

ICONOGRAPHIC METHOD AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMERGING GARDEN'S IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

Garden design has been described as a category of fine arts with a long association with landscape painting. Thus, gardens can be considered as a work of art due to their artistic nature and value. Accordingly, like other artistic artefacts, they can be studied and recognized by their specific icons. This is very true for a number of well-known gardens in the world, like Persian, English, Japanese and Chinese gardens, which are recognized through their individual icons. However, emerging gardens still do not possess any icons that people can identify them with. Consequently, there is a need for these gardens to develop recognizable icons that people can associate with to reveal their identities. This paper attempts to discuss the definitions of iconography and identity relevant to gardens. It also suggests the application of iconography as a symbolic imagery method for creating identities for emerging gardens. Moreover, the contribution of iconography as a method to study garden icons is also argued in this paper. In addition, an iconographic framework for creating new garden identities has also been formulated based on local cultures and public preferences.

KEYWORDS: garden, garden identity, icon, iconography, iconographic method.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultures are the products of traditions which are made throughout history. They provide conditions for development of identities. On one hand, identity consists of cultural constructs and emerges during the life course. In fact, it is related to rituals, meanings, customs, as well as behaviours, social and historical events, which are influenced by the life story and the value system of the people over the time. On the other hand, culture affects on people's general understanding of their physical environment, and how to deal with it. Thus, landscape features provide a channel in the relationship between people and nature. These features convey special symbolism and meanings that contribute to the establishment of specific landscape identity which is rooted in the culture of the people [10, 16, 14, 30, 37].

Therefore, the development of landscape identity is a basis for the development of a national identity. In more specific, landscape identity reflects the image of specific people and it could be a vision for the development of community identity. Meanwhile, garden plays a significant role in landscape imagery. In fact, it is a specific form of a landscape and reveals both aesthetic values and materiality of that particular landscape. Hence, garden identity is considered as an aspect of social identity, and could contribute to the development of national landscape identity [6, 7, 13, 44].

As a category of fine arts, garden design has a long-lasting interrelation with the art of painting [33]. Ross has considered this art to be equally noble as the arts of painting and poetry in the 18th Century England. In the past, both Western and Oriental gardens have been closely associated with other branches of art such as poetry, calligraphy, and painting. For instance, it reported that Persian gardens were interacting with the Persian arts of painting, poetry and carpet design [19]. Similarly, painting, poetry and calligraphy have been important aspects of the Chinese gardens [11]. As a result, one can recognize a garden by the elements from such work of art. Moreover, throughout history, well-known garden styles are recognizable through their specific images or icons [40]. As such, gardens as a fine art, can be studied and recognized through their detailed images or icons.

Even though well-known gardens of the world, such as the English, Persian, Japanese and Chinese gardens can be identified and recognized through their specific images or icons, this does not seem to be the case with newly emerging gardens. Nevertheless, they still require the development of certain significant images which lead to the formation of their iconography and identities. This selected iconography should be in form, quality and appearance, which reflect the needs, beliefs, philosophy, history, and culture of the people associated with the gardens.

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1.0 ICONOGRAPHY, PLACE IDENTITY AND GARDEN

The following definitions are presented to assist the understanding of how iconography can be used to determine garden identity, and subsequently, propose a framework for creating the identities of new gardens.

1.1 ICONOGRAPHY

Icon is a visual element that is identifiably associated with its meaning and is shared commonly in public places for certain purposes [20, 32]. It acts as a device and can take the forms of sculptures, paintings, preserved artefacts or buildings. According to Hopkins, as cited in [42], icons communicate with human beings by creating links between real spaces and imaginary ones. In addition, it has highlighted that they are parts of social and political history, and they represent a sense of continuity and cultural unity of people [8]. An icon communicates meaning beyond its specific context. Consequently, philosophical and cultural principles and beliefs lie behind icons. Overall, icons attempt to clarify the characteristics of cultural features, which are spatial metaphors for objects or places, and give rise to the formation of a belief system and an identity.

The word iconography is derived from two Greek words, namely *eikon* and *graphein*, which are translated as “image” and “writing”. Therefore, the term can literally be translated as “image writing” or “image describing” [38]. Iconography is the representation or set of representations of a person, place or thing, as a picture or an album of pictures, also the iconography is a pictorial illustration of a subject [45]. It has described as an attempt in search of social relations, as well as cultural and political influences of images by describing and interpreting symbols or images [17]. Moreover, Wages defines iconography as the visual expression of the idea in a text [41]. Based on these definitions, it can therefore be stated that iconography is the image or images that can describe symbolic and traditional heritage of a place.

Meanwhile, symbols embody the major characteristics of ambitions and the belief systems of cultures. Lowenthal (as cited in [9]) suggested that iconography could explain the condition of a landscape as a cultural image. It is a pictorial approach to represent structure and symbolize the environment. Hence, iconography can be used to describe landscapes. On the other hand, iconography can also refer to a methodology for studying landscape as a cultural image. It is a direct or an indirect search for the meaning of the subject being represented (Bialostocki, as cited in [36], p. 955). Page argues that iconography has been developed as a way of analyzing symbolic implications in a wider cultural context [28]. In his opinion, symbols include significant indicators of the aspirations and the belief systems of cultures. As such, they represent the essential tools in any analysis of the past and the contemporary attitudes towards science, technology and the future. Straten established a theory of which iconography is a method to study the history and the theory of symbolic imagery [38]. This theory was further refined by Panofsky who suggested the iconography as a text that can be read [29].

1.2 PLACE IDENTITY

Identity has diverse definitions, depending on the contexts or viewpoints, and it is also a word with uncertain limitations. The process of shaping identity acts upon several principles of the culture [14]. For instance, identity can be an expression of heritage, which celebrates both the nature and culture of people [37]. Therefore, it needs to be reflected in a place to be learnt and experienced by others. Meanwhile, the identity of a place is a special character of that particular place, and this distinguishes it from other places while reflecting its ethnic origins and heritage [43]. Thus, place identity (in this context, it refers to the garden's identity) is defined as the individuality of a place which includes its character, symbol, image and icon that have roots in popular culture.

1.3 GARDEN

Miller defines garden as an “excess of form”, an imaginative and immovable feature of people's art [24]. Ross believes that gardens provide pleasure, beauty, respite and reflection [33]. In addition, they also engage imagination, as well as delight emotions and feelings. Olonetzky suggests that garden conveys the personality of the person who has created it [26]. In addition, a garden is also established through symbols, meanings and practices which are based on culture and social relationships [12, 35]. Therefore, the study of gardens is actually concerned with an exclusive understanding of the human culture and activities, as well as an understanding of their distinctive interactions with nature. In this relation, it can be said that a garden is defined as an artistically designed place, indicating specific icons, emerging from culture, and being influenced by particular social relationships.

2.0 GARDEN AND ITS IDENTITY

In the past, gardens were adopted as the symbols of national identities [18]. Each culture endows gardens with forms that in return contribute meaning and identity to them. A garden is not just estimated through its physical manifestation. The value of a garden is also built upon its represented form, medium of exchange, sites of

visual appropriation, and focuses on the formation of identity. In fact, sense of communal identity could be supported via garden development [15]. Therefore, gardens are important for a nation to enhance its history, common goals and achievements.

Gardens are not just concrete man-made artefacts. They are interwoven in real forms, which hold both the past and the present. Moreover, they are shaped throughout past events, beliefs, needs and the culture of people who have created them. Hence, history and culture have had great impacts on the formation and the evolution of garden identity. In this relation, garden identity could be defined as a characteristic by which a particular garden is differentiated from the others.

According to the aforementioned definition, a garden is an artistically designed place with specific icons and images that convey the individuality, history and culture of a society. This art has roots in its past events, traditions, beliefs and the needs of the people who have created it. Therefore, in studying the identities of the existing gardens, it is essential to look at those specific icons and images to interpret them and to understand the meanings and philosophies which underlie them. Obviously, these meanings and philosophies had also been shaped through past events, religions, beliefs, as well as the needs and culture of the people. Therefore, a method, which studies and interprets the artistic phenomena that pay attention to the history and philosophy in creating or determining a new garden identity as a symbol of national identity, can be suggested. Thus, iconography can be applied as a method for studying direct or indirect meaning of a subject so as to formulate a framework for creating the identity of a new garden.

Gardens stand at the crossroads of nature and culture. They expose both the natural form and the human art [25]. Straten argues that the concept of iconography or image reading of gardens, as a practice, is a creative method of historical analysis of the garden as a work of art [38]. According to Wages, iconographies expressed a variety of ideas that are associated with the gardens in historical paintings or images [41]. Consequently, an understanding of the components of a garden and its iconography can be helpful for art historians to identify and explain the meaning of a particular garden.

Based on the previous statements regarding icon, iconography, place identity and garden, the iconography as the interdisciplinary tool can assist in the development of a garden identity. In fact, gardens can be considered as an artistic endeavour. Consequently, a theory for developing a garden iconography can be considered by analyzing the images or the representatives of garden images. This is because iconography links the visual quality of a garden with its historical and cultural backgrounds. According to this method, the garden can be read and recognized through its specific images.

3.0 ICONOGRAPHY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN IDENTITY

Iconographic method was developed to identify and to interpret the meaning of symbols within their wider cultural context. It is a fundamental tool in any analysis of the past and contemporary attitudes towards science, technology, and the future [9]. In fact, the iconographic method is an artistic and historical method. It interprets the levels of meaning in human artefacts covering painting, poetry, and literature, in addition to landscape design [38]. Cosgrove and Daniels further argue that an iconographic study requires an investigation of the meaning in a work of art by understanding its historical context and the analysis of the ideas implicated in its imagery [9].

Panofsky suggested three phases in an iconographic methodological approach [29]. It was based on Straten's findings [38], and was later refined [9]. Ultimately, the researchers established the three phases of iconographic approach, as follows:

- a. The first stage is the pre-iconographical description which takes place when an image is being observed for the first time. A mental image of everything being portrayed by that particular image is automatically created without defining the relationship between things. During the pre-iconographic observation, the stylistic aspects of the visual arts are often ignored although they are fundamental for a complete understanding and explanation of an image.
- b. The second stage is the most important stage in iconography; it is the iconographical descriptions which manifest the subject of a specific image.
- c. The third stage is termed as iconographical interpretation. The purpose of this particular part is to ask whether the represented images convey an underlying significance that could be interpreted within philosophy or history. An affirmative response will lead to the task of unravelling its significance.

Osborne employed this method in his research on Canadian national iconography [27]. The researcher was looking for the development of a unique iconographic system in his study of artistic images of the Canadian lands and people. He further argued that images could play an imperative role in the development of Canadian iconography and pointed to an integral relationship between the images and their spirituality and materiality. In his opinion, block images, forms, or line drawings could also compose a pictography of sacred communications,

spiritual identity, or history of cosmological events. He concluded that old buildings, early architecture, tools, vehicles, weapons, and contemporary pictures of people's clothing, as well as places and events must be examined to determine or identify their national iconography. In addition, popular historical novels, folk dances, and other traditional activities as parts of the national identity await further inspections [27].

Another study, offered some ideas and guidelines for developing an identity in relation to iconography [21]. The researcher further argued that specific national space emerges as a representative of the whole and it often appears as a symbolic place. Hence, an image affects on the public relationship with its certain space. Consequently, she finalized that iconography is a method for identifying the specific characteristics of a place and icons, and when they are brought together, they will establish an identity for that particular place.

In another iconographic study, Prince argued that a picture could present people's emotions and their relationships [31]. In his study, the researcher interpreted the painting by Thomas Gainsborough that pointed to the sense of satisfaction and ownership of a young couple in the painting. He further argued that the method of studying paintings could also provide a vast view about the culture of the people and their lifestyle. Meanwhile, Terkenli believes that pictures could present rural landscapes and the traditional view of living and working [39]. The researcher also concludes that these perceived forms and visual elements of the landscape are related to their iconological qualities and can assist the identification of an iconography for a specific landscape.

Based on the above examples, iconography can be employed as a method in creating, developing or identifying an icon or an identity. In the first example, many factors were considered for the development of a national iconography. As such, the old photos and instruments of the past, public beliefs, spirituality and clothing were engaged to identify the identity via iconography. In the second example, attention was given to a unique characteristic of a place by specifically focusing on particular icons. Finally in the third study, the culture of the people and the traditional method of living and working were employed to identify their identity. Hence, cultures, old traditions, beliefs, symbols and religions should be considered in understanding, creating or developing an identity in the iconographic method. Accordingly, the iconography as a method could be employed to identify a specific characteristic of a garden, which contains particular icons.

4.0 ICONOGRAPHIC METHOD FOR IDENTIFYING GARDEN

As indicated earlier on, garden has been considered as a source of meaning and value with a long-term association with period, traditions, symbolism, philosophy, art and poetry. It is a controlled nature and a movement from the nature to an independent form of art with several levels in perceptions and meanings [1, 4, 5, 22, 23, 33]. Artists, landscape architects, anthropologists, archaeologists and environmental historians agree on the analysis of landscape painting and garden design as cultural materials. In fact, a garden mirrors the culture and each culture creates garden forms with specific meanings which express that particular culture. Hence, it is critical to understand the cultural context in order to understand the garden [2, 3, 15, 34, 44].

As a cultural image, garden is a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing environment. It is also concerned with geography, fine arts, literature, social history and anthropology [9]. The features of a garden have been created differently among diverse cultures. They link particular needs and religious beliefs, and they have been designed to provide for different intentions. In the twentieth century, for instance, garden design puts an extra emphasis on the importance of wilderness. In particular, Chinese moon gate, Islamic Talar and different types of enclosed gardens are some examples of this particular category [3, 33, 23].

As mentioned earlier, garden is a pictorial phenomenon which concerns people. It is created to represent a cultural image of a specific group of people with long association with their traditions, arts, symbols, beliefs, histories and life course. Hence, the method for understanding and studying gardens should be related to all of the aforementioned items. According to the analysis and the argument given above, the iconographic method can be employed in developing an identity. Iconography is a visual expression of an idea which has been used as the verbal and visual method of analyzing Italian villa gardens. The iconographic method has been employed in the theoretical and historical study of symbolic imagery that is associated with ethnography and can clarify the meaning of garden images [2, 9, 28, 41].

Moreover, iconography can reflect the way of living and the culture of the people that are associated with the garden identity. Based on the definitions which have been suggested for garden identity, garden iconography and the definition of the garden, the iconographic method and the three phases of this approach can be employed in the identity development of a new garden.

Identities of a garden are developed through the culture of the people who are associated with it. For instance, specific features, that contribute to make a place recognizable, will enhance the place identity in that garden. These specific features, which are rooted in the culture of the local people, become the icons of the garden and form its associated image. In other words, a collection of these specific images make up the iconography of the garden. Well-known traditional gardens in history, such as Chinese and Persian gardens, are some examples of the

gardens that have already possessed their iconography, and hence, identity. These gardens can be identified and labelled by their unique and representative images or icons. These icons are different from each other and reflect the cultural backgrounds of their creators. Therefore, a circular inter-relationship between garden identity, garden iconography, the people and their specific culture can be suggested as a fundamental framework for the development of the new garden identities (Figure 1).

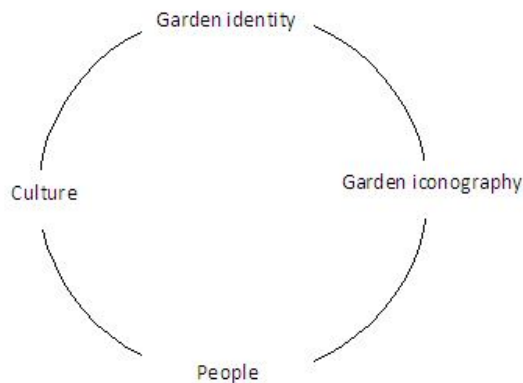


Figure 1: *The inter-relationship between garden identity, garden iconography, people and culture.*

This framework is based on the three phases of iconographic approach. It aims to create new garden identities according to the circular inter-relationship. The iconographic method can be applied in studying the gardens which have already possessed their own identities so as to determine or identify their specific philosophy, needs, beliefs, and the culture of the people which are represented by the garden icons. However, in the development of a new garden identity, the iconographic method can be used in reverse. In more specific, by studying specific needs, beliefs, and the cultures of the people who are associated with the development of the garden, new icons for the emerging gardens can be created. Subsequently, the philosophy and meanings, which are located behind these icons, are corresponding to those people and their culture. It can be concluded that specific icons and images which form the new garden iconography are related to the particular people who have created the gardens. In other words, these new gardens can be recognized and identified through these specific images and icons. As a result, the iconographical method can be employed in establishing a new garden identity.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, garden as a cultural image is an artistic, symbolic and pictorial collection of icons in a designed environment. From an iconographic point of view, these icons are notable for their representation of a garden. Garden iconography should include garden images due to its scenic manifestations of certain icons, figures and symbolic objects. Therefore, garden iconography can be defined as a tool that is associated with art, history and philosophy. It includes a collection of garden images which represent specific icons that project the garden's identity. Furthermore, it contributes to the formation and creation of an international visual language of a garden, which is artistically employed to express various ideas about the garden.

Like other artefacts (e.g. painting and calligraphy), gardens reveal artistic values which are vividly depicted through their creators' work of art and these can be easily identified and distinguished from one garden type to another. Moreover, using the three- stage iconographic method, gardens can be studied and differentiated based on their specific iconographies. Thus, identification of the icons for new gardens and formulation of their iconographic framework are made possible through garden iconography. This framework will further suggest the icons, the layout and the design principles for the development of the new garden style based on the local culture and history. The knowledge which is derived from the studies of garden iconography will significantly contribute towards the development of a national landscape identity for developing nations.

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