expected to formulate in the Guanqian Area and a better ecosystem is hopefully to improve the general environment there. Later on, a series of cultural and commercial buildings' refurbishment will start with a view to accelerate the regional economic prosperity and stimulate the development of tourism.

The Shilu Commercial District is planned and remodeled on a higher beginning point to be one of the busy commercial centers of Suzhou City according to the modern standards. Shopping, food, entertainment, tourism and leisure will be fully represented in its central area, around which a circular radiation will be formed to bring along the prosperity of the commercial streets in peripheral areas.

Invested by Jianguo Asia Group with 250×10⁶ yuan, Nanhao Street was reconstructed in 1999. The new Nanhao Street is connected with the Shilu Area to the west. And the whole area has already developed into one of the most modernized recreational business districts in Suzhou. According to the master plan of urban tourism development in Suzhou, the function of RBD in Shilu is positioned as: modern commercial zone in the west; walking street in the east, and characterized by the embodiments of Suzhou culture: local food, crafts, consumer goods, flowers, birds, fish, insects, antique, and embroider; regional commercial center for shopping, entertainment, service, sightseeing, and leisure.

4.2 RBD in the Suzhou New District (SND)—Accreting with the Urban Theme Park

The SND is to the west of the Suzhou Ancient City, 5km away from the downtown. The development and construction commenced in 1991 on a planned area of 52km². In accordance with the master plan, the New District is to be built into an agglomerated area of hi-tech industries and a new modern urban district as well. It is divided into four sub-districts: the Central Commercial Zone, the Hi-tech Industrial Zone, the

Comprehensive Economic Development Zone, and the Holiday Resort Zone.

The RBD in the SND stands on the Shishan Road where the Suzhou Amusement Land lies. The development of the theme park can act as visitor magnet. RBD in the Suzhou New District should make use of the market that the Suzhou Amusement Land has occupied at first; on the other hand, the symbiosis with RBD can effectively prolong the life cycle of the theme park. Especially in the maturity stage, RBD can provide a new developing opportunity. In a word, the combination of RBD and urban theme park can benefit from each other. They will extend the development space and achieve the win-win goal.

4.3 RBD in the Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP)—Engrafting on the Jinji Lake

The Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP) lies beside the Jinji Lake, east of Suzhou Ancient City. It is the stretched space of the Suzhou Ancient City (SHI and ZHANG, 1997). Being a project of cooperation between the governments of China and Singapore, the SIP started its development and construction in May 1994 on a planned area of 70km², of which the Phase One Development of 8km² has been basically completed with first-class investment environment in conformity to international standards. Sixty thousand persons are expected to inhabit the park when it is completed.

The development of the RBD in the SIP is closely connected with the construction of the Jinji Lake Park. The park will feature a square, a botanical garden, an aquarium, an art gallery, and many other facilities. The construction of the park is part of Suzhou's effort to turn the industrial park into a modernized urban area. The Jinji Lake Area integrates water landscape with urban view perfectly. And the natural attraction can provide the impetus for the development of the RBD. Based on the master plan, the RBD in the SIP is put up from the northwest area of the Jinji Lake to the center park. The main function of the RBD is to supply the visitors with the modern leisure and entertainment services. Engrafting on the Jinji Lake Park, the RBD in the SIP will grow up rapidly and act as a strong tourism site.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The RBD has become a new way of urban landuse. The formulation of the system of the RBDs in Suzhou is not only the result of urban dispersal, but also the

necessary choice for urban area to seek development. Furthermore, with the improved understanding of the relationship between urban development and urban tourism, municipal authorities have sought to plan the RBD, often in conjunction with economic development, urban renewal, or redevelopment schemes.

The formulation of the SRBDs interworks with the urban planning and urban development: urban dispersal is the prerequisite of the emergence of the RBD; planning and constructing the RBD becomes a new impetus to urban growth or renewal.

In short, the planning of the RBDs is inherently mixed with other urban planning and development issues, and, for the most part, requires strong intervention by public agencies—both for planning or regulating, and for investment or subsidy. Creating effective tourism business districts is a major challenge for cities, and will require very long planning horizons (GETZ, 1993). And because the development of the RBD depends upon functional combination rather than segregation, and upon multi-functional environments rather than mono-functional ones, the need to integrate a variety of different functions has been a deliberate part of the planning process (PEARCE, 1998).

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