

# The Regional Landscape Expression of Western Sichuan in Du Fu Thatched Cottage

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**Abstract:** Regionality is the essential feature of landscape and the foundation of sustainable development. Traditional regional landscape is the concrete expression and carrier of regional culture, and an important way to understand regional characteristics. Western Sichuan has formed a distinctive regional landscape with its unique natural and human resources. Du Fu Thatched Cottage, as a cultural landmark in western Sichuan, has typical regional landscape characteristics. Therefore, taking Du Fu Thatched Cottage in Chengdu as an example, this paper interprets the formation and expression of regional landscape from four aspects: site selection, spatial layout, constituent elements and artistic conception expression, explores the ways and key points of regional landscape expression, and puts forward four strategies: diversification of element combination, reappearance of artistic conception, layout space and continuation of local culture. It provides theoretical reference for the practice innovation of relevant regional landscape.

## 1. Introduction

In the early stage of urban construction, due to lack of experience and theoretical knowledge, the protection of regional culture was neglected, leading to the gradual assimilation of the unique form of regional landscape by modern landscape. With the development of cities, many places begin to attach importance to the expression of regional landscape, but there are few and in-depth studies on its specific expression methods and practical utilization. It is urgent to develop corresponding strategies to guide the construction of regional landscape in order to achieve the objectives of diversification of regional landscape, inheritance of regional context and remodelling of local identity. Du Fu Thatched Cottage, as a typical cultural landmark in western Sichuan, contains profound regional culture. This paper summarizes the main points of regional landscape expression by analyzing the characteristics of Du Fu Thatched Cottage's regional landscape expression from four aspects: site selection, spatial layout, elements and artistic conception expression. It is hoped that the paper will provide a theoretical basis and inspiration for Chengdu to build Park City with "literary mind of scenery", increase cultural connotation of urban landscape, and realize the inheritance and sustainable development of regional landscape in western Sichuan.

## 2. Overview of Regional Landscape in Western Sichuan

Regional cultural landscape is a type of cultural landscape existing in a specific geographical area. It is formed and retained in a specific geographical and cultural background. It is the record of human activities

and the carrier of cultural heritage, and has important historical and cultural values [1]. As an important part of Chinese traditional regional culture, western Sichuan culture has formed its distinctive regional landscape because of its unique plain terrain, natural conditions and religious beliefs.

The research scope of this paper is limited to the western Sichuan plain, that is, the Chengdu plain. It is located in the self-flow area of Dujiangyan Irrigation System in the west of Sichuan Basin. Because of its fertile soil, abundant land and stable environment, it is known as the "Heavenly Land of Plenty". Depending on the interaction of geographical environment and farming and water conservancy civilization, the region has formed a very deep and unique regional culture in western Sichuan, which is expressed and inherited through landscape construction.

## **2.1 The Background of the Formation of Regional Landscape in Western Sichuan**

The formation of regional landscape needs long-term historical and cultural accumulation. It is a landscape with unique local characteristics promoted by the interaction of multiple factors. The unique geographical location, abundant resources, beautiful natural scenery, profound Bashu culture and Taoist culture, together with the precipitation of human history, formed a unique artistic conception of the perfect habitat of Western Sichuan regional landscape [2].

**2.1.1 Natural Resources and Agricultural Civilization Subtitle.** Chengdu plain is located in the transition zone from northwest Sichuan Plateau to Sichuan Basin. It has its own unique climate resources, abundant rainfall and warm and pleasant climate suitable for the growth of a variety of flowers and trees. Unlike the north, Chengdu is full of green even in cold winter. Therefore, the plain is vigorous all the year round, which provides an important ecological basis for the development of regional landscape. Secondly, geographically, Chengdu plain is an alluvial fan plain originating from the Minjiang River, Tuojiang River and their tributaries in the northwest Sichuan Plateau. It is located in the west of Sichuan Basin, Longquan Mountain in the southeast, Longmen Mountain in the northwest, and many shallow hilly plains in the region. It has abundant natural resources, fertile soil and abundant precipitation. Moreover, because of the construction of Dujiangyan Irrigation Project in Qin Dynasty, the flood and drought were controlled by human beings, so the water canals on the plain were vertical and horizontal, the agriculture was developed, the products were rich, and the farming civilization had a long history. The unique farming conditions and suitable human settlements provide the basic conditions for the formation of stable and unique regional landscape in the plain [3].

**2.1.2 Local religious beliefs and thoughts.** As the birthplace of Taoism, ancient Shu Taoism culture has also had a far-reaching impact on the formation of regional culture in western Sichuan. Tao not only expresses the clear themes of respecting nature, stillness and motionlessness, attaching importance to life, appreciating life and harmonious development, but also stimulates the infinite interest of Shu people in exploring the world. Therefore, the people of western Sichuan have shown a very regional attitude and way of life in their daily life, which is characterized by fairy freedom and unrestrained [4]. Such a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere has greatly affected the creative thinking and work style of Sichuan literati, forming a unique literary style in Sichuan. Sichuan has been infiltrated by a specific culture based on Taoist thought for a long time, forming its own regional landscape style.

## **2.2 The Impact of Regional Landscape in Western Sichuan**

Western Sichuan regional culture includes settlement culture, folklore culture, history culture and immigration culture. It has an important influence on the country, society, city and people. The regional landscape bears the function of expressing and inheriting these cultures. In the country, the regional cultural context is the link between history and an important component of Chinese traditional culture; in the society, the regional culture of western Sichuan reflects the local customs and practices, and maintains social harmony; in the region, it is the display of the characteristics of western Sichuan and the image of the city, and it also promotes the development of regional economy; for the people, it is the common values of life and cultural spirit, and also the basis of open, inclusive and harmonious coexistence.

### **2.3 Characteristics of Regional Landscape in Western Sichuan**

(1) Influenced by the flexible philosophy of life in religious beliefs, the people of western Sichuan have a strong adaptability to the environment and make flexible use of natural resources to transform the environment [5].

(2) The spatial layout and landscape construction of traditional dwellings reflect the unique leisure culture of western Sichuan. From the unique regional landscape, we can see that the people in western Sichuan are naturally optimistic, good at adapting to nature and enjoying life.

(3) The local folk customs have regional characteristics, which express the characteristics of plain country, rich connotation and high practicability from the landscape, so they are widely disseminated.

(4) The open and inclusive nature of western Sichuan has led to the integration of local culture and other cultures and the development of a profound immigration culture. And since ancient times, the western Sichuan area advocated culture and attached importance to education, and built celebrity memorial gardens to commemorate the sages. This is also an important reason why Du Fu Thatched Cottage can still be rebuilt after several years of prosperity and abandonment.

### **3. The Regional Landscape Expression of Western Sichuan in Du Fu Thatched Cottage**

In the winter of 759 AD, Du Fu took his family into Sichuan to avoid the rebellion of An-Shi and settled in the western suburbs of Chengdu. At the end of Tang Dynasty, Weizhuang wanted to recall Du Fu and built a hut on the old site of Caotang. This encouraged the descendants to restore Caotang and draw Du Fu's portrait for people to worship, which formally endowed the nature of Caotang memorial. After many years of renovation, the scale of the Caotang has gradually expanded and became the largest and most complete Poetry Sage's former residence in the whole country. Nowadays, Du Fu Thatched Cottage is simple and elegant, and its environment is quiet. It has developed into a museum integrating the pattern of memorial temples and the style and features of Poetry Sage's old residences, and a typical representative of famous gardens in western Sichuan.

As a typical cultural landmark in western Sichuan, Du Fu Thatched Cottage's landscape construction contains profound regional culture. This paper analyses the expression of regional landscape in Caotang from four aspects: site selection, spatial layout, construction elements and artistic conception expression.

#### **3.1 Site Selection-Location and Periphery**

Du Fu chose Huanhua River to build Caotang, which is located in a countryside of Chengdu plain, surrounded by native plants such as flowers and fruits, pine trees and bamboo. This is a typical method of landscape in western Sichuan. It can create habitats and provide private living space at the same time. Consideration of site selection originates from the folklore geomancy in western Sichuan. Since ancient times, Fengshui has been used to choose a place for residence. Traditional human settlements are all based on water. Because of the characteristics of plain terrain, the traditional view of Fengshui in western Sichuan mostly uses trees surrounded by hill-like barriers as "soft Fengshui" to realize the trend[6]. Innovation according to local conditions combined with regional characteristics is also a manifestation of ingenious utilization of natural resources and adaptation to the environment.

Du Fu Thatched Cottage is still built on the old site. Although the original hut has been destroyed, it respects the original ideas when rebuilding, highly restores the traditional residential style and surrounding regional landscape, expresses the cultural connotation of Du Fu Thatched Cottage, and inherits the traditional regional culture in western Sichuan.

#### **3.2 Spatial Characteristics-Function and Layout**

During Du Fu's residence period, the main function of Caotang was residential, so the space was mainly laid out according to the needs of life. According to Du Fu's poems, Caotang was located in the

suburbs, facing the southwest, surrounded by low walls and bamboo fences. There were ponds, wells, rattan racks, vegetable nurseries, and pharmacies in the courtyard, "Water Barriers" outside the courtyard for recreation, as well as "flower path" and "bamboo path" leading to the "firewood gate". Outside Caotang, there were large areas of farmland and several distant neighbours. The regional landscape characteristics of Caotang are highly coincident with the spatial landscape characteristics of Linpan, a traditional rural residential form in western Sichuan. From private living space to public communication space to open production space, Caotang uses the typical "courtyard-house-vegetable plot-forest-field" hierarchical complex function space of Linpan to divide space, so as to meet the basic needs of daily life, production and ecology. It is the overall landscape characteristics and patterns formed in the long-term historical process under the support of local knowledge system, taking into account the surrounding natural environment, land resources and utilization, building and settlement forms and water resources utilization modes [7].

Later, later generations rebuilt the Caotang to commemorate Du Fu, and the function of the Caotang changed from residence to commemoration. The overall spatial structure of Caotang has also become a typical multi-courtyard memorial garden pattern with symmetrical central axis. The scale gradually expanded, and besides the symmetrical building group, the natural garden space is interlaced and merged, and the main space layout forms of Xishu gardens are produced. Eventually Caotang became a typical representative of memorial gardens in western Sichuan (Figure 1).

The axis of Du Fu Thatched Cottage is relatively simple, which conforms to the regional characteristics of simplicity in western Sichuan. Its axis is deflected from southwest to north, which is "Zhaobi", Main Gate, "Daxie", hall of historical poetry, "Chaimen" and "Gongbu shrine", forming two rows of enclosed courtyards. There are water systems between the main gate and "Daxie", hall of historical poetry and "Chaimen", which are the main space of landscape architecture (Figure 2).



Figure 1. "Chaimen" in Du Fu Thatched Cottage



Figure 2. The axis of Du Fu Thatched Cottage

### 3.3 Constructing Elements-Patterns and Rules

**3.3.1 Caotang in "Du Fu Period".** The landscape construction elements of Du Fu Thatched Cottage also changed in different periods. During Du Fu's residence period, the function of Caotang was mainly residential, and its construction mode was similar to the traditional rural residential form in western Sichuan, namely Linpan. Therefore, its main construction elements were River, Field, Plants and Curtilage. The residential pattern is the comprehensive reflection of the traditional regional cultural landscape, and also the internal embodiment of the regional landscape [8].

1) Curtilage. "One hundred thousand households in the city, two or three here". From the description in Du Fu's poems, it can be seen that Caotang was built in the countryside and had the macro-layout characteristics of "scattering with the fields" (Figure 3). It accords with the spatial pattern of Linpan in western Sichuan in Tang Dynasty. In addition, relevant studies have proved that structure of Caotang also

adopts the Bucket-through structure of traditional dwellings in western Sichuan.

2) River. Caotang is built beside river, which conforms the basic Fengshui principle of "negative Yin-Yang hold" in traditional residential location selection. It ingeniously uses the local method of rural water diversion to connect the canal with the concentrated water area, so that the water runs through and around the whole garden. River meets the material and spiritual needs of daily irrigation fields, boat rides, indulged waterscapes, and contacting the feelings of neighbours. It expresses the unique characteristics of the ancient and quiet regional landscape in western Sichuan.

3) Field. "Caotang overlooks the green countryside". Du Fu's poems refer to the fact that the grass hall is surrounded by a large area of paddy fields, which is a typical feature of the Linpan in western Sichuan (Figure 5).

4) Plants. Plants are the soul of the expression of regional landscape in Caotang. The plants used are native trees in western Sichuan. They can not only limit space, protect and shelter, guide vision, produce practical and other life functions; it also ensures a quiet and secluded environment, and enriches the landscape with plant arrangement and seasonal changes; the characteristics of specific native plants are preferred by literati to express their emotions. Bamboo in western Sichuan is a local characteristic plant. It grows densely and can be found everywhere by roadside streams and ridge houses. Local people all love bamboo. There are always local residents living deep in the bamboo forest, which reflects the free and easy atmosphere of the region. The hermit bamboo forest is also Du Fu's yearning, so the Caotang is directly located in the depth of the bamboo forest (Figure 4).



Figure 3. Airview of Linpan



Figure 4. Bamboo forest



Figure 5. Rice field around Caotang

**3.3.2 Modern Du Fu Thatched Cottage.** Later, as the functional nature of Du Fu Thatched Cottage changed from the residential nature to the celebrity memorial garden nature, its size, construction techniques and construction elements all changed. Around the theme of commemorating Du Fu, it expresses the regional landscape features of the gardens with architecture, waterscape, plants, and literary works as the main elements.

1) Architecture. The architectures of modern Du Fu Thatched Cottage takes remembering Du Fu as its theme to meet the spiritual needs of the people and the traditional culture and custom of worshipping the sages. Therefore, the Bucket-through structure of traditional dwellings in western Sichuan has also been adopted in the plan of modern reconstruction of thatched houses. On the one hand, the landscape environment and cultural atmosphere of Du Fu's period should be restored as much as possible. On the other hand, a complete and typical traditional residence can be preserved by rebuilding Du Fu's former residence to express the characteristics of regional landscape and inherit the regional culture. Therefore, it has formed the multi-row courtyard-style grass hall pattern symmetrical according to the central axis. At the same time, the interaction between architecture and greening has formed the unique celebrity Memorial Garden in western Sichuan [9].

2) Waterscape. Du Fu Thatched Cottage's waterscape layout uses the waterscape layout pattern in the traditional landscape of Western Sichuan. It not only imitates nature, but also recreates the natural water with lyric and freehand brushwork. Water converges in the form of ponds in the east, west and central part

of the park, dividing the central axis in the form of ditches and running through the whole park. It basically maintained the original artistic conception and implied the natural charm of Sichuan pastoral water system (Figure 6).

3) Plants. The commemorative garden in Western Sichuan often focuses on some kind of garden plants related to the commemorative figures or meanings, highlighting the nature of the garden through the plant landscape. Now Du Fu Thatched Cottage has towering ancient trees, simple and elegant, dense and compact plants, and distinct layers. On the one hand, it planted the types described in Du Fu's poems, reproduced the scenes and images in the poems, and continued the poet's spirit. On the other hand, it used a large number of native plants to reflect the regional characteristics of Western Sichuan, so that culture and artistic conception can be inherited in one continuous line. For example, one of the landmark landscapes of Du Fu Thatched Cottage, the "flower path", its "Red Wall Bamboo Shadow" artistic conception not only expresses the memorial atmosphere, but also perfectly combines with the regional culture. In this way, Du Fu Thatched Cottage eventually became a typical representative of memorial gardens in western Sichuan (Figure 7).

4) Literary Works. Another distinctive feature of western Sichuan gardens is that people are regarded as the noumenon to express the regional human landscape [10]. Du Fu Thatched Cottage is a place to carry people's sacrifices, tours and other collective activities, which has a certain degree of publicity. Landscape space of gardens in western Sichuan is often developed and continued as a carrier of folklore activities involving the public. Similar activities such as "People's Day Tour Du Fu Thatched Cottage" show the characteristics of gardens in western Sichuan, such as popularization, openness, regionalization and common appreciation of elegance and vulgarity, which are not available in other gardens. In addition, the atmosphere of emphasizing culture and religion in western Sichuan has attracted scholars of all dynasties to enter into Shu, leaving works handed down from generation to generation. There are tens of thousands of cultural materials collected in Du Fu Thatched Cottage, including the collation, carving and evaluation of Du Fu's poems in past dynasties; exhibits of bonsai, inscriptions, calligraphy and paintings; couplets of various buildings... This is also a major feature of the western Sichuan regional landscape. Therefore, the cultural atmosphere of Du Fu Thatched Cottage is very strong. The state has established the Du Fu Thatched Cottage Museum to protect and continue to study these cultural relics (Figure 8).



**Figure 6.** Waterscape of Du Fu Thatched Cottage



**Figure 7.** "Red Wall Bamboo Shadow"

### **3.4 Artistic conception expression: construction and technique**

The artistic conception of Caotang inherits the traditional landscape of western Sichuan, such as "winding paths with seclusion", "combination of virtual and real" and "combination of hiding and dew". It uses local elements such as thatched houses, streams, flowers and fruits, bamboo and wood, farmland and natural resources to create the artistic conception of the landscape. From Du Fu's many poems and sentences, we can restore his original image: "Caotang is built in the depth of the alder forest. The alder forest is dense and does not penetrate the strong sunshine". In traditional folk houses in western Sichuan, the entrance landscape of Linpan is often constructed by means of "winding paths leading to seclusion". The entrance is blocked by the enclosure of plants so as to avoid the courtyard being seen directly and



enrich the spatial level. The dense and tall trees outside the Linpan and the relatively sparse courtyard space inside the Linpan constitute the "virtual and real orderly" living environment. This kind of landscape construction technique shows the people's reclusive rural pleasure and free life thinking in western Sichuan, which follows today's Du Fu Thatched Cottage. At the same time, Du Fu's residence injected a cultural atmosphere into the Caotang, and the artistic conception of poetry and prose was formed. The reconstruction of Caotang and people's worship make the poetry mood and memorial atmosphere of Caotang stronger and stronger, and eventually evolve into a typical celebrity memorial garden in western Sichuan and become a strong regional cultural landmark (Figure 9).



Figure 8. "Thousand Poetry Steles"



Figure 9. The Artistic Conception of Caotang

#### 4. Enlightenment and Conclusion

Through the analysis of the characteristics of Du Fu Thatched Cottage's regional landscape, we can summarize some strategies and ideas for the expression of regional landscape:

**Diversification of Element Combination.** To combine the cultural context of regional historical development and the evolution process of regional landscape, extract landscape elements that can represent regional characteristics, consider different images and locations, screen and combine elements to avoid the simplification of regional landscape.

**Reappearance of artistic conception.** To explore the local cultural history and related cultural relics, poetry, etc., reproduce the scenes described in the poems, translate or display the relevant cultural symbols, reproduce the classical artistic conception space in cultural records, such as "flower path" in Du Fu Thatched Cottage.

**Continuation of native land.** Suitable to local conditions, use local materials, continue the local architectural style, respect the local nature of the region.

**Layout Landscape Space.** To consider the actual functional needs and usage atmosphere of space, use plants to enclose and decompose space, combine with the material and spiritual needs of modern life, to create a cultural heritage site, and a multi-functional space with regional characteristics and practicability.

In the process of modern city construction, the importance of regional landscape construction has been gradually realized. However, restricted by insufficient theoretical guidance, there are still some practical problems in the expression of regional landscape in major cities, such as unclear characteristics, unclear cultural orientation and weak cultural awareness. Chengdu puts forward the idea of building Park City with "literary mind of scenery". Its core problem lies in how to express regional culture in landscape. Du Fu Thatched Cottage, as a successful case, shows us the idea and inspiration of expressing regional landscape. According to the analysis of the paper, the expression of regional landscape can start from the spatial layout of the site, through combing the regional cultural elements of the site, decompose and recombine them to create landscape space. At the same time, use local materials to show the cultural mood, in order to express the regional landscape. The correct expression of regional landscape is of great

significance for future urban development.

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