

A Study on the Narrative Approach of Rural Landscape

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Abstract:

In recent years, China has proposed the strategic goal of rural revitalization, and the creation of beautiful villages is an important measure in the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy. Within this, rural landscape design is a key link in the construction of beautiful villages. Landscape narrative is a form of expression in rural landscape space design and plays a vital role in the landscape planning of beautiful villages. This article starts with an analysis of the role of rural landscape design, takes landscape narrative as the core, analyzes its connotations and specific expression methods, and verifies the use of narrative in rural public spaces through case studies. It concludes that landscape narrative, as an important way of telling stories and presenting culture, can not only continually perfect and implement its own functions, but also truly provide the public with a place for daily leisure and entertainment, fully reflecting people's current values and aesthetic views.

Keywords:

Rural Landscape, Landscape Narrative, Method

1. Introduction

On the basis of existing research in rural landscape, a proper grasp and application of landscape narrative methods can effectively improve the overall construction level of rural landscape space. By means of narrative landscape design, the added value of landscape spaces can be enhanced. Integrating symbols carrying local cultural features into the landscape design of rural public spaces in a clever way can metaphorically convey the spiritual culture and connotations of the village, making the landscape of rural public spaces more humanized throughout the process. It allows villagers to appreciate the beauty of nature in their actual lives, and deeply understand the new design concept of landscape narrative methods close to, sourced from, and returning to life.

2. The Role of Landscape Narrative for Rural Landscape Creation

As a carrier of culture, the landscape can comprehensively reflect the natural and social development history of rural areas, narrating ancient legendary stories and

myths to people. Thus, like literature, landscape encompasses diverse methods, themes, and interpretations, not just a simple form of existence. It is more of a piece of work or story with a strong subjective emotional expression for people to appreciate and read. Only by mastering the content of the context can the quality be improved.

The essential task of rural landscape design is to convey information about nature, village, culture, and history to the experiencers in the language of landscape, enabling good “communication” between experiencers and the place. The culture and connotations, ideology, social relations, and religious beliefs of the village are all implied in the spatial form and landscape elements of the village. The spatial organizational structure and physical aspects of the village together constitute the inner soul of the village. Using the research methods of landscape narrative studies to investigate the relationship between material elements and narrative elements, spatial structure and narrative structure of the village, can help identify the inherent elements sustaining the unique image of the village and the intrinsic drive for village development, making the existence and manifestation of rural landscape more culturally significant, not merely focusing on its “appearance”.

3. Overview of Landscape Narrative

3.1. The Connotation of Narrative

Narration refers to the symbolic representation of a series of events that are connected in terms of time and causal relationships. The term first appeared in Latin, where its primary meanings are “to tell” and “to know”, that is, through one's own experiential sensations, such as basic sensory abilities like sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing. From a content perspective, narration refers to a form of expression similar to storytelling. More precisely, narration encompasses not only telling but also involves stories, the background, process, and outcome of which not only represent objective past facts but also expound on the meaning of the stories that have occurred. Since the 1980s, the phenomenon of “narratology” has emerged and spans across various fields. The theories of narratology also have broader applications and manifestations in design, film, painting, journalism, education, and other areas.

3.2. Landscape Narrative

Narration includes three main aspects: the narrator, the medium, and the experiencer. By incorporating narrative techniques into landscape space design, the landscape space is endowed with connotations and meanings. Through the medium, the experiencers can generate memories and associations in the process of experiencing, thus enhancing their sense of identification and belonging to the place, achieving the narrator's purpose.

In “*Landscape Narratives: Design Practices of Telling Stories*”, renowned British landscape designers Jamie Purinton and Matthew Potteiger blended the concept of narration with landscape design. The “narrative” theory was introduced into the landscape, perfectly combining narratology with landscape design. The landscape is the site of event behavior, and at the same time, it enriches and changes the “narrative”, making the place and behavior interact to produce new stories.

The content of rural landscape narration mainly uses narrative techniques, whether abstract or metaphorical, through specific environments, objects, or forms to construct

the spiritual features of the village. In two and three-dimensional spaces, the division of space is visually laid out to create the cultural context of the village and highlight its theme. The spatial narrative structure of rural landscapes mainly includes the associations between rural landscape spaces, between landscape elements, and narrative structures and contextual structures. By optimizing the village's own landscape through rural landscape narrative design, its resources are reasonably utilized in a restructured way. This better combines natural and cultural landscapes, integrates them into realistic landscapes, enhances landscape value, and achieves the final goal of comprehensive rural development.

While showcasing its own aesthetic and ecological value, the rural landscape portrays the rustic rural charm, traditional customs, and pristine ecological environment through the narrator's "narration". The content of rural landscape narration comes from rural life, pastoral scenery, folk architecture, farming customs, local humanities, etc. For example, an old dilapidated straw hut, a naturally delicious dish, a handed-down custom, a verbally passed down myth, a simple mountain song... these are unique historical accumulations of the village. By using narrative techniques, vitality and continuity are given to the rural landscape, making it not only a natural landscape but also endowed with humanistic spirit, integrating it with everything around it, thereby giving it "vitality". Rural landscape design not only needs to meet external functions such as ecological greening, environmental coordination, cultural heritage, etc., but also through the narrative design of rural landscapes, it can explore the comprehensive path of sustainable development for the construction of beautiful villages.

4. Methods of Landscape Narrative Expression

There are many ways to express landscape narration, and in recent years, it has been widely used in landscape design to narrate story plots and create a shared cultural landscape, making the landscape a multi-layered narrative. This article has selected some methods for a brief narration.

4.1. Naming

Naming refers to the theme of architectural ordering in the cultural value system. According to the set content, a certain rendering of the whole space's order is carried out, effectively integrating traditional culture or story development. By using concise and direct language, the cultural content and background included in the architecture are summarized, giving specific meanings to things. Thus, things are not just about "appearance", but also have connotations.

4.2. Sequence

Sequence mainly refers to the organized and purposeful connection of various separate spaces, making the overall layout more sequential. It can effectively combine plots and experience modes, fully implement functions according to the theme, realize episodic spatial order, and effectively combine and control originally independent content. This provides the experiencer not only with a good visual experience but also with pleasant psychological feelings.

4.3. Revelation

Revelation, as a main narrative expression technique in rural landscape space design, greatly foreshadows the hidden cultural meaning content and social application value of the entire building. It can closely combine nature and culture, human beings, and further integrate objective factors, explaining the significance of narrative techniques in construction from all angles.

4.4. Concealment

The design of public space and function-related components should be as vivid and specific as possible. According to graphics or text, certain indicative meanings are highlighted. In landscape environment design, through indirect environmental landscape place composition, the cultural connotation beyond the environment itself is enhanced by this method, enhancing understanding.

4.5. Gathering

By initiating people's understanding and inheritance of architectural space from a specific angle, and expressing its own meaning and content, a mastery and understanding of the entire space's natural attributes is achieved. This further integrates the content of the building into the creation of natural landscapes, fully highlighting a lifestyle and consciousness.

4.6. Opening

The narrative opening mainly highlights the bright spots in the design, correctly guiding the public to grasp the construction advantages and cultural connotations of public spaces, and further showcasing the human brilliance and energy in the architecture.

4.7. Overlay

Different things are arranged according to their own logic, and then overlaid together to form a whole. This method moves away from the original functional layout of the design, and instead involves entering the design site for understanding and mastering. The application of this design technique may initially create contradictions in the design. Importantly, however, its use can create a mix of spaces, which may lead to a sense of mixed behavior or alienation to some extent. Both can effectively promote communication and the experiential use of the design site. The overlay technique is used to meet the fluidity and ambiguity within the design site. For example: Bernard Tschumi's Parc de la Villette.

4.8. Collage

Collage design techniques are widely used in contemporary urban environmental design, and they are the most efficient solutions for designers when facing challenges. It involves putting two or more things of different nature and different orders together without any processing. To a certain extent, this technique opposes the idea of "overall design", allowing each thing to have its unique situation and recognizing the independence of discrete things. There is spatial collage and temporal collage (things or images from different periods). For instance, the Ningbo History Museum by Wang Shu was created using historical materials collage.

4.9. Juxtaposition

A reasonable juxtaposition will be conducive to the occurrence of events and is a kind of non-visual expression means belonging to “hyper-flat”. It is a method of retaining contradictions and conflicts in the site. Limited conflicts and differences can be a positive factor in creating spatial vitality.

4.10. Implantation

The focus of implantation is on creating heterogeneity, which can continuously bring in new people flow and stimulate rapid development of surrounding plots through activities. This approach trades minor costs for the development of the entire area and has been frequently used in the past for old city renovation and site revitalization projects. Nowadays, it often uses public space as a medium to stimulate the vitality of an entire community or region.

5. Narrative Use and Expression Strategy of Rural Public Space Design

5.1. Narrative Arrangement of Rural Space Aggregation (Pattern)

The narrative aggregation of rural spaces primarily focuses on inheriting the design advantages of traditional cultural architecture, and in the actual creative process, it can further integrate modern lifestyle and experiential pathways. In this technique, the overall pattern of public space design is well combined, further shaping the model and controlling and managing the architectural sequence relationship in spatial layout. Notable real-life examples include Qinglong Ancient Town in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, and Wuyuan Ancient Villages in Jiangxi.

Located between Taiyuan City and Yangqu County, Qinglong Ancient Town belongs to the suburban type of rural area. It has a long history and a profound cultural heritage, which together form the unique characteristics of Qinglong Town. The town has become a famous historical and cultural town combining folk sightseeing and leisure, integrating natural ecology and agricultural activities, as well as cultural venues and merchant hotspots. Its architectural layout mimics the construction techniques of the Summer Palace in Beijing, with the Wenchang Shrine built in the east, the Dragon King Temple in the west, and the Phoenix Head Fort in the north, forming an overall layout of “literature in the east, martial arts in the west, dragon in the south, and phoenix in the north”. This arrangement forms a vibrant dragon and has become a renowned important town in the history of the northern region. The entire pattern looks like a dragon flying in the sky, highlighting the body of the dragon. The entire layout shows the narrative aggregation strategy of the architectural group formed by the dragon’s claws.

Wuyuan County, located in the northeast of Jiangxi Province bordering Anhui and Zhejiang provinces, has ancient villages that are among the best preserved ancient architectures in China today. Wuyuan Ancient Village is renowned at home and abroad, known as “the most beautiful countryside in China”. The overall layout of the Wuyuan ancient villages is compact, with public buildings and squares forming the open space within the village, and the combination of residential communities led by the convergence and turning spaces of streets and alleys. The aggregation is centered around several ancestral halls and temples, organizing a clearly tiered, strictly hierarchical artificial space that forms a spatial form that is rich in layers yet orderly. In case of rain or snow, one can walk from one end of the village to the other without

getting their clothes wet, reflecting the characteristic “group house unity” of the ancient village. The centralized layout is a typical inward and enclosed layout, which, although somewhat coercive, undoubtedly helps achieve mutual recognition and integration between buildings.

5.2. Narrative Arrangement of Rural Space Sequence (Space)

The so-called narrative space mainly refers to the architectural space that is closely linked to the experience, and a compound type of architecture that combines modern civilization with traditional regional culture. Relatively speaking, its functions are more diverse, specifically implemented in the life, culture, and tourism of rural residents, and it can establish large leisure places according to its own needs, such as museums and performance halls, etc. The spatial setting of these public facilities follows the main principle of minimizing construction costs, further ensuring the realization of intensive shared use, carrying out saving behavior. As a cultural complex, it connects the experiential relationship between the public and the architecture through different narrative spaces.

5.3. Narrative Arrangement of Rural Space Naming (Story)

The narrative naming of rural spaces largely gives a positioning and subject to the development of space, so that experiencers can fully exert their imagination and highlight the entire theme concept from all aspects according to certain possibilities. According to specific scenes, try to render as much as possible and fully grasp the limited story plot based on specific story content. The source of this concept may be a combination of world history, religion, movies, or other cultural content, highlighting the memory of history from all aspects, mainly including historical sites or myths and legends. For example, Pantao Yu Village in Shimen Zhai Town, Funing County, Hebei Province, is known for the myth of the Monkey King Sun Wukong stealing peaches from the Peach Garden.

5.4. Narrative Arrangement of Rural Space Revelation (Implication)

The narrative revelation of rural spaces mainly refers to, based on relevant theoretical research in the actual process, the development of overall historical and cultural events through the specific relationship of themes or structures for specific spatial construction. This further reveals the actual meaning and true significance of the entire building's construction, looking at the essence from the phenomenon. Please translate the above Chinese into English.

5.5. Narrative Arrangement of Rural Space Metaphor (Connotation)

From the perspective of language learning, it is not difficult to find that the essence of landscape metaphor is more about people's understanding of space after having a certain understanding of it. On the basis of the concept of place, the meaning of the landscape is expanded. In design products, mainly based on people's understanding and mastery of the world, further explore content beyond this environment and other methods, and fully grasp other cultural and value information. In the actual process, the design of spatial places mainly uses color or form to reveal the connotation of specific meanings, and uses it as a connection between human culture and thoughts to fully reflect humanistic features, such as Niangziguan Town, Pingding County, Shanxi Province.

6. Conclusions

At this stage, the development of rural landscape space can to a certain extent promote the cultural exchange of farmers in our country and promote the overall development of rural areas in our country, improving the overall economic benefits. It can be seen that certain landscape design and adjustment of rural landscape space in our country can have a positive impact on various aspects of rural development.

Narrative design of the landscape is an effective way to construct the meaning of the place and emotional experience. Through narrative landscape design, integrating the design language of gathering, space, naming, implication, connotation, etc., into the local culture and philosophy can arrange multiple spaces into a narrative space with tension and logical order, establishing a spiritual connection bridge between the site and the user. Landscape narrative, as an important way to narrate stories and culture, can not only continuously improve and implement its own functions, but also truly provide the public with a place for daily leisure and entertainment, fully demonstrating the current values and aesthetics of people. On the existing basis, correctly grasping the importance of landscape narrative in the construction of rural landscape space can fully reflect the humanization of public landscape space, and without damaging humanistic relics, design patterns reasonably, combine cultural connotations and real architectural value well, and form a cultural system with regional characteristics. Please translate the above Chinese into English.

Studying rural cultural landscapes from a narrative perspective expands the protection and continuation of local cultural information to a settlement-level system, revitalizes rural material cultural elements, and pays attention to the daily lives of local people. This approach allows the design of rural landscapes to go beyond simple rural beautification. Instead, it closely links landscape, local culture, and the life of local residents, exploring suitable models of rural construction, which has positive practical significance for current rural development.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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