

Constructing Visual Images in the Urban Space of Chengdu under the Remodeling of Tianfu Culture

Xiaoshan Ding

School of Marxism, Chengdu University of Information Technology, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China

Keywords: visual construction of urban space; Tianfu culture; Chengdu.

Abstract: The visual construction of urban space can reflect urban culture as well as the character of the city. History has endowed Chengdu with profound urban culture and formed unique visual images of urban space. To build a unique city brand in the new era, Chengdu must rely on the Tianfu culture and highlight its features. The construction of visual image needs to focus on following aspects: the construction of a park city, the specialization of blocks, as well as the shaping of artistic city landmarks.

1. Introduction

Visual construction of urban space combines visual communication with the spatial structure of cities. It is a scientific, holistic and pluralistic study on the identification system of a specific environment. The research of urban spatial vision has not been paid enough attention in the practice of urban construction in recent decades. The rapid development of cities has led to the identity of urban images. Designers usually neglect users' spatial experience and feelings. Therefore, the visual construction of urban space is particularly important in urban planning and construction today. In the new era, Chengdu should establish well-recognized and distinct cultural images. The creation of visual images of urban space is particularly important for the establishment of urban cultural image. How to make use of the capital of Tianfu (means "city in the heaven") culture and create visual images which can reflect historical continuity and innovation of the times, is an important issue to be discussed.

2. The Connotation of Visual Images of Urban Space

Yi-fu Duan once pointed out, "human vision has the strongest spatial recognition ability. Because of the long-term usage of this perception, we regard the world as a space entity clearly defined by lines, surfaces and bodies." A city is a complex space system. The urban space is not only the space being used, but also the landscape being viewed. It has both functional orders and visual orders. Urban spatial vision is not only the intuitive display of urban images, but also an important perspective for people to understand and interpret the changes of city development and the establishment of urban images.

With the rapid development, now many cities are built identically and lack visual recognition. The core purpose of the visual image of urban space is to shape the unique charm of different cities, to show the beauty of cities, and to create more happiness for people living in it.

How to realize the construction of visual images in urban space? The key is to tap resources from urban culture and integrate them into the characteristics of the times, so as to highlight the characteristics of the city and make it distinguishable from other cities.

3. Spatial Visual Images of Chengdu in the History

Chengdu is a famous historical and cultural city with the history of thousands of years. History has endowed the city with profound urban culture, nurtured the cultural atmosphere of harmony and inclusive between man and nature, and formed unique visual images of urban space.

3.1 The visual image of urban space surrounded by two rivers

Ancient Chengdu was a city with dense rivers and beautiful environment. “The two rivers encircle the city; the two rivers run through the city. There are canals surrounding streets, and dense streams distributed in the city”. The water system led to the overall development of the city, and the water city pattern was formed in that process. The dense rivers and lakes as well as the flowing waterways endow the city with unique features. Many extremely beautiful pictures were formed. Examples include, “living in the shadow of green locust trees, there is a bridge over the spring water near my gate”, and “My window is framed the snow-capped peak of Mount West; close by my door are moored boats from faraway Wu”.

Jinjiang is the mother river of Chengdu. Historically, there were many gardens built along the Jinjiang River, forming many poetic landmarks related to water, such as the Wangjiang Tower, the Hejiang Pavilion, the Jiuyan Bridge, the Sima Bridge, and the Songxian Bridge. These landmarks carried special meanings. For example, in the Song Dynasty, the Wanli Bridge became a meaningful and representative landmark of Chengdu. Ji Zhang wrote a poem, saying, “There are many restaurants beside the Wanli Bridge. Which one do visitors like to choose?” The Wanli Bridge in this poem not only refers to Chengdu, but also becomes a symbol of parting. With so many symbols complementing and enriching each other, the constructed landscape conveys the concept of “harmony” as a whole. People in Shu (the ancient name of Sichuan Province) enjoyed visiting gardens, and formed an optimistic, confident and elegant attitude towards life.

3.2 The image of a flourishing city combining temples and markets

Roads to Sichuan are dangerous, but Chengdu has always been an open and prosperous city since ancient times. In Han Dynasty it was one of the “five metropolises”; in the Tang Dynasty, “Yangzhou was the most prosperous city of China while Chengdu ranked the second.”

The close combination of temples and markets embodies the cultural spirit of opening and integration in Chengdu. Since ancient times, there have been many famous temples built in Chengdu, such as the Wenshu Monastery, the Zhaojue Temple and the Daci Temple. An Overview of Chengdu made a survey on temples in this city. During the reign of Guangxu Emperor of Qing Dynasty, there were 155 temples built in the city of Chengdu, as well as 210 temples built outside the city and in surrounding countries. The Daci Temple is the most famous ancient temple. Built in the Tang Dynasty, the Daci Temple is place where the eminent monk Xuanzang was ordained. It has a tradition of sermon. The temple witnessed the grand scene of millions of people listening to sermon in a single day. During the Tang and Song Dynasties, there were drug markets, silkworm markets, incense markets, fan markets and Qibao (seven treasure stones in Buddhism) markets around the Daci Temple. In Song Dynasty, Zhi-chun Li recorded that, “people from all directions gather near the Daci Temple. Some people are performing on the streets; some are selling precious and exquisite goods. This place is bustling.” It can be seen temples have become places for leisure and communication among citizens, which reflects the natural integration of religious culture and civic culture. Because of the characteristics of opening and integration, Chengdu is a very vibrant city. Today, such expressions like the Daci Temple Business Circle and the Wenshu Monastery Business Circle are frequently used in newspapers, which show the far-reaching influence.

3.3 The collection of cultural landmarks

The cultural spirit of innovation, creation and worship of culture and religion in Tianfu culture is reflected in many cultural landmarks such as the Du Fu Thatched Cottage Museum, the Zhuge Liang Memorial Hall, the Wangjiang Tower Park and the Huaxi Dam in urban space vision.

Chengdu is a center of humanities and celebrities. It is the birthplace of many famous writers such as Xiang-ru Si-ma and Xiong Yang, and fosters the Chengdu culture of “pursuing elegance” and “admiring scholars”. The Wenweng Shi Shi founded in the Han Dynasty was the earliest official local school in China. From the “Wenweng Shi Shi” to the “Jinjiang Academy” in the Qing Dynasty, and from the “Chengdu Normal School” and “Chengdu Middle School” in the modern times to today’s “Chengdu Shi Shi High School”, schools have been built in the same place for

more than two thousand years; tens of thousands of talents have been cultivated. This place becomes a well-deserved cultural landmark of Chengdu.

4. The Visual Construction of Urban Space in Chengdu under the Remodeling of Tianfu Culture

4.1 The construction of a park city

Howard, Emerson and others persevered in finding a way to combine the high level of material civilization with the concept of protecting nature and the garden world. They attached great importance to the quality of people's living environment in the construction of an ideal country. Lynch also pointed out that "in a vivid environment, the same daily activities will certainly have a new meaning".

The overall spatial structure of the city is the primary feature of urban space. In history, Chengdu was a water city. Water endowed the soul of the city as well as the peaceful, inclusive and relaxed attitude of Chengdu people. With the rapid development of the city, people's life rhythm is speeding up, but they still have the strong desire to relax in nature. In 2018, Jin-ping Xi went to Chengdu and put forward the concept of building a "park city". The construction of a park city under the remodeling of Tianfu culture has been put on the agenda. The emphasis of the construction is to restore the visual sense of the water city.

At present, Chengdu is still surrounded by two rivers; large-scale ecological lakes such as the Qinglong Lake, the Jincheng Lake and the Bailuwan Wetland are built. They not only improve the urban ecological environment, but also highlight the beauty of urban spatial vision. For example, covering an area of 4000 mu, the Qinglong Lake Wetland Park is the largest ecological lake in the central city of Chengdu. The park has beautiful scenery. The landscape design of the lake area strengthens the artistic conception of mountains and rivers, and combines the architectural features of the western Sichuan area. The visual space is full of beauty. In its development and construction, designers also take full account of its impact on the Ming Tomb of Shu King. Green lawns and plants in the park have a good connection with the Tomb; the two places complement each other. The combination of the garden and the tomb of king by the lake reflects the unique connotation of Chengdu. The Qinglong Lake Wetland Park has trails with the total length of 10 kilometers; they are built around the lake. Because of the beautiful environment, the long and wide runways, as well as the convenient transportation and perfect service facilities here, the trail ranks first in the "Top Ten Running Resorts" of Chengdu.

Chengdu takes the green road as the carrier. On the basis of maintaining the ecological background, the city creates rich visual experiences through combining the water network with hills and vegetation. As for July 2018, Chengdu has built 1585 kilometers of greenways. Through the ingenious designing, these roads present the scenery of "changing scenes with every step". The Jincheng Greenway links the Sansheng Flower Town, the Qinglong Lake, the Jincheng Lake, the Beihu Lake, the Longtan Lake, as well as the Jinsha and Jiangan scenic spots. It connects the theme tour route of the Jincheng Greenway, and displays the beauty of harmony between man and nature in Tianfu culture through the ingenious design of urban space.

4.2 Characteristic blocks

The diversity of blocks can enrich the visual hierarchy of the city and provides citizens with unique aesthetic experiences.

4.2.1 Renewal of historic blocks

The renewal of historic blocks means to renovate historic and cultural blocks on the basis of respecting the original culture. From the perspective of understanding and respecting the history, old blocks need to keep their historical charm and present unique visual spaces. As a famous historical and cultural city, Chengdu has five national characteristic commercial blocks, 11 provincial characteristic commercial blocks, as well as four important historical and cultural blocks

including the Kuanzhai Alley, the Wenshu Monastery, the Daci Temple and the Swellfun. After many years of conservation, these four historical and cultural blocks have formed different styles and realized the multi-dimensional visual space.

The Daci Temple has become a modern historic block after renovation. On the basis of preserving the texture and historical relics of streets and lanes, transformation has been made to the greatest extent. The renovation redefines the historical function and creates a brand-new space system of streets and lanes; it not only preserves the history and culture of the city, but also meets the needs of modern cities. In 2014, the Sino-Ocean Taikoo Li opened in Chengdu. It is located in the historic district of the Daci Temple. The theme of “enjoy playing and slow life” is close to the city culture of Chengdu: free, leisure and relax. With the exquisite space design integrated with the Daci Temple, it satisfies the shopping and leisure needs of the new generation of consumers and becomes the most representative creative commercial district in Chengdu. It is not only a model of renovating historical blocks, but also a manifestation of the innovative spirit of Tianfu culture in the new era.

4.2.2 Development of characteristic blocks

Chengdu is the starting point of the Southern Silk Road and the Tea Horse Road. The pluralistic urban cultural elements also reflect in the visual culture of urban space: there are a large number of minority blocks. The most representative one is the Tibetan street near the Zhuge Liang Memorial Hall. Most of the shops in this street sell characteristic Tibetan commodities. The street is adjacent to the scenic spot of the Zhuge Liang Memorial Hall. It integrates the life of Tibetans, the Han population as well as dozens of other ethnic minorities, and reflects the opening and integration of Tianfu culture.

The transformation from the Yulin old block to a life aesthetic block is a representative example. The song of Chengdu made Yulin become an online celebrity. In 2017, the old house No. 3 of Yujie Lane was renovated; the Yard Culture and Creative Park was opened to build characteristic streets represented by music culture. The building of this park not only has its unique style, but also can be perfectly integrated into the whole living block. The most innovative feature is the blending mode adopted by the Yard Culture and Creative Park and the Nijiaqiao Community of Yulin Sub-district. The community and the park coexist in harmony, realizing overlapping functions and staggered service. The combination can create more diversified spiritual fruits and cultural products for citizens. The Yulin Sub-district Office also coordinates the layout of street landscape, and combines features of streets and lanes with cultural characteristics. The Yulin Street is connected with old courtyards and small shops. Through sculpture and installation art, it can recall the city memory, inherit Tianfu culture and create a leisurely and livable living block with old Chengdu features.

Xicun is a cultural, artistic and creative industry development park with cultural and creative industries as the main body and modern service industries as the core. Adhering to the concept of “the contemporary expression of traditional elements”, architectures here combine the typical elements of the agricultural, industrial and information ages with the space of collective residential compounds in the planned economy era, and integrates them into the ideal community space model of collectivism. Every day, the air runway and the open-air lighting stadium become places for people to gather and communicate. Xicun becomes a “specimen of the times”.

4.3 Artistry of urban landmarks

Urban landmarks are often equated with “spatial visual markers”. Since the 21st century, “new landmarks” have been emerging in cities all over the world. Chengdu has many landmarks, such as the global center, the TV tower and the Anshun Corridor Bridge. In the new era, when the public space art of urban landmarks brings changes to the urban landscape, it also integrates into the system of urban cultural life in a more civilian way. More and more works of art appear in urban space; they not only bring fresh changes in the appearance of cities, but also stimulate citizens to share and interact with the city. They play the role of incubator in the growth of urban culture.

The expression of Tianfu culture often relies on these artistic landmarks. Chengdu is the home of giant pandas. Panda is not only a kind of charmingly naive animal, but also has the cultural

characteristics of tolerance, friendliness and equality. Panda has become a symbol of culture; the unique panda culture has been formed. But Chengdu has not fully explored and displayed the panda culture. In 2014, the largest outdoor panda art installation in the history was created by Lawrence Argent. The panda is called “I AM HERE”. With a height of 15 meters and a weight of 13 tons, it caused a sensation in the whole city. The panda of IFS international financial center is also a new city tourism landmark. The panda of IFS spread Chengdu’s unique panda culture. This landmark conforms to the unique temperament of the city. Its success depends not only on the intimacy of the image itself, but also largely on the ability to capture the public’s imagination from the novel and exquisite shape.

5. Conclusion

The core of the visual construction of urban space is to respect people’s visual perception and to plan and design from the perspective of people’s perception. History has endowed Chengdu with profound urban culture and formed unique visual images of urban space. In today’s internationalization, the visual construction of urban space under the remodeling of Tianfu culture not only extends the regional culture from the macro, meso and micro levels, but also reflects the innovation and creation of the new era. By interpreting the visual construction of urban space under the remodeling of Tianfu culture, we can explain why Chengdu is the happiest city of China.

Acknowledgement

This paper is the outcome of the study, Research on the Development of Different Types of Cities in Yunnan Province in Modern Times, which is supported by the Foundation for Key Research Projects of Sichuan Provincial Department of Education. The Project No. is 2017z040.

References

- [1] Duan Y. F. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2018.
- [2] Lynch K. *The Image of the City* [M]. Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House, 2017.
- [3] Ebenezer H. *Garden Cities of To-morrow* [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2010.
- [4] Fu C. J. *An Overview of Chengdu* [M]. Chengdu: Tiandi Press, 2013.
- [5] Xie Y. L. *General History of Chengdu, the 3rd Volume: the Period of Jin Dynasties, the Northern and Southern Dynasties, as well as Sui and Tang Dynasties* [M]. Chengdu: Sichuan People’s Publishing House, 2011.
- [6] “Visual, Space and Narration”: Thoughts on the Visual Image of Urban Space [J]. *Industrial Design*, 2015 (12).