



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

# Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies Outstanding China Fieldwork Insights Award

| 2022 Winning Paper

## Opportunities and Challenges: Conducting Fieldwork in Chongqing

Third Place Prize paper - 2022 Outstanding China Fieldwork Insights

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**PhD project title**

Memorials' Engageability: What is the Role of Memorials  
in People's Daily Activities



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Jie Zhu is a current PhD student in Landscape Architecture and Urban Design at RMIT. He received his Bachelor's degree and Masters' degree in Landscape Architecture from Sichuan Agricultural University. His research interests include open public spaces and vernacular landscapes with a focus on design, engagement, identity and meaning, and perceptions. Throughout his academic career, Jie Zhu has been involved in several research projects, including Integrating Taoist Thought into Vernacular Landscape and Connecting Public Memorial with People in Daily Uses. He has presented his research at three conferences and has two authored/co-authored papers in conference proceedings.



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### Introduction

Since the 1980s, many memorials have been erected in Chinese cities (季峰, 2009). With an increasing number of the appearance of spatialised memorials after 2000, their associations with daily urban activities have strengthened (Liu & Li, 2003). They are not only for ceremonies but also for daily activities, such as playing. Daily activities at memorials support their social association, keeping them alive in people's memories (Bakshi, 2017, p. 196; Gurler & Ozer, 2013). However, most research focus on the commemorative function and meaning of memorials.

This study examines factors influencing memorial engagement from the perspective of urban design. 'Engageability' refers to public memorials' ability to engage visitors in daily uses. Questions are also proposed to assist in achieving the primary research objective. What factors contribute to memorials' engageability? Secondly, what do people do at memorials on normal days? Why do people behave in these ways based on environmental attributes and people's senses? Next, what factors link behaviours to memorials? Lastly, what are the differences in the daily uses of memorials in different urban contexts and forms?

## The Method of Data Collection

To accomplish the research objective, the research used qualitative methods primarily. Firstly, it reviewed the existing literature to draw out five factors that constitute the engageability of memorials. These factors include physical urban context, site attributes and activities, sensory stimuli, management, and meaning and identity. The research needs the following data to evaluate each factor: the physical urban context (land use map), the historical and cultural context, the attributes of memorials (facilities and urban furniture, design plans of memorials), people's behaviour (visitors and managers), and sensory experiences at memorials. Therefore, the research used mixed methods to collect the above data. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the following methods were developed based on the remote collection.

Table 1 shows the needed data, sources, collection methods, and purpose. In terms of data sources, there are three types: from the government and departments, open-access platforms, and fieldwork. The government must be contacted with a document disclosure request. An applicant must submit a document disclosure form electronically or in person with a Chinese identification card (see Figure 1). A few municipal data sets, such as land use, are available for online application. Other data, such as the design plan, are unavailable online because the local district department does not have internet access. Due to this, I had to ask my family for help. It took a month to two months for both methods to get data. The department needed considerable time to approve the application and search for data.

**Figure 1**

Documents Disclosure Form and Approvement

附件：

### 重庆市沙坪坝区政府信息公开申请表

申请人信息	公民	姓名		工作单位	
		证件名称		证件号码	
		联系电话		邮政编码	
		联系地址			
		电子邮箱	363813347@qq.com	传 真	
	法人及其他组织	名称		组织机构代码	
		法定代表人		联系人姓名	
		联系电话		邮政编码	
		联系地址			
		电子邮箱		传 真	
申请时间		年 月 日			
所需信息情况	所需信息的内容描述	三峡广场水系改造平面图（2016至2017年左右） 沙坪坝区最新高清用地性质规划图			
	所需信息的用途				
本人（单位）承诺：获取政府信息后，不作任何炒作及随意扩大公开范围。					
申请人签名：_____					

\*提交申请时请附身份证明。

Documents Disclosure Form

## 重庆市渝中区人民政府办公室

渝中依复〔2020〕10号

### 政府信息公开申请答复书

朱秋玉同志：

本机关于2020年8月19日收到您提交的政府信息公开申请，经审查，现答复如下：

一、您申请公开的沙坪坝三峡广场设计总平面图1997年版，本机关不掌握。据初步判断，沙坪坝区人民政府可能掌握相关信息，根据《政府信息公开条例》第三十六条第（五）项的规定，建议您依法向相关单位了解获取该信息，联系地址：重庆市沙坪坝区凤天大道8号，联系电话：65368559。

二、您申请公开的高清渝中区最新的用地性质规划图或者高清渝中区城乡规划全覆盖控规“一张图”方案文件予以公开，根据《政府信息公开条例》第三十六条第（二）项的规定，将该政府信息提供给您（附后）。

如对本答复不服，可以在收到本答复之日起60日内向重庆市人民政府申请行政复议，或者在6个月内向重庆市第五中级人民法院提起行政诉讼。

感谢对政府信息公开工作的理解和支持。

重庆市渝中区人民政府办公室  
2020年9月9日

— 1 —

Approvement

**Table 1**

The Needed Data, Sources, Collection Methods, and Purpose

Needed data	Sources	Collection Methods	Purpose
Land use and zone map	Government	Online or in-person requests to the local planning department	To know the physical urban context and surroundings.
Urban map	Baidu and Gaode map	Screenshot	The raw data for Space Syntax analysis and for knowing locations
The history of memorials and related culture	County annals; Literature databases	Online searching and on-site borrowing.	For the historical and cultural background
The master plan of memorials	Government; Baidu and Gaode Map	Online or in-person requests to the local planning department; Screenshot	For the physical attributes of memorials
Facilities and urban furniture at memorials	Baidu and Gaode map; Government; Fieldwork	Screenshot; Online or in-person requests to the local planning department; Photos and mapping in fieldwork.	For the physical attributes of memorials
People's behaviours	Fieldwork (main); Social media (supplement)	Photos and films by a 360-degree camera; Using keywords and filters to search on Weibo; Record.	To know people's acts and activities; to explain the sensory experience.
A sensory experience at memorials	Fieldwork	Sensory notation (Lucas, 2014).	To know the sensory experience and make a sensory map.

Data from open-access platforms, including social media, libraries, and literature databases, is easier to acquire than from the government. Two things should be highlighted. Firstly, the county annals are only available for on-site borrowing. Thus, my family helped me scan a few chapters. Second, it utilised Weibo to compile pictures of people's behaviours and activities in each case. Using filters and keywords to search, the research collected 160 pictures from about 120 users. The keywords are the activities assumed according to the pilot study in Melbourne and the site's facilities and land uses (see Table 2). Additionally, two criteria should be used to select appropriate pictures: (1) Choose a picture with a broad perspective to include various activities, except for rare actions such as protests; (2) Avoid pictures presenting already collected activities.

**Table 2**  
Keywords for Searching on Weibo

None directly engage with memorials objects	Directly engage with memorials objects
Begging	Carving on memorials
Dancing	Climbing on memorials
Drawing	Drawing memorials
Drinking	Hiding by memorials
Eating	Hanging on memorials
Exhibition	Knocking on memorials
Jogging	Lying on memorials
Kids game	Leaning on memorials
Napping	Observation memorials
Other Exercising	Placing tributes
Observation	Placing other things
Playing cards	Praying
Posturing	Playing water
Protesting	Posturing with memorials
Propaganda	Prostrating on memorials
Public urination	Painting on memorial
Playing various balls	Reading inscriptions
Picking plants around memorials	Sitting
Reading	Striking on memorials
Resting	Sweeping memorials
Riding bikes	Sliding on memorials
Singing	Standing on memorials
Studying	Spitting on the memorials
Street performance	Touching on memorials
Spitting	Throwing against
Speech	Taking pictures and filming
Taking photos, filming or streaming	
Walking animals	
Waiting	

Fieldwork provides the most meaningful data, such as people's activities and sensory experiences. Due to travel constraints, I recruited a local assistant to assist me with the fieldwork. In order to acquire effective data, I provided extensive training, including explaining research aims and methods and making a hypothesis for survey results. In the fieldwork, he visited sites twice (one on weekdays and one on weekends) to collect comprehensive data. In each visit, four 30-minute observations were conducted in the following period: 8-11 am, 11 am-2 pm, 2-4 pm, and 5-7 pm. In each period, the assistant placed a 360-degree camera at the assigned spots to film the site (see Figure 2). Two or three camera spots were necessary to observe the whole site. In addition, the assistant took pictures and verbal descriptions to compensate for the shortcomings of fixed-point observation, such as blind spots. In total, 1440 minutes of video and 257 pictures were collected from the fieldwork. Also, the sensory experience is described using sensory notation (Lucas, 2009) (see Figure 3).

**Figure 2**

Films from 360 Degrees Camera at Three Gorges Plaza



**Figure 3**

Sensory Notations and Mapping of Three Gorges Plaza

Recording perceptions by notation

Location: plot the site being recorded, whether a part of the route or a static position. Details such as time, date and weather may also be included.

Descriptor: use a word from the list given to characterize each of the six perceptual systems: visual, aural, olfactory/gustatory, tactile, thermal, kinesthetic.

Priority: draw a line on the chart corresponding to the priority given to that perceptual system in this context.

Corroboration: indicate how the senses overlap.

Temporality: indicate the repetition, singularity, etc., of the observations.

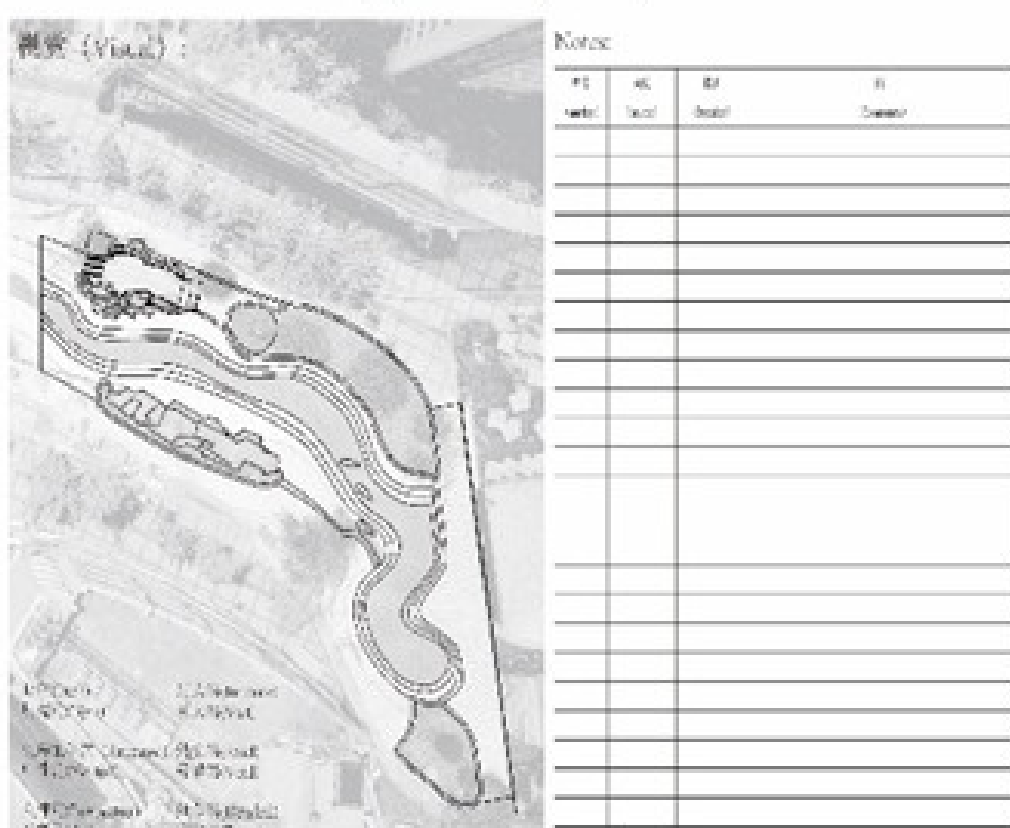
(From Sensory Notation Handbook, Raymond Lucas)

Descriptor

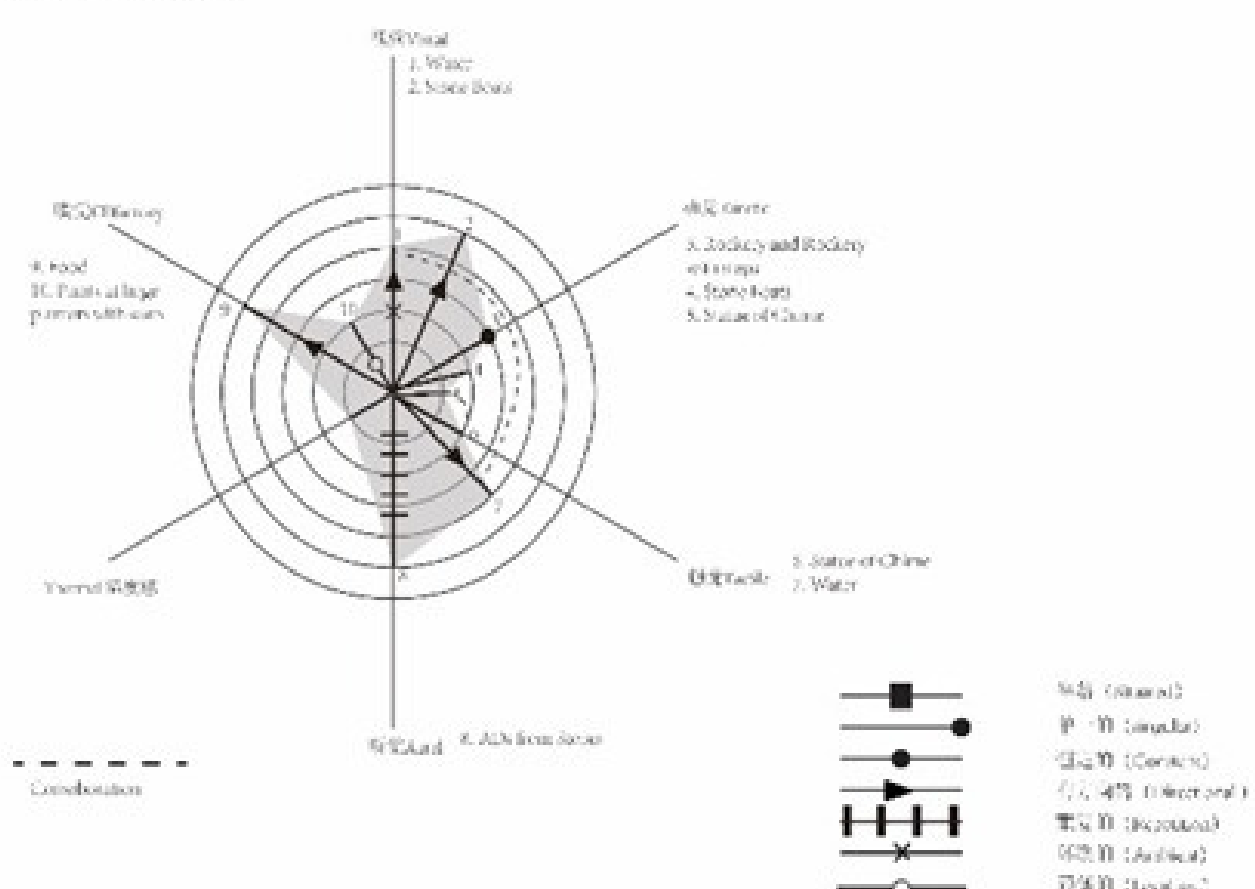
Visual	Aural	Tactile	Kinetic	Thermal	Olfactory
Dark	High Pitch	Static	Strong	Hot	Weak
Bright	Low Pitch	Mobile	Light	Cold	Intense
Saturated	Quiet	Rough	Free	Dry	Stagnant
Neutral	Loud	Smooth	Bound	Wet	Fresh
Perspectival	Clear	Light	Indirect	Natural	Fragrant
Flat	Reverberant	Heavy	Direct	Artificial	Musky
Intimate	Vocal	Porous	Level	Ambient	Industrial
Vast	Non-vocal	Resistant	Graded	Source	Natural
Solid	Natural	Hard	Sustained	Radiant	Spice
Void	Artificial	Soft	Quick	Convective	Edible
Detailed	Attack	Warm	Crowded	Constant	
Blank	Decay	Cold	Empty	Responsive	

Diagram for mapping impressive perception

Recording visual perception



AWITH General Association



## Challenges in data collection

Data collection is a challenging process. Firstly, requesting document disclosure from the government archives is time-consuming due to the complex procedure and unavailable online applications. Next, sometimes, the officer's misunderstanding of the request increases the number of requests. Secondly, due to the intensification of international disputes, security guards at memorials and officers were concerned about data use. Hence, I would not voluntarily mention research conducted by a university outside of China.

Moreover, the Covid-19 outbreak made data collection harder. Due to travel restrictions, I needed help from a local person to collect data. Plus, the assistant lacked an urban design background (few students applied for the job during Covid-19); thus, I had to spend much time on training. Also, the primary data collection method in fieldwork, using a 360-degree camera to film the site, is added. In this case, I can observe the site and interpret the data, reducing my dependence on an assistant. Additionally, the frequent lockdown stopped fieldwork, increasing the time and cost of data collection. On the other hand, the lockdown encouraged me to use social media and pilot studies to test methods and gain a perception of fieldwork results in China.

## Conclusion

While collecting data in China is full of challenges, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, it drove me to improve my research methods and gain more knowledge, such as collaborating with others and training assistants.

Regarding the suggestion to managers, I expected the government to simplify the procedure for data enclosure. Also, the site manager and security guard should be more concerned about ethical issues such as personal privacy, not just national security.

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