

Application of Vernacular Landscape Symbols in Du Fu Thatched Cottage of Chengdu

Dingying Ye, Xian Zhao, Yuanyuan Jiang

College of Landscape Architecture, Sichuan Agricultural University, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China

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Abstract: This paper takes the perspective of semiotics, and mainly focuses on the signified and references features of symbols. The researchers conducted on-spot investigation on Du Fu Thatched Cottage, and collected the vernacular landscape symbols used in this garden. Through screening and classifying these symbols, the application characteristics of symbols in Du Fu Thatched Cottage are analyzed. This paper also excavates the regional cultural features of Chengdu, and provides the reference for the landscape construction of Chengdu area.

1. Introduction

Since the 21st century, with the rapid development of social economy and culture, the comprehensive strength of our country has been growing. However, in the rapid development of urban construction, many historical relics are submerged. The features and cultural heritages of cities are facing enormous challenges. With the promotion of activities like "cultural return" and "tourism wave", the exploration of regional culture has attracted much attention. The uniqueness of vernacular landscape plays an important role in the formation of diversified regional landscape and can effectively prevent the convergence of landscape under the influence of globalization. [1] As a prominent and representative feature of vernacular landscape, special element symbols have a wide range of application value, and are closely related to the development of urban landscape with local cultural characteristics and inheritance of regional history and culture. This study explores the application of vernacular landscape symbols in Du Fu Thatched Cottage, a famous garden located in western Chengdu of Sichuan Province. It is conducive to the excavation of regional cultural characteristics in Chengdu and can provide the reference for the landscape construction and design innovation of this city.

2. The Concept of Vernacular Landscape Symbols

In Ci Hai, the word "Xiang Tu", or vernacular is interpreted as "native land or hometown", which also refers to "local regions". [2] With the common development of many disciplines, the meaning of "Xiang Tu" is no longer limited in its original meaning. The connotation gradually expands and changes; a lot of related concepts come into being, such as vernacular landscape, vernacular culture and vernacular architecture, etc. They all focus the concepts of vernacular elements, regional places and hometown. [3] In short, "Xiang Tu" is the place where human beings are born, grow up and die out.

With the in-depth study of "Xiang Tu", or vernacular, a new concept of "vernacular landscape" appeared and attracted people's attention. The word is used in relevant literature with different connotations due to the different focuses of study. At present, there are mainly three explanations of vernacular landscape, namely rural landscape, regional landscape and ordinary landscape. These three explanations have certain commonalities. They all believe that vernacular landscape is the procedure which people cognize the nature and adapt to the land as well as the space and pattern on the land. It is the manifestation of people's life style on the land at a special period of time, and is closely related to the modes of human life and production. It is the result of the spontaneous or semi-spontaneous process based on the accumulation of human activity experiences. [4]

Symbols are abstract; their essence is to represent some substance or concepts through other

substance. Semiotics is a science dealing with life and symbolic structure. It covers a wide range; it can analyze all things in the world. The vernacular landscape symbols derive from the combination of symbols and landscapes; they refer to landscape patterns formed spontaneously or semi-spontaneously in the accumulation of people's life experience. These symbols include human's recognition on nature and land, as well as the methods they adopted to adapt to specific spatial patterns. Vernacular landscape symbols have the three characteristics of signification, signifier and reference.

The creation and inheritance of human culture are usually accomplished by symbols. The process of human culture creation is actually the process of constructing the symbol system; the process of symbol inheritance is also the process of cultural continuity. Therefore, in the process of building the human living environment, the traditional symbols created by people's subjective initiative are all vernacular landscape symbols.

3. The Application of Vernacular Landscape Symbols in Du Fu Thatched Cottage

3.1 Basic situation of the cottage

Du Fu Thatched Cottage, located in the western suburbs of Chengdu, was once the residence of Fu Du, a famous poet of the Tang Dynasty who came to Chengdu to flee the war. It is also known as the Du Fu Cao Tang, Shaoling Thatched Cottage, Huanhua Thatched Cottage and Gongbu Thatched Cottage. The garden was built in the first year of the reign of Emperor Zongbao in Tang Dynasty, and underwent Zhuang Wei's reconstruction of in the late five generations; it was also expanded and repaired in Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. The existing buildings of Du Fu Thatched Cottage were renovated in the 16th year of the reign of Emperor Jiaqing of Qing Dynasty. The Thatched Cottage is a complete architectural complex with five thematic buildings: the main entrance, the Daliao, the Shishitang Hall, the Chaimen Gate and the Temple of Gongbu, which are arranged on a central axis.

According to the evolution of traditional Chinese cultural symbols, the construction history of the garden, as well as the life of Fu Du, the protagonist of the site, we can extract the possible signified meanings of vernacular landscape symbols in the park. These symbols express meanings such as poetry, politics, life, official career and leisure living. From this, we can get the overview of corresponding symbols in Table 1.

Table 1. Symbols in Du Fu Thatched Cottage

Dynasty	Typical symbols
Tang	Animal pattern (poetry and official career intention), rolling grass pattern (life intention), Bao Xiang pattern (beautiful vision), brocade pattern (beautiful vision), Twig pattern (life intention), bird, flower and grass pattern (life and poetry intention), Lian Zhu pattern (beautiful vision)
Song	Melon and fruit pattern (beautiful vision), flower and bird pattern (poetry intention), grass pattern (life intention), ribbon pattern (official career intention), character pattern (life intention)
Ming	Flower pattern (life intention)
Qing	Character Wan pattern (beautiful vision), animal pattern (poetry and official career intention), flower and bird pattern (poetry intention), character pattern (life intention)

3.2 Application of vernacular landscape symbols

Under the guidance of symbolic images, 117 vernacular landscape symbols were collected. Fifty-five symbols are kept after excluding damaged and unclear samples. According to the nature of these symbols and the comparison with patterns mentioned in Chinese Symbols (2008) and other works, the vernacular landscape symbols of the site were obtained; specific application statistics were carried out. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of symbols in Du Fu Thatched Cottage

Symbol	Dynasty	Meaning	Frequency
Cloud and thunder pattern	Shang and Zhou	power	1
Nipple pattern	Qin and Han	Order	1
Rolling grass pattern	Tang	Good luck and happiness	1
Sun pattern	Tang	Mystery and power	1
Flower and bird pattern	Song	Beautiful vision	2
Character pattern	Song	Meditate on the past	1
Plant pattern	Song	Different intentions	25
Gold ingot pattern	Ming and Qing	Rolling in money	2
Character Wan pattern	Qing	Good luck and happiness	2
Calligraphy and painting pattern (scenery pattern)	Qing	Different intentions	9
Myth pattern	Qing	Beautiful vision	2
Geometric pattern	All dynasties	Order, power and preciseness	8

Du Fu Thatched Cottage was established for a long time and renovated during several dynasties; symbols of Tang and pre-Tang Dynasties gradually disappeared. The existing vernacular landscape symbol patterns include plants, figures, paintings, as well as clouds and thunder, among which the plant patterns of Tang and Song dynasties are the most frequent, followed by the calligraphy and painting patterns of Qing Dynasty and various geometric symbols. Other symbols scatter around the site as foils. In this paper, the typical symbols are analyzed specifically.

Plant patterns. Plant patterns account for nearly 1/2 of all symbols in Du Fu Thatched Cottage. They are mostly used in bridges, pavements, structures, flower pots and armrests. The main forms are peonies, orchids, bamboos, plum blossom, lotus flowers and cherries. However, in areas with dense plant patterns, the implication of plants is not the most important; the key is to create a landscape with "a group of plants" as symbol aggregation. The common "plum blossom, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum" and the "three durable plants of winter: pine, bamboo and plum blossom" are typical examples. At the same time, the wide application of patterns with a single kind of flower is mainly used in the ancient pagoda area of Du Fu Thatched Cottage; most patterns are peony, lotus, orchid, peach blossom and branch. The majority of them represent the meaning of "longevity" (as shown in Figure 1).



Figure 1. Plant patterns form a set of symbols in the space.

Geometric patterns. Geometric patterns account for nearly one fifth of the total symbols in Du Fu Thatched Cottage. Most of them are used to express the landscape through different materials. For example, bamboos are woven to form rhombic railings around the countryside. The landscape wall made of bricks and tiles expresses a strong pastoral flavor, which conforms to the humanistic spirit of the site. The combination of bamboo weaving, bricks and tiles makes the landscape simple and lively. Bricks and tiles, straight eaves, red beams and columns, as well as lintels and railings create a unique vernacular garden which is completely different from northern and southern gardens. In the partition of the landscape wall, the repeated geometric patterns are often used to create orderly

aesthetic. At the same time, the appearance of geometric symbols imitating bricks and tiles makes the landscape of the site more vivid (as shown in Figure 2).



Figure 2. Fences with geometric patterns in Du Fu Thatched Cottage

The application of geometric patterns, together with the series of landscapes of the thatched cottage, the pond and five Mu field, combines well Du Fu's life and the environment of the cottage. It not only provides Fu Du with a place to settle down, but also shows his feelings of living in a hut but concerning the whole world. Moreover, the integration of Du Fu Thatched Cottage and famous poem, *My Cottage Unroofed By Autumn Gales* not only increases the popularity of the cottage, but also increases the Confucian cultural accumulation of the place and sublimates its humanistic mood. For the aesthetic subjects, the experience of staying in the thatched house strengthens their aesthetic feeling, enriches their aesthetic experience and helps them to realize the aesthetic transcendence. Visitors can truly feel the Confucian mind of "with thousands of miles in sight and centuries of history in mind" described in the *Five Poems of Spring Villages and Rivers*.

Painting and calligraphy patterns. Painting and calligraphy patterns account for 1/5 in Du Fu Thatched Cottage. That kind of pattern is commonly used in memorial gardens to express the theme of commemoration. Du Fu Thatched Cottage takes Fu Du's residence as its prototype. Fu Du's life experiences, feelings as well as the future generations' memory of him are the source of creation of calligraphy and painting patterns. Through landscape molding the spirit of this place is created to inherit its story (as shown in Figure 3).



Figure 3. Painting and calligraphy patterns in Du Fu Thatched Cottage

4. Characteristics in the Application of Vernacular Landscape Symbols in Du Fu Thatched Cottage

In Du Fu Thatched Cottage, there are many kinds of symbols, which cannot be obviously classified into different categories from the perspectives of history or archaeology. Therefore, in order to facilitate the generalization and summarization, symbols investigated in the garden are interpreted in a popular way according to their contents or images. For example, narrative-oriented symbols, as the name implies, are calligraphy, painting and figure patterns. After classifying and summarizing the vernacular landscape symbols in Du Fu Thatched Cottage from the aspects of signified and reference meaning, this paper summarizes the application characteristics of vernacular landscape symbols in the cottage from the perspective of the "signified" of the three characteristics of symbols.

4.1 Narrative is the main way to express the theme of landscape.

In Du Fu Thatched Cottage, Du Fu, as the protagonist of the place, is carved in the painting and calligraphy patterns. These symbols are mainly narrative, showing the main themes of "Fu Du's image", "the original cottage", "pastoral scenery" and so on. The image of Fu Du and the cottage can be found on the railings and pavement of the garden. It not only shows the landscape atmosphere of the place, but also enables visitors to feel the historical differences in the comparison of symbols and landscapes and to experience the changes of the site. It also helps to shape the image of Fu Du. In the landscape-based painting and calligraphy patterns, the main elements are nature, cottage and native land, which conform to the feature of the site and bring visitors a kind of "spiritual sustenance". These symbols uplift the meaning of symbols to a higher level. The appearance of story patterns about characters related to the site is different from patterns reflecting the real life of the Spring and Autumn Period as well as the Warring States Period. The patterns here have nature of commemoration and nostalgia (as shown in Figure 4).



Figure 4. Narrative landscape expressions

4.2 The types of symbol application are greatly influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism cultures

Influenced by the strict feudal ruling ideology of Confucianism, such as "ministers submit to the monarch, while sons submit to the father", geometric patterns stand for order as well as the cloud and thunder patterns stand for rights often appear in Du Fu Thatched Cottage. The lotus-seed patterns, lotus-flower patterns, lotus-seat patterns and Wan-character patterns in the cottage are concrete manifestations of the influence of Buddhist culture and ideas such as "achieving the Buddha-hood". The emergence of painting patterns and cloud patterns which show mythological mood and the realm of immortality is the embodiment of Taoist culture. The traditional Chinese culture is deeply influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Although Du Fu Thatched Cottage has been repaired and perfected for several times, its cultural foundation has not been affected. Therefore, the vernacular landscape symbols in the cottage are the inheritance and development of our traditional culture (as shown in Figure 5).



Figure 5. Comprehensive influences of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism

4.3 The meaning of symbols is full of auspicious and beautiful visions

In Du Fu Thatched Cottage, there are a large number of landscape symbols full of auspicious implications, such as the patterns of character Wan, which means ten thousand in Chinese, the patterns of gold ingot, as well as various plants, flowers and birds patterns. In the fence symbols of the garden, the combination of Wan-character patterns and gold ingot patterns expresses the

beautiful vision of "ten thousand words do not reach the end" and symbolizes the long-term happiness and longevity. The gold ingot patterns are integrated into the design of the landscape wall. It forms a kind of cut-off landscaping through repetition. The application integrates with the natural environment, and can satisfy the function of landscape and express people's pursuit for a better life. The appearance of a large number of plant and bird patterns is also a concentrated expression of the auspicious and beautiful life. For example, there are orchids representing tranquil and the leisure living, peonies representing glory and wealth, vinca representing exuberant scenario, as well as lively and festive birds and animals (as shown in Figure 6).



Figure 6. Landscape expresses beautiful wills

5. Conclusion

Vernacular landscape symbols evolve in the historical process according to users' different functional needs, as well as their aesthetics and spiritual pursuits in different periods. Although the existing Du Fu Thatched Cottage was renovated during the reign of Emperor Jiaqing of Qing Dynasty, vernacular landscape symbols in the park are mostly popular patterns used after the Song Dynasty. As a famous literary shrine and memorial garden, the meaning of these symbols does not change fundamentally. The extensive use of plants and painting patterns creates a strong aroma of books and gives the site literati temperament. It is not only a simulation of Fu Du's living environment, but also a respect for the existing site. Therefore, when applying landscape symbols, we must innovate on the basis of fully understanding their cultural connotations, in order to design real landscapes with cultural characteristics and connotations, and can reflect the spirit of the times.

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