



## The Functions of Modern Mural Art

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### Abstract

Murals evolved with human development and have been playing an irreplaceable role from the ancient to modern time. Ancient murals are effective tools for worship, preaching the authority of the ruling class and maintaining the interests of the ruling elite, and its social functions of indoctrinating and promoting human relations have continued ever since. As the modern civilization develops, appreciation of aesthetic beauty has become more individualized, and as a result, mural art tends to cater to the development needs of the micro-environment while maintaining its traditional educational functions, and decoration and interest have become new requirements for murals. Since mural art works can contribute to improving the cultural environment (macro environment) or space environment, it will be expounded in this paper from three aspects, namely, social educational function, spatial decorative function and changing and value-added function.

**Key words:** Murals; Environment; Function

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### INTRODUCTION

Murals not only serve as “decoration” for beautifying people’s living environment but also have especial social and cultural properties that meet aesthetic needs of the public and possess functions for reflecting the ethnic,

folk, and contemporary culture trend as well as functions for socio-cultural welfare purpose. Artistic creation murals in harmony with environment can enhance the art value, cultural value of environment and add its functions. Murals of new era can also reproduce historical events, heroic deeds of historical figures, thus playing a role in narration. As people’s living standards have been improved and aesthetic demands have increased, murals begin to enter small space such as private houses and therefore decorative functions of murals, decorative functions of murals become increasingly obvious.

### 1. EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION

Themes and aesthetic orientation conveyed by murals are beneficial to enhancing human mental minds and achieving dual functions of appreciation of aesthetic beauty and enlightenment, truly reflecting social value of mural art.

Diverse space environment and extensive aesthetic groups increase the demand for murals, and especially the increase in large public buildings provides grater prospects for mural development, and meanwhile brings more limiting factors for mural creation as well as imposing more requirements for selecting themes, expressing vectors of inner spirit. Therefore, the viewers’ aesthetic ability and aesthetic taste should be taken into account during considering the diversity of space buildings.

Murals can adapt to requirements for space functions and forms of specific environment, thereby achieving its own aesthetic perfection, so that people can enjoy the environment aesthetically and get spiritual enjoyment fully. At the same time they can achieve social functions of indoctrinating and promoting human relations, which can be best shown from the square in this respect, as the square buildings as micro-environment are more open and broader, whose various groups of appreciation have different levels of aesthetic standards and rich

aesthetic tastes. It is important to reflect the openness and characteristic civilization of regional cities in medium-environment. Murals of Jinan Springs City Square mural take Qilu culture as the base to show Shandong's time-honored culture and rich and profound historical heritage, and reflect the opening up and development of Shandong as its theme. During mural creation, Confucius, Mencius, Sun Bin and other historical figures were selected, including such historical stories as Confucius Gave Lectures, Sun Wu's Art of War, Tsou Yen's Debate, Qian Que Practiced Medicine, Luban's Craft, Mencius Studied Abroad, Guan Zhong Conquered Qi, Bo Qin Governed Lu, Xi Gong was Conferred Grand Duchy and so on. Besides, Daming Lake, Yellow River, Baotu Spring and other scenic spots and tourist attractions are representatives of its geographical characteristics. With diverse content, rich themes and vivid description, those murals well demonstrate the medium environment, namely, cultural characteristics, human phenomena and geographical features of Shandong Province, and fully show the cultural history and picturesque scenery with Shandong regional characteristics. Consequently, people can know about the history and culture as well as good mental outlook of Shandong Province while their aesthetic demand can be met and more social responsibility will be borne by them.

"Window of the World" build in Shenzhen is a large park for mainly showing the world cultures, whose large-scale murals *World civilization* crossing throughout five doors are 200 meters long reliefs, forming a magnificent cultural plaza with gate style architectures, ancient colonnades and sculptures from various continents. These murals' contents take great cultural creation of human as the theme. By combing cultures of China, India, Japan, Korea and other Eastern countries as well as the ancient Mesopotamian civilization, and Islamic cultures of Middle East, and Oceanian culture of the majority of the Pacific Oceania areas, *Oriental Civilization* is made up of typical cultural relics of these cultures with contents covering various aspects of culture. In the embossing process, high, medium and low, carved lines are employed comprehensively, thereby achieving overall harmony. "The theme of these murals focuses on reflecting the great civilization of thousands of years to show incomparably rich and profound civilization in a magnificent manner. Only by this way can the murals match with the ancient majestic buildings so that people can be moved and inspired by colorful human civilization from the angles of culture and art and are motivated to learn about the world and seek world peace, stability and prosperity. People will be more willing to bear their social responsibility and mission, and there inner thoughts and soul will be improved. Therefore, murals perform aesthetic and society functions."

With respect to commemorative meaning of murals, in a narrow sense they refer to murals for one historical

event or one historical figure. In a board sense, those with commemorative and aesthetic functions are commemorative murals. Most of murals with such functions take characters as main body, plot and story as clue, featuring magnificent scene and numerous figures, which are created based on historical documents, taking educational and cognitive function as primary function. They represent an art form combining education and aesthetics. Most modern murals are in the form of panoramic mural paintings, "cultural wall" in public places, memorial hall, monuments, etc. to perform the commemorative functions of murals. Commemorating is not the ultimate goal of mural art, which is to emphasize the social nature of mural art, promote and guide healthy aesthetic taste and aesthetic interest of the public, and actively guide the lofty mental mind.

## 2. DECORATIVE FUNCTION

Murals with decorative function refer to the mural art form with the purpose of decorating and beautifying environment. Decorating features has existed with murals were created. However, few viewed it as the primary purpose. Therefore, decorative function of murals has not been fully demonstrated. Since the 19th century, with the socio-economic development and improvement of aesthetic sense of the general public, decorative function has become a major feature of their development. Nowadays, owing to great increase in privatization of space and personalized aesthetic requirements, small space and personalized space have gradually been separated from thematic and social idea of creation, turning to the decorative mural art form that is popular with the general public.

With respect of this kind of mural, decorative function is placed in the first place, so there is usually no complex plot in such murals which often reflect personalized aesthetic taste through non-thematic creation. "Being meaningless is its meaning". There are three forms of creation: the first one creates murals with figures, scenery, animals, plants and other objective physical environment being materials, and gives expression to personalized aesthetic taste through scene structured by decorative techniques. The second creation is full of abstract contents such as peace, light, life, youth, wealth and other similar topics. And the third one creates fresh feeling and generates new aesthetic enjoyment through the material beauty, fine workmanship and scientific innovation. The subjects in the illustrative pictures are just elegant crane and clouds, which are used to cater to the warm and peaceful atmosphere and the sense of beauty produced by handmade silk fabrics and warm and wealthy colors give individuals sensual pleasures and warm and calm aesthetic enjoyment.

Murals in Beijing Capital International Airport have exerted profound influences. Most of these murals with

decorative function emphasize formal beauty and have great shocks on artists who woke up from ultra-“left” creation mode in decade-long Cultural Revolution. *Prince Nezha's Triumph against Dragon King* of Zhang Ding was created entirely from the traditional forms, but has modern decorative implication. *Celebration of Life-Happy Songkran* of Yuan Yunsheng was produced by taking advantage of Western artists, whose combination of lines with faces and subject matter to be reflected are blended into one harmonious whole. Although Yuan Yunfu's *Sichuang Mountains and Rivers* is tinged with traditional landscape painting features, this decorative landscape is magnificent and unique. Some other murals including miniature-style murals of Zhu Danian describing southwest dense tropical landscape, and *Spring of Science* created by Xiao Huixiang by using bold cubism and constructivism, almost without fail, show the characteristics of distinct decorationism.

Mural environment is not only square, library and medium-sized environment, its functionality also changes with environment. In small space such as private houses and bedrooms, aesthetic nature of the picture, sensory pleasure and resulting aesthetic enjoyment have become important criteria of mural creation. With the diversification of social consciousness, and personalization trend of human minds, murals will enter into small space, becoming a kind of “decoration”.

### 3. CHANGING AND VALUE-ADDED FUNCTION

#### 3.1 The Forms and Languages of Murals in Harmony With the Environment Can Increase the Visual Space and Intentions Space

Functional requirements for murals in the environment and construction forms pose limitation on murals, whereas murals are changing and sorting out the deficiencies and limitation of filling up space in the environment, thereby giving environment artistic atmosphere. Murals can increase plane visual space, strengthen the sense of space and depth degree of space environment, and meanwhile enhance the deep meaning of the picture. Panoramic murals as a unique form of expression best show the space and intention. There are a lot of memorial hall built specifically for the panorama murals, such as *Capturing Jinzhou*, *Jinan Campaign*, *Surrounding and Annihilating War at Chongchon River*, *Laiwu Battle*, *Battle of Southwest of Shandong Province*, *Battle of Red Cliff*, *Tough Fight of Yuncheng*, with the pictures covering the entire space, and real earth, prop carriage, stone walls attached to the bottom for working in concert with the walls and residential houses. Consequently, the vivid and realistic pictures both have a sense of uniform and integral painting, and produce an illusion of a real space due to the vivid part. Simulation

of cries and fire burning sounds would give one strong visual impact on the hearing and vision. A mixture of truth and falsehood reproduces imposing and intense war scenes at that time in a real manner, completely breaking the time and space constraints.

Since most of the buildings have been produced before creation of murals and the built environment is restricted by many factors including place, funds, functions and other constraints. Therefore, mural creators must create murals based on given built environment. Since murals can provide good supplement for environment space, the principles of making good use of space in the murals and creating murals in accordance with space environment should be followed by each creator. *Shun Cultivated at Lishan Mountain* created by Zhang Yimin in Shungeng Hillview Hotel describes the scene when emperor Shun cultivated at Lishan mountain, with balanced composition of picture, strong decorative function produced by adopting romantic style and simple, elegant and quite colors that give one profound sense through using blue and green hues, which produces a mysterious and illusory psychological feelings. The original small interior space that compared to the murals is filled up and the picture adds depth to the space environment, giving one broad, cheerful visual experience, and reflecting history-honored and profound Chinese civilization. This piece of harmonious art work created in combination with space environment not only adds individual value to mural painting and space environment, but also increase intention space for overall atmosphere. *Into Space* by Xu Rongchu was created by using different forms of stainless steel such as special curves, straight lines, tubes, faces and edges to form several circles in order to match with the broad and bright hall. Under the lighting of numerous lights, refractive shining of the stainless steel works in concert with the smooth and bright marbles, sparkling. Covering the deficiency of small space at the top of building, this creation combined by buildings and murals that enhance value of buildings becomes a harmonious and uniform environmental work of art.

#### 3.2 Murals in Harmony With Environment Can Increase Artistic Content and Cultural Values of Environment

Mural-environment harmony not only endows the form content, materials of murals with new artistic values, but improves environmental quality which would be brought to a new level. For instance, *Commemorating Victims in Jingxing Coal Mine* in Jingxing mine of Shijiazhuang in Hebei Province was produced by using sculpture harmonized into language. Thousands of forms of hands are crowded in the narrow galley gives an expression of lives' cry, struggle, and escaping from death, thus combining the inorganic industrial products with organic lives artfully. New forms and fresh expressive language can convey cry of inner life better and get rid of the

superficial forms of real steel, ingots, cement images, endowed murals with new idea, thereby leading to the harmonious and uniform artistic effect of the whole space environment and giving intense visual impact and psychological shock to viewers who will not refrain from expressing condolences to victims and realizing the preciousness of life. Therefore, not only do murals enhance the artistic contents of works of art and the environment, but also endow them with higher socio-cultural values. Queli Hotel in the center of Qufu City is a traditional ethnic style double building by imitating courtyard of Ming Dynasty. Its quaint dignified, elegant and unique architectural pattern and other ancient buildings such as Confucian Mansion and Confucius Temple bring out the best in each other. It was well designed by China's famous ancient architect Mr. Dai Nianci and murals in it should match with the overall architectural environment and rich culture. *Confucius' Six Arts* created by Wu Zuoren, Li Huaji is a very harmonious works, made by inlaid ceramic plate, crystallization, vitreous enamel. Portrait Han Dynasty and seal script and characters written across the arch of palace gate are used to outline the contents of six arts. The vivid figures and little characters show the intrinsic link six arts. Clear composition of the picture, black, the reprehensive color of Warring States, mottled texture of pottery shard and tangled and orderly rhythm help the picture reflect the distinct characteristics of current times and profound sense of history. The picture is simple but yet lively, brief but with a strong expressive force, endowing the work with high artistic value as well as social and cultural values. As a result, it forms a harmonious and uniform art world with Queli Hotel.

Creation of murals in harmony with the environment, not only can change the visual space of micro-environment, but also can increase its intention space. Based on the macro and medium environment, the creation will enhance the artistic value and socio-cultural values of overall aesthetic environment.

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## CONCLUSION

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The functions of the murals for environment can be viewed as limitation and requirement for realizing the value of murals. Combing murals and the environment to create harmonious atmosphere is a resulting creation caused by the internal trend of mural itself and outer demands of environmental.

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APPENDIXES

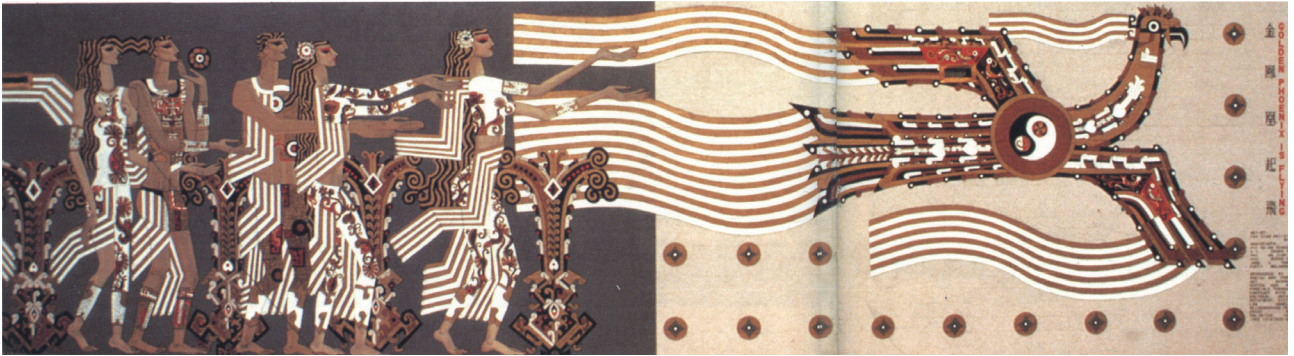


Figure 1



Figure 2

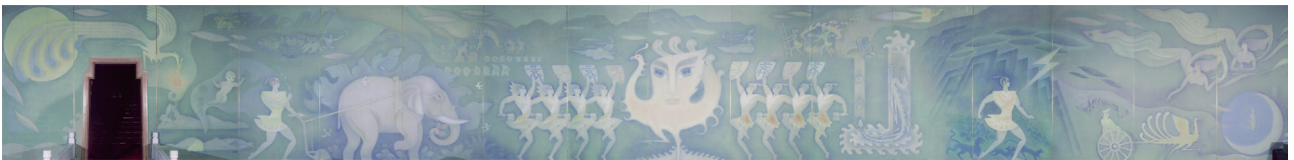


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

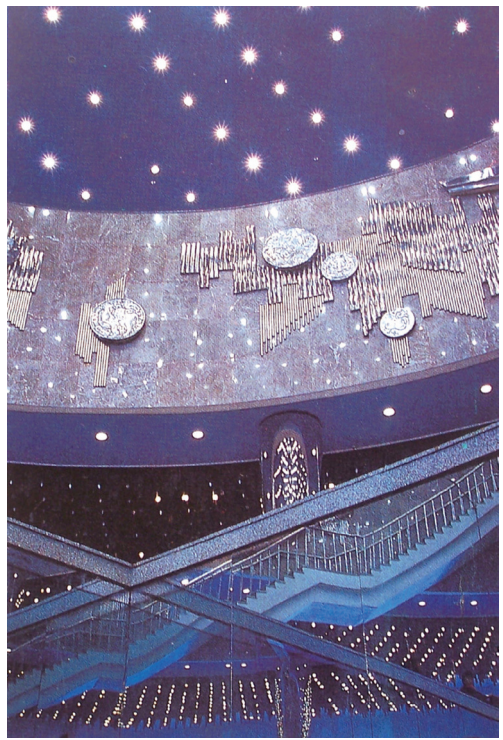


Figure 6