



Tourism spatial organization of historical streets – A postmodern perspective: The examples of Pingjiang Road and Shantang Street, Suzhou, China



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Postmodern theory and deconstruction method were applied into the study of spaces in historical streets.
- Constructed cultural space, leisure space and landscape space of historical streets.
- Put forward a creative tourism spatial organization mode.
- “Eight paths” of tourism spatial organization in historical streets were proposed.

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ABSTRACT

While tourism is closely associated with globalization and modernity, so too it has been held to exemplify post-modernism. This paper reports the application of the concept of deconstruction to urban heritage sites. Such locations are divided into the tourism zones of cultural, leisure and landscape spaces. After describing the construction of these three spaces it is suggested that “eight paths” of space organization exist, namely “culturalization”, “creative”, “experience”, “humanization”, “leisure”, “refinement”, “life-orientation” and “characteristic”. The final section of the paper proposes an integrated organization of space that aids our understanding of historical street design in Suzhou through a utilization of post-modern concepts.

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1. Introduction

Philosophical thought on postmodernism emerged in the humanities and social sciences between 1960 and 1970. The core idea was to criticize rationalism, which is emphasized by modernism. Postmodernism rejects the idea that a single theory can explain everything or is universally applicable (Foucault, 1980) and emphasizes creative thinking with tolerance and openness as characteristics of human nature, culture, and pluralistic values. Postmodernism has significantly influenced the ways, functions, and development paths of tourism. In modern tourism, the

experiences of tourists are rationalized and standardized, which results in the phenomena of commercialization and assimilation (Zuo, 2005). Although commercialization and assimilation can meet the basic requirements of a rigid production structure of a modern society, the personality of tourists and the authenticity of tourism destinations will be lost. Therefore, remodeling tourism becomes unavoidable in the urban development process. Post-modern tourism is a new concept that strongly contradicts rationalism and utilitarianism in leisure as well as the communication and aesthetic processes of modern tourism. The essence of post-modern tourism is an open attitude toward multi-culture, multiple choices and multiple development paths in tourism. Postmodern tourism calls for a greater emphasis on seeking the “truth” and “nature” of the tourism experience (Uriely, 1997). This concept is capable of recovering the true nature of leisure and the communication and aesthetic concepts of tourism as well as rebuilding its creativity. The boundaries between art and life are gradually blurred in the postmodern context (Rotaru, Nitulescu, & Rudolf, 2010).

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The McDonaldization of tourism products may become a way of life in the context of postmodernism, but tourism will revert from commercialized to lived tourism (Guo, 2013), which is important for attaining sustainable development in tourism.

Urban planning in modern industrial cities has adversely altered the original shape, texture, and culture of historic buildings, streets, and cities. The individuality and diversity of historical streets have been lost due to construction, particularly in urban redevelopment. Historical streets are slowly fading. New postmodernism planning ideas that emphasize urban emotion, historical culture, and the natural environment are necessary to protect historical streets (Liang & Hua, 2008). The preservation of authenticity and lifestyle under postmodernism creates positive conditions for the retention of historical streets and eliminates the distinction between high culture and popular culture, resulting in a vivid display of culture for tourists (Rotaru et al., 2010). Therefore, postmodernism serves a tremendous role in promoting street culture. In addition, postmodernism supports multi-culturalism and multi-knowledge, which promote the development of historical streets and meet the diverse demands of tourists. Hence, it is necessary to study the application of theories of postmodernism in developing and protecting historical streets.

After the 1970s, the space structure of modern cities entered a new development stage that emphasized humanization and seralization (Zhang & Cui, 1998). Research on space structures has begun to support a new type of narrative or effective understanding of society (Zhang & Deng, 2009). Cultural space, leisure space, and landscape space have received considerable research attention (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts, & Whatmore, 2000; Lefebvre, 1991; Lu, 2004; Zukin, 1995) and compose the three components of tourist space in historical streets. The core purpose of the postmodern concept of space is to reveal the relationship between various social relations and space, namely, the dialectical unity of society and space as well as the unity of “people” with the “local” scale. The tourism spatial structure of historical streets includes the relationships among street elements. This spatial structure involves the performance of form, style, layout, and other tangible elements of the material composition of historical streets and is concerned with the spatial combination of various architectural forms. A comprehensive reflection of the interactions among human factors, such as tourists, postmodern culture, consumption, life, and natural factors, is considered. The structure creates a concrete expression of complex relationships between human and local elements across cultural space, leisure space, and landscape space. In the context of postmodernism, significant shifts have occurred in human culture, consumption, and aesthetic preferences. Tourists use the power of their intellect and imagination to receive and communicate messages and to construct their own sense of historical place to create individual journeys of self-discovery (Nuryanti, 1996), resulting in the development of a spatial organization of tourism for historical streets. This study adopts a spatial perspective as an important entry point to understand the relations between the characteristics of postmodern tourists and the spatial development of historical streets. The transformation of tourism spaces to appeal to the needs of postmodern tourists is an important issue for historical streets.

This study selects Pingjiang Road and Shantang Street in Suzhou, China, two nationally, historically and culturally famous streets, as typical and representative examples. The spatial organization of the cultural space, leisure space, and landscape space of the two streets is compared to achieve an in-depth understanding of the demands of postmodern tourists. The study analyzes the approaches to construction and the interactive mode of the three spaces. A tourism spatial organization mode that includes cultural space, leisure space, and landscape space for historical streets is created with the aim of providing a scientific reference for the promotion of

sustainable development. Two specific research questions guide this study: (1) What is the universal feature of the spatial organization mode of cultural space, leisure space, and landscape space in historical streets that are preferred by tourists? (2) How can the tourism space of historical streets be organized to meet the needs of tourists?

2. Literature review

2.1. Postmodernism

The concept of postmodernism was introduced in 1943 and flourished in culture, art, sports, politics, the film industry, the tourism industry, and scientific development after the Second World War (Denzin, 1991). Postmodernism represents a form of philosophical thought and an attitude that criticizes and deconstructs modern philosophy and the value of spirit (Flax, 1990; Frazer, 1989; Uriely, 1997). This movement is characterized by reflecting, criticizing, and denying modern culture and involves a theoretical orientation, theoretical basis, and way of thinking (Zhang, 2001). This philosophy opposes, denies, and transcends traditional metaphysics, dualism, essentialism, rationalism, mechanical materialism, and patriarchy and reflects uncertainty, diversity, and non-centricity, which significantly influences spatial research.

2.1.1. Postmodern culture space

Gregory et al. (2000) suggested that cultural forces generated by the human mind (e.g., values, emotions) are the essential drivers of spatial variation. Zhang and Deng (2009) clarified the relationship between culture and space, showing that particular cultural attributes create space and vice versa. To maintain lasting charm in a city, the historic feel of a place that has been removed through postmodernism must be restored to achieve historical continuity, not only to restore the love of history but also to fulfill the demand for a return to tradition and human nature in modern society (Zhang & Cui, 1998). Historical streets act as cultural museums and as spaces for the convergence of urban culture. Especially in the development of modern streets, which are nodes of high consumption activity, culture becomes a symbol for shaping space as well as a medium for generating consumer demand. Here, the scope of culture goes beyond its own meaning and reality or may undergo space-time trans-placement, transforming from an empty pursuit to an objectified and popularized reality. The public has increasingly emphasized the need for the symbol of “culture” to enter the field of commercial operations (Zhang & Deng, 2009). In turn, a cultural space presents a unique personality while connecting traditional and modern elements of historical streets.

2.1.2. Postmodern leisure space

With the arrival of the postmodern, the “consumer society” described by Baudrillard emerged and spread around the world through processes of globalization. Zukin (1995) described the postmodern city as a “commercial and consumer place”. Consumption has changed from a simple behavior for the satisfaction of material desires into a special form of behavior that involves constructing social and spatial relationships. Therefore, Lefebvre (1991) asserted that space supported the characteristics of consumerism by containing productive relations and using topology as the medium of social relations. The so-called consumer space appeared on a large scale and became a basic type of space in the modern city. Sun (2009) summarized the essence of the consumer space by arguing that production has been replaced with consumption and has become the main form of productivity. Furthermore, the creation of consumption space has been effective at stimulating

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