

The Transmission and Literacy Role of Cultural Memory of Traditional Houses in the Context of Rural Revitalization

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ABSTRACT

This research is part of the “Ancient Xuzhou Houses in China: Cultural Memory, Symbol and Process Reconstruction in the Context of Rural Revitalization” project. Traditional houses contain a large amount of cultural value, literacy role, and historical memory. In order to sort out the transfer process more clearly between memory and people, this study set three research objectives. First, spatial memory transmission and literacy role needs to be studied and analyzed. Then, on this basis, we will further study the method of spatial memory transmission and literacy role. Finally, the appropriate medium for spatial memory transmission is analyzed. This study used descriptive analysis to summarize and discuss the results. The results show that spatial memory transmission and literacy is a process of maintaining and transmitting social and cultural values through the use and evolution of architecture and spatial design over time. Symbols in the memory space of residential buildings are containers for storing memories, just like a mobile hard drive that records relevant memory information. Residential buildings and people are like two devices that convey information and communicate through symbols. After comparison, in the dimension of cultural memory, symbols are more social and cultural and are more suitable as a medium for transmitting spatial memory and literacy role under cultural identity. This article explains the relationship between symbols and spatial memory, through spatial memory transmission to describe how common memories are shared and reproduced among collective members through cultural memory, literacy role and symbolic translation. It can transmit cultural and historical memories between different generations and acquires the importance of spatial positioning and environmental interaction in transmitting cultural memory.

Key words: Spatial Memory Transmission, Cultural Memory, Literacy Role, Rural Revitalization, Traditional Houses

INTRODUCTION

In the context of China’s rapid urbanization, nostalgia is a form of memory that has been mentioned often in contemporary times. It means the sad mood of missing one’s hometown. People reflect on the loss of rural culture in the process of urbanization through memory.

From a biochemical perspective, memory is closely related to the structure and function of our brains and is affected by our consciousness, attention, emotions, etc. The primary physiological mechanism of memory is that when objective things act on the analyzer in a particular relationship, temporary neural connections will be formed in the cerebral cortex. These temporary neural connections remain in the mind in some trace form after the stimulus has ceased, and they become active again under certain conditions. From a sociological perspective, nostalgia memory’s essence is based on cultural memory’s expression, and it is also the spiritual form derived from cultural memory. The houses are the physical form of the concept of home. Traditional houses can be

regarded as a storage, recording the memories of individuals and groups. Cultural memory is a sublimation of collective memory theory (Assmann, 2011). Through the study of shared memories, we can think overall about the construction and inheritance of memory from a cultural perspective. This kind of thinking is not isolated. It is closely connected with the value norms and commonly recognized values that are collectively observed. It can support people’s overall perception of their region and has a clear direction for the future.

A close interactive relationship exists between cultural memory, literacy role and traditional residential space memory. Studying the cultural memory in traditional houses can observe the roots of local culture and remember the origin of individual souls. On the one hand, the spatial form of residential buildings is the material carrier of cultural memory. It reflects each region’s history, culture, socioeconomic and other factors. It is also essential for the inheritance and continuation of cultural memory and literacy. On the other hand, cultural memory is expressed and spread through the spatial

form of residential buildings, which affects the architectural style, spatial layout, decorative details, and other aspects of residential buildings, making residential buildings in various regions unique and traditional (McBride, 2017).

In traditional Chinese rural life, from ancient tribes to the formation of modern settlements, people always rely on some everyday rituals to maintain the order of daily life. These rituals serve memory in terms of details and knowledge and become a way to store knowledge. Important places. With the invention and popularization of writing, the form of cultural memory also changed. In this process, the mnemonic techniques of “repetition and interpretation,” “repetition and recall,” and “text and documentation” come into play. The gap between unchanging text and changing reality makes interpretation essential to connecting the two. When differentiation occurs within a culture and traditions are broken, society members must decide and choose to embody the best culture and the most authentic tradition. In this process, strengthening a certain kind of memory is a means of selecting excellent traditions that need to be inherited. In ancient times, mnemonics enhanced memory through imagined spaces, and its earliest medium was spatialization. Nowadays, creating residential space through landscape design is also a manifestation of memory technology (McBride, 2017). For example, the overall space of ancient Xuzhou houses has become an activator of cultural memories. In terms of content, the cultural memory of ancient Xuzhou residential spaces includes material culture, myths, and legends, major events in the history of settlements that are closely related to people’s daily lives, as well as various skills, stories, folk art, local dramas, and other intangible culture heritage (Zhang et al., 2017). Formally, the presentation of this cultural memory has changed from informal, naturally developed interpersonal interactions and daily life to more ritualistic social interactions. Through transcending ordinary celebrations and festivals and standardized and shaped memories, literacy, people’s perception and identification with a place are deepened.

Regarding media, the robustness of ancient architectural remains plays an important role. The roof trusses, beams, column foundations, foundation stones, etc., in the building all carry the function of solidifying memory. The external forms of houses, such as the tiles in front of the eaves, the wood carvings on the doors and windows, and the decoration of the capitals in front of the corridors, etc., behind what seems to be just plastic art, actually contains rich folk cultural characteristics. These characteristics are closely related to long-term ecological concepts. The value component and identity of the content are crucial and require designers to discover and understand them through in-depth fieldwork and research.

The cultural memory and literacy of traditional residential space is a group memory reflected in a single text. Local chronicles, other historical materials, and corresponding existing village and town buildings, landscapes, humanistic activities, and images usually become the support points of memory. The landscape within the residential community space is an essential medium for cultural memory—for example, a village’s most important public buildings include temples, shrines, and ancestral halls. As well as other

memorable places such as memorial sites, festival sites, and places with regional characteristics, such as village heads, old streets, courtyards, old houses, etc., all constitute the elements of traditional residential landscapes and show the richness and variety of daily life in the city. Memory symbolization is the memory process from storage to reconstruction, or the process in which “a certain form” is presented, expressed and demonstrated. As an outstanding memory art, symbols create vivid image worlds, which will inevitably be integrated into the construction of spatial memory.

‘Spatial memory transmission’ is introduced when studying ancient Xuzhou houses in this context. We not only open up new research directions in the fields of art design and cultural heritage but also provide a new perspective on how these historical buildings transmit cultural and historical memories between different generations. We acquire the importance of spatial orientation and environmental interaction in the transmission of cultural memory.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Decades of urbanization in China have led to the rapid loss of rural civilization. The rural revitalization policy proposed by the government in recent years has begun to pay attention to the sustainable development of rural areas. This article combines the theory of cultural memory and semiotics, using traditional houses as the text. In order to sort out the transfer process more clearly between memory and people, this study sets three research goals.

First, researchers need to study and analyze the concept of spatial memory transmission and literacy role.

Then, on this basis, we will further study the method of spatial memory transmission and literacy role.

Thirdly, the appropriate medium for spatial memory transmission is analyzed, to obtain the impact of historical buildings on memory construction and literacy role at the cultural level.

METHODS

This article uses a qualitative research method to focus on contemporary people’s reflections on the loss of rural culture in the process of urbanization in the form of expressing nostalgia. It explores the methodology of spatial memory transmission and literacy role of traditional residences under the dimension of cultural memory. Data were collected from academic papers and interviews with scholars.

The researchers conducted research and analysis in three directions: the concept of spatial memory transmission, the method, and the media of spatial memory transmission and literacy role. Results are presented as descriptive analyses.

RESULTS

The Concept of Spatial Memory Transmission and Literacy Role

Spatial memory transmission has literacy role in cultural identity; it maintains and spreads social and cultural values

through architecture and space's design, use, and evolution over time. This process involves not only the preservation and restoration of physical space, but more importantly, the understanding and representation of those spaces that have been given specific meaning through historical events, characters, or social changes. In the disciplines of cultural heritage and art design, spatial memory transmission can be understood as capturing and expressing a place's historical and cultural spirit through design (Twardowski, 2022). This involves using the layout, style, and function of a space, as well as the symbolism and emotional value associated with it, to tell the story of an area and inspire people's cultural identity.

In art design, especially in the field of environmental design, the practice of spatial memory transmission and literacy includes modern interpretations of historical buildings and cultural sites. For example, in the design and renovation of ancient Xuzhou houses, designers focused on restoring the physical space of the building but also focused on how to retain and express the historical value and cultural significance of these buildings in modern life. Although contemporary people have paid more and more attention to the restoration of tradition in the contemporary era, it must be addressed that the focus of most designers' work is often just the application of traditional elements on the surface. For example, Huizhou architecture is a style of Chinese houses. Because it is listed as a world cultural heritage and the minimalist contrasting form of black and white is consistent with modern aesthetics, Huizhou architecture has become a cultural hotspot. It has been adopted by designers from all over China. Hui-style architecture was originally just an architectural style of houses in southern Anhui. However, it has appeared in large numbers in areas with different cultural backgrounds in China, where it is used as a public traditional element. For designers, insight into culture is often the most basic. Only by tapping into the local culture can we avoid the rise of appropriationism in the design industry. Restoring ancient architectural forms can only complete traditional physical restoration, and mining local cultural memories can spread architecture's historical value, literacy role and cultural significance to groups within the community in modern life.

In this process, designers should strive to capture and reproduce those emotions and memories associated with the building. This may include incorporating historical elements into the design or creating spatial layouts that evoke memories of a specific period or event. Of course, the basis of all this is to find the channel connecting cultural memory with personal or collective memory. For example, ancient Xuzhou houses are storage containers that store a large amount of cultural memory in Xuzhou, and the process of spatial memory transmission is the channel that connects the memories sealed in the ancient folk house space. Spatial memory transmission may be reflected in the architectural style, spatial layout, and traditional customs and community activities associated with these spaces. These elements constitute residents' daily life environment and become an essential medium for transmitting and maintaining regional culture, history, and social identity. By maintaining, using,

and telling stories about these spaces, spatial memories, literacy role are passed on and preserved between generations.

The Process of Transferring Spatial Memory of Traditional Residences

Although memories are stored in the space of ancient houses, from a macro perspective, these memories are chaotic and borderless. In the space of ancient houses, the structural principles that promote the formation of memory forms and boundaries are uncertain because these structural principles stem from the group's own needs for identity, norms, and positioning. This is not to say that the contents of stored memories are essentially valid, valuable, or touching; they may or may not be entirely so. It depends on the readers of the information, their identities, experiences, emotions, and cultural values.

The interaction between symbols and memory is an ongoing process that occurs at all levels, and this applies especially to the "memory of the will." Whenever we think of things we do not want to forget, we artificially create various tools to help us remember. For example, the famous knotted notes, national monuments, etc., are all tools of this type. These auxiliary tools are also called "memory fields" (*lieux de memoire*). They condense the memory of an entire country or religious group, such as monuments, rituals, festivals, customs, etc. (Cultural memory and early civilization: Writing, remembrance, and political imagination).

Undoubtedly, the dwellings that people live in daily are not tools with commemorative significance as their primary purpose, but the ancient Xuzhou dwellings do now carry this function. Ancient residential buildings with a particular history have been listed in the catalog of government protection. For example, the Ming and Qing residential buildings in Xuzhou's Hubu Mountain are now listed as China's national historical protection units. From the perspective of the goal of protection, what is most important is not the residential properties of the ancient residential buildings but their cultural properties. The cultural attribute of residential architectural space is a "memory field" (*lieu de memoire*). They condense the memory of the entire region, such as family ethics, rituals, customs, intangible cultural heritage, etc. This "memory field" is a system of symbols. It enables individuals living in this tradition to find a sense of belonging, that is, to realize their potential to become a social group member and to learn, remember, and share a culture in this group. The *Legendary Topography of the Holy Land in the Gospels* (1941) was the last book published by Halbwachs during his lifetime. In this work, he applied the concept of memory to analyze various symbols and monuments, showing that memory and various symbols are inextricably entangled (Lock et al., 2018). Among their complex entangled relationships, one involves the transfer process of spatial memory. Symbols, like a mobile hard drive, are storage containers that record relevant memory information. Houses and people are like two devices that convey information and communicate through symbols. This process involves the encoding and decoding of information, that is, the inheritance and acceptance of

cultural memory, literacy role and the continued existence of what is accepted.

Spatial Transmission Medium of Traditional Residences

Studying the spatial transmission media of traditional residences requires the help of semiotic theory, mainly semiotic interpretation methods. The medium of spatial delivery emphasizes the efficiency of conveying information to the viewer of the symbol and tracks how the symbol operates within a more significant meaning. Symbols are meaningful perceptions that the human body's senses can recognize. There are many schools of thought in history, such as the Saussurean, Peircean, etc. (Peiren, 2010). This article can refer to the symbol classification standards of the American scholar Peirce. Peirce (1991) divided symbols into icons, indexes, and symbols. These three types of symbols correspond to three ways of meaning reference; explicit, implicit, and metaphorical.

Therefore, the process of symbolic reference is the process of transmitting information. Similar symbols and their referents are formed by simplifying things in real life, and people can project the images inside into real life. This kind of symbol has no inherent causal connection and no social-traditional agreement, so it means more uncertainty and trial (YanJun & Dan, 2005). This method of similarity is the simplest way to transmit signals. If the symbol itself needs to be more similar and the interpreter cannot recognize it, it means that the design of this symbol does not meet the requirements of similar symbols, rather than a question of similar symbols. According to Peirce's definition, there is a causal relationship between the signifier as a signifier and its referent. The signifier represents the referent, such as the road sign before the car turns, the wind flag indicating the wind direction, the mercury column of the thermometer indicating the temperature, etc. The referents of symbols are the result of conventions. For example, in Chinese culture, "clouds" symbolize peace and blessing, which fall into this category—the relationship between the signifier and the signified results from human cultural construction. An accurate grasp of the relationship between the signifier and the signified requires a culturally embedded understanding. Therefore, the Chinese not merely use it on utensils, such as the "cloud" pattern on the torch of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. This is also often used in architecture to express emotions. For example, ancient Xuzhou houses used flower-arranged clouds and swallows to decorate the roof ridges. The top of this decoration has a swallow spreading its wings in the wind. Below the swallows are layers of auspicious clouds, with the sun, moon, and stars as the axis in the middle. At the bottom is an auspicious animal with flower arrangements. The entire combination embodies both auspicious meaning and status symbol. It is located at the highest point of the building and serves as a medium to convey information to the outside world. Similar signs, deictic signs, and symbolic signs refer to meanings in ways that correspond to explicit, suggestive, and metaphorical signs. Expression is relatively simple, meaning objective information is given from a cognitive perspective. This information does not contain individual

emotions or other constructible components and is more prominent in public information. Suggestive symbols have indirect, implicit, and causal expressive power. They can remind each other so the recipient can think of their objects. They usually use specific signifiers, such as color, light and shade, texture, texture, etc., to achieve a specific suggestive meaning. Metaphor compares A to B based on the auxiliary association of emotions and the relationship between socially agreed symbols and meanings.

However, when exploring the meaning of symbols conveyed by spatial memory, Peirce's symbol classification framework faces a challenge: cultural memory represented by symbols is a selective, intentional, and constructed emotion. This emotion is based on cultural identity, making the viewer psychologically attached. It is an emotional identity evoked by certain symbolic forms in a situation and background. It is more than just a simple process of deciphering the symbols and determining the information. It is when the subject and the situation reach a particular state of fusion of mind and body, making the emotional identification in the situation dynamic. Therefore, if used as a medium for spatial memory transmission, the application of symbols needs to be expanded and discussed.

As mentioned above, the discussion in this article is to construct a framework of spatial memory transmission media based on Peirce's classification of symbols (Peng & Sirisuk, 2024). This framework of analysis applies Peirce's original concepts of semiotics. At the same time, it further expands the viewer's interpretation of symbols into "situation" or "space," reflecting the importance of social and cultural interpretation of symbolic media in residential spaces. If all landscape symbols are used as a medium for transmitting spatial memory, then the interpretation of the symbols will be complex or intertwined and may stimulate different spatial reactions. Regarding the explicit, implicit, and metaphorical functions of similar signs, deictic signs, and symbolic signs proposed by Peirce, it is necessary to fully consider the impact of social interaction and cultural interaction that occurs in the situation on the symbolic interpretation behavior of the behavioral subject (YanJun & Dan, 2005). Then, the concept of translation was introduced. Therefore, different symbol types and the meanings they generate will significantly affect the uncertainty of information transmission due to the widespread translation phenomenon before the viewer's behavior occurs. However, this article presents a different perspective on the process of semiotic translation. Among the three modes of meaning reference corresponding to the three kinds of symbols, there is no doubt that explicit expression produces the most minor translation, inspires the most certain behavior, and has the lowest requirements for cultural background, implying that it is relatively confident in the middle. The requirements for the cultural background are also in the middle; metaphors produce the most translations and are the least certain about the behaviors inspired by the crowd, so the requirements for the viewer's cultural background are the highest. The uncertainty of this transfer precisely forms the threshold of cultural identity. This threshold has a screening effect. It can easily make it easier

for people with local cultural memory to understand the content of symbolic translation. It achieves the function of transmitting information and lets the memory become a bond and a bond memory.

According to the above analysis, the medium used to transmit information and literacy role in the context of traditional residential space faces a highly complex symbol system. Various cultural symbols are regarded as architectural decorations. Their symbolic meanings are embedded in certain situations due to the cultural attributes given by cultural memory, and the main symbols and background symbols jointly achieve the role of transmitting information. Therefore, each symbol's information transmission must be completed at the corresponding level or stage. In Peirce's classification, a symbol can only belong to one of similar symbols, indicator symbols, or symbolic symbols, reflecting the mutual exclusivity and extension of symbol classification. Similar symbols are intuitive expressions and do not require a cultural background. Indicative symbols are an implicit expression of cause-and-effect relationships and are relatively intuitive. Symbols are symbols that have no legitimate connection with the object. They are what Saussure calls "arbitrary/arbitrary" symbols. They are social and cultural conventions. The nature of normative conventions is social, so the norms and conventions in different societies are different, so symbols cannot be universal. However, similar symbols and indicators are possible or capable of being understood by each society. As Nietzsche said, People need the help of memory to form bonds. Therefore, when discussing the choice of symbols for the transmission of spatial memory, in the dimension of cultural memory, symbols are more social and cultural and are more suitable to become a medium for transmitting spatial memory and literacy role under cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

In the context of rural revitalization, for the transmission of cultural memories and literacy role of traditional houses, it is essential to connect these memories with current social development. Their new vitality can be explored through a deeper understanding of the history, culture, and connections these buildings carry with modern life. For example, research on how traditional houses can play a more significant role in modern society, including their potential to promote community cohesion, tourism development, and educational resources. At the same time, this means that the government, community, and researchers need to work together to formulate supportive policies and provide financial support. They combine modern technological means, such as computer-aided design, digital recording, and virtual display, to protect and inherit these precious cultural heritages. Through such efforts, we can preserve the memory of the past and provide unique resources and inspiration for future development. Spatial memory transmission and literacy role describes how common memories are shared and reproduced among collective members through cultural memory and symbolic translation. Traditional houses record rich historical memories of the social economy's

development, change, and evolution. Based on cultural identity, cultural and historical memories can be transferred between different generations through spatial memory transmission, gaining importance in spatial positioning and environmental interaction in the transfer of cultural memory.

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