



Relationship between soundscape and historical-cultural elements of Historical Areas in Beijing: a case study of Qianmen Avenue

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ABSTRACT

With the tourism development of Historical Areas in Beijing, the soundscape of Historical Areas has changed dramatically. Whether the new soundscape of Historical Areas created by tourism could highlight Beijing's traditional culture and history, and whether the new soundscape could convey true meaning of Historical Areas to visitors and give them good tourism satisfaction, are both key issues to be solved in balancing the relationship between development and conservation of Historical Areas. Taking Qianmen Avenue of Beijing city as a studied case, this paper examined the relationships between the current soundscape of Historical Areas and the historical—cultural elements of Historical Areas. The methods of In-depth Interview and the Statistical Analysis were adopted in the paper to acquire the subjective appraisals of related experts and visitors who have experienced the soundscape. The findings of the paper showed that experts believed that the new soundscape of Qianmen Avenue had separated itself from Beijing traditional history and culture. Visitors there could not perceive the essence of Beijing' regional culture and their tourist satisfactions are associated with the current new soundscape. Suggestions of improving and optimizing current soundscape were proposed in the final.

Keywords: Soundscape, Historical Areas, Qian'men Avenue. I-INCE Classification of Subjects Number(s): 56.3

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Schafer proposed the concept of soundscape in late 1960s (1), the research on soundscape has been conducted for four decades. During this period, many scholars focused their studies on the theories and applications of soundscape from different professional perspectives. The objectives of these studies include soundscape in urban open public spaces (2, 3), national parks (4), urban residential environments (5) and forest planning (6). Among which, the classification and characteristics of soundscape (7, 8), the evaluation and assessment of soundscape (9, 10,11) and improvement of soundscape (12) were paid more attention to. Especially on the application of soundscape, scholars have introduced the concept of soundscape into recreation management (13), urban planning (14) and landscape planning (15). All the above studies have not only expanded the contents of soundscape, but also made the concept of soundscape more popular and widely accepted.

Although there are many differences in the concept definition of soundscape, scholars have formed relatively consistent view on the core elements of soundscape in the past decades, namely sound, listener and space environment (12,16). In the previous studies, the evaluation and improvement of soundscape have been paid more attention to; however, the match of soundscape with specific regional location, or the coordination of soundscape with social environment and

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historic culture has not been examined in detail. This study, taking Qianmen Avenue of Beijing City as the representative of Historical Areas, aims to explore the relationships between soundscape and the local elements of history and culture. As the objective of this paper is about the relationship between sound and the environment in which sound generates, exists and transmits, the paper has distinctive characteristics of space and geography. Furthermore, many geography terms such as space, place, and scale were applied in this research. As a result, the findings of the study would expand the contents of research on soundscape, and establish a bridge between sound research and geographical space research.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction of the studied case

Qianmen Avenue is a typical representative of Historical Areas in China. It is full of historical and cultural information of Beijing traditional business and old Beijing dwellers' daily lives. As a result, the soundscape of Qianmen Avenue is unique and colorful. With the development of Beijing city, especially the urbanization trend, the soundscape of Historical Areas such as Qianmen Avenue has changed dramatically. New sound elements have been added and many traditional old sound elements have been replaced or decreased. From May of 2007, the Qianmen Avenue was under renovation and reconstruction and the project was completed in May of 2008. After the renovation and reconstruction, the visual landscape as well as the soundscape has changed a lot.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

The method of In-depth Interview was adopted in this study to collect data. According to the relationship between soundscape and historical and cultural elements, this study designed a questionnaire with 12 questions. In order to distinguish the differences of cognitive soundscape by people from different occupations and education levels, the interviewees were divided into two groups, the first group including experts and scholars who are engaged in geography, urban planning, architectural design and tourism development. The education level of this group is master degree and above. The other group consisted of common tourists who had paid a visit to Qianmen Avenue. In general, 25 experts and 42 tourists have been interviewed. Some demographic characteristics of the interviewees are shown in Figure 1, Figure 2 and Table 1.

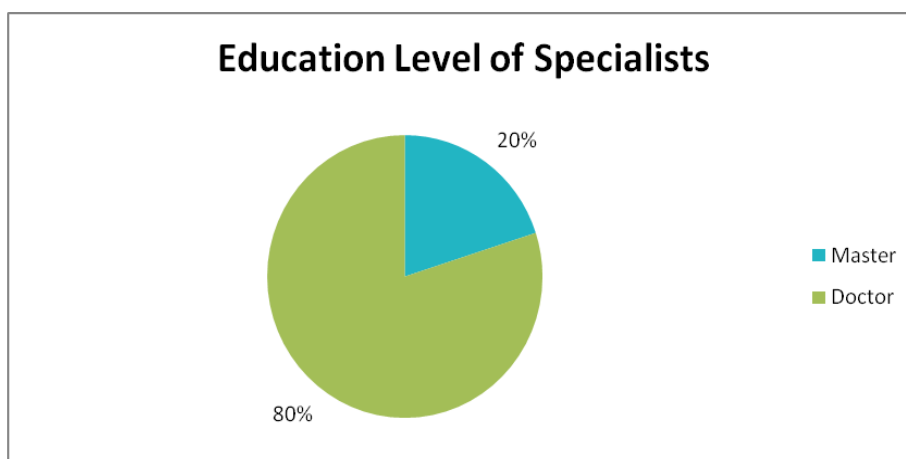


Figure 1 – The education level of experts and scholars

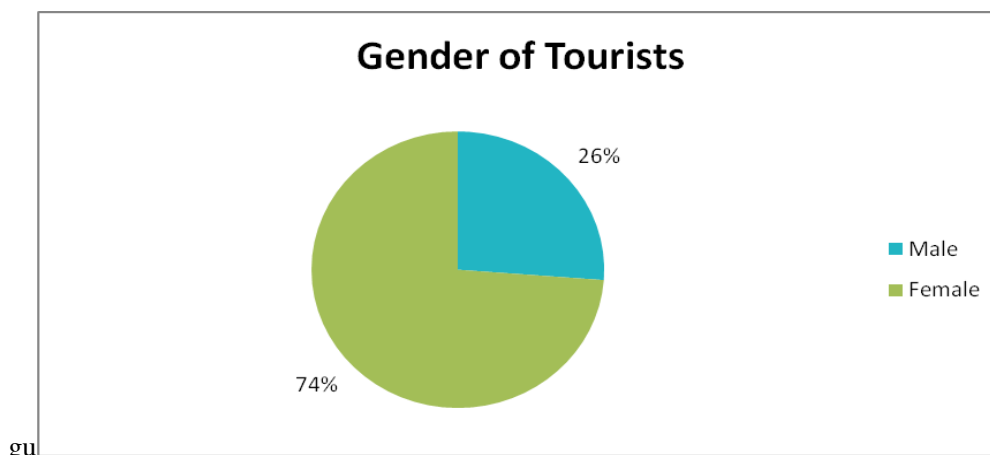


Figure 2 – The gender of the tourists

Table 1 – Ages of the interviewees

Interview subjects	18-24	25-35	36-45	46-55	More than 56
Specialists	0	13	5	5	2
Tourists	9	27	3	2	1

Based on the data collected by deep interviews, the software of Excel was utilized to do the related analysis below.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Recognition of the importance of soundscape

As shown in Figure 3, 18 specialists thought the soundscape was very important or important for the reconstruction of Historical Areas, while 7 experts did not pay more attention to the soundscape and only one specialist of the 7 experts thought it was unimportant for the renovation of Historical Areas. In other words, more than 70% of specialists attached importance to the soundscape. In addition, another question showed that 16 experts thought that sound should be designed to reflect the traditional culture. 9 professors argued that Historical Areas only need to be appropriately filled with historical and cultural elements and sound should change with time. In a word, although there were different viewpoints about whether the soundscape should reflect the traditional culture totally in designing the soundscape, most specialists agreed that soundscape should be paid more attention to in the renovation of Historical Areas.

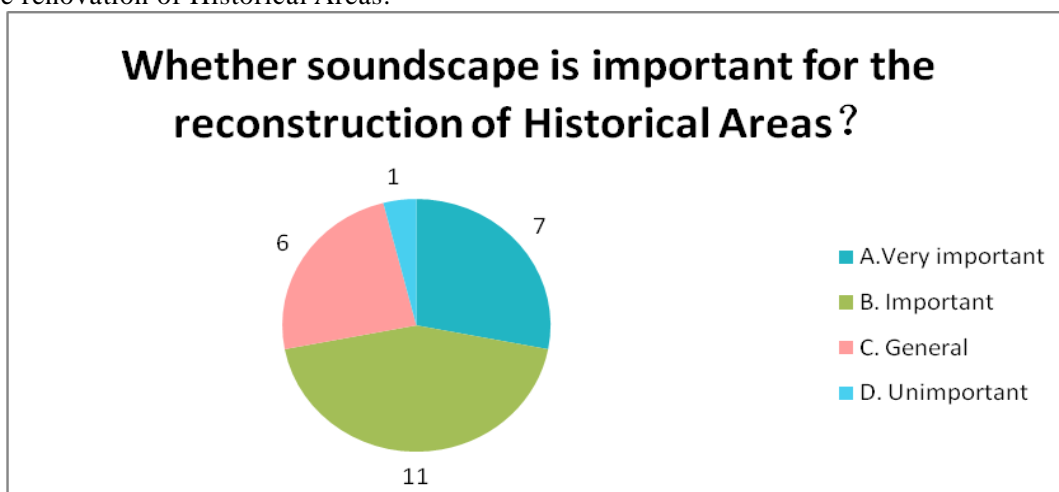


Figure 3 –The importance recognition of soundscape for the reconstruction of Historical Areas

As the above analysis, soundscape should be considered in the renovation of Historical Areas. However, administrators generally ignored the importance of soundscape in most cases. Table 2 showed that only 8 professors thought parts of Historical Areas were designed under the consideration of soundscape and 14 experts argued that the soundscape were not focused on. Besides, no experts thought the governors had fully considered the construction of soundscape in the renovation of Historical Areas.

Table 2 – Whether the construction of soundscape is considered in the renovation of Historical Areas in Beijing?

Whether the construction of soundscape is considered in the renovation of Historical Areas in Beijing?	Number of respondents
Has been fully considered, there is a special soundscape planning	0
Has been considered, there is soundscape design in some sections	8
No special consideration, occasionally soundscape problems are included	11
No consideration	3
Unkown	3

According to the above comparative analysis, there were differences in recognizing the importance of soundscape. While specialists thought soundscape planning needed more attention, related stakeholders such as government and historical area planners ignored the elements of soundscape that could reflect history and culture. In conclusion, it is indispensable to pay more attention to the soundscape planning in future.

3.2 Differences of the expected, perceived and representative soundscape

Identifying and analyzing the differences of the expected, perceived and representative soundscape of Qianmen Avenue is one of the objectives of the paper. The expected soundscape refers to the one that respondents could firstly thought of when they are asked about the soundscape of Qianmen Avenue. Representative soundscape refers to the one that can represent the history and culture of Qianmen Avenue after the consideration of respondents, differing from the expected soundscape. Perceived soundscape is defined as the most prominent soundscape that tourists actually experienced in Qianmen Avenue. Specialists and tourists were asked about their thoughts of expected, perceived and representative soundscape in Qianmen Avenue. The answers included four kinds of soundscapes: Shouts of street vendors, traditional folk music of ancient Beijing, natural sound (the sound of wind, birds, pigeon whistle on behalf of the natural characteristics and so on), hustle and bustle (such as the whistle, horns, raucous vocals).

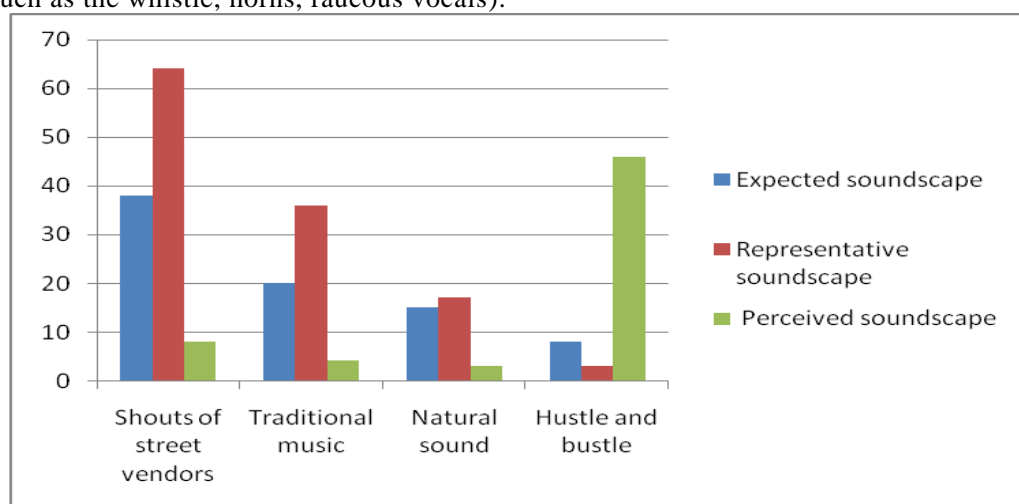


Figure 4 – Differences of the expected, perceived and representative soundscape

Figure 4 indicated that most respondents thought that the expected soundscapes and representative soundscapes in Qianmen Avenue were shouts of street vendors and traditional music. However, the

actual soundscape that could be easily perceived was hustle and bustle in the Historical Area.

It can be concluded from Figure 4 that respondents thought the soundscapes of Qianmen Avenue, which is an important place reflecting old Beijing history and culture, were of traditional business features (shouts of street vendors) and arts (traditional music). However, after the reconstruction, these soundscapes were replaced by the modern business atmosphere. The whistles, horns, raucous vocals were similar to other commercial pedestrian streets.

3.3 The overall evaluation of soundscape

There was a significant difference in the overall evaluation of soundscape between specialists and tourists. All the specialists and tourists who have visited Qianmen Avenue were asked to answer the following two questions. According to Figure 5, 97% of tourists did not take the negative view on the soundscape in Qianmen Avenue. Moreover, 35% of tourists thought the soundscape was reasonable at least. In contrast, no specialists thought highly of the soundscape after the reconstruction of Qianmen Avenue (Figure 6). In addition, the evaluation for soundscape was poor by 12% of specialists.

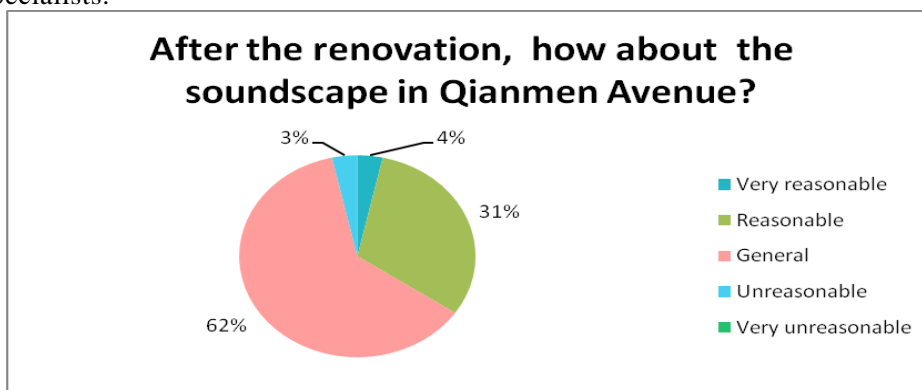


Figure 5 – How about the soundscape in Qianmen Avenue – tourists

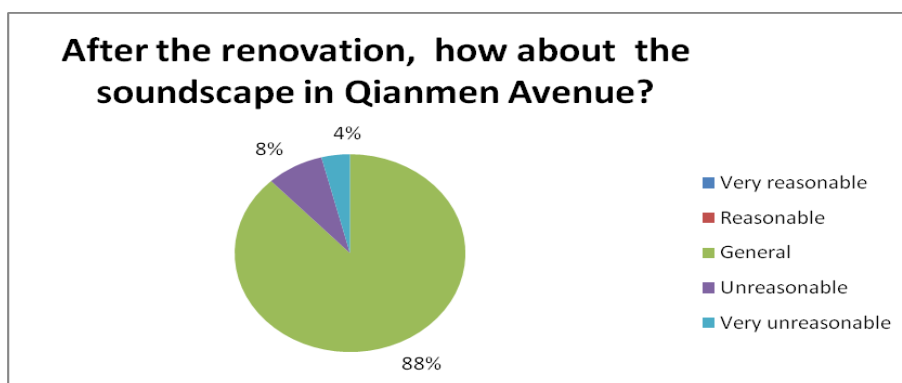


Figure 6 – How about the soundscape in Qianmen Avenue – specialists

Table 3 –How much did the sound in Qianmen Avenue reflect history and culture of old Beijing?

	tourists	specialists
Greatly	1	0
More or less	16	8
Not at all	9	14
Unknown	3	3

The result of another question was similar to the above one. Most tourists thought the sound in Qianmen Avenue reflected history and culture of old Beijing more or less, while most specialists argued that the sound did not reflect old Beijing at all. Most tourists did not know the history and old situation of Qianmen Avenue exactly. They were not disgusted with hustle and bustle there because the soundscape was same with other commercial pedestrian streets. Conversely, specialists, who are engaged in geography, urban planning, architectural design and tourism development, are more concerned with the changes of soundscape and tourist satisfaction caused by sound experience. The actual sound did not meet their expected soundscapes and the hustle and bustle would reduce

tourists' satisfaction, so specialists took negative attitude towards the construction of soundscape in Qianmen Avenue.

3.4 Influences of soundscape on tourist satisfaction

According to Table 4, two groups both thought soundscape had certain or a little influence on tourist satisfaction. Figure 5 showed that most of the tourists did not take negative view on the construction of soundscape in Qianmen Avenue. Therefore, it is reasonable that 97% of tourists did not have a bad tourist satisfaction (Figure 7). However, most of these tourists were not totally satisfied with the visit to Qianmen Avenue. The ratio of tourists satisfied with the visit was 31% and this ratio was similar to that of tourists (34%) who thought soundscape was reasonable in Figure 5. Thereby, it is necessary to take measures to improve the soundscape.

Table 4 –How much did the soundscape influence tourist satisfaction in Qianmen Avenue?

	Tourists	Specialists
Greatly	4	5
Certain	15	10
More or less	10	9
Not at all	0	1

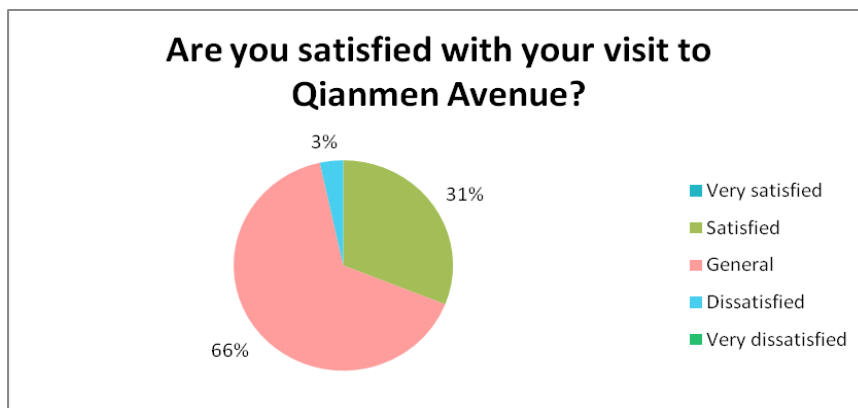


Figure 7 – Tourist satisfaction in Qianmen Avenue – tourists

3.5 Suggestions of soundscape improvement

Both experts and tourists were not satisfied enough with the soundscape of Qianmen Avenue from the above analysis. Figure 8 showed the sounds that could be enhanced to improve soundscape suggestions of soundscape improvement proposed by respondents. The sound that needs to reappear firstly was shouts of street vendors, because of the fact that Qianmen Avenue is a commercial street of old Beijing. In the past, vendors used their shouts to attract customers, so shouts of vendors are the feature of Qianmen Avenue. In addition, traditional music and natural sound were also needed in this avenue. It is obvious that no one want to experience hustle and bustle when they visit this Historical Area.

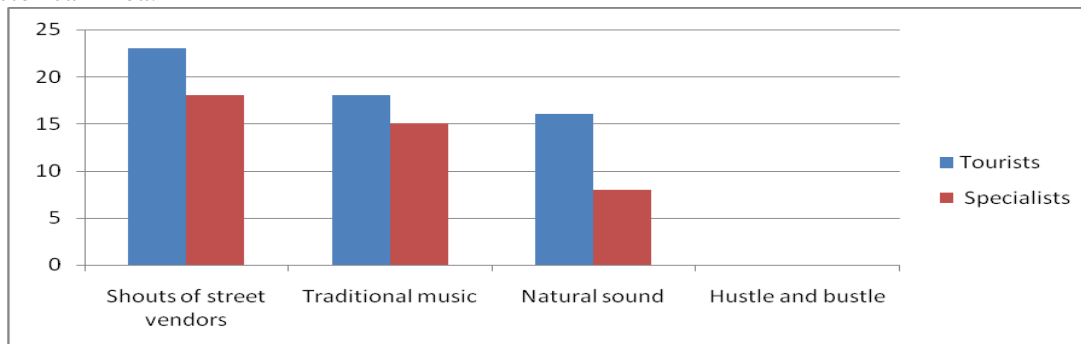


Figure 8 – Suggestions of soundscape improvement

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the relationships between the current soundscape and the historical—cultural elements in Qianmen Avenue and provided a new perspective on the

reconstruction of Historical Areas. It can be concluded firstly that soundscape is very important in the renovation and display process of Historical Areas. However, soundscape construction has not attracted enough attention from related stakeholders of Historical Areas such as government and urban planners. The findings of the interviews showed that soundscape should demonstrate the traditional historical—cultural elements of a Historical Area on one hand, and it also needs to change with the passage of time on the other hand. Secondly, although tourists realized that soundscape was an important part of one's travelling experience, they had low requirements for soundscape; the reason of which lies in the fact that most scenic spots and commercial pedestrian streets were inundated with hustle and bustle in China. There was no satisfied example that could provide them with wonderful soundscape experience. Thirdly, a splendid soundscape can increase tourists' satisfaction because audible experience together with visual experience forms complete perception and sense of space for tourists. Eyes are not the sole sense organs that could be used by tourists to experience a scenic spot, scenic area or a tourist destination.

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