The Creation of Urban Square Landscape under Cultural Context

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Abstract
The landscape of urban square is not only the symbol of the city, but the cultural performance. The creation of urban square landscape is of great significance to the inheritance of historical context and regional culture, and also the important means to enhance the quality of city. With cultural context as a starting point, this paper explored the design issues of urban square landscape. It proposed three strategies in the design of urban square landscape as the cultural memory, cultural evolution and cultural association through analyzing the concept of cultural landscape and the classification of the three, combined with practical cases for objective description. As the prototype of urban landscape design, the effective extraction and translation of the specific elements, abstract elements and associative elements are the prerequisite for the creation of urban landscape, with the key link of abstract, visualization and symbolic design method. These three design strategies will help to cope with the creation of urban square landscape under different regional cultural environment.

Keywords: Urban Square Landscape, Cultural Context, Cultural memory, Cultural evolution, Cultural association

1. Introduction

Since the urban square is the crystallization of material and spiritual civilization, it is closely linked with people’s daily lives, showing the local customs as the cultural window. However, the issue arising with the similar mode of extremely high speed development in modern city is the ”Millennium City” and “cultural convergence”, and then loses the ”cultural imprinting”. In the current situation of economic globalization and cultural diversity, the study of urban square landscape will be conducive to shaping a city’s own cultural image, highlight the cultural personality and showing cultural connotations, and it is also the purpose of this research.

The aim of the study is to provide a scientific and effective design method for the shaping of the urban square landscape, and put forward three strategies in the cultural perspective under the concept of "cultural
landscape" in heritage conservation. Based on the design practices which author participated in Tianzuo Architecture Institute of Shenyang Jianzhu University, the method of inductive analysis and case analysis is used to explain the issues of urban square landscape, and it will provide the design basis for the shaping of the urban square landscape under the different regional cultural environment in the urban process.

2. Origin

The creation of urban square landscape is of great significance to the inheritance of historical context and regional culture, and also the important means to enhance the quality of city. American sociologist Robert Ezra Park referred to the city: "city is a kind of state of mind, which is composed of various customs and traditions as a whole, but also what contained in the custom with the tradition of unified thoughts and emotions form the whole." The cultural milieu is the expression of urban culture thoughts, cultural precipitation, cultural character and cultural feature; the external rendering of urban spirit nature release and performance; the most intuitive feelings and experiences of human demand. As the world's development of cultural, environment and backgrounds and transformation of people's thinking, behaviour and lifestyle, the cultural milieu has become the key element to consider integrated indicators of a city.

Cultural landscape is closely linked with urban square landscape when discussing under cultural context. The concept of cultural landscape was put forward and brought into the World Heritage list in the 16th session of the United Nations UNESCO World Heritage Committee held at United States Santa Fe in 1992. American geographers C.O Sauer points out in The Morphology of Landscape, cultural landscape is a synthesis of complex with natural and human factors, constituting a regional feature, which is formed within any specific period. It changes with the effect of human activities. Cultural landscape is humanized natural geographical phenomenon and the product of interaction between people and nature. There are two aspects as the physical cultural landscape and the intangible cultural landscape (spiritual cultural landscapes) in cultural landscape. According to the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention published by the World Heritage Committee's, the cultural landscape could be divided into three categories: landscape designed and created intentionally by human, organically evolved Landscape and associative cultural landscape. The cultural landscape is a landscape created by human activities, and it reflects the feature of cultural system in one region.

Urban culture is covered with regional ideology, knowledge hierarchy, local customs, artistic achievement, natural beauty. As the prototype of urban landscape design, it could be summed up as specific elements, conceptual elements and associated elements corresponding to three types of cultural landscapes. Specific elements corresponds to the first type of cultural landscape as the landscape designed and created by human, which means that human intends to design and creating landscape, including gardens and parks. They are often connected with religion or other monumental architectures, all these are specific tangible things. Conceptual elements corresponds to the second type of cultural landscape as organic evolution of landscape, including residual relics (or fossil) landscape and sustainable landscape. It is usually understanding and reviewing them from a conceptual angle. Associated elements corresponds to the third type of cultural landscape as relevance cultural landscape. This kind of landscape is figured into the World Heritage list. We can only utilize them by associational approach. Cultural landscape of the city is the carrier of human social formation, values and mode of thinking, whose purport is memory, display and smriti of local culture, emphasizing its publicity and artistry.

3. Strategy

Highlighting the characters of cities is one of the purposes of the current urban square design and construction. Infusing humanity factors in design of urban square would give the square more spiritual
connotation, creating a place full of cultural atmosphere. The aforementioned three types of cultural landscapes inspire us in the ideas and methods of urban landscape design. On the premise of cultural context to create the urban landscape that we put forward the following three strategies: cultural memory, cultural evolution and cultural association. And when discussing the three approaches of creating urban square landscape, we will illustrate three cities of different levels in Northeast China in recent years as examples of practice.

Urban context is the history of civilization, the cultural gene of formation and accumulation of urban character, which is tending to express themselves through symbols. As every region has its own cultural identity, extracting local cultural symbols and graphical elements to use in the design, with the specific elements, abstract elements and associated elements as creation material, through symbols representation to convey cultural information and context.

3.1 Cultural Memories
There are many cultural landscapes in the process of urban development that are destroyed, and some might have ceased to exist, leaving people with endless regret and nostalgia. These destructions are unavoidable in such ruins in the renovation or renewal of the plaza design. Complete restoration is one of the methods, the pros and cons of not much here. But history is not replicable, we pursue inheritance of history in the level of spirit, focusing on the abstract reproduction of historical memory. Here we advocate to use abstract restoration method, striving to be alike in spirit rather than copying the original to preserve the ‘mood’ of environment, which is the fusion of physical condition and state of mind, so as to conserve the heritage of the city's cultural genes while recreating.

In the process of renovation of the square in old urban district, the historical and cultural resources which are used to express extinction are often encountered, that the abstract creation is an effective means of expression. Pattern recognition in cognitive psychology is regarded as a typical perceptual process, which relies on the knowledge and experience that people already have. Cognitive psychology puts forward the template theory, prototype theory and Feature theory. Using the principle of the pattern recognition of people's perception of architecture to copy, abstract and variate the concrete elements such as the construction details of urban historical buildings is acquiring the new image to inspire the creative thinking, which can reinforce the cognition of the urban architectural landscape characteristics. The abstract restoration of cultural landscape is often with a very strong cultural implication, which is usually the refining of some specific elements in the culture of the city. Arousing people to the historical aftertaste and infinite association.

In the renovation design of the Harbin Museum Square, the strategy of creating cultural memories is proposed, which not only expresses the dying culture of the old city, but also creates the spatial characteristic of the new square. On the issue of the restoration of the Nicholas Church in Harbin, which was destroyed in in the 1960 of the 20th century, we use abstract restoration methods, and strive to resemble
rather than copy the original. In the crowded urban square environment, it shows an image of transparent, concise, vivid and unity of form and spirit. In the concrete creation, the original image of the church is simplified and abstracted by the use of citizen's cognitive and nostalgic psychology to the old Nikolai Church (Figure.1) with some features such as understanding, selectivity and integrality of human perception to extract the characteristic elements, and construct a brand-new image with lattice architectural language. In this way, the original intention of this creation would be achieved by using the simple and abstract symbols to invoke the local people’s collective memories of grand image of the Church of Nikolai. We reconstructed the St. Nicholas Cathedral by a modern means in the centre of the square and used the cathedral as an entrance to the urban underground commercial space (Figure.2). This not only avoids the drawbacks of site restoration, but also produces practical functional content(Figure.3–4).

### 3.2 Cultural Evolution

Cultural evolutionary landscapes generally refer to the most initial social, historical, traditional and religious needs, which evolve to the present form by linking or adapting to the surroundings. The cultural evolutionary landscapes include two categories: one is the remnant (or fossil) landscape, representing an evolutionary process that has ended in the past. They have prominent and universal value. The other is the durative landscape, which maintains a positive social role in the society that is connected with the traditional lifestyle, and its own evolution process is still underway, while demonstrating the historical material evidence of its evolving development. For the first type, there is no doubt to adopt fully protected measures. However, the second type will need to explore deeper meaning, with the use of language description, such as the concept of the symbolic image creation. So, the use of this cultural landscape to embody the urban development and the lasting charm of urban culture has a positive significance.

The creation of cultural evolutionary urban landscapes should be based on the protection and inheritance of regional culture. They could be sorted out as the regional cultural resources with abstract characteristics from the essence accumulation of architecture, costume, pattern and colour. After screening, refining and integrating, it is adopting modern design form to shape the unique and novel beauty. This deep exploration and cognition are fastidious about the abstraction of regional cultural symbols. The urban cultural gene is an imaginal symbol which is impressive and could represent the cultural characteristic of the city. It is the visiting card distinguishing the different soul between cities, is the soft power of the city development, which embodies the brand image of the city, also has the inheritance value.

![Fig.5.Master Plan of Century square in Jilin City](image1)

![Fig.6.Landmark of Square – ship of century](image2)

![Fig.7.Red giant boat sculpture](image3)

In the design of the ‘ship of century’ in Century square in Jilin City, we translate the history of the ancient shipyard in Jilin as the image of the giant ship, echoing the historic inheritance significance of the birthplace of Manchu nationality in Jilin Province. In Ad 1409 (Ming Yongle Seven years), the Ming’s government set up a ship-building base in Jilin. Since then, Jilin names as “shipyard”, the ship has become the cultural symbol of Jilin City. The design of the ‘ship of the century’ conforms to the thought of “whole design” in the century square. As the scale of the square is enormous, we establish the main building itself as a huge landscape sculpture. In the whole city sequence formed by the commemorative square, the main logo, the leisure
square, land boat in Songhua river shore and church in the opposite river bank, the ‘ship of the century’ plays the role of controlling the whole environment, becoming the centre of the region (Figure.5). Urban space in here is created as a visual and cultural symbol of social significance. The ‘ship of the century’ has the functions of both exhibition and sightseeing, the structure characteristic of both high-rise and big span. It shapes as the door style with the four-corner support. The base is 50x50 meter, and the four corners is the 7x7 meter's support body, which hold 50x50 meter sightseeing layer. The 40 meters high sightseeing layer hangs under the red giant ship sculpture with the implication of "ancient shipyard" (Figure.6-7), meaning that the history of Jilin Ancient shipyard, and embodying the magnificent momentum in the new century, that could be described as the finishing touch of the urban culture.  

3.3 Culture relevance

The creation of culture-related urban landscape is not characterized by cultural material evidence, it is the method of landscape creation with the content related with culture as the archetype, such as natural factors, artistic factors or social factors. With the profound cultural origins in culture-related urban landscape, people could feel the natural breath, historical flow and cultural accumulation of the city, which enrich the form of cultural landscapes in profound cultural significance. Therefore, the creation of culture-related landscape has no definite copying object, and there is no symbolic representation of practical significance, which more emphasis on the metaphysical cultural connotation, often using symbolic means to illustrate sincere emotion and profound implication.

Immanuel Kant believes that symbolism is the only way to sustain the perceptual world and the rational world, which makes it possible to feel something imperceptible (God, perception, will, etc.). "Symbolism" means the artistic technique of expressing some profound thoughts of the creator with the help of the external characteristics of a particular thing, or the expression of a certain kind of special meaning. There is no inevitable connection between the ontological meaning and the symbolic meaning of the symbolism, however, the author's prominent depiction of the characteristics of ontology can make the appreciator full of association, thus comprehend the meaning of the creator and show the natural and social cultural characteristics of the specific environment, and then achieve the emotional communication between the creators and the audience. The famous American philosopher Suanne k Langer interprets the artistic form as a symbol of expressing emotion, and the symbolic of art implies form of symbolic, which is consistent with the essential form of experience. Symbolism is the way of expressing the abstract meaning or implication with perceptual image, it is with a long history, wide application and far-reaching scope. The excellent landscape works should have the beauty of form and implication.

In the design of the Wetland Plaza of Citizen Center in Panjin Liaodong Bay, we use the symbolic landscape creation method of culture-related to create an overall image of the landscape of the local ecological landscape and the visual conflict with the newly constructed city. Alvar Aalto once said: "Culture, which originates from human nature and instinct." The Red Beach as a cultural symbol of Panjin concentrates local history, culture and natural characteristics, accumulation of regional emotions and memories, becoming the core of association material (Figure.8). The site is situated at the intersection of the
West-East inter-city highway from the old city to the new town and the South-North waterfront ecology belt. The south side is the urban secondary road, divided into a triangular shape by three roads. The inside of site is naturally divided into natural reed wetlands (Figure.9). Coping with the characteristics of the site, we have established the principle of design: retaining the original texture, reducing development efforts and strengthening the participation of public to design a structure with prominent images and become the visual focus of the people along the road, as the urban sign showing the urban images. According to the site condition, the theme structure adopts triangle element, which is the continuation of the urban texture. Red is the symbol of the culture-related of the Red Beach with the regional characteristic of Panjin. The treatment of architectural landscape echoes the original natural texture. The red wings float above the surface of the wetlands, the basic function space of the building is placed underground, and the roof becomes the public activity platform of the public (Figure.10).

4. Conclusion

The concept of "cultural landscape" in heritage conservation is introduced in this paper, and three design strategies of cultural memory, cultural evolution and cultural association are put forward to raise the landscape design from morphological level to the cultural level. The characteristics of three kinds of cultural types are different in the creation, and therefore it is extended that the effective extraction and translation of specific elements, conceptual elements and associative elements are the key points to shape the urban square landscape. Finally, the operational design strategies of urban square landscape are proposed: the use of abstract, visualization and symbolic operation, summarized in Table 1.

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<th>Strategy</th>
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<th>Cultural factor</th>
<th>Translation means</th>
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Three design strategies of cultural memory, cultural evolution and cultural association will be beneficial to the shaping of urban square landscape under different regional cultural environment. Through discussing the culture of the urban square, the construction consciousness of the cultural inheritance of the city is proposed, which is very important to enrich the characteristic of the urban square, and also provide the feasible practical reference for the cultural construction of the urban square.

Figure Source: Figure 1 ~ 10 provided by Tianzuo Architecture institute of Shenyang Jianzhu University

References