Exploring the Desert Culture of the Ancient Silk Road Under the Threshold of Ecological Aesthetics

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Abstract

During the Qin-Han period of great unification, the boundaries of geographic perception expanded through the military campaigns and conquests of ethnic minorities in the northwest, as well as the establishment of the Silk Road. The desert was depicted as a barbaric land located far from the central region of Heluo in Zhang Qian's exploration of the Silk Road. However, it also held great exotic allure and was susceptible to aesthetic and cultural clashes, thus becoming an essential component of the spatial aesthetic framework during the Qin and Han dynasties. The article first examines the historical perception and record of the desert as a marginalized field in the realm of spatial aesthetics. It then delves into the varied influence of different geographic regions on aesthetic styles, revealing the intimate connection between the desert ecosystem and the survival and reproduction of human beings since ancient times. This is exemplified by the nomadic culture of the desert as depicted in the petroglyphs of Badanjilin Desert. Finally, the article attempts to integrate ecological perspectives into the traditional concept of natural beauty to elucidate the ecological aesthetic appreciation of desert landscapes and their effects on human beings. Aesthetics of desert landscapes contribute to the cognitive and aesthetic construction of desert landscapes.

Keywords

Ancient Silk Road, Desert, Nomadic Culture, Badanjilin Rock Art

1. The Desert in the Aesthetic Order of Qin-Han Space

The process of human understanding of nature includes philosophical spatial planning and realistic cognitive investigation. Ancient China's exploration of the geospatial order was influenced by the level of science and technology at that time, leading to great subjectivity. Therefore, in the process of understanding nature, our ancestors had to rely on subjective cognitive aesthetic experiences before engaging in scientific practices. Unearthed in the southeast region of the Taihu Lake basin of Liangzhu culture proves that as early as in the late Neolithic era, there has been a "circle in the sky," which is the Chinese for the cosmic order of the space of the first exploration. Since then, this kind of circle-based, round-with-square space pattern has been almost throughout the pre-modern period of Chinese society, the scientific concept of geography until after the May Fourth Movement was brought into China. In the pre-Qin and Han Dynasties, with the rapid development of science and culture, the exploration of traditional geography did not stop at primitive cognition but continued to philosophize and aesthetics into geographic cognition, in the exploration of the gradual improvement and self-consistency. The formation and development of the unification situation not only promoted the exchange and integration of the cultures of various ethnic groups within the territory but also broadened the boundaries of geographic cognition in the attack and invasion of the Northwest Minorities and the opening up of the Silk Road. Under the influence of the ancient Silk Road trade, the culture and art of the time were also influenced by the desert region. Although the desert was regarded as a barbaric place far away from the circle centered on the Heluo region in
the spatial order of the Qin and Han Dynasties, it was also an area of great exotic attraction and easy to produce aesthetic and cultural collision and became an indispensable part of the spatial aesthetics order of the Qin and Han Dynasties at the same time (Zeng Fanren, 2020).

2. Aesthetic and Cultural Differentiation Breeding in the Desert Belt of the Ancient Silk Road

Badanjilin Desert is located in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, since the Qin and Han dynasties, here is the Xiongnu, Xianbei, Turkic, Danghang, Mongolia and many other ancient northern ethnic minorities have been nomadic, the historical arena of the war, but also successive generations of the central dynasty to build a city, the frontiers of the frontier. The Central Plains farming civilization and grassland nomadic culture here frequently alternate, mutual conflict, collision, continuous integration, and the formation of the Alxa unique national and regional characteristics of the historical landscape. With the Central Plains book in the history books, painted on silk cultural practices are different, the desert area of the northern nomadic people because of the living habits by water and grass, few recorded social customs and history and culture can be examined, instead of another distinctive northern characteristic, record the important carrier of nomadic life - rock paintings. Badanjilin Desert petroglyphs are mainly distributed in the vicinity of Mandela Mountain, the number of more than 20,000 groups, and hundreds of thousands of individuals (Cheng Xiangzhan, 2019). Badanjilin petroglyphs are superbly crafted, with lifelike patterns, vividly describing the economy and culture of the Alashan region, social life, and the natural environment, spanning from the Stone Age to the Ming and Qing dynasties. Its subject matter includes a wide range of extremely rich content, and can be regarded as the gallery treasures of ancient art in northwest China. Petroglyph expert Gai Shanlin has also highly evaluated the artistic value of Mandela Mountain petroglyphs, praising them as "the living fossil of the art world". The preferred rock for rock painting is the weathered surface of gabbro dyke and granite, while the main body of Mandela Mountain in Batang Jilin Desert is granite body, accompanied by a number of gabbro dyke intrusions in the late period, the rock body, rock dyke is broken, and there are abundant fissures, which makes the granite and gabbro fissure surface exposed in large quantities and the development of desert paintings, and the unique carving and preservation of the conditions, which makes the Mandela Mountain concentrate on the distribution of the desert. Nomadic culture from prehistory to Xixia, Yuan, Ming, Qing, and other eras reflecting the natural and living environment and religious scenes of the rock painting heritage examples, showing a typical desert ecosystem and desert culture in the early hunter-nomadic life of the picture, its profound historical connotation and distinctive aesthetic characteristics of the regional cultural characteristics of the nomadic people of the rugged simplicity of the Batang Jilin region of the celestial and human relations, but also in the painting of the techniques and contents of the rock paintings are also vividly displayed and gradually evolved. In the petroglyphs of the prehistoric period, the main painting method is still the abrasive carving method, and many extinct animals of Badanjirin Forest appear in the petroglyphs, such as the northern mountain goat, goitered antelope, deer, roe deer, yak, tortoise, wild boar, wolves, tigers, leopards and prairie eagles, etc. (Zeng Fanren & Cheng Xiangzhan, 2020). The northern mountain goat and the pan goat are the most common animals in the Badanjirin Forest, and they are all very popular, representing the climate is a stage of the warm zone, it can be inferred that the environment was relatively wet compared to today, grassland vegetation is very lush, and the arid deserts seen today are different, 6,000-7,000 years ago, the lake basin of the Badanjirin Desert may have more water, grasslands, and shrubs. The appearance of horseback figures and religious systems in the petroglyphs, the precision of the chiseling method, which is more adaptable to the shaping of details, and the more vivid and colorful camels and antelopes drawn by the scratching method also reflect that the Badanjirin region after the Xixia period is very close to the modern ecosystem and that along with the changes in the climate, the relationship between nature and human beings is also changing accordingly. Riders, tent groups or villages, distributed from Northern Europe, Northeast Asia to North America, which is a typical feature of the culture of the nomadic hunting peoples, and the distribution of all kinds of tents around the center of the multi-storey big tents, reflecting the nomadic society of the class has been formed. The differentiated nurturing of people by natural geography and the aesthetic characteristics of nomadic culture are also clearly reflected in the rock paintings. The rock paintings are drawn with rough and ancient techniques, simple but strong lines, and vivid and dynamic images, which is a direct reflection of the nomadic people's perception of nature bred in the desert area, and shows the northern nomadic culture's praise for life and reverence for nature (Wang J, 2019).

3. Cognitive and Aesthetic Construction of Desert Landscapes

The geological changes and human activities reflected in the Badanjilin petroglyphs are the petroglyphs as the carrier...
of the wordless history of the desert region, witnessing the course of changes in the survival and aesthetic activities of human beings in the desert and its neighboring areas. The tall sand hills of Badanjilin Desert show a spectacular and beautiful desert landscape (Liu Gusheng, 2015). Various types of wind-formed landforms and phenomena, such as clear and pure dune ridges and curved surfaces, delicate and elegant sand ripples with clear textures, and singing sands under the effect of wind, bring the world diversified aesthetic sensations. Diversified dune forms, huge height difference between the tall sand hills, more than a hundred lakes between the hills, rich desert flora and fauna, together composed of amazing, doubly mysterious tall sand hills and lakes between the hills interlaced with the development of wind and sand geomorphological combination of landscapes, demonstrating the three-dimensional aesthetic value unique to the Badanjilin Desert. The unique sand dune geomorphological features of Badanjilin, including crescent-shaped dunes, crescent-shaped dune chains, star-shaped dunes, etc., is a representative area for the study of the development of deserts and wind-sand geomorphological processes in the global scope, while Badanjilin Desert is a carrier of sand hills, and the aesthetic performance of digging lines is an important way to show the aesthetic value of sand hills and the specific embodiment of the line beauty in the form of beauty aesthetics (Sarina, Dong Zhi Bao, & Nan Wei Ge, 2021). The crescent-shaped dune curve is soft, smooth, and poetic. The dune chain retains the original crescent-shaped arc body traces, resembling rows of ocean waves on the shore, rolling and surging. The vastness of the desert embodies a rhythmic and pleasing aspect of life, appearing very spectacular. A star-shaped dune is composed of a rigid straight line. The star-shaped dune arm of the line is an upward extension of the straight line, solidly supporting the sand hills, in a variety of wind directions under the action of the star-shaped dune arm sand in the formation of desert sand hills, straight line and the uprooted sand hills to the visual impact of the towering in the sky and the earth. Looking around from the top of the dune, the straight line of the dune arm is like a torrent flowing down, silently demonstrating the powerful force of nature. The sand ripples, which can be seen everywhere in the desert, smoothly and regularly show the characteristics of straight ridges parallel to each other. Including human and animal activities in the desert formed by the secondary lines, ruts, footprints, camel trails, etc., also in the nature of the desert artifacts under the creation of some of the new embellished with a lot of fun. The formation of these lines is also each time and space traces to follow, the history of the geological evolution of the formation of tall sandy mountains, small to the role of the wind constantly changing the sand ripples, stretching endlessly. Desert lakes are also one of the wonders of the Badain Jilin Desert, because of the long-term stability of groundwater recharge, so that the lake water volume has remained stable for a long time, the surrounding sandy plants flourish, and there are more than 200 years of history of the Badain Jilin Temple is also based on the water and was built on the shore of listening to the scripture springs. Whenever a lama chants sutra, a spring will automatically gush out from Suming Jilin Lake. Such a magical natural phenomenon in the Badanjilin Desert in more than one, Badanjilin Desert also has a unique group of lakes between the mounds, in the desert development of more than 100 perennial lakes, there are different shapes, depths, salinity, and even colors, due to some of the lake water mineralization is high, with the seasons, from spring to winter, the lake water will also be presented with a light pink, light red, pink, vermilion, crimson, and other different red color in the dots between the golden sand dunes, between the golden-colored sand dunes. The sandy peaks are long and winding, and the lake is a marvelous spectacle with its blue surface and lush water and grass. In the sand dunes and lakeside can often be seen or sporadic or patchy growth of plants, between which live a variety of desert animals, adding vitality to the desert, making it a real "vitality of the desert". The desert lacquer skin has even left precious prehistoric petroglyph records, which can provide the best historical materials for scientific research. Badanjilin Desert has symmetry and balance under the interweaving of dune lines, the harmony and contrast of lakes of different sizes and colors dotted in the vast expanse of yellow sand, as well as the rhythm and regularity of the boundless dunes and the sand ripples that can be seen everywhere, combined with a variety of desert flora and fauna, the richness, diversity and unity of different wind-eroded landforms in the Badanjilin Desert, constituting the aesthetic elements of form and beauty summed up by Hegel, which corresponds to the concept of natural beauty. The concept of natural beauty corresponds to the concept of natural beauty, which shows that the natural beauty of the desert is embodied in the desert at different levels and different types of diversity in history and reality (Zhang Wenzhi, 2008). At the same time, Longinus thinks in "On the Sublime" that sublime things can cause people to be "thrilled" and "awe-inspiring", and the boundlessness of the desert, the tallness of the sandy mountains, and the vastness of the chain of sand dunes also show the extraordinary visual impact. (Li Tianbao, 2020) Once again break through the proportion, balance, rhythm harmony, and other formal beauty of the law, beyond the grasp of people's senses, so that people feel shocked and fearful, small one of the ocean, mourning my life for a moment, envy the universe of the infinite (Zhang Xiaolin, 2022).
4. Conclusion and outlook

In China's contemporary ecological aesthetic vision, the cognitive and aesthetic construction of desert landscapes is an attempt to introduce an ecological vision into the traditional aesthetic category. The aesthetic construction of Badanjilin Desert is diversified and complex, originating from the interaction between human beings and nature. On the one hand, people regard the desert as a magnificent painting of nature, and the undulation of sand dunes, the flow of sand patterns, and the refraction of sunlight form a rhythmic and changing picture, which provides people with rich cognitive resources. The "aesthetic" here is not limited to visual perception but covers all the elements of the ecological environment - wind, sand, sunshine, cold at night, and even the phenomenon of life in the desert. This aesthetic construction reflects the pursuit of natural beauty and the reverence for the natural world. On the other hand, people's subjectivity and cultural background play an important role in the cognitive and aesthetic construction of desert landscapes. Individuals' emotions, values, and aesthetic orientation affect the perception and evaluation of the desert. For residents living around the desert, the desert often represents difficulties in livelihood and environmental challenges, and their perception and aesthetic construction of the desert may be more related to survival and practicality. For urban residents living far away from the desert, the desert has a romantic and mysterious attraction, and their perception and aesthetic construction of the desert may be more related to natural beauty and the spirit of adventure. The Badanji Lin Desert carries rich nomadic cultural connotations and historical memories of marginalized areas and is regarded by local residents as a symbol of national spirit and regional identity. From the perspective of contemporary Chinese ecological aesthetics, the Badanji Lin Desert, endowed by nature with mysterious and magnificent beauty, is breathtaking, and the ecological appeal of the marginalized areas has also attracted constant attention. In the endless expanse of the Badanjirin Desert and the struggle for survival of human beings in the areas adjacent to the desert, as well as in the ecological environment of climatic extremes, it is important to understand the ecological relationship between human beings and nature that is symbiotic and harmonious and to open up the spiritual realm of human beings and enrich the inner world of human beings from the association between human beings and the desert. This aesthetic construction closely links the desert with humanistic factors, giving the desert a more far-reaching meaning and aesthetic value. Through the cognition and aesthetic construction of Badanjilin Desert, we can deeply explore the relationship between humans and nature, the construction of cultural identity, and the protection of the ecological environment, and provide new perspectives and thinking paths for the development of contemporary ecological aesthetics theory.

References


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