

CITY LAKES AS HERITAGE SETTINGS; WEST LAKE , HANGZHOU AND LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN , CANBERRA

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Introduction

Cities are greatly enhanced by locations on water be they harbours, rivers, estuaries or lakes with many of the water settings also functioning as an industrial resource heavy with traffic and industrial infrastructure. However, the city lakes, West Lake in Hangzhou, China, and Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra, Australia, are purely picturesque features and their success as settings is, to a large degree, due to their tranquillity as garden lakes and their modest scale. In both cases the lakes have integral landscape settings of parks and hills. They are also settings for capital cities as well as for countless heritage features and their settings are valued and managed as major cultural features.

This paper examines some of the heritage landscape/lakescape features and the setting qualities of these two urban lakes that are located continents apart and are the products of very different cultures. Using the lake examples, consideration is given to defining the settings of large heritage features such as lakes, while a brief perspective is offered on the adequacy of existing heritage guidelines for settings, and how World Heritage site settings can be considered. A final discussion is based on the culturally specific, yet similar qualities of the two lakes and their settings.

West Lake

History

West Lake, Hangzhou, was believed to have formed around 12,000 years ago, when alluvial soil built up across the mouth of a small bay on the Qiantang River to form a lagoon. Around 1,400 years ago during the Sui Dynasty, the lagoon was formed into a lake (Chen, 2001 p. 20). The legendary account of the creation of the lake is that of a Jade Dragon and Golden Phoenix found a pebble and spent many years grinding and polishing it into a dazzling pearl. They lived with the pearl and guarded it, but it was stolen by the Queen of the West, and when they tried to retrieve it, it fell to earth and turned into a clear lake. The Jade Dragon and

Golden Phoenix turned themselves into hills to guard their bright pearl (Chen, 2001 pp.18-19).

Hangzhou, situated on the northern bank of the Qiantang river estuary, became an administrative centre during the Qin dynasty 221-206 BC and was known as Qintang County. During the Sui Dynasty 581-618 Hangzhou became a major cultural, economic and political centre with the construction of the Grand Canal (Chen, 2001 p. 3) that connected Hangzhou to Beijing. Hangzhou, formerly known as Lin'an, became one of a number of famous cities of South China linked by canals that were flourishing trade centres during the Song Dynasty (960-1276). It was adopted as a new capital when North China fell to the Jin in 1126. By then Hangzhou was already a walled city and West Lake a major feature. As the adopted capital city it surpassed other Song cities in beauty and wealth and by then had a population of over a million (Steinhardt 1990 p.144). It appears that the ancient city pattern follows the flow of the river in cradling the lake, as it still does today. Unlike most of China's imperial cities that were developed following traditional plans for an ideal city, the imperial city of Hangzhou was established over an existing evolved urban centre. Nonetheless it developed with the ingredients of an imperial city such as a palace compound, government buildings, ancestral temples, towers, gardens, parks, markets and with West Lake and its hills providing a desirable 'fengshui' for the city setting.

During the Yuan dynasty (1206 –1368) Marco Polo provided a detailed description of Lin'an as a lavish city and although the veracity of Marco Polo's writings have been challenged, his descriptions placed great emphasis on West lake, its surroundings, the monasteries and abbey's on the shores, the palaces on the lake islands, and the pleasure the lake gave its local citizens.

To the south lies the lake with its thirty-mile circumference. Many fine palaces and noblemen's houses are built on its banks. They are magnificently designed and beautifully constructed; indeed, they could not be more luxurious. There are also a large number of idolaters' monasteries and abbeys. In the middle of the lake are two islands on each of

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which stands a magnificent ornate palace suitable for an emperor.... In addition to this, the lake is filled with pleasure boats of all kinds so that between ten and twenty people can go boating together.... The boating is an extremely agreeable way of passing the time; the city seen from the lake is magnificent with its palaces, temples and monasteries and its gardens along the banks with their tall trees.' (Waugh, 1984 p.120.)

West Lake's inspiration to citizens, artists and poets over the centuries has been continual. Governments have maintained and managed its beautification with massive dredging. Two causeways constructed during the Tang and Song Dynasties were named after the poet governors, Bai Juyi and Su Dongpu respectively. Islets were also formed from dredging and extensive gardens developed. Many artists, poets, and distinguished individuals had their homes beside the lake were buried there .

Heritage Description

Today, West Lake has a circumference of approximately 15 kilometres with a perimeter of lake edge parklands. The highly urbanised Hangzhou City is the backdrop to the northeast while low-forested hills form an amphitheatre to the west. The lake landscape appears much as Marco Polo described it 700 years ago, retaining its high importance as a pleasure ground.

Pedestrian pathways edge the lake, and the adjacent roads, now heavy with traffic, are lined with mature trees, predominantly Plane trees (*Platanus orientalis*). The north western side of the lake has a strong historic character with early twentieth century hotels such as the Shangrila retaining their past grandeur while still enjoying a favoured lake-side location, while older style apartment blocks and inns provide the urban infill before the land rapidly rises to hills. Atop Solitary Hill, a natural island in the lake, is the evocative area of Xilang Seal Engravers with its gardens, shrines, statues, museum and epigraphy. There are countless small features of dry stone walls, statues, rockeries, ancient trees, patterned old and modern paving and numerous statues and steles dedicated to warriors, scholars, gods, artists and heroes. A monumental tomb to Yui Fei, a war hero of the early Song Dynasty is adjacent to the lake. A short distance from the lake is the Peak Flying From Afar grotto carvings and Lingyin Temple dating from the Song Dynasty, one of the largest Zen Buddhist temples in China (Chen 2001) and of State significance. The historic Baopu Taoist Temple from

the Tang dynasty is close to the lake. Throughout the adjacent hills are gullies, caves, hilltops, springs and mountain peaks that have been layered with meanings and have many famous and beloved view points while pagodas with their distinctive silhouettes create landmark features. In 1982 the West Lake landscape became a national park

On the eastern lake edge close to the city, it appears that no expense has been spared with the new high quality landscaping works such as paving, pedestrian bridges, garden edging, all executed in stone using a time honoured tradition of skilled masonry. Historic hotels and teahouses on the lakeshores have been retained and restored while additions and new restaurants are mostly modest glazed structures. Further back from the lake, new stylish low-rise modern architecture provides the interface between the lake and the city's central business district. On the lake edges, the Xihu Tandi parkland has been recently developed with extensive formal gardens. Other lakeshore landscaping has a more informal character with stands of trees such as the Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostoboides*), shrubberies, herbaceous plant beds and lake lotus gardens.

The diameter of the lake at approximately three kilometres enables views to the setting landscapes to be comfortably appreciated. Viewpoints, vistas, enframed views, and small intimate views are highly valued and renowned. There are one hundred famous views of the lake, many of which have had poems, essays, couplets, stories and paintings attached to them. Ten celebrated views are also called 10 heavenly sights with poetic names such as 'thread of the sky' and 'breeze ruffled lotus'. There are myths and legends embedded in the lake's fabric and the Jade Dragon and Golden Phoenix of the ancient legend, now as hills, still guard the lake.

West Lake Setting

West Lake, its islands, causeways and parklands are an integrated place that includes many varied heritage features. The principal setting area includes the streets and the urban fabric of Beishan Street, Xishan Road, Nanshan Road and Hubin Street, and importantly, several small hills, Precious Stone Hill, Dingjia Hill, Xizhao Hill and Nanping Hill. Beyond this area is the extended landscape setting of tree-clad hills that sweep around the southwestern area.

Management

The lakeshores are subject to excessively high numbers of

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local visitors and domestic tourists, particularly on public holidays. Successful management appears to a large degree, to be due to the design of landscaping works executed in the highest quality of craftsmanship and materials. The numerous human-scale spaces, bridges, walkways, promenades, pagodas and features of interest provide a continuum of changing scenery and experiences, in a mix of gardens and heritage features, making every step a pleasurable experience. The lake landscaping promotes urbanity enjoyed by strolling pleasure seekers constantly moving through the parklands. Small electric people mover vans cater for the less-abled.

The Hangzhou Municipal Government's West Lake Protection Project aims to facilitate and broaden the visitors experience to the lake and this is regarded as a necessary step as the Government wishes to nominate the lake for World Heritage. The project aims to make West Lake sustainable for the future, to conserve and enhance the historic background of Hangzhou City, and to further promote the comprehensive presentation and competitiveness of Hangzhou City. The project also aims to meet ecological requirements; focus on the extensive history of West Lake; restore some graves; ensure that local authentic natural material is used in the restoration and reconstruction work; and show the richness and diversity of the culture. Now, following restoration, effective on-going management is being implemented by employing a large number of site management staff (Hangzhou Municipal Government 2005)¹.

In 2003 –2004 in the restoration work of the eastern lake parklands including Xihu Tiandi, ten buildings were restored and every tree was saved, some of which were over 100 years old (Warr 2003). Part of the recent construction work around Beishan Street includes planting 3600 colourful trees and beautiful grasses. The project also involves restoration works to many places that include 95 historic buildings, many historic views, several memorials, the graves of famous poets and writers, the Yong Gong Causeway, the Mei Jia Wu (Chinese tea museum), Renshou Shan Park and, the Wei Lu building and gardens. As difficulties were recognised in the possible moving of some residents out of the area, the Deputy Mayor initiated an approach to understand the attitudes of the residents to the project and

achieve the best of resident and visitor satisfaction (Hangzhou Municipal Government 2005).

Lake Burley Griffin

History

Some 600 years after Marco Polo's visit, Australia became a federated nation. This event is perhaps the most outstanding achievement in our nation, and although carried out with much debate and argument, there were no battles and no loss of life. Following the Federation celebrations in 1901, a congress of engineers, architects and surveyors advocated that a site be selected for a Federal Capital city and that it should have an abundant water supply to furnish the creation of lakes, gardens and fountains. The 'site was to provide for a beautiful city, occupying a commanding position, with extensive views and embracing distinctive features...securing picturesqueness, and also with the object of beautification and expansion' (Reid, 2000, p.13). After many years of consideration and further debate, the site of the Molonglo River Valley was selected as its amphitheatre of hills gave protection from the south and west. Nearby ranges could provide a drinking water supply, open valleys to the north east could allow for city expansion while the confluence of two small rivers, to the east provided the waters for an ornamental lake. After selecting the site, the new Federal Government then had to negotiate with the New South Wales State government for rights to the rivers and some control of their catchments.

In 1911 a design competition for the capital city was launched. The design submitted by the young idealistic American, Walter Burley Griffin, was chosen above those of other well-known international planners. Griffin, imbued with 'City Beautiful' planning concepts and with a passionate appreciation of nature, designed a city around geometric axes, incorporating hills and mountains as nodal points and termini, with a functioning city order that expressed national democratic ideals and a system of urban centres. The design was richly endowed in vistas, parks and gardens, as well as gardens suburbs in the 'Garden City' style. A lake was a central feature as a playground for the city. A critical feature of Griffin's Canberra plan was for a central grand triangle that could symbolise a physical expression of democracy, having at its apex and highest point the 'Capitol', a place for the people. Lower in elevation were to be the two houses of Parliament while lower still and set aside was the High Court, symbolising the role of the judiciary in mediating between the people and Parliament. The triangle as the central feature overlapped the underpinning cruciform of the land and water axes where

¹ The author obtained via email a paper written in Chinese, on West Lake management. The paper was purported to be produced by the Hangzhou Municipal Government but no authorship was provided on the paper.

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they crossed in the lake's central water basin. Natural features defined this geometry with small hills being the vertices and points of the triangle while the higher mountains were the terminal features of the axes.

The early years of the 20th Century saw the fledgling nation of Australia involved in two world wars and a savage economic depression. As a consequence there were compromises to Griffin's original plan. Indeed, one plan was to do away completely with the west lake basin. It was almost 50 years after the acceptance of the Griffin plan, when economic prosperity had returned, that Australia could afford the lake. By then Canberra was well established with suburbs, a bureaucracy, a city centre, a precinct of foreign embassies, a university, a military college, a provisional parliament house and a proud local community. Hundreds of thousands of trees had been planted to mitigate the effects of a century of sheep grazing by revegetating the excessively denuded landscape. The British planner, Sir William Holford engaged to advise the government, recommended the development of the lake, with only a slight reduction to its original scale and formality (Reid 2002).

The lake construction commenced in 1959 and proceeded at great speed involving the construction of a dam wall and two bridges, research on the catchment hydrology and siltation abatement, construction of extensive retaining walls, top soiling and grassing to the lake shore parklands, the construction of ponds, footbridges, the formation of three islands and the planting of 55,000 trees. The dam gates were closed in September 1963, but there was little rain over the summer and early autumn, and then, after some uncommonly heavy rain in the catchment, the lake filled almost magically reaching its impoundment level, six months after the gate dams had closed. After years of noisy lake construction, the silently yet quickly filling lake gave the immature and sprawling city a consolidation of great beauty that stunned its residents. Although the lake design had been modified and reduced in scale from its original plan, it amply fulfilled the vision of its by then dead designer, Walter Burley Griffin and was named in his honour.

Although some aspects of Griffin's plan were ignored, the last few decades have seen a revived concern for honouring his exceptional plan. In the late 1980's the design and construction of a new Parliament House, culminated the functional order of Griffin's symbolism with a public space at the apex and highest point of the triangle and a flag mast that sits astride the land axis allowing it to continue to its original terminus at Mount Bimberi, 47 km distance

Heritage Description

Today Lake Burley Griffin covers an area of some 634 hectares and has a length of about 9 kilometres and a shore length of approximately 40.5 kilometres. Around the lake amidst the extensive plantings of now wonderful specimens of exotic and native trees, are some original native woodland trees of *Eucalyptus blakeli*, *E. melliodora* and *E. bridgesiana*, while pre-Canberra plantings from pastoral properties remain in scattered locations. Some of the lake edge plantings such as Alders were too successful and after invading the nearby bushland were labelled 'weeds' and removed by the zealous park managers. The lake's foreshore parklands developed as designed gardens and landscapes, particularly in the central basin, while around the east and west basins a more naturalistic grassy woodland landscape predominates. Recreation activities on the lake are encouraged with restricted water skiing, while yachting, sculling, dragon boating and other non-motorised water sports are allowed elsewhere. Boat ramps, wharves and picnic facilities have been established.

Several of the features around the lake are heritage listed such as the Land Axis Vista, the Australian War Memorial and avenue of memorials, a 19th Century farmhouse, and more modern architectural features of the Carillon, the High Court - National Gallery Precinct and the National Library of Australia. The lake is a feature from Canberra's viewpoints at Black Mountain, Mount Ainslie and Red Hill, and its scale is perfect for appreciating the setting. The two gently curved bridges, a water jet, a Carillon tower and the now mature water edge plantings further enhance the lake's aesthetic quality.

Despite being artificial in origin, the lake has become one of the most significant aquatic ecosystems in the Territory with many of its natural values contained within the Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve of the East Basin. The lake provides open waters and a mix of habitats of reed beds, marshlands, mudflats, gravel beaches, grasslands and drowned trees that add to the habitat diversity. Seventy-seven species of waterbird have been recorded, sixteen of which use the area to breed. Notable amongst the waterbirds are the Latham's snipe (*Gallinago harwichii*), the common greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), the red-necked stint (*Calidris ruficollis*) and the sharp-tailed sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*), all of which are protected under the China Australia Migratory Bird Agreement and the Japan Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (Commonwealth Government 2003)

Lake Burley Griffin setting

As a national capital, Canberra requires a strong symbolic presence of ideals, dreams, aspirations, achievements, culture and history. Its architecture is not dominating and Lake Burley Griffin and its parklands are an integrated place and a major component of the significant national triangle area known as the Parliamentary Triangle. Lake Burley Griffin is also central and integral to a larger management area known as the Designated Areas that has been set aside for hosting national capital functions, protecting the symbolic character established by Griffin, and protecting the landscape setting (National Capital Authority 2003). The Designated Areas includes the inner Canberra hills of Mount Ainslie, Black Mountain, Red Hill and Mount Pleasant and the major road routes that lead to the Central National Area.

Management

Lake management is a Commonwealth Government responsibility administered by the National Capital Authority (NCA) under the National Capital Plan, with day-to-day management undertaken by arrangements with various Territory Government agencies. The principle for management of the Lake and its parklands is to conserve and develop it as major landscape feature. The lake and its foreshores are intended to provide a range of recreational, educational and symbolic experiences. The wetlands are to be protected as a wildlife refuge and the water quality is maintained to protect the visual and symbolic role of the lake and its foreshores (National Capital Authority 2003). Recently, a new detailed planning document (National Capital Authority 2004) has been released, that promotes the Griffin legacy and outlines a proposal to develop it as a showpiece.

Lake Burley Griffin and its setting receives excellent management but this is not achieved without some tension, as the Designated Areas straddles both land owned by the Commonwealth Government and land owned by the Territory Government. Some of the key features of topographical significance are on Territory Land with the NCA having responsibility for final planning approval of developments within the Designated Areas. This ensures that developments adhere to the planning principles of the National Capital Plan.

There have, in the past, been suggestions made that the Canberra plan area has World Heritage potential and recent suggestions recommend that the Designated Areas be nominated to the National Heritage List. However none of these suggestions have been realised.

The ICOMOS General Assembly Questions

From the perspective of the story of West Lake and Lake Burley Griffin and their settings, the following section of this paper addresses some of questions raised by the General Assembly (ICOMOS, Volume 15, No.1 2005).

Do ICOMOS Charters and Guidelines give sufficient guidance on settings? The *Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter* (2000) provides a simple definition of a setting, 'the area around a place, which may include the visual catchment'. This definition, in my opinion is inadequate, however, the *Illustrated Burra Charter* (2005), provides excellent examples of settings that well explain their complexity. The *Florence Charter on Historic Gardens* states the need for appropriate surroundings and that alterations to the physical environment could endanger the ecological equilibrium.

The *UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas* provides a stronger approach, describing how the 'environment' shall mean the natural or man made setting which influences the static or dynamic way these areas are perceived or which is directly linked to them in space or by social, economic or cultural times. It further notes that every historic area and its surroundings should be considered in their totality as a coherent whole (UNESCO 1976). Similar to the UNESCO recommendations, the *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China (Item 14)* lists 3 factors affecting the quality of settings which cover ways in which settings can be defined, using situational examples. Importantly, it stresses the need for treating places on a case-by-case basis and that there 'should be no single, rigidly determined, or generally applied solution to deal with issues'.

Although in Australia, in the 1970s and 80s, the visual approach was used for delineating the settings of historic townscapes, over the last decade, there has been far greater emphasis on defining the full extent and depth of the cultural heritage of a place. This involves analysing layers of historic and symbolic meanings, the extent and depth of social/community attachment values, the patterns of use of the place and its interaction with the environment, as well as a deepening the aesthetic understanding to include the

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spectrum of evocative qualities the place may have.

How can the settings be defined?

As demonstrated by West Lake management policy, there is a growing need to consider the social aspects such as the resident communities that have a strong association with the setting landscape, and define the catchment of those communities.

The visual zones of influence should also be noted as to how the place is perceived from beyond the heritage area, the significant vistas from within the heritage area noted, as well as the aesthetic experiences derived from the middle and distant visual zones. These visual factors must be determined, assessed and considered for possible inclusion as the setting landscape. The extent of aesthetic experiential features must also be considered along with qualities that enhance the approaches to the core heritage features. In addition, fragile heritage features of the setting landscapes requiring protective management must be noted along with the more robust areas that can absorb visitor impacts and visitor amenities. There is a need to consider near and far physical influences, such as atmospheric and noise pollution. The lake water flows and water quality could be impacted hundreds of kilometres upstream from the lake.

Defining the setting is clearly complex and may need to resolve competing values. A suitable setting area would therefore need to be generated by combining the delineations of areas expressing the range of considerations such as those outlined above. As well, appropriate policies for community values need to be respected and retained.

What are the special needs of World Heritage site settings?

From the experience of these lake studies and other observations, the special needs of a World Heritage site setting should cover an understanding the heritage qualities and aspects that could impact the heritage values, particularly any threats. The relationship of the community associated with the setting landscape must be understood and respected, and their traditional activities encouraged and supported. Efforts should be made to engage, involve and empower the community as stewards of the setting. Communities with long standing associations with the site should not be removed from the setting area in order to

promote a western concept of a natural green setting² nor used for tourist accommodation.

The restoration of World Heritage settings should follow the best heritage conservation practices and management. Sound cooperation between all relevant Government agencies, heritage institutions and the local community is required.

Are settings culturally specific or can there be a shared understanding?

Although there are many cultural differences between Hangzhou's West Lake and Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin in age and culture³, the lake settings yet have many similarities. In terms of aesthetic qualities, both lakes as city settings bring into focus the natural beauty of distant mountains and adjacent hillsides; both have landmark tower features that focus views; both provide a visual context for their significant cities, capturing views and setting vistas of their cities, and both lakes provide extensive ephemeral aesthetic qualities from weather, light, colours and bird life. West Lake provides a beautiful picturesque lakeside setting to numerous heritage places including its stunning gardens, while Lake Burley Griffin's central area is more open in order to provide a reflective setting for national buildings and national vistas.

Both lake settings but particularly West Lake have beautiful parklands with a richness of garden expressions that provide settings for countless monuments and both have nearby tombs or memorials to their national heroes. Both, but particularly Lake Burley Griffin, have important ecological values for natural fauna.

Both lakes and their foreshores provide a quiet, tranquil city core and as the nucleus of the cities, hold entanglements of symbolism, mythology and religion, although the symbolism expressed, is culturally very different.

Both lake settings, are venues for festivals, attracting local residents and countless visitors for active and passive recreation and both, but particularly West Lake, absorb heavy burdens of visitation

² This concept has been discussed by Feng Han (2005) that describes a new model for scenic and historic areas referred to as New Wilderness that is prevailing in China.

³ Much of the study of West Lake was by observation, given the author's inability to read Chinese.

To conclude, it must be stressed that West Lake and Lake Burley Griffin, their foreshores and near settings appear to have strong heritage value but neither have been listed in National Heritage Lists as features in their own right.

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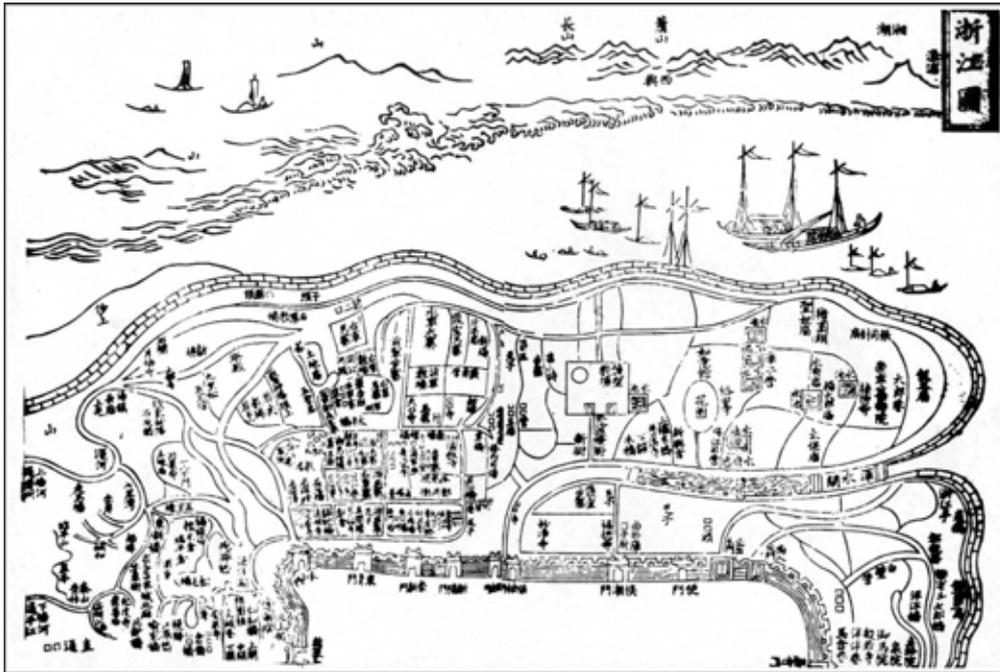


Fig 1. Historical drawing of Hangzhou on the Qiantang River showing the walled city and main canal (copied from Chinese Imperial City Planning, Steinhardt 1990 p.145)

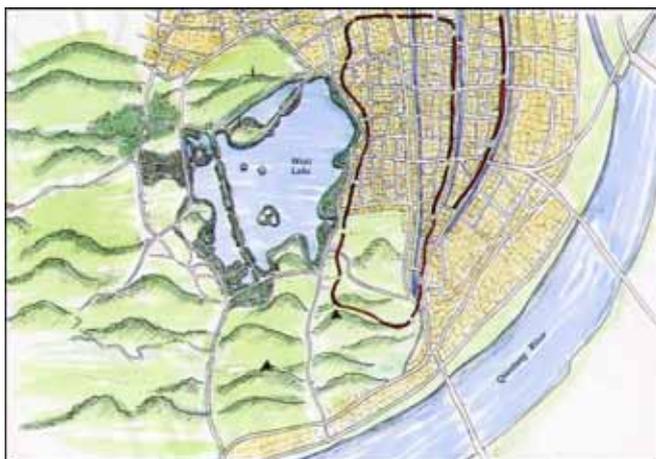


Figure 2. Illustrative plan of West Lake and setting. Broken lines indicate the approximate location of the historic city walls (Steinhardt 1990 p.24).

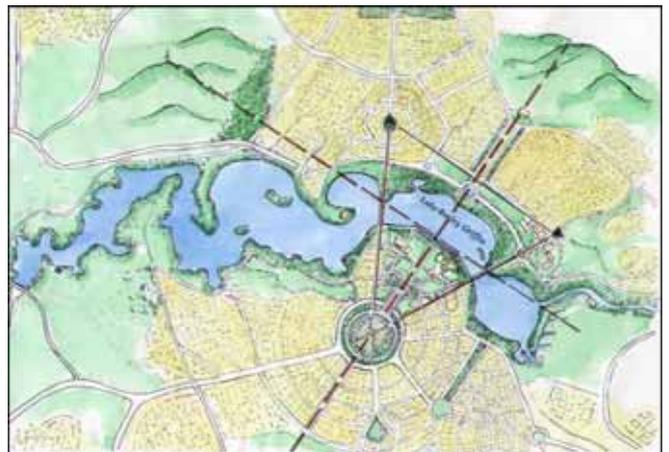


Figure 4. Illustrative plan of Lake Burley Griffin and Setting, delineating the Parliamentary Triangle and showing the land and water axes as broken lines.

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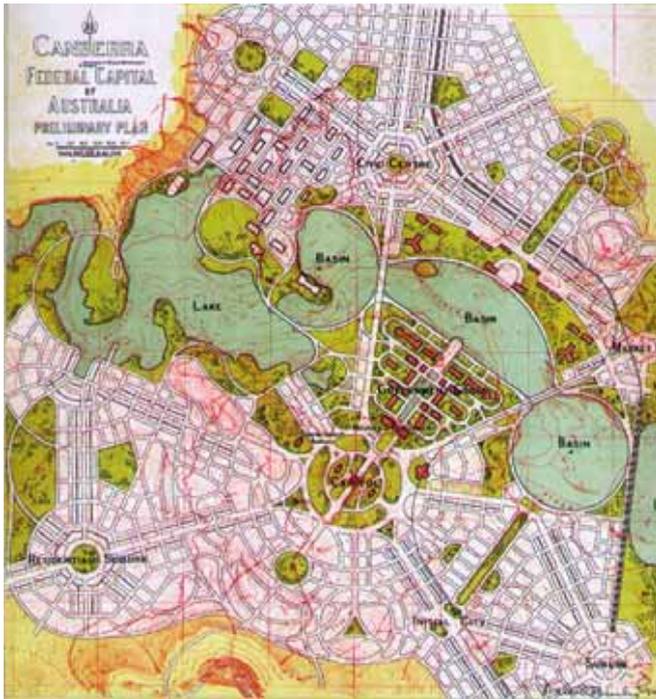


Figure 3. 1913 Plan of Canberra by Walter Burley Griffin (copied from The Griffin Legacy National Capital Authority 2004 p. 45)

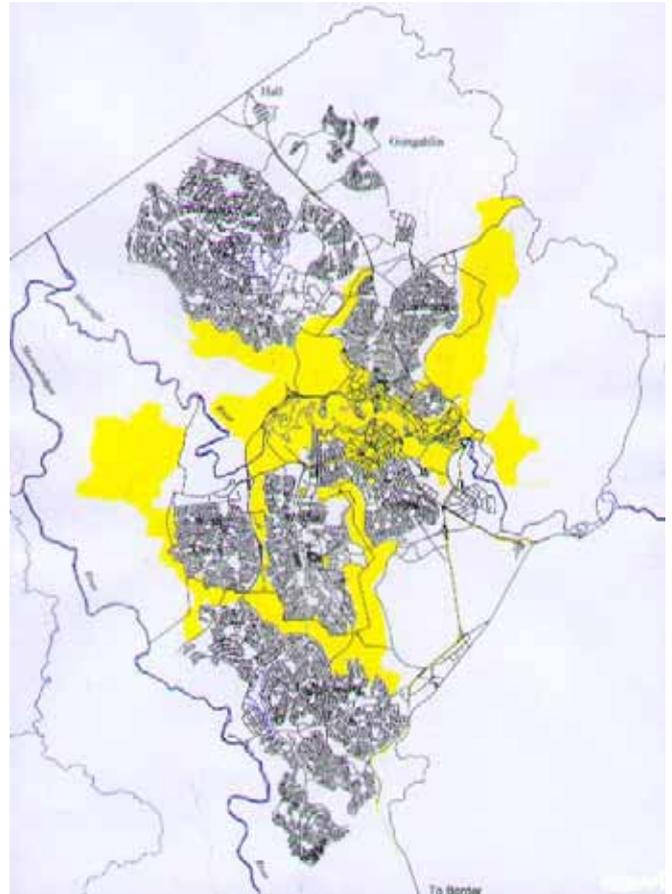


Figure 5. A plan of central Canberra showing the Designated Areas (copied from the National Capital Plan 2003)