Research on the Creation of the Cultural Atmosphere in Modern Campus Design

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Abstract. This paper explains the meaning and features of the modern university’s cultural atmosphere, and reviews the history of campus design’s development. In addition, it also analyses the ways of creating the cultural atmosphere from different aspects, such as the environment of the campus, the historical context of universities, and communication space. Only in this way, can we promote each student’s all-round development, which is the request of the times.

Introduction

Education is the foundation of a society. The university has always been regarded as a place where human culture meets and is inherited. Throughout Chinese and foreign history, those prestigious universities all represent the national spirit and the pursuit of the times. Newman, a famous British educator, has said that the college training is a effective way to achieve the extraordinary purposes.[1] It aims at improving the social ideological style as well as the personal behavior and providing appropriate principles for the public enthusiasm. The university has also expanded the boundary of thought of the times.

On one side, man creates the space. On the other side, the space shapes man too. Research shows that there are many influential factors in education, and the campus environment is one of the most important aspects in education process. It plays a subtle role in the development of students. Corbusier, the master of modern architecture movement, has regarded colleges as “Cities in microcosm”.[2] In the United States, the campus design is often discussed in the urban design course. Indeed, the campus design and urban design face many similar contradictions. They all contains many buildings with different function, which are connected by the similar public facilities. At the same time, they all need to create symbolic space to form the overall image and style. However, it should be noted that the campus design has its particularity. It should reflect a concept and be filled with a rich cultural atmosphere. From Peking University’s “Freedom of thought” to Tsinghua University’s “Self-discipline and social commitment”, the campus represents a kind of culture, which is embodied in an atmosphere. For modern universities, it means advocating the science and the pursuit of democracy. Moreover, it is a kind of people-oriented and harmonious atmosphere. Therefore, the campus design is to express a kind of spirit and convey a belief and idea.

The History of Campus Design

As a place of rich culture, the university campus environment and the education concept interact. The modern university originated in the west. The first university in the world was founded in the 11th century in Europe, which is mainly for church services. Since the main teaching activities were completed in churches and monasteries, those universities didn’t have their own environment space. From the 13th century, there have appeared universities with the independent teaching environment in Europe. For example, Oxford University inherited the pattern of the early monastery’s space, and formed a closed square. This model maintains a serious religious atmosphere. It is independent from the society and become an isolated ivory tower. Most of the early European universities followed this
pattern. In the 17th century, the campus pattern has gradually changed along with the industrial revolution and the thought of education’s evolution. Especially in the United States, the campus design changed the closed form of the sacred space and paid more attention to the combination of the overall layout and the environment. In this way, a lot of universities with cultural atmosphere and landscape have appeared. Among them, the University of Virginia designed by Thomas Jefferson is a classic example.

The University of Virginia is the first campus that has been conceived and planned carefully in the United States. Jefferson believes that Rome is a symbol of democracy and freedom. Therefore, he thought that the architecture design should be based on the Rome style. The University of Virginia focused on the teaching of language, agriculture and science during its early years. It tried to cultivated talents with the democratic spirit. The university was managed in a democratic way and it required students to be self disciplined. In the campus center, there are two rows of dormitories, which echo with each other across the meadow. Each department building is adjacent to the faculty dormitory. Most of the buildings are connected by the colonnade, and thus form a semi-open courtyard. This plan has broken through the traditional layout pattern of the monastery. At the same time, the library is located on the top of the central axis of the campus, which is the soul of a university. The whole design emphasizes the axis as well as symmetry, and reflects the spirit of democracy and equality. It has created a new era of American campus design. In addition, many other American universities such as Harvard, Yale and Connell have showed a strong cultural atmosphere and the spirit of creation too. This has become the epitome of American modern civilization.

In the 20th century, especially after World War II, the education system has become more and more diversified. The purpose of education has also changed. At the same time, the thought of modern architecture has also been mature. As a result, the campus design practices begin to show a trend of diversification. However, to create a good cultural atmosphere and reflect the unique spirit of the university has always been the constant theme of the campus design.

**Campus Design Should Respect the Historical Context of the Campus**

The university is a place for cultural heritage and education. The formation of campus culture and the continuation of historical context are inextricably linked. Most of those famous universities have a history of 100 years in the world. Moreover, the historical tradition and buildings themselves exude an intoxicating cultural atmosphere. History can not be recycled. Therefore, this rich historical atmosphere is a rare cultural wealth for the old campus. It should be particularly stressed that the campus construction must have the consciousness of protecting history, and cannot destroy the original style of the campus.

In the United States, many universities regard determining historical preservation area as the important part of the campus planning and design. Stanford University is such a good example. This campus is designed by the landscape architect Olmsted. It was first formed by a group of bottom buildings and arched corridors, which took the memorial church as the center. The composition is symmetrical. The whole groups of buildings are constructed by the yellow sand masonry and have red roof. Furthermore, the buildings are decorated with vine arches and carving, showing a distinct Spanish style. In later years, the old building is always the center of the campus. In addition, the old architectural style has been extended and respected in the following construction continuously, and eventually formed an unforgettable whole beauty of the campus. Jordan, first president of Stanford, said that the long corridors and the grave columns are a part of the education too. Every stone in the campus teaches people to have decency and honesty. Stanford’s story has undoubtedly set a good example for us to respect history.

To attach importance to the tradition of campus, we need to create same historical and cultural sites as well as the memorial facilities in the campus. This is also a great benefit to the formation of campus’ historical atmosphere. For example, the old building’s corridor floor has been engraved with the successive numbers of graduating classes, which gives students the great motivation with the time
fleeting. Another example is Harvard University. In front of its administration building stands John Harvard’s statue. It looks handsome and elegant. And it is engraved with three lines of words: “John Harvard”, “Founder of school”, “1638”. Additionally, many universities engrave the academic master’s life and his epigram on the monuments. This is not just a decoration, it is also a kind of expectation to emulate those better than yourself. These carvings, inscriptions as well as the historic buildings look like the images of history books, which are talking to people about the process of the campus’ development. This helps us comprehend the true meaning of traditional culture of the university.

**Trying to Form the Features of the Campus**

To have distinctive features is an important link in creating the campus’ cultural atmosphere. And the formation of the features is the result of many factors. We can proceed from the different aspects in the campus design.

**Making Full Use of the Natural Environment of the University**

The Chinese traditional academy always emphasizes choosing the sites. In fact, the colorful natural environment provides a valuable source of creation for design. It can also lay the foundation to create a cultural atmosphere of the campus. Specifically speaking, methods of Chinese garden design have a good value for us to use the nature.

First, it should discover and respect the beauty of nature and pursue the harmony between human and nature.

Second, it needs the space form by artificial means and highlight the features of nature.

Third, the design should use various landscape elements to reproduce the nature.

In fact, many universities in China and abroad have made full use of the natural environment, Zhejiang University is a prominent example. The planning of the new campus of Zhejiang University has made good use of the existing water system in the base so as to show the landscape of the Southern Region. It has created an ecological garden zone throughout the new campus. Here, the water is flowing through the buildings, and the space is filled with the romantic atmosphere. The long history of cultural tradition of Zhejiang University has been reflected in the campus design.

In addition to the grasp of the topography, the climate cannot be ignored in the design too. It combines the spatial composition with features of weather and makes the campus more dynamic and has a local flavor. King of Saudi Arabia University, designed by HOK, is located on the outskirts of the capital Riyadh. The designer has used a new style of a pedestrian corridor, which is seven meters high. The pedestrian corridor links up a lot of small courtyard groups. In the design of the central square and atriums, the Arabia language of architecture as well as the various techniques of layout has been used. Eventually, a modern university campus, which is adapted to climatic conditions and has thick national culture breath, has been created.

**Paying Attention to the Campus Greening and Landscape Design**

As far as the landscape layout is concerned, plants, water, even stones are all important parts of the content of the campus’ beauty and cultural features. The most characteristic scenes in many well-know universities have become the symbol of the campus, such as the tree-lined boulevard in Stanford University and cherry trees in Wuhan University. The Japanese educators have proposed that the education process should include the plants of the school. In fact, most of Japanese universities attach importance to the campus greening and integrated landscape design. From three-dimensional green art, sculptures, and monuments to well-designed stones, color walkways, etc, can all been seen in Japanese universities, which let people feel the influence of culture when enjoying the beauty. Moreover, we should also pay attention to combining the landscape design with enriching the cultural atmosphere.
Creating the Colorful Communication Space

The president of Ecole Normale Superieure has summarized that the key to the success of school is to create a positive atmosphere for students’ communication. Similarly, people in our country cannot forget the free speeches and debates that can be seen everywhere in the old campus of Peking University. That is to say, the communication and democratic discussion are not only indispensable parts of college life, but also the important feature of culture of the university.

The campus life is rich and colorful. And this determines that design of the communication space should penetrate into all fields from the buildings to the exterior space. Specifically, the communication space can be divided as follows.

First, public space and campus center space: There should be a large public activity space in any campus, such as a central campus square. Here, the meetings and celebrations can be held. As a result, it is often seen as the representative of the alma mater’s image in a student’s mind. The lawn in front of Tsinghua University’s Great Hall is a good example.

Second, small group space: A large number of activities usually occur in a group of three to five students. This is a form of small group. Therefore, public buildings should have adequate place for people’s communication. It can provide chairs and benches inside and outside.

Third, private space: Such space may be stones by a pond, benches in the forest, or the corner of a building. They have a good sense of enclosure and privacy and offer an ideal spot for staying alone and the intimate exchanges between two guys.

The design of communication space should pay attention to the diversification in the form firstly. It can use the top of buildings as a roof garden and use the ground elevation as sinking courtyards. Additionally, pedestrian street system can be designed in the overall campus planning. At the same time, the rise of using the bottom layer of buildings as the public communication space in recent years is also a very good exploration. In the planning of new campus of Shenyang Architectural University, a wide walking corridor which connects all the teaching buildings has been designed. It is full of laughter with streams of students busily coming and going in it every day. Moreover, it’s necessary to focus on the humanization design of the communication space. The core of modern education is to make people oriented. Thus, the care of people should be integrated into the campus design. As far as the design of communication space is concerned, it needs to make the design have a bit more intimacy, comfort and fun, so as to let it be more in line with people’s psychological characteristics. It can use the green, pools, rocks, street lamps, and even the changes in the ground’s height to express different atmosphere of space. It may be warm, intimate, romantic, elegant, or cheerful. At the same time, the convenience stores and coffee bars with comfortable sofa or chairs can be set here, which will have a positive guidance for social activities.

Conclusion

Universities are affected by many factors, such as history, culture, social development, educational belief and so on. When young students enter the campus, they will inevitably feel a different flavor. It is neither the chirping of birds nor the fragrance of flowers, but a kind of academic and cultural atmosphere brewed by the buildings, environment, and educational philosophy. Therefore, campus design explores not only the buildings of school and traffic planning, but also an educational dream and belief. To create a good environment and rich cultural atmosphere for promoting each student’s all-round development is the request of the times. It also needs to be the goal of the campus planning and design that we should pursue in the new century.

References


