

West Lake patrol officer saves lives, smartphones



Hangzhou police officer Zhou Xiangjun helps a visitor in August to retrieve an item that had fallen into West Lake. [Photo/China Daily]

Zhou Xiangjun, a police officer who has patrolled the shores of Hangzhou's West Lake for almost 15 years, is more used to spending time in the water than in the media spotlight.

That has changed in recent days, however, after a TV show reported on his exploits in saving people who jump or fall into the lake as well as salvaging people's bags, cameras and mobile devices from the deep water.

Zhou said he has prevented dozens of people from attempting suicide at the popular scenic spot in Zhejiang province. He also estimates that the total value of the smartphones he has recovered over the years comes to about 100,000 yuan (\$14,500).

"As a police officer, it's my job to save lives. I also would like to help people salvage stuff from the lake," said the 57-year-old, who joined the police force 36 years ago. His main tasks are to patrol the waters, maintain public security and deal with emergencies, such as saving drowning people or those who attempt suicide.

Because the scenic spot is the subject of many legendary love stories, West Lake is a common choice for suicide attempts.

"I can recognize a suicide attempt quickly by a person's actions or words," he told China Daily. "Usually I will go forward and try to chat with them ... and I start to talk them out of it."

"To make people feel comfortable, I've learned many dialects. It has turned out to be very useful. All of those I've talked to have returned home safely."

In recent years, people have increasingly turned to him to salvage their belongings from the lake.

"The number of tourists here is many times that of years ago, and it makes West Lake the most crowded scenic spot in the city," he said, adding that the popularization of smartphones and rising popularity of selfies make the phone one of the items most easily lost.

Zhou used to jump into the lake to find lost things. Once, however, he hit an underwater stake, making him realize that dangers lurk beneath the surface. So he tied a magnet to a fishing line to recover items. Then he did some research in his spare time and upgraded his equipment, making a hollow steel tube that can be extended to more than 4 meters long to find things in deeper water.

He fixes a strong magnet to one end of the tube and puts the magnet side into the water to retrieve lost property.

"For smartphones, only the charging port and SIM card port are made of metal components that can be detected and attracted by a magnet," he said. "It requires patience, experience and skill to pull them out."