Public Discourse and Urban Development: A Case Study of Hangzhou, China

Monika Vij

Department of Geography, Miranda House, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Abstract: *In this paper, an attempt is made to study urban development from the point of view of discourse and focus on the particular case of city development discourse of Hangzhou, a historical, prosperous tourist city on the east coast of China. Drawing on a local perspective and a global-minded approach, it is an attempt to ascertain and assess what features of public discourse come to shape and consequently impact the development of the city. It will be seen, among other things, that in recent decades a popular discourse by citizens has literally penetrated and merged with the physical and cultural change of the city thereby initiating a historic transformation of the erstwhile authoritarian nature of city planning and beckoning democratization of urban development. This paper helps to draw implications for the construction and appropriation of urban development discourse, especially for cities in the developing world.*

Keywords: History, Public Contest, Global minded, Local perspective, Social Media, Municipality, Spatial Identity

1. Introduction

Development, when seen in a particular socio-cultural condition, is the defining feature of a host of so-called Third World, or developing and under-developing countries and societies in the world, which account for more than 80 per cent of the world's population. For this reason alone, it should be a top research priority in social-cultural research (Shi-xu 2009). Social and socioeconomic studies of this area have yielded valuable results and implications for understanding and transforming societies in development (Pottier 1993). In recent years, issues of development have also been approached from the viewpoint of language and communication, or discourse, though still in very disproportionate quantities (Pottier 1993). Human communication or discourse, as is understood here, has a vitally important role to play in development: as a form of social action (Austin 1962), it can define, act upon, and bring about change to, development. Scholars and students from the developing world have paradoxically paid far from sufficient attention to the issue and to make matters worse have little voice on the subject. It is still the conventional ways of studying development, i. e. from social, economic, and political perspectives, that dominate the field.

This paper is based on the case study of Hangzhou, a medium-sized city located to the east of China, with a territory of 16, 596 square kilometres and a population of over 5 million. Hangzhou is one of the fast-growing and thriving cities in one of China's most developed regions by both national and international standards. With a double-digit increase in GDP over the past ten years, Hangzhou has accelerated its development, especially in the past few years, as proven by statistics of several social, cultural, economic, municipal and environmental survey results. Lessons from this, whether positive or negative, can have extremely important implications for not just itself, but also for development in China and in Asia more generally. Hangzhou as a city has many historical sites some dating back to Qin Dynasty over 2200 years ago, on the one side, and many natural scenic spots, on the other side. Hangzhou has been listed as the UNESCO world heritage site too (https: //whc. unesco. org/en/list/1334/). Any possible change to the city can have profound consequences on the morphology of the city. Analyzing and assessing the city's discourses regarding urban development may shed light on the relevant processes and so be instructive on the city's future orientations, also about the UNESCO listing.

Understanding Urban Development as Discourse

In this research, public discourses of urban development mean city-development texts, their uses in the public sphere *and* their relevant contexts. The data are gathered from various channels of public communication ranging from newspaper reports and articles, municipality documents, web publications by various agencies and individuals, as well as public posters and museums.
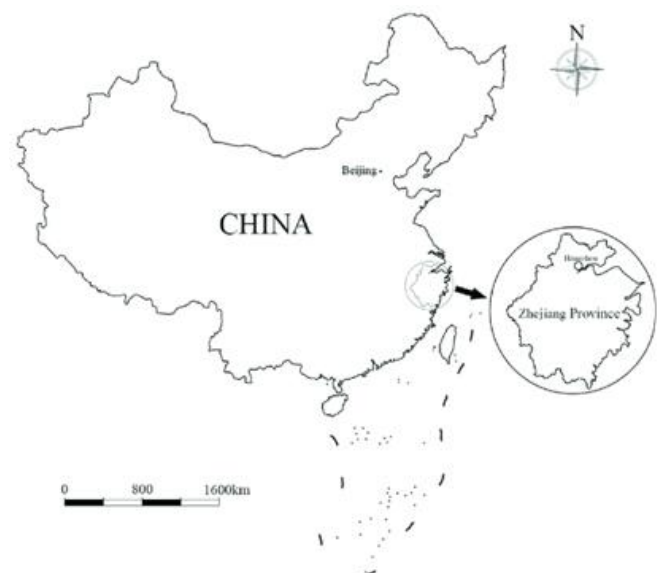
The authors have attempted to investigate the interrelated, constituent components of discourse: 1) discourse participants, individual, collective or institutional; 2) forms and contents of texts and talk including topic, definition, categorization and evaluation; 3) mediums of communication used; 4) modes of communication whereby particular identities and social relations are implicated, enacted, maintained, transformed, etc.; 5) historical, spatial and cultural relationships involved or indexed and 6) the

purposes and consequences, followed by the 7) evaluations of the discourses in question. In this respect, we assume that urban development is a desired objective of developing countries but that it is not absolute and must be subjected to local cultural and international—multicultural—norms. Accordingly, the evaluation takes into consideration the traditional Chinese worldview and value of *tianren heyi* (man-nature harmony) on the one side and that of the UNESCO World Heritage guidelines on the other hand for the protection of the natural and cultural heritage of universal value.

Methods of Discourse Studies

The framework to evaluate discourse is **Ontology** (holistic): the universe as a unified whole of parts in opposition of various kinds, unlike the Western view of a bipolar world in which self and other, subject and object, language and context, etc. are separable from each other. It follows that development and the discourse of development are considered as an integrated whole and so studied together. **Epistemology** (dialectic): obtaining knowledge in a holistic, relational, dynamic and active way, as opposed to the Western analytic, objective, static approach to facts and truths. Thus the study of Hangzhou development discourse is done as a whole, historically and interculturally with the use of subjective experience in addition to reason and evidence and open to further dialogue and investigation. **Axiology** (pragmatic): practical and applicable scholarship, rather than only a pursuit of 'pure' knowledge. Theory (imaginative and harmonious): Concept of meaning: not only (Western) meaning in language but also (Chinese) meaning beyond language, historical and intercultural.

It is indeed interesting to note that (1) since discourse is made possible by individuals, groups or institutions as agents of meaning, important identities and power relations emerge thereby, it will be necessary to examine who is involved and who is not in the process of production, circulation and interpretation of discourse. Such author/speakerships are often manifested in contextual information as well as textual realizations of various forms (e. g. in quotations). Investigation of this question about the city development discourse of Hangzhou may then yield insights into the nature of the agents of urban development in Hangzhou. (2) Second, as contents and forms of spoken and written texts offer particular versions of (particular aspects of) reality, against other versions, real or potential, through topical selection, categorization, designation, definition, characterization, evaluation, etc., special attention will be paid to the ways that Hangzhou's identity in the respect of urban development is constructed. (3) Third, the mediums of communication used are important, too. These refer to the semiosis or symbolic materials and channels through which meaning is expressed, circulated and understood. This includes the particular languages used, spoken or written channels taken, (conventional and new) media adopted (e. g. internet, museums), simultaneous symbolic means (e. g. pictures and sounds) and communicative space occupied (e. g. bus stop stands, national or international TV). These will reflect identity, power and influence, too. (4) Fourth, because participants do not merely speak or write, but, when they do so, also occupy and (re -) create social and institutional

positions by choosing particular kinds of speech act and genre (e. g. statement, consultation, argumentation, explanation, advertisement, threat), the social relations in both the background (i. e. implicit) and foreground (i. e. expressed) were examined. A study of the ways linguistic communication is socially organized, used and deployed in the case of Hangzhou city development will yield insights into social-structural relations in the city's development. (5) Besides, since texts and contexts change through time, in parallel and in tandem, and people consciously and inadvertently orient their linguistic communication to time (Fairclough 1992; Wodak 2001), An attempt is made at understanding the changes in urban-development discourse through the timeline on the one hand and how people manage their linguistic communication about time, retrospectively and prospectively. A historical perspective may reveal not only the role of time in discursive changes but also the nature of the discourse (s) in the question (e. g. in terms of the ways that participants/texts construct time).

It has been seen that discourse orients to, embodies and transforms cultural relationships. These will have consequences on urban development as well. Therefore, efforts will be made to investigate how discourse participants relate their text and talk to East and West, China and its Other as well as their interrelations. (6) The purposes and consequences of the discourse in question are quite important, too. Such may be interpreted from the point of view of the speakers, hearers, speech acts, settings, as well as engaged researchers. (7) In addition, we are also of course committed to making value judgments about the discourses under study, as our discourse approach aims not only to enhance our own (self -) critical consciousness about discourse but also to impact on discourse itself.

Critical criteria are bound by particular relevant domains of discourse and in the present case reference is made to two values in particular. On the one hand, since Chinese traditional culture exhorts the fundamental worldview that man and nature are a unified whole and should be kept in harmonious relationship with each other (*tianren heyi*), we take it for granted that city development discourses should be in favour of that basic value and so a balanced and harmonious relationship between man and nature should be maintained. On the other hand, reference is made to the UNESCO Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (2008; Guidelines hereafter). To accomplish the above-mentioned analysis and assessment, data and related information were gathered from various channels of public communication. These are in the form of newspaper reports and articles, documents by the municipality as well as various subordinate agencies, and web publications of various kinds including historical documents, as well as public posters and museum exhibitions. This means that some of the analyses below are also based on secondary information, i. e. information culled from these media sources.

2. Findings

Users of Discourse

In this first section, an analysis of the speakers of Hangzhou urban development is done by examining a representative case of the participating speakers of the West Lake sceneries from a historical-comparative perspective. The West Lake is the very core feature of the city and the historical perspective taken by speakers could yield insights into the nature of urban development and especially the nature of the political process involved. During historical times (in Song Dynasty, Yuan Dynasty, and Qing Dynasty) the scenic spots around the West Lake were nominated, selected and named or christened. In Qing Dynasty (1723-1736) for example, 'Eighteen Scenes of the West Lake' were decided upon and presented. Such discourses range from administrative documents, descriptions, narratives, journalism, advertisements, evaluations, surveys, scientific reports, etc. The most enduring and influential ones were the so-called Three Nominations of the West Lake.

(1) During the Song Dynasty, the nation's capital moved from Kaifeng in the North to Hangzhou (Lin-an Town) in the South in 1129. At that time, the city was a place of pleasure for the rich and the elite. It is in this context that the first scenic nominations of Hangzhou were determined by artists in 1239 in the Southern-Song Dynasty (then were inscribed with modifications by and calligraphy of Emperor Kangxi (1661-1772) in 1699. The artists painted pictures of scenic spots around West Lake and 10 scenic spots were selected based on these paintings and each given poetic names.

(2) In 1984, some newspapers, magazines, television stations, government offices and tourism consortiums initiated a public contest amongst citizens and tourists to choose ten new scenic attractions around West Lake. Some 9 businesses sponsored the event and several well-known figures formed a jury for the contest eventually a few even more renowned men of letters and public figures performed calligraphy of the names of the scenes selected. Over 100, 000 people from all over the country participated and forward over 7, 400 items. In 1985, the city's Gardening, Forestry and Relics Bureau has stone carvings erected at the ten selected scenic spots.

(3) In the wake of years of renovation and reconstruction around the West Lake, in 2007, under the themes of 'Harmony of the West Lake and Life Quality of Hangzhou', the so-called 'Third' and bigger contest was launched by the Municipality and the city's Party central committee for the public to choose still other ten new sights from amongst 145 newly reconstructed or renovated sites or scenes (excluding the previously known ten old and ten new scenic spots from the Southern Song Dynasty and 1985). This time, as many as 338, 000 citizens took part. Citizens were invited to join in the contest and telephone numbers and websites are provided for the public to make enquiries and comments. In addition, the city government invited experts from various relevant fields of study and professions to give opinions after consulting the public and domestic and international tourists; their opinions will weigh 20% in the votes vis-à-vis 80% on the part of the general public. What is particularly worth noting this time is also the fact that human, social and cultural values were required for the scenery names that participants propose: 1) they must have suggestive meaning reflecting subjective ideals); 2) they must reflect contemporary times and customs; 3) they must be four characters which sound melodious and easy to pronounce; and 4) the ultimate selection of nominations must correspond to a balanced spread of scenic locations. Again, over 100, 000 people participated and the result was announced three months later at the opening ceremony of the West Lake World Expo. In Aug 2006, the Municipality of Hangzhou put together an expert group of artists, men of letters, sociologists and city planners and launched a selection call for the city brand of Hangzhou. Over 2000 people from 20 provinces of China put forward 4620 items of proposals. Through a complex process of standard setting, expert evaluation, and public voting, the name of the City of Quality-Life came out first.

Diversified public speakers On top of the historically growing participation by ordinary citizens in speaking of and deciding upon scenery development in Hangzhou, there is today also a wider diversity of public speakers for the development of Hangzhou as a city, ranging from the city's municipality officials, municipality offices, subordinate institutions and agencies to scholarly publications and societies. The City Tourism Committee and City Journalism and Press Bureau, City Gardening Bureau, West Lake Scenery and Relics Committee, and West Lake Expo Office are but a few examples of the city government organs that regularly publish relevant documents.

Forms and Contents

Regarding the form and substance of the public texts about the urban development of Hangzhou, we would like to make two kinds of observations. On the one side, there is a set of 'outsider' speakers who give honorary titles to the city. On the other side, the city's various powerful agencies, groups and personages confer upon the city itself designations and orientations in a fast-changing manner and in an un-coordinated way.

Title – winning: On the one side, the city has won from various national and international agencies, media and competitions a host of honorary titles and awards (www.hzhome. sunbo. net). In 2001, in a contest organized by the Ministry of Public Security, the city came out as number one amongst 'the most feeling ─ safe cities of China'. The city has been awarded 'the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour by the UN-Habitat (2001). In 2007, the National Tourism Bureau approved Hangzhou as 5A Tourist-Scenery City.

Fast-changing, modernity-minded self – naming: On the other side, however, various media, agencies and personages of Hangzhou—elite and the city authorities—have actively named the city as 'Capital of Leisure', 'Capital of love', 'Capital of tea', 'Capital of cartoons, 'Capital of women's fashion', 'Capital of expos', etc. 'brandings' that the city has been assigned-brandings that have the force to alter/change the course or nature of the development of the city. These definitions will contribute to the creation of new identities and new orientations. But, if we considered the kinds of

definitions proffered, the tempo at which they were generated and the power relations involved, then we shall see disorienting effects they may have on urban development. The municipality and Party organ actively re-introduced and re-advertised the scenic spots of the city by repeatedly announcing and describing scenery renovation projects.

The paucity of natural and cultural re-contextualization: To some extent, the relations between linguistic expressions and surrounding space need to be analyzed. In this section, we want to make a further case on the ways that naming, defining and categorizing (of Hangzhou or its parts), as a discursive activity, is connected with spatial/natural and temporal/cultural organizations. The analysis can be done from two perspectives: nature and culture. It is realised that most of the self-named projects do not reflect either of the concerns. Instead, (1) they orient to business and economy, and (2) whilst they certainly add global dimensions to the city of Hangzhou by reference to Dubai, Venice, Hong Kong, etc., they pay virtually no attention to the conservation of the city's natural landscape. There are definite conclusions for Historically changing patterns of use of public communication or discourse. This may be seen in particular in the use of language which is more socially organized, involving the roles of the discourse agents, the numbers of the agents participating and the rules of the language game as it were.

Public mobilization: There was a strong public competitive process of the nominations of the West Lake sceneries. These promotions were hugely propagated through newspapers and the public was encouraged and motivated to participate in large numbers.

Public probation: Before plans of reconstruction or restoration projects are implemented, institutions concerned provide a public display of them, and, similarly, the media publicize such plans, for the public to give input or feedback. Especially in recent years, various municipality offices and their subordinate agencies publish and publicize various plans and projects of renovation, reconstruction or otherwise business in the city. They envisage and imagine the future shape of the city and outline the plans for working on it.

Balanced improvement of urban space From the analysis of the three alignments of speakers above, it may be concluded that the selection and naming of scenic spots of the city have become successively more *public* and more *democratic* and in this sense, the subsequently the reconstructed landscapes have a more humanistic dimension. In other words, in comparison with olden times when naming, describing or projecting (aspects of) Hangzhou, there is growing popular participation which, as it were, penetrates and merges with the material landscapes of the city. Further, if we examine these three historical discourses about the spatial, and geographical features involved, then it is realized that historically speaking, the scenic, tourist areas of the city have become ever *more sprawling* and *spreading evenly* across the city's territory, constituting a desired and welcome progress in urban development in the Third World.

3. Conclusion

From the above analysis of the different elements and dimensions of discourse, two overall conclusions can be made. First, against the context of globalization in which development is a key concern to a country like China, the city's discourses have become ever more linked with geographic expansion and balancing of the city's tourist scenic spots on the one side and ever more diversified in terms of economic activities. In this sense, it may be argued that the discourses of Hangzhou have contributed to the urban development of the city. Second, the city's development discourses, as both human and poetic/rhetorical artefacts, have increasingly penetrated and merged with Hangzhou's scenic landscape. In this sense, the discourses of Hangzhou have contributed to the harmonious unity between the human (ist) world and the spatial/natural world and consequently the well-being of the citizens themselves.

At the same time, however, it must be pointed out that, especially in terms of harmony of space, time and man, the presently existing discourses of the urban development of Hangzhou have been too fast-shifting and too wide-disparaging, depriving the city (and its citizens) of a relatively stable identity and the possibility of a centrifugal force for a consistent and systematic urban development. It is generally felt that the current public discourses have become too preoccupied with material needs and neglected the historical-cultural and natural values of the city, impoverishing the spiritual and natural identity of the city.

References

[1] Andrews, L. (1996). *Story and space in Renaissance art: the rebirth of continuous narrative*. Cambridge University Press.
[2] Bahktin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination. Four essays*. Austin: the University of Texas Press.
[3] Conrad, P. (1984). *The art of the city. Views and versions of New York*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[4] Irogbe, Kema (2005). Globalization and The Development of Underdevelopment of The Third World. *Journal of Third World Studies*, vol. XXII, No.1. Pp41-68.
[5] Jaworski, A. , V. Ylanne-M Wen, C. Thurlow & S. Lawson. (2003). Social Roles and Negotiation of Status in Host—tourist Interaction： A View from British Television Holiday Programmes．*Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7 (2): 135–163.
[6] Jaworski, A. (2007). *Language, Tourism and Globalization: the sociolinguistics of fleeting relationships*. London: Routledge.
[7] Johnstone, B. (2004). Place, globalization and linguistic variation. In C. Fought (ed), *Sociolinguistic Variation: Critical reflections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp.64-83.
[8] Johnstone, B. (forthcoming) Language and geographical space. In P. Auer & J. E. Schmidt (eds), *Language and Space: An international handbook of linguistic variation.* Vol.1. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. Pp.1-18.

[9] Lees, L. (2004). Urban geography: discourse analysis and urban research. *Progress in Hum Geography.2*8: 101-07.

[10] Lerner, D. & Schramm, W. (eds) 1967. *Communication and Change in the Developing Countries.* Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.

[11] Lynch, K. (1960). *The image of the city.* Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

[12] Marin, L. (1984). *Utopics: spatial play. Atlantic Highlands*. New Jersey: Humanities Press.

[13] Mondada, L. (2007). Multimodal resources for turn-taking: pointing and the emergence of possible next speakers. *Discourse Studies*.9 (2): 194: 225.

[14] Mondada, L. (2009). Emergent focused interaction in public spaces: a systematic analysis of the multimodal achievement of a common interactional space. *Journal of Pragmatics*.41: 1977-97.

[15] Pottier, J (1993). *Practising Development: social science perspectives.* London: Routledge.

[16] Qiu, J. P. (2007). Develop West Lake Longjing tea brand and its uniqueness. http: //www.teawindow. com/newtea/news. php

[17] Reeves, G.1993. *Communications and the 'Third World'*. London: Routledge.

[18] Testu, K. (2006). Tourism Promotion and Regional Development in Low-income Developing Countries. *The Pakistan Development Review*，45（3）: 417-424.

[19] Van Den Berg, D. J. (1997). Picturing urban environments in the scenic tradition, in *Acta Academica*, 29 (3): 86-128.

[20] Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse–historical approach. In Wodak, R. & M. Meyer (eds) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: Sage Publications Ltd, pp.63-95.

Web References

[21] http: //www.univiu. org/undergraduate/fall_2007/f0715/

[22] http: //www.zeno. ro/2007/10/31/city-of-romance-venice/http: //www.cronicas-da-lilian. com. br/cronica_lilian_24_eng. htm

[23] http: //www.eki. ee/km/place/pl03/Place3_Haapala. pdf

[24] http: //padawan. info/2003/06/preserving-a-citys-identity. html

[25] http: //www.crii-online. net/

[26] http: //tennessean. com/apps/pbcs. dll/article?AID=/20081101/OPINION01/811010328/1008

[27] http: //www.allacademic. com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/2/9/8/p252984_index. html

[28] http: //www.urbanecology. washington. edu/student_info/classes/Aut2004/Pol2002-optional. pdf

[29] http: //www.crii-online. net/uploads/media/Erasmus_CityIdentityImage_Dec04. pdf