

# From "Spatial Reconstruction" to "Scene Construction": Analysis on the Design Pathway of Waterfront Space in Tourism Cities from the Perspective of Scene Theory: A Case Study of the Xuan'en Night Banquet Project in Enshi

Shuyi SHEN\*

Wuhan Institute of Technology, Wuhan 430205, China

**Abstract** With the upgrading of tourism consumption patterns, the traditional renovation models of waterfront recreational spaces centered on landscape design can no longer meet the commercial and humanistic demands of modern cultural and tourism development. Based on scene theory as the analytical framework and taking the Xuan'en Night Banquet Project in Enshi as a case study, this paper explores the design pathway for transforming waterfront areas in tourism cities from "spatial reconstruction" to "scene construction". The study argues that waterfront space renewal should transcend mere physical renovation. By implementing three core strategies: spatial narrative framework, ecological industry creation, and cultural empowerment, it is possible to construct integrated scenarios that blend cultural value, consumption spaces, and lifestyle elements. This approach ultimately fosters sustained vitality in waterfront areas and promotes the high-quality development of cultural and tourism industry.

**Key words** Scene theory; Tourism city; Comforts; Scene construction; Waterfront space

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In the context of consumption upgrading and experience economy era, the waterfront space of tourism cities has become an important carrier for carrying urban culture, tourism consumption, and public life. The traditional "spatial reconstruction" model focuses more on the transformation and improvement of material environment, and often neglects the functional requirements, commercial and cultural values behind the landscape space. As a new paradigm in urban sociology, scene theory shifts its research perspective from the material attributes of space to the cultural values and lifestyles it contains, providing a theoretical framework for understanding and shaping waterfront spaces through the synergy of "spatial form - lifestyle - cultural values"<sup>[1]</sup>.

The scene theory proposed by Terry Clark and his team emphasizes the core of examining urban space from the perspective of consumers. By integrating specific cultural values and consumer experiences, spatial quality can attract creative talents, shape regional characteristics, and drive urban development.

In recent years, using the waterfront area of the Gongshui River as a carrier, Xuan'en County of Enshi has transformed from a single space reconstruction to the creation of diverse scenes through the "Xuan'en Night Banquet" project. It becomes a model for the development of nighttime cultural and tourism economy. This project not only achieved an annual reception of over 15 million tourists, but also created employment opportunities for over 50 000 people, resulting in a 66% increase in market entities.

Based on the perspective of scene theory, this paper analyzes the practical path of the Xuan'en Banquet Project from spatial reconstruction to scene creation, in order to provide reference for waterfront space design in similar areas.

## 1 Core connotation and application value of scene theory

**1.1 Conceptual framework of scene theory** In the late 1990s, with the advent of the post industrial era, the form of cities gradually shifted from production oriented to consumption oriented, and the realization of urban economic development gave birth to the scene theory proposed by Terry Clark of the Chicago School. Scene theory divides the structural system of the theory into subjective and objective aspects based on a holistic thinking framework. In terms of objective structure, scene theory examines the specific five elements contained in urban spatial scenes from the perspective of consumers: communities, physical buildings and facilities, crowds, distinctive activities, and the cultural values formed from them. The community is a spatial element; physical buildings and facilities belong to the category of material structures; crowd is the main participant; distinctive activity is under the category of behavior. The combination of these four elements determines the value and symbols of multiculturalism in scenes, thereby stimulating the inward development momentum of the cities<sup>[2]</sup>.

In terms of subjective structure, the different combinations of five basic elements of a scene give rise to three dimensions: "authenticity", "legitimacy", and "theatricality". "Authenticity"

refers to the material structural elements of the scene; "legitimacy" refers to the judgment of right and wrong in the current social context; "theatricality" refers to the personality traits present in a scene. The cultural values reflected by the combination of different scene elements attract the participation of different groups of people, thereby promoting the formation of industrial clusters in the region and stimulating the renewal and development of urban areas.

**1.2 Application value of scene theory in waterfront space design** Waterfront space is an important communication area between urban nature and culture, mainly serving visitors who come and go. In addition to ensuring the functions of viewing and resting, it also needs to meet the ecological needs of not polluting water flow. Under the influence of scene theory, the design thinking of waterfront spaces can shift from "engineering thinking" to "life thinking". While balancing functional and ecological needs, it is also necessary to consider the cultural value and industrial synergy of the city where the space is located. This shift in design thinking shifts the focus from "spatial reconstruction" of waterfront spaces to "scene creation" that is rich in regional cultural characteristics and commercial value<sup>[3]</sup>.

## 2 Background and original state of Xuan'en Banquet Project

**2.1 Project foundation** Xuan'en County is located in the Wuling Mountain area of western Hubei Province, and was once an unknown small mountain town. The Gongshui River runs through the city, forming the core waterfront space of Xuan'en County. In the initial stage, the Xuan'en waterfront area faced many typical problems: single function, disorderly space, cultural disappearance, and insufficient vitality. Although there is a natural background, it lacks distinctive appeal, and tourists have short stays and weak purchasing power.

With the implementation of the *Domestic Tourism Enhancement Plan (2023 - 2025)*, empowering urban renewal with the cultural and tourism industry has become an important development direction. Xuan'en County seized the opportunity and focused on nighttime cultural tourism with the waterfront area of the Gongshui River as the core carrier, achieving the transformation from transit tourism to night tourism through scene creation. The overall positioning of the project is "Fairy Mountain Gongshui · Romantic Xuan'en", and a nighttime experience area with waterfront space as the stage has been constructed.

**2.2 Original state issue** The "Xuan'en Night Banquet" waterfront project in this paper is located between the Molong Bridge and Lianhuaba Bridge in Xuan'en County, on the south side of the river. There are multiple large trees interspersed in the site, forming a green belt along the river. Most of the commercial landscapes along the Gongshui River in the main urban area of Xuan'en County have been completed, with complete and diversified formats and tourism interactive landscapes rich in ethnic characteristics.

However, when tourists travel downstream along the Gongshui River to the Molong Bridge section, the scenery on both sides of the river is in sharp contrast to the bustling scene upstream; the space lacks connectivity, the riverside area lacks effective connection with the water surface, and the interaction between water and city is insufficient; there are currently no business formats available, and the site only has simple and non functional greenery, which cannot attract tourists to stop and lacks consumer power; the utilization of cultural resources is insufficient, and the rich Tujia and Miao cultures have not been transformed into experiential and consumable cultural products in this important region.

## 3 Design path from "spatial reconstruction" to "scene creation"

**3.1 Project positioning and site overview** The main functional positioning of this project is to design a multicultural homestay that serves the catering and accommodation needs of tourists. Due to its unique geographical location, there are many pedestrians coming and going, the privacy is poor, and the accommodation function serves as a supplement. In the future, it can be converted into a tea room or a cultural and creative display consumption space. The design site is located on the north side of the river, with an irregular strip shape. There is a simple boat dock left by the river, and there are many irregularly distributed ancient trees in the site (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Site satellite map



Fig. 2 Site plot differentiation

### 3.2 Design strategies from "spatial reconstruction" to "scene creation"

#### 3.2.1 Spatial reconstruction.

(1) Narrative space construction. The project takes the Gongshui River as the narrative axis and constructs a continuous sequence of cultural scenes around the two themes of "Tujia culture" and "water life". Through the spatial framework of "four houses, one boat, and one corridor", scattered cultural elements are integrated into a scene system with narrative logic. The overall

site is divided into three functional systems: homestay cultural and creative area, bar and fishing boat catering area, and dining and event seating area. Combining unique architectural design, it immerses tourists in the life scenes of the Tujia ethnic group.

(2) Construction of buildings that integrate culture and nature. In the design of architectural form, it combines nature and traditional Tujia architectural culture. The entrance combines the original landscape steps of the site to enter the cultural and creative area of homestay (Fig. 3), and the ancient trees in the original site are preserved.

Due to the significant height difference in the site 1 (Fig. 2), the architectural design adopts the form of four treehouses (Fig. 3). The treehouses are arranged in a staggered manner according to the terrain features, and are connected by observation platforms and steel staircase corridors, fully integrating the building with nature. The site 2 (Fig. 2) is relatively flat overall and is also the location of the main building. In terms of architectural design, combining the commercial system of upstream fishing boats competing with each other, it has been integrated into the shape of a dock with curved roof (Fig. 4). Important ancient trees in the site have been preserved and interweaved between spaces through lighting wells, to enhance the natural flexibility of space. Combined with the dining area of water fishing boats, a catering commercial system of water – bank linkage has been formed. The site 3 (Fig. 2) has a steep floor, and it cannot be built directly on the floor. Therefore, the building adopts the form of columns, and five shaped houses with regional cultural characteristics are erected with steel columns in the air (Fig. 5). Tree houses with different cultural shapes are hidden among ancient trees, creating a beautiful atmosphere of being in nature and overlooking the Gongshui River.

### 3.2.2 Scene creation.

(1) Weaving and repairing business consumption scenarios. In the era of experience economy, the core of business has shifted from "traded goods" to "business premises". Business format, as a collection of commercial content, has elevated its role to the core carrier of scene creation. It is no longer an isolated functional provider, but a stage and script for building specific lifestyles and triggering emotional resonance. However, the mutual spatial drive also has a reverse effect on the development of business formats. The spatial form is no longer just a physical container, but also a catalyst and testing ground for business innovation.

The Xuan'en Night Banquet project extends the consumption chain by building a diversified business network of homestays, cultural and creative industries, tea rooms, bars, and restaurants, achieving an upgrade from single consumption to full-time full-chain experience. The project combines the creation of regional cultural spaces to tell a unique story of Xuan'en culture, in order to develop a business model that differs from general chain formats. This business model focuses more on cultural narrative and consumers' in-depth experience, forming a differentiated core competitiveness (Fig. 6a).

(2) Integration of cultural symbols. Xuan'en County is committed to promoting all-round cultural tourism. Strolling along the banks of the Gongshui River, one can also appreciate the architec-

ture of the Tujia and Miao ethnic groups in the upstream. In this downstream project, it is committed to creating a riverside natural Tujia culture hidden in the forest. In architectural design, the traditional Tujia brocade of Xilan Kapu is applied to the structural patterns of each wooden house, allowing one to experience a strong traditional brocade culture while being in the building. In terms of food culture, the culinary IP of "Xuan'en Roasted Live Fish" is created, making it the core attraction of the waterfront area. The project not only established the process standard of "fresh and freshly killed, roasted first and then fried", but also innovatively developed more than 20 flavors including sour and spicy, rattan pepper, black duck, and even pineapple flavor, to meet diversified needs.

(3) Water – land spatial linkage. By using the design technique of "water – land integration", the waterfront landscape is organically integrated with the commercial experience. On the one hand, unique projects such as "eating grilled fish on bamboo rafts" are created to complement the culinary experience with the waterfront landscape. On the other hand, the elevated wooden houses in the waterfront area are used to set up elegant seating and homestay cultural and creative areas, meeting both architectural design creativity and flood prevention standards, and turning the riverside space into a scenic, experiential, and serviced tourist destination. It provides entrepreneurial opportunities for residents and creates unique consumption experiences for tourists (Fig. 6b).

## 4 Practical insights from the Xuan'en Banquet Project

As a connected space accompanying the coordinated development of cities, the waterfront space of tourist cities has long been regarded as a "green belt" and "observation deck" within the city. This has led to the homogenization of landscape forms in most tourist cities' waterfront spaces, without injecting regional culture and consumption scenes. The introduction of the "scene principle" research and the successful practice of the "Xuan'en Night Banquet" project design in Xuan'en County, a tourist city, has provided valuable experience for the design of waterfront spaces in tourist cities.

**4.1 Spatial narrative** The waterfront space should go beyond the function of transportation connection and become a continuous place for water – land linkage, cultural narrative, and emotional experience. The main building of the site 2 is expanding towards the water surface, forming a linkage industry of "dock ashore, fishing boat under the shore", and revitalizing the connectivity of waterfront tourism experience. The project forms three major plots through the original site, and it is divided into three major zones. The entrance is the cultural and creative homestay area for experiencing culture, then it leads to the commercial and culinary cultural experience area of the main building, and finally it ends in the family activity elegant seating area in the form of a treehouse, forming a narrative space for narrating the cultural experience of Xuan'en tourism. By setting up the overall space of the dock and the privacy space of the elegant seats, it aims to enhance consumers' emotional experience in different environments.



Fig. 3 Cultural and creative zone of homestay (effect rendering diagram)



Fig. 4 Dry dock design drawing (effect rendering diagram)

**4.2 Industrial ecologization** Guided by core IP, it aims to build a collaborative industrial ecosystem between upstream and downstream, forming a development pattern of deep integration of culture, tourism and commerce. The core "roasted live fish" food

IP created by Xuan'en Culture and Tourism is the main business model of the project. Around roasted live fish, it has formed a full industry chain integrating aquaculture, logistics, and e-commerce in the upstream section of the Gongshui River. The downstream of the project cooperates with the upstream mode. The processing on the site is conducted through logistics, making the food IP of the Gongshui River in Xuan'en form a collaborative industry model between upstream and downstream.

**4.3 Cultural presence** Traditional culture needs to be integrated into contemporary life through scenario based and experiential design, achieving the value transformation from resources to capital. In the downstream project of Xuan'en Night Banquet, by creating traditional wooden architecture form and spatial form of cultural implantation of the Xilan Kapu pattern, a consumer business scene is created. It serves consumers by carrying regional cuisine culture through traditional cultural scenes, attracting tourists to experience the local characteristic culture.



Fig. 5 Tree house seat (effect rendering diagram)



Fig. 6 Real-life images of the Xuan'en Night Banquet



## 5 Conclusions and prospects

As an important public space in tourist cities, riverside landscapes not only bear the responsibility of ecological protection, but also enhance the life quality of residents, promote social interaction and cultural heritage. Based on the scene theory, the riverside landscape design of tourist cities is studied through the "Xuan'en Night Banquet" project. The project aims to shape a collaborative commercial system of "spatial form - lifestyle - cultural value" in

waterfront spaces from narrative space construction to commercial scene creation and the resulting service-oriented cultural venues. This design strategy from spatial dimension to scene dimension proposes a path to optimize the riverside landscape. Scene based design not only meets diverse needs, but also enhances spatial emotional appeal and cultural identity, which helps to revitalize the cultural and commercial resources of riverside spaces in tourist cities. (To page 25)

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ies, enhance spatial image, reshape spatial vitality, improve urban public services, and promote high-quality urban development. In the future, riverside landscape design needs to focus on intelligence and sustainability, continuously optimize functions and experiences through dynamic monitoring and user participation, and create more livable, healthy, and culturally rich public spaces for urban residents.

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