

Narrative Design in Practice: Enhancing Cultural and Economic Value Through Wall Painting at Qilihai Ark Theater, Tianjin

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Abstract

This study investigates the application of narrative design in the creation of wall paintings with focus on the Ark Theater in Tianjin Ninghe Qilihai. For this, it explores the narrative design concept in wall painting with the analysis of successful examples including the Martyrs Yu Fangzhou wall painting. From this basis, the study derives design principles and applies them to the creation of wall paintings in different areas of Qilihai including the Red Liberation Courtyard, Green Wetland Courtyard and Antique Ark Theater. The innovative application of narrative design is expected to bring diversity and increase engagement beyond conventional approaches, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of cultural heritage and promotion of the spirit of the Ark. The study integrates theoretical analysis, field investigation and case study methodology to provide a comprehensive view of the potential of narrative design in cultural preservation and dissemination.

Keyword : Narratology, Wall painting, Martyrs in the ark, Qilihai Ark Theater, Qilihai wetland

1. Introduction

The grandeur and profundity of Chinese history and culture have continuously shaped a nation's identity and it has particularly reflected in the tales of national heroes and their philosophical spirits. These narratives, whether explicit or subtextual, act as catalysts in driving the resurgence of the Chinese nation while serving as invaluable cultural wealth. In the context of contemporary society, the propagation of these heroic narratives and the development of co-creative industries can significantly contribute to cultural flourishing in the new era and simultaneously aid in rural infrastructural expansion [1].

Cultural representations in particular, those manifested in the form of wall paintings have been effective tools for endorsing the national spirit, consequently enhancing national unity [2]. Such tangible depictions of the spirit of revolutionary martyrs have palpably influenced the cultural landscape in places like the Ninghe District of Tianjin and fostered a sense of respect and longing. A review of extant research has been conducted to underscore the relevance and importance of narrative wall painting

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designs and to posit them as potential catalysts for heritage conservation, innovation and the preservation of heroic spirits [3][4]. However, the intricate web of interrelations between various industries in the new age often escapes scholarly attention. The portrayal and commercialization of heroic images in foreign contexts provide crucial insights [5] that have been instrumental in conducting a comprehensive study and design of the Ark Theater. For this, this study employs narrative theory and wall painting design to articulate the personality, revolutionary spirit and actions of Tianjin Ninghe Qilihi Ark. This design fuses characters, narratives and wall paintings to narrate compelling tales and provide multifaceted experiences for viewers [6].

The methodologies employed in this paper include literary research, field investigation and case study. Literary research encompasses the collection and analysis of pertinent texts on ‘Heroic Spirit’ and ‘Celebrity Wall Painting’ to provide the theoretical basis for the design. Field investigation involves photographic documentation of Ark and other celebrity wall paintings as primary material for design research. The case study approach includes the analysis of pre-existing exceptional designs, identification of valuable referential cases and formulation of practical solutions for Ark’s wall painting design.

2. The Narrative Design Concept in the Wall Painting

As society evolves and the domestic economy expands, the demand for wall painting design, particularly character wall painting, extends beyond mere aesthetic gratification and encompasses more profound emotional and cultural needs. Utilizing an understanding of narratology and narrative design, this paper seeks to scrutinize the status of Ark celebrity effects and related wall painting narrative designs. For this, this paper will unearth additional visual elements particular to Ark and deeper spiritual connotations including revolutionary and national spirit.

2.1 Narratology and Narrative Design

Narrative serves as a conduit for conveying real or imagined events and it links elements to disseminate information and elicit cognition and emotions in the recipient. Coined by French scholar Tsvetan Todorov, the term ‘narratology’ was later extended by Roland Barthes to encompass all media forms, although traditionally it was concentrated on text-based works [7]. Narrative design applies narratology principles to design and employs storytelling to communicate information and establishes emotional bonds. This method aligns with the human proclivity for processing information based on narratives. In design, it aids in the creation of dynamic, coherent and chronologically arranged

presentations that facilitate comprehension. For instance, Naoto Fukasawa's CD player design that resembles an exhaust fan transforms the act of music listening into a tactile experience as shown in [Fig. 1]. His another work of the annual ring roll paper uses the visual motif of tree rings to tell a story about environmental conservation and the passage of time as shown in [Fig. 2]. Seungbin Jeong's cloud and rain flowerpot combines practicality with emotional appeal while creating a relatable narrative about 'clouds and rain' as shown in [Fig. 3]. Narrative design complies with audiences' cognitive habits and addresses both practical and emotional needs. It offers an intuitive understanding of a product akin to listening to a story and enables audiences to appreciate the deeper humanistic connotations of the products and satisfying physiological and psychological needs.



[Fig. 1] CD player designed by Naoto Fukasawa



[Fig. 2] Annual ring roll paper designed by Naoto Fukasawa



[Fig. 3] Cloud and Rain Planter designed by Seungbin Jeong

Emerging with the rise of cultural industries and wall painting, narrative design grounded in narrative theories offers a story-driven logical approach. It recreates culture and forms a new mode of social experience. This design style underscores emotional and cultural bonds and employs narrative techniques in wall painting design. It emphasizes the emotional experiences and cultural transmission it facilitates and depicts the properties, feature and functions of the designed products while conveying beauty and cultural connotations [8]. Consequently, the creativity interest and thematic value of wall painting design are of utmost importance.

2.2 Successful example of Martyrs Yu Fangzhou wall painting in China



[Fig. 4] Monument to Martyrs Yu Fanzhou

As shown in [Fig. 4], Yu Fangzhou (1900-1927) was a founder of the Tianjin Socialist Youth League as a student movement leader. Born and raised in Tianjin, Fangzhou took on the mantle of the Party chief for the committee, leading workers' movements with unwavering dedication. Unfortunately, his life was cut short by an enemy following a rebellion in Yutian, Hebei province. The former Martyrs Yu Fangzhou is located in the Qilihai Wetland of Ninghe with beautiful scenery and abundant products. The former residence of Martyr Yu Fangzhou situated in the scenic and resource-rich Qilihai Wetland of Ninghe is depicted in [Fig. 5] and [Fig. 6]. These images capture the heroic spirit and life story of Fangzhou to offer villagers and visitors alike a visual narrative to contemplate and appreciate. In the wall paintings, Fangzhou's courage and determination are boldly depicted. His caricature which is characterized by thick eyebrows and a sternly clenched fist communicates an image of unyielding resolve. Grounded in historical reality, the wall painting starkly represents his leadership and the sacrifices he made for his cause and brings his legacy to life for present and future generations [9].



[Fig. 5] The Martyrs' Oath



[Fig. 6] The Martyrs' initial engagement in the Party

3. Design Principles of Wall Painting in Tianjin Ninghe Qilihai Ark Theater from the Perspective of Narratology

The Ark wall painting design guided by narratology aims to visually portray Ark's life story by utilizing storytelling, logical arrangement and innovative design principles. This design concept fuses Ark's visual elements and modern design style and it is incorporated with the revolutionary spirit of Ark with aesthetic appeal. The narrative wall painting is not mere fantasy but a reinvention of Ark's story through color and material with different narratives creating various emotional experiences for the audience. The design uses specific stories of Ark and narratively merging visual elements and the spirit of Ark with a clear and logical organization to effectively express its spiritual connotations.

Designers have to align with modern aesthetics, market demand and the diversified appreciation of products. The design should be innovative and have personal characteristics that resonate with daily life to ensure that the final result is both aesthetically pleasing and relevant [10]. This is the essence of the Ark wall painting design: a blend of 'culture' + 'creativity' by adding a coat of spiritual connotation to the design while spreading Ark's story and spirit in a more captivating manner. To effectively convey the core content, the design elements are carefully selected from Ark's life story not only to extract the text information but also to embody other spiritual connotations. The relationship between the design form and its meaning is crucial where neither can exist independently. This relationship enables effective communication between the design work, designer and audience to create an emotional connection with the audience. While staying true to the cultural and historical contexts, the design should also introduce the narrative essence into the work and it ensures it is in line with the spiritual connotation of the characters and the modern design aesthetics. Hence, the narrative Ark wall painting design is a fusion of Ark's life story elements with modern design and create an appealing visual representation with deep spiritual connotations.

4. Design applications of the Qilihai wall painting

After the previous field investigation and the extraction and processing of visual elements, the direction of the narrative wall painting design of the Ark Theater was obtained. This section mainly optimizes the materials and visual elements integrated and draws with the color direction in mind.

4.1 Wall Painting Design of Qilihai Red Liberation Courtyard



[Fig. 7] Original appearance



[Fig. 8] A set of walls painted with new colors.

Creating a story hinges on a thorough understanding of narrative theory and its adept application to the overall design of the tale. The core of our story is a pattern and it is an element far more lively

and easier to comprehend than plain textual representation. This innovative approach unites the third-person narrative mode with cutting-edge design techniques and underscores the practicability of narrative theory.

As shown in [Fig. 7], the original wall was merely gray but Fangzhou is an area rich in the cultural heritage of the red culture. And the case theme is likewise grounded in the red culture. Therefore, efforts were made to harmonize the architectural design and layout of the house with the overall aesthetics of the village as shown in [Fig. 8]. The unique cultural artifacts and specialty products of the region are showcased in an exhibition hall, further cementing the integration with the red culture.

The design deftly intertwines the distinctive regional characteristics of Qilihai and the spirit of the red culture in a homestay format to lend the project an exceptional specificity and recognizability. It is an ode to the red culture that reminds us to never lose sight of our original objectives and stay focused on our mission. Visitors are invited to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of the red culture and partake in comprehensive cultural education while simultaneously appreciating the rustic charm of the rural setting.

4.2 Wall Painting Design of Qilihai Green Wetland Courtyard



[Fig. 9] Original appearance



[Fig. 10] A group of wall painting new colors

The transformation was done when compared to the original appearance as shown in [Fig. 9]. The charming culture of Qilihai Wetland is reimaged through the lens of a contemporary minimalist lifestyle as shown in [Fig. 10]. This fusion represents a unique confluence where simple and ecologically sourced materials meet modern decorative counterparts. This juxtaposition acts as both a sedimentation - a settling and preservation of the traditional - as well as a catalyst for innovation. The aesthetic is pared-down aligning with a lifestyle that values simplicity, yet it simultaneously promotes a continuous elevation of thought and insight. This harmonization embodies the modern urban dweller's perennial aspiration - a return to rural roots while still maintaining a progressive mindset.

4.3 Wall Painting Design of Qilihai Antique Ark Theater



[Fig. 11] Original Appearance



[Fig. 12] group of wall painted new colors

The depiction of Ark's image with the extraction of artistic elements and the application of specific scenes and agricultural products in this study are all aimed at embodying and communicating the essence of 'the spirit of the Ark'. An analysis of the audience's age, preferences and consumer psychology for the relevant agricultural products supports the conclusion that the Yu Fangzhou mural design presented in this study exhibits a robust market resonance. As shown in [Fig. 11], the wall were dull and no significance in a narrative or symbolic way. However, it turned into the Ark's spirit and beautiful scenic appreciations as illustrated in [Fig. 12].

The new designs will be tailored according to the traits of various agricultural products to create a unified style. The intention is to boost the image and appeal of Ark and promote the dissemination and appreciation of its spirit and actions. Furthermore, the designs can encompass all facets of the Ark's image to balance practical functionality with spiritual connotations and present the spirit of Ark in a more youthful and accessible manner.

5. Conclusion

This study was conducted to to innovate the mundane walls by introducing modern design elements and a variety of agricultural product design forms into the narrative-driven painting design. This approach is expected to enhance diversity beyond conventional character heads and statues and to increase product engagement. The proposed method includes graphically processing the life scenes of the Ark, extracting relevant elements and altering standard design frameworks with the goal of fostering interaction and adding interest. However, exploring the mural design of Yu Fangzhou from a narratological perspective presents challenges. Currently, due to objective capacity limitations and time constraints, numerous untapped narratives and deeper spiritual facets cannot be explored enough in this paper. Moreover, its theoretical grasp is not yet comprehensive or profound enough. Also, the artistic treatment and expression of the design, character elements and spiritual temperament leave room for enhancement. The innovative drive behind the related murals also needs strengthening. These are areas for future improvement. Therefore, further studies can continue to enhance the knowledge structure and skill level in all relevant aspects while striving to make it more aesthetically pleasing, lively, engaging, widely appreciated and educationally enriching.

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