Reconstruct the Missing Narrative: Rethinking Contemporary Chinese Architecture Through Ancient Landscape Paintings

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RECONSTRUCT THE MISSING NARRATIVE

Rethinking Contemporary Chinese Architecture Through Ancient Landscape Paintings

Taiming Chen + Yiwei Wu
In this thesis, we will continue to address the issue of self-identity and missing narrative in contemporary context. Differently, we will use landscape paintings as our design source to revive the narrative quality. We will use the methodologies developed from the research to deconstruct the selected landscape paintings, transform them into narratives, and reconstruct the narratives into architecture.

By extracting events, atmosphere, and spirits from original painting narratives, and by borrowing the principles of paintings to transform them into sequences, we will set up architectural narratives in contemporary context for people to experience.
Introduction

1. Narrative
2. Missing
3. Reconstruct
Narrative

Designing ancient garden based on landscape paintings and poems began to thrive from Song Dynasty. The inherited narrative is a medium to create an environment that provides personal experience and elusive meaning from a participant’s point of view instead of an omniscient view.

In the southbank a hall was built, named “Hall Like a Villa”.

To its north side above the water was a little bridge called “Little Flying Rainbow”.

I crossed it, walked toward north then west, and saw a pavillion called “Little Surging Waves”. Lots of bamboos were standing opposite to its south side as a screen.

Passing through the bamboos along the bank, there is a huge stone called “purifying Will Place”, where I could sit and play the water.

Here, water turned its way toward north, and it was so vast as if it were a lake. Lots of willows stood at the west bank, called “Willow Band”....

Continuing walking toward east, I arrived at the back of “Tower for Dreaming of Reclusion”.

There, several huge pine trees stood and generated soft sound when wind was blowing. This place was “Listening to Windblown Pines Place”....

1. Wen Zhengming, 王氏拙政园记, Notes of Wang’s Humble Administrator’s Garden.

Figure 2-5: Reprinted from 拙政园三十一景, Album of Thirty-One Views, by Wen Zhengming.

Figure 6-9: Scenic Spots of Zhuozheng Garden. Retrieved from http://www.szzzy.cn/Home/Default.
Hall Like a Villa is in Humble Administrator’s Garden, the former house for Tang’s poet Lu Luwang. Though located in the town, it is has fun of silent mountains and forests.

Once Pi Quemei said this house “Without going outside of the town, it is vast as if it were a villa in the suburb.” So it is named as “Hall Like a Villa”.

Streams, bridge, and the color of spring grass,  
Wood fence, thatched cottage, with afternoon crowing of the cock.

Don’t disappoint the place where sages seclude.  
Bring the scrolls and teach children to read.

Little Flying Rainbow is in front of the Tower for Dreaming of Reclusion,  
To the north of the Hall Like a Villa,  
Crossing the Surging Wave Pond.

The Rainbow bows as if to drink the water,  
Its shadow is projected under the sunset as if to turn the wave.

There is water in the garden, covering several hectares, similar to Su Zimei’s Surging Wave Pond, so I built a pavilion at middle, called “Little Surging Waves”.

Likewise, the little pavilion sits alongside the water,  
Still, the blue water circles around the middle column.

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Still, the blue water circles around the middle column.

Aren’t there fresh wind and bright moon with you when you go to fishing?  
There are also children singing that water washing cloth.

Everywhere has river and lake to put your mood,  
After hundred of years bird and fish will already forget that feeling.

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After hundred of years bird and fish will already forget that feeling.
In contemporary context, as international style prevails, the narrative quality from ancient garden has stopped developing. Concepts and theories were brought up to revive the narrative quality, as it is essential to Chinese architecture’s distinct identity.
I.M. Pei creates the narrative sequence by referring to ancient Chinese gardens. However, certain landscape elements such as artificial mountains are directly plugged in, which people cannot experience through.

Wang Shu revives the atmospheric and narrative quality based on landscape painting. However, the interior and the exterior narratives are separated.

Shan-Shui City

Shan-shui city, a spatial planning concept was proposed in contemporary China to construct the “architecture landscape city” by integrating aesthetics and ideas from landscape paintings, poetry, and gardening design.

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In this thesis, we will use landscape paintings as our design source to revive the narrative quality. We will use the methodology developed from the research to deconstruct the selected landscape paintings, transform them into a narrative, and then reconstruct the narrative into architecture.

Ma Qingyun used various vernacular materials to guide the narrative sequence.

However, no landscape scenarios are incorporated into the sequence.

Ma Yansong used the parametric method to construct both architectural and landscape scenarios.

However, architectural scenarios are merely formally imitated as mountains without consideration of spatial narratives.

By extracting events, atmosphere, and spirits from original painting narratives, and by borrowing the principles of paintings to transform them into sequences, we will set up architectural narratives in contemporary context for people to experience.
II. METHODOLOGY
ARCHITECTURE

1. BERNARD TSHUMI
   MANHATTAN TRANSCRIPT / PARC DE LA VILETTE

2. WANG SHU
   NINGBO MUSEUM / CERAMIC HOUSE
   XIANGSHAN CAMPUS

3. THOMAS HILLIER
   URBAN THEATER
Creating the sequence from landscape paintings involves steps from extracting path, defining programs based on scenes, and designing the corresponding spaces.
TWO SCALES
Scale 1: Facade
Scale 2: “Going Into”

MOUNTAIN VS. CAVE
Mountain: Outside, Body Form
Cave: Inside, Interior Space

DIALOG
Built form & Nature
People & Nature
ATMOSPHERE

Visual realization of conditions in landscape paintings as a way to revive atmospheric quality of narrative and phenomenology

Two Scales
Mountain vs. Cave
Dialog
Mountain vs. Valley
Diversity

Form
Material
Spatial Relationship

MOUNTAIN VS. VALLEY
Mountain: Solid, Mass
Valley: Void, Circulation

DIVERSITY
Far distance: Different Things
Near Distance: Experience

Figure 38. Contemplating on a Donkey Ride Home

Figure 39. Mountain Retreat

Figure 39. Mountain Retreat
Figure 40. Yoshino River in Yamato Province (Woodblock print), by Ando Hiroshige

Figure 41. Architect’s Transcription

Figure 42

Figure 43

PRINCESS = A KNITTED MEMBRANE
COWHERD = PERIMETER GRASS PARKLAND

The membrane extends towards the outer parkland.
EMPEROR = ORIGAMI LUNGS
The lungs are physical barriers that manipulate the knitted skin to represent conservative attitude toward love.

UNCONDITIONAL PIETY = STRINGS
The manipulations are articulated by pulley systems.

METAPHOR
A set of architectural language as a way to express the metaphors behind a drawing to address the current cultural and social issues.

Figure 44
Figure 45

Objects
Meanings
Architectural
Language

Figure 44-45: Retrieved from http://www.thomashillier.co.uk.
II. METHODOLOGY

1. PLAY TIME
   JACQUES TATI

2. 2046
   WANG KAR WAI

3. IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE
   WANG KAR WAI

4. REAR WINDOW
   ALFRED HITCHCOCK

5. KAILI BLUES
   BI GAN
Clues are used in Play Time to direct audience through the spaces and help locate oneself. Clues such as elevator or escalator appeared in current scene, then following scene at a different location to indicate the protagonist’s movement and sequence.
The director used intentional framing in the movie 2046. The framing is not only unconventional, but also addresses different focal points. Frame and void together constructed the atmosphere of the movie and emotions of the protagonists.
Same spaces like staircase, hallway, room door, restaurant are showing in the movie with different protagonists, events in different times. The familiarity of the spaces allows viewer to juxtapose the tone and emotion as well as the space itself, which leads to the metaphor of the space. For example, the staircase is a vertical maze indicates the hesitation; hallway indicates the segregation.
As each protagonist’s life is exhibiting through the windows, Hitchcock divided the action of different players but presented them all at once. He created new connections across seemingly unconnected actions for both the viewer and the protagonist.

MULTI-FOCAL POINTS
Fragments of moments are showing in the movie, which seem confusing. However, the arrangement of shots combined formed an intellectual meaning. This meaning does not exist within the individual shots, but only shows when they are juxtaposed. Montage as a technique allows audiences to find different clues and form different story lines, which leads to the autonomy of the narrative. In contrast of the rest of the movie, there is a 42 minutes long shot, within which protagonists’ movement carved out the spaces.
II. Methodology

Phenomenology

1. James Turrell
   Roden Crater

2. Peter Zumthor
   Bruder Klaus Field Chapel

3. Bruno Taut
   Glashaus

4. Libeskind
   Jewish Museum
Innovative "Installation"

"Freed from the structures of permanent, functional, or comforting architecture, Taut and his colleagues hoped to reveal through the building an evanescent spiritual and artistic ideal. By focusing on the building primarily as an environment that creates illusive experience and elusive meaning, rather than as object or mere backdrop for display, they hoped to make manifest for the populace (Volk) a "higher passion to build" that could inspire the way to a brighter, reformed, unified, and eventually "socialist" European culture. In the best spirit of innovative "installations," Taut intended his Glashaus not only to provoke radical change in art and architecture, but also to give inspiration for massive social, cultural, and political change promised by his vision of a new light-filled world."

---Kai K. Gutschow. From Object to Installation in Bruno Taut’s Exhibit Pavilions.
WORSHIP OF MATERIAL & PROCESS

CROSS SYMBOL AS METAPHOR
III. PAINTING ANALYSIS

1. 夏山图
   SUMMER MOUNTAINS

2. 溪山图
   STREAMS AND MOUNTAINS

3. 溪岸图
   THE RIVERBANK

4. 江山秋色图
   AUTUMN COLORS OVER RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS

Criteria for Selecting Paintings:

* The work should depict a sequence formed of diverse scenes or events.
* The work should be a combination of landscape and architecture that contains human activities.
* The work should contain various elements of landscape, such as mountain, water, cave, trees, etc.
* The work should express important metaphors or spirits from traditional Chinese culture.
* The work should inherit certain quality of atmosphere and phenomenology.
* The selection will sort out paintings of different narratives and different metaphors.
"This painting is one of the few landscape handscrolls remaining from golden age of the art. The magic of this painting relies on its power to draw the eye and the mind of its viewer across a thousand miles in a single foot, to become the vehicle for a unique journey through the hours of the day and the seasons."  

1. A returning fisherman draws in his net for the last time in the gathering dusk.

2. A traveler on his donkey and a porter carrying his zither make their way from the landing.

3. Travelers make their way toward a temple retreat where vacationers are seated together overlooking a stream, enjoying the view and contemplation.

4. Stepping down from the central mountain, there is a cluster of magnificent buildings where travelers gather and enjoy various activities.

5. A stream is hidden behind mountains for travelers to explore.

6. A returning farmer makes his way along the path to his house.

7. A lone porter crossing a bridge and a mule train descending from a gated mountain leads the viewer back.

This diagram shows the extension as a compositional rule to set up a series of sequence and sequential connections.


1. The scholar withdrew and lived in a thatched cottage with rear farming land.

2. He met friends and inscribed poems in the pavillion.

3. He started the journey in natural landscape with his friends.

4. They heard apes crow along the hidden stream.

5. They visited magnificent building clusters. 

This diagram shows the layered condition of mountains. It creates a spatial sense of flowing, which guides a viewer’s sighting as well as the physical movement.

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1. The scholar and his wife lived a secluded life in the riverside courtyard house.

2. The cowboy rided a cow in the courtyard.

3. The servant girl was spinning behind the bamboo fence.

4. A farmer was catching path in the valley.

5. Two other farmers was at a farther distance along the valley.

6. Waterfall as a scene in an alternative path for the audience to follow.  

This diagram shows how the overlap of mountain and water creates a valley condition. It suggests spaces and the direction of physical movement.

This painting resents a spectrum of rocky textured mountains inhabited only by travelers on the way to grand vistas and palatial retreats of forbidding isolation. A continuous foreground of low lands with large inlets leading to the horizon is set off from a freakish mountain range that runs along the middle ground and background interrupted only once by a large winding river." 

Trees = Leading Clue
Columns

Water = Connection
Sunken Space
(Courtyard, Green Space, Platform)

Cave = Physical Path
Entrance to Sunken Space

Valley = Visual Connection
Gap Space
IV. NARRATIVE
Narrative Theme 1: Recreation / Relaxation
SUMMER MOUNTAINS
(Traveler Gathering + Local Domesticated Life)

Narrative Theme 2: Study / Creating
STREAMS AND MOUNTAINS
(Scholar Activity)

Narrative Theme 3: Meditation / Living
THE RIVERBANK
(Scholar Reclusion & Domesticated Life)

PRESENTATION METHOD
1. Meditation Spaces
Original Narrative: Scholar’s Cottage
“The scholar withdrew and lived in a thatched cottage with rear farming land”. 11

2. Meeting Room
Original Narrative: Pavilion
“The scholar met friends and inscribed poems in the pavilion”. 12

METHODOLOGY

Intentional Framing:
A series of framings lead people from one space to another.

Dialog:
Visual and physical interactions between built form, nature, and people.

Clue:
A series of similar objects act as clues for people to experience through and approach to the main space.

11 Richard M. Bamhart, Along the Border of Heaven, 148.
12 Richard M. Bamhart, Along the Border of Heaven, 148.
3. Exchange Space
Original Narrative: Bridge
“The scholar started the journey in natural landscape with his friends.”

Montage:
When two juxtaposed spaces combine, a meaning is formed. Here, people go back and forth between discussion and creation to exchange ideas.

Metaphor:
Bridge is a space of connection, a space for exchanging.

4. Creative Studio
Original Narrative: Hidden Stream
“They heard apes crow along the hidden stream” (as an inspiration for their poems).

METHODOLOGY

Two Scale:
Hidden behind the front elevation, there is a space with a lot of hidden values and experiences.

5. Resource Library
Original Narrative: Magnificent Building Clusters
“The scholar and his friends visited magnificent building clusters”. 15

METHODOLOGY
Multi-focal Points / Repetitive Indication:
a series of buildings with identical form but different
details makes people explore and discover one
that fits them the most.

Mountain / Cave:
Mountain implies building form, cave represents
interior space. Here, it contains libraries of
different resources.

6. Gallery
Original Narrative: Waterfall
“The journey ended with appreciating waterfalls at the mountain top”. 16

METHODOLOGY
Mountain / Cave:
Mountain implies building form, cave represents
interior space. Here, it is a gallery space for people
to appreciate the creative works.

Introduction


Architectural Precedent


Films


Landscape Paintings


Architectural Precedent


Landscape Paintings


