

An Exploration of Aesthetic Manifestation within the Literary Landscape of Chi Zijian

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Abstract: The field of contemporary literature has witnessed the emergence of landscape aesthetics as a prominent approach that effectively influences the construction of literary landscapes. With an exceptional ability to shape landscapes through his literary works, Chi Zijian, a renowned master of landscape portrayal, displays a profound understanding of aesthetic principles encompassing distance, color, and symbolism. This research focuses on Chi Zijian's novels as a case study and adopts a perspective grounded in the realm of landscape aesthetics. By employing a meticulous examination of the text, this study aims to elucidate the concrete creative techniques that have been derived from abstract aesthetic theories. This approach facilitates a precise exploration of the aesthetic elements embedded within literary landscapes, thereby establishing a profound connection between literature and aesthetics.

Keywords: Chi Zijian; Literary Landscape; Landscape Aesthetics; Symbolic Symbolism

1. Introduction

Throughout history, literature has served as a significant form of constructing landscapes, employing symbolic elements to evoke visual imagination and engender aesthetic experiences for the recipients. The allure of the "landscape concept lies in its ability to connect individuals with the surrounding environmental factors" [1]. In comparison to the concept of "scenery", the term "landscape" places a stronger emphasis on the reader's contemplation of the scenery. In today's era, the disciplines of literature and landscape aesthetics have become inseparable, often drawing inspiration from each other through theoretical integration. The construction of literary landscapes relies on the theoretical guidance provided by the field of aesthetics,

and examining the readability of literary works through the lens of landscape aesthetics theory proves to be an effective research methodology. As one of the most prominent writers in the Chinese literary scene, Chi Zijian excels in the art of depicting landscapes, using them as vehicles to convey aesthetic sensations. Through her vivid portrayals, she captures the blooming of spring flowers in the Greater Khingan Mountains and the pristine splendor of arctic villages adorned in a silvery white veil. She masterfully depicts the flickering lights of city streets and the ethereal beauty of mountains, rivers, and vast plains under the enchantment of rain, snow, and the changing hues of dusk and dawn.

By adhering to diverse aesthetic principles, Chi Zijian intricately reveals the unique allure of literary landscapes from a three-dimensional perspective. Through an examination of her works through the lens of aesthetic theory, meticulously unraveling the details within her landscape descriptions, we not only acquire an ideal model for constructing landscapes from the dual domains of literature and aesthetics but also establish the expansive pathway for interdisciplinary research between landscape aesthetics and literature.

2. Vertical Distance for Showcasing Vast Spaces

To experience the perception of distance, the most convenient means for individuals is to rely on visual observation. In terms of aesthetics, "landscape and environment are not synonymous; it is the environment that is perceived, particularly in visual terms" [2]. Vision endows readers with the ability to perceive space, transforming external landscapes from indiscernible backgrounds or mere juxtapositions of patterns and colors into compositions comprised of elements that maintain a certain distance from one another. It is through the presence of distance that

landscapes possess a visual stretch and extension.

In order to overcome the inherent flatness of spatial representation, Chi Zijian employs a strategy of vertical extension within her landscapes, effectively enhancing the sense of depth and distance. This technique involves combining foreground and background elements in a manner that conveys a cohesive spatial perception. For instance, in her work *Willows by the River*, she employs a progressively shifting perspective to portray the natural environment. This approach involves the delicate juxtaposition of distant mountains against a backdrop of misty rain, seamlessly connected to the expansive fields that intermingle with rolling hills and the meandering riverbanks. Finally, Chi Zijian directs her artistic focus toward the closer proximity of the willow trees. Through the layering and interplay of these diverse landscape elements, a harmonious and serene tableau is crafted.

Similarly, in the opening description of *Twilight Drizzle over Grieg Sea*, the artist adeptly captures the urban landscape. She skillfully renders the billowing clouds in the distance using nuanced ink techniques. As the reader's gaze follows the direction of sunlight, the scene gradually unfolds, encompassing the urban terrain. This visual progression orchestrates a deliberate narrowing of the perceptual distance, sequentially shifting the reader's focus from remote architectural structures to the immediate street scenes. In doing so, the artist accentuates the overall aesthetic appeal of the landscape, underscoring the interconnectedness and harmony of its constituent components.

In *The Wuzhang Temple Fair*, Chi Zijian employs a refined style of writing to meticulously depict the unfolding spectacle of a sunrise. The scene is delicately illuminated by the rising sun, as its radiant glow melds with the ethereal hues of pink-tinged clouds. This luminescent interplay extends from the distant horizon, quietly enveloping the nearby mountains and frolicsome forests. The artist's astute observation of the dynamic qualities of sunlight results in a meticulously rendered natural landscape, imbued with a distinctly layered composition. By employing a top-to-bottom and far-to-near arrangement within the narrative framework, Chi Zijian masterfully

imparts a profound sense of depth and three-dimensionality to the spatial representation. Through this deliberate approach, the literary landscapes generated within her works possess a unique potential for evoking aesthetic appreciation and allure.

The aesthetic experience of the reader is derived from perceiving distances within the landscape, where the existence of distance divides the scenery into three distinct levels: the background, middle ground, and foreground. This division imparts a harmonious and integrated aesthetic quality to the space. As the reader "simultaneously takes notice of distant objects, the intermediate ground, and the closest foreground, while paying attention to the distances between them, there is a constant adjustment of perceptual scale"[3]. In Chi Zijian's novels, the background often comprises elements such as the sky and clouds, which inherently evoke a sense of unreachable distance. Yet, they also possess the encompassing characteristic of embracing all objects.

Therefore, the function of the background in the landscape is to expand the visual field while serving as a backdrop to the foreground, which occupies the central position within the composition. The middle ground typically includes fields, buildings, and similar elements. These objects can be physically approached by the reader but are always maintained at a certain distance. As mediators within the vertical landscape, they provide a clear sense of direction, facilitating a seamless transition from the background to the foreground.

Finally, the foreground consists of objects such as plants or animals, representing the nearest point of convergence for the reader's gaze. Thus, in literary works, the foreground serves as the core of the entire landscape and represents the writer's true focal point. While the background evokes a romantic atmosphere but risks excessive emptiness within the space, and the foreground offers clarity and tangibility at the cost of visual oppression, it is the middle ground that faces challenges in fully exerting its own utility. Therefore, only by carefully controlling the distances in the spatial composition, allowing the different levels of the landscape to seamlessly integrate from far to near, can the reader truly experience aesthetic pleasure.

Within the vertically extended panoramic

landscape, the integration of the background, middle ground, and foreground also facilitates the efficacy of perspective. "Perspective", originally a term in painting theory, allows visual perception to form a sense of space, connecting the elements within the landscape. As Duan Yifu points out, "Perspective techniques employ converging lines to create a strong visual effect" [4].

Chi Zijian fully harnesses the characteristics of perspective when depicting various landscapes. As the layers of the landscape unfold in the reader's imaginative world, magnificent scenes gradually unravel before their visual consciousness. From the nearby riverbank and vegetation to the slightly more distant structures and fields, ending with the distant clouds, haze, and sun, the writer carefully positions them along the same visual axis, allowing the reader to take in the entirety of the scenery with a forward gaze. In such a landscape, it seems as if the writer places the space within a continuously traversed lens, enhancing its overall grandeur while showcasing a spectacular aesthetic effect. Through Chi Zijian's skilled application of distance arrangement, the literary landscapes acquire possibilities for aesthetic creation at a spatial level.

3. The Intricate Scroll Created Through the Depiction of Colors on a Two-dimensional Plane

If the emphasis on distance accentuates the vertical extension of the landscape, giving rise to the beauty of spatial composition, then colors focus on the horizontal examination of the landscape, highlighting the pictorial aesthetics within the scene. Colors play a crucial role in shaping the literary landscape as a vivid picture within the reader's consciousness. "The division and functional utilization of space, the expression of decorative materials and textures are all closely associated with colors within the landscape" [5]. In the composition of a visual scene, colors are often the first sensory elements that our eyes perceive. They have the ability to evoke personal associations and ignite a desire for further exploration. The proper handling of color combinations directly impacts the aesthetic effect of the literary landscape.

Chi Zijian, a master of color depiction,

possesses the remarkable ability to infuse colors into landscape descriptions, bestowing upon them a texture and aesthetic reminiscent of oil paintings. In the opening passage of her novel *The Sleeping Giant*, the author begins by portraying a sunset, envisioning the sky as a vast canvas. The grey expanse of the heavens, the crimson hues of the clouds, and the delicate shades of pink haze intertwine and mingle within the ascending mist, amalgamating into a kaleidoscope of vibrant beauty. Similarly, in her work *Primitive Landscape*, Chi Zijian employs colors that surpass ordinary imagination as she skillfully depicts the snowy vistas of an Arctic village. Snow, in her portrayal, transcends its usual portrayal as a monochromatic white and is imbued with an enchanting array of hues. Under the soft caress of the morning sun, its pristine whiteness is kissed by a rosy blush. As the sun descends, the snowy landscape transforms under the shimmering reflection of the sky, assuming a tranquil shade of deep blue. And as night falls, a celestial glow emanates from the snow, reflecting the radiant luminescence of the full moon in a delicate, creamy yellow.

Furthermore, in her work *Last Quarter of the Moon*, the author frequently employs the evocative power of color to render the landscape. She deftly utilizes sunlight as a painter's palette, skillfully depicting the layered clouds and ethereal mist as if they were delicate strokes upon a piece of paper. Initially adorned with a simplistic white palette, as the sun sinks in the west, warm tinges of gentle orange gradually engulf the canvas, with gentle brushstrokes of pale yellow emerging amidst the scene. Through the harmonious fusion of a myriad of hues, the landscape assumes a textured quality akin to an exquisite oil painting. The author's brilliant mastery of color interplay allows for seamless transitions and transformations, effectively realizing the poetic essence and aesthetic allure of the literary landscape.

Although individuals may have diverse interpretations of colors, there exists a relative stability and universally accepted aesthetic connotation associated with them. "Visual needs are constantly changing and evolving, but at the same time, they also have a relatively stable aspect" [6]. Therefore, in literary works that depict landscapes, it is crucial to wisely consider the psychological

connection between colors and the readers' perception. Chi Zijian's landscape descriptions consistently harness the characteristics of colors. Red, symbolizing passion and power, consistently occupies a central position in the landscapes she portrays, depicting intense sunlight or vibrant flowers, capturing the readers' attention with its striking tones.

Unlike the fiery red, yellow and orange convey warmth and gentleness. Chi Zijian often employs these colors to illustrate the remaining glow of the setting sun or falling autumn leaves. Placed around the central focal point of the landscape, they serve as both contrast and transition elements. Blue and black often represent depth and tranquility. Chi Zijian skillfully employs these hues to depict night skies, flowing rivers, and other such elements. These colors appear as background tones, establishing the overall emotional tone of the landscape. By leveraging the distinct qualities of different colors, Chi Zijian elevates the visual beauty of literary landscapes.

In addition to capturing the aesthetic connotations of various colors, Chi Zijian's landscape descriptions also skillfully employ complementary colors to create a sense of beauty. Complementary colors are characterized by significant contrast, capable of generating a strong visual impact through juxtaposition. Arnheim suggests that "placing complementary colors side by side leads to a balanced or completed experience" [7]. When authors utilize complementary colors to construct literary landscapes, the tension and conflict between the two colors gradually find equilibrium, resulting in a satisfying and harmonious effect. Among the myriad of imagery, the night sky serves as a perfect landscape for the author's application of complementary colors. In Chi Zijian's portrayal, the nocturnal canopy is imbued with a deep blue-violet tone, yet it is not empty and desolate. Instead, it is adorned with lanterns of orange-yellow, introducing a gentle warmth to the overall cool-toned scene.

Indeed, the night sky is not the only example where Chi Zijian employs complementary colors. When crafting landscapes of mountains, forests, and wilderness, she often uses green as the dominant color. Additionally, she integrates warm-toned flowers into the scenery, juxtaposing vibrant red blossoms against the backdrop of lush green foliage, creating a

vibrant and lively spectacle. Furthermore, when depicting the scenery of late autumn, Chi Zijian employs complementary colors to portray the background of the landscape. She typically focuses initially on the brightly lit blue sky, emphasized by the gusts of wind, before turning her attention to the orange-yellow earth. Through the contrast of colors, she conveys a sense of depth and layers within the landscape. By seamlessly weaving the aesthetics of color into her descriptions, Chi Zijian offers readers a visual experience akin to admiring a picturesque painting.

4. Symbolic Representations Serving as the Embodiment of the Spiritual Essence

In the realm of readers' visual imagination, space and color merely exist as superficial aesthetic elements. For literary landscapes to evoke aesthetic pleasure at a spiritual level, they must possess profound intrinsic value. As a medium rich in connotation, landscapes invariably establish intangible connections between their inherent attributes and external spiritual beliefs. According to Mitchell, landscapes "are contained within a tradition of cultural references and communication, serving as a set of symbolic representations that can be invoked, reshaped, and imbued with meaning and values" [8]. Through literature, landscapes are transformed into symbolic representations endowed with distinctive significance, bridging the gap between the human soul and the natural world. In order to imbue landscapes with a sense of aesthetic beauty at both the visual and spiritual levels, Chi Zijian deliberately highlights specific elements within the overall landscape, making them symbolic representations containing aesthetic significance. The Sound of Begging vividly portrays a late-night lakeshore, with the moon serving as the central symbol that distills the emotions of the characters: when the moon is obscured by dark clouds, the earthly rivers and lakes lose its lunar shadow. The moon's radiance not only modulates the brightness of the scenery, but also corresponds to the joys and sorrows of the protagonist's love. Fairytale of the Arctic Village delineates the beautiful snowscapes of the north, constructing a gentle and tranquil poetic world. The author emphasizes the tender and spiritual nature of the snowflakes, attributing to them a unique significance.

They are not merely external elements contributing to the overall landscape, but also symbolize the author's pursuit of an ideal spiritual world. In *Midday Melody of the Green Grass*, the river landscape takes on distinct symbolic and allegorical qualities, signifying the passing of childhood life, juxtaposing the somber water's surface with the desolation deep within the human heart. Once the landscape is imprinted upon the sensory organs of the aesthetic subject, they are endowed with anthropomorphic value and connotation. By condensing intricate spiritual significance into conspicuous landscape symbols, Chi Zijian unites the natural scenery with individual thoughts and emotions into a single entity.

Within a vast landscape, the objects that undertake symbolic functions hold particular importance. They constitute the core embodiment of the landscape's profound implications and serve as essential finishing touches. As Appleton points out, the aesthetic pleasure derived from landscapes arises from the reader's experience of an environment that satisfies their biological needs [9]. He employs the "prospect-refuge" theory to explain the biological foundation of landscape aesthetics and categorizes symbolic representations in landscapes into perspectives, shelters, dangers, and other categories. Objects with a prospect-oriented nature easily become symbolic markers within the landscape, such as the boundless lake surfaces and expansive plains depicted by Chi Zijian. In landscapes dominated by prospect, the reader's vision is wide open. The author intensifies the presence and symbolism of prospect symbols like the sun and snowy plains by reducing the prominence of shelter symbols.

Indeed, the aesthetic qualities of a landscape sometimes require the collaborative efforts of two types of symbols to be effectively manifested. Shelter symbols often contribute to the overall atmosphere in the landscape, enhancing the prominence of prospect symbols. Take shelter-dominated landscapes like night scenes as an example. Chi Zijian often employs elements such as buildings and trees as sheltering images, while reinforcing the effect of shelter through shadows in the darkness. In such environments, objects capable of reflecting light, such as the moon and the river, become the focal points that

illuminate the darkness and maintain compositional balance within the landscape. As the most prominent prospect symbols in the entire landscape, they assume their symbolic function under the backdrop of shelter symbols, becoming the primary vessels that condense the spiritual will and values within the landscape.

Chi Zijian's selection of symbolic elements in the landscape not only implies the aesthetic principles of "prospect" and "shelter" but also reflects an alignment with Gestalt psychology. Objects can only become symbolic landscape elements when they stand out from the constructed background of the landscape. Gestalt psychology suggests that "when people perceive objects, there is no need to separately analyze the different parts that form the object and then combine them into a holistic judgment, but rather to directly grasp the perceptual structure of the object as a whole" [10]. Gestalt theory focuses on how objects are recognized and differentiated from the background within the field of view.

In order to highlight the symbolic representations within the landscape, Chi Zijian often employs a writing style characterized by continuity in arrangement and the subtle downplaying of details. Frequently, she arranges elements such as trees and shrubs in a continuous fashion, while refraining from delving extensively into their individual specifics. These elements share similarities in form and color, creating a relatively enclosed and blurred background. In contrast, the symbolic symbols within the landscape present more intricate details. They possess clear contours, striking features, and carry cultural connotations. They attract the reader's expectations and attention, while also holding the possibility of deeper interpretation. Chi Zijian deftly manipulates various elements, subtly shifting the reader's focus, thus allowing the literary landscape to showcase endless aesthetic potential.

5. Conclusions

When it comes to the evaluation of literary landscapes, the standards of beauty can vary greatly. However, the forms and meanings of beauty are not elusive concepts. In Chi Zijian's novels, we witness the author's meticulous design and detailed arrangement of landscapes. From controlling the vertical distances to

harmonizing the horizontal colors, and finally employing symbolic symbols, Chi Zijian demonstrates a profound understanding of aesthetic theory. As a prominent figure in contemporary Chinese literature, Chi Zijian's works provide valuable inspiration for the creation of landscape writing in Chinese literature. Moreover, it is worth noting that Chi Zijian's literary creations emphasize the mediating function of landscapes in interdisciplinary fields. Landscapes offer a crucial pathway for writers to delve into the realm of aesthetics, enabling a traceable interplay between literature and aesthetics.

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