

# Scenic Zones' Construction and Tourists' Aesthetic Imagination

--A Reflection on "Better Imagining than Seeing"

Jie Ma

Office of Equipment and Laboratory  
Anyang Normal University  
Anyang, China  
malisa666@163.com

**Abstract**—The widely spread old saying that better imagining than seeing, reflects regretful feeling of tourists, which not only affects the enthusiasm of tourists, but also the development of tourism. This paper analyses the main reasons for this phenomenon, among which the lack of aesthetic imagination of tourists occupies the first. Based on this, the paper proposes shallow views on this problem. On the one hand, it is necessary for tourists to improve their aesthetic abilities, on the other hand, it is vital for tourism planners to design unique aesthetic attractions for tourist destinations, in order to meet the aesthetic expectations of tourists and cultivate their aesthetic imagination in accordance with the psychological acceptance patterns of tourists.

**Keywords**—tourism landscape; aesthetic expectation; aesthetic experience; aesthetic imagination

## I. INTRODUCTION

"From the perspective of different stages of tourism industry development, China's tourism industry has just finished its basic formation, which is its major task. Between now and 2020, China's tourism industry is and will be entering a new stage of development with growing scale, increasing profits and more scientific development mode" [1]. As a major section of national economy, it is of great necessity that problems and shortcomings are identified, and relevant solutions be proposed. This paper will make an introduction with a common complaint of tourists—"better imagining than seeing" and give some tentative suggestions.

## II. SEEING AND IMAGINING

Generally, the widely spread saying "better imagining than seeing" indicates that scenery appreciating in person is not as good as pure imagining while hearing about others' description about the tourism landscape. It's not surprising that people lament, "Suffering costs simply a lot. Better imagining than seeing." From the perspective of aesthetics, as human being's advanced senses, auditory and visual senses work together to complete the procedure of aesthetic experience. What brings about so many complaints? To "hear" here means no capturing of the sound of wind, water and bird in the nature, but hearing about others' narration of their sensuous experience in the tourist destination. Obviously, what is heard about will arouse one's desire to appreciate in person? It is reckoned that the narration is

saturated with passion and gratification, thereby having a great impact on the listener and granting much contentment, which is obtained through his own "imagination". In this process, the narrator's words are transformed into a series of enthusiastic, positive and vivid pictures in the listener's mind, which have been created by the narrator and the listener. The transformation itself from words into images is creation, let alone the blank produced by the narrator. The "image" created by words does not seem to be so intuitive as the "picture" captured by eyes, thereby leaving a lot of blank to be filled in by the listener with his comprehension of the narration based on his own life experience. With "words" as its medium, the listener's imagination is also a process of recreation, which certainly guarantees the spiritual fulfillment. Accompanied by enjoyment, the sense fulfillment is after all evoked by others' narration, not his appreciation in person. His decision to be personally on the scene is thus logic. Why does the listener get a quite different feeling from that while imagining? Quite a few factors contribute to one failure in sightseeing. Regardless of other causes, this paper just makes an analysis in terms of aesthetic imagination.

## III. TOURING AND AESTHETICS

Twenty years ago, Chinese well-known aesthete Ye Lang stated in his *Touring cannot be separated from Aesthetics*: "Touring in nature is an aesthetic activity, which cannot do without aesthetic appreciation" [2]. His widely acknowledged idea has got confirmed by the booming tourism and flocks of tourists in various scenic spots. Now that sightseeing is an aesthetic activity with tourists as the subject and diversified tourist destinations as the object, an aesthetic relationship between them needs to be built. Nevertheless, it is conditional for the tourists to gain mental pleasure and satisfaction with their comprehensive use of aesthetic sensation, imagination, emotion and understanding facing tourist attractions. After all, not every tourist has the sense of beauty in a famous scenic zone. For example, although Xiangtan Park is well known for the fascinating view of red leaves in autumn, it isn't hard to find people playing cards in the shade of the fiery trees. They go back to their hometown with great regret that "better imagining than seeing", due to their failure in building aesthetic relationship with beautiful scenery, which requires the subject to have

aesthetic ability, namely, the comprehensive ability of sensation, imagination, emotion and understanding. In spite of the integration of psychological mechanisms, aesthetic imagination is meanwhile a full embodiment of them. If the aesthetic imagination gets stimulated, the tourists will see with the mind eyes a train of gorgeous images, which can enchanted them with much gratification and delight. Facing the scenic zone, tourists with better aesthetic sensation will be more fascinated, since better aesthetic sensation means better aesthetic perception. Among all that cause the regret “better imagining than seeing”, a major one is the tourists’ lack of aesthetic imagination. Therefore, it is essential to raise tourists’ quality—the aesthetic ability of the tourists. Although, the authority of the scenic zone can do nothing to cultivate the tourists’ aesthetic ability before their appreciation in person, they could fly their imagination with their own scenic zone construction and unique design of tourist attractions so as to avoid the aforementioned pity.

Such pity can be hardly heard from tourists who have been to some famous scenic zones at home and abroad, it is not so much because of their better aesthetic ability as because of the irreplaceable defining features of the scenic zones, where even tourists with poor aesthetic imagination can still gain great satisfaction instead of massive disappointment. An expert cotton picker, who was rewarded with a tour to Guilin for his proficiency in cotton picking, came back with such observations: “You cannot find out any repetition and duplication of the magic scenery along the bank of Li River. Boat in the river, scenery in the eyes... One hill looks like a giant cow; one is like a couple of mules crouching towards each other; Li River is so pure like clean glass...” His face beaming with joy reveals that he is enchanted ardently over the landscape in Guilin and his analogies serve as eloquent proof of his rich aesthetic imagination. Truthfully, the love towards beauty and the affinity with nature is part of human nature. Every person has the sense of beauty. It is whether the scenic zone can trigger the tourists’ sense of beauty that counts a lot.

#### IV. EXPECTATION AND SENSATION

A person begins his tourism experience with the aesthetic expectation towards the scenic zone, therefore the failure in fulfill his aesthetic expectation will lead to the regret—“Better imagining than seeing”. Then, how to fulfill a tourist’s aesthetic expectation? Hans Robert Jauss’s Reception theory provides the answer. According to Jauss, the reader approaches a text with “Horizons of Expectation”, a directional expectation of its genre and style. With a relatively definite boundary, it helps to define the reader’s comprehension of the text. [3] If the text complies with the reader’s expectation horizons, he or she will finish the comprehension of the text soon with satisfaction, which is called Consequent Response, which often happens between the reader and light literature. While some literature with more charm and appeal will achieve both Consequent Response and Reversing Frustration with the reader’s aesthetic horizons of expectation. In the process, the reader accepts the text with aesthetic satisfaction. Jauss’s theory

also applies to tourism aesthetics because scenic appreciation is an aesthetic activity in nature.

Aesthetic gratification and delight can’t do without aesthetic imagination. The conformity between the tourist aesthetic expectation and the scenic zone beauty is actually a forward response of aesthetic imagination, while the inconformity means “block”, because the scenic zone fails to arouse the tourist’s aesthetic imagination.

Some well-known tourist destinations win people’s favor with their unique scenery, which bring the tourists great delight and pleasure in the process of conforming—blocking—conforming. On the contrary, some less famous scenic zones show too much conformity to the tourist horizons of expectation, thereby discouraging their aesthetic imagination and bringing the regret “better imagining than seeing”.

Classical Chinese gardens win the tourists’ heart with their pursuing of the poetic imagery beauty. The principle of harmony with nature is carried further. The bridges, pavilions, long winding corridors, irregular rockeries, and sweeping roofs belong perfectly to the scenery as to become a whole with it. Chinese garden is characterized by studied disorderliness with exquisite arrangements, which comprises the natural purity and elegance. What’s more important is that Chinese gardens follow the principle of concealment and surprise in landscape composition, which has therefore a very close bearing on these verses: “Winding path leading to a secluded spot place, and a monastic room obscured by flowers and trees”; “I doubt if there’s any way out in this multitude of hills and rivulets, when a village appears amidst shady willows and bright flowerbeds”. Chinese gardens, “to the greatest extent, strike a responsive chord in tourists’ heart with the formula ‘showing the large in the small and the small in the large, providing for the real in the unreal and for the unreal in the real’, which combines the finite specific images with the infinite imaginary vistas, thereby becoming a whole.” [4] The tourist’s expectation is satisfied in the process of conforming—blocking—conforming, which will definitely not lead to any regret. This holds true in the planning of Niagara Falls. Tourists can appreciate the magnificent falls from different angles in different ways. “Firstly, the tourists enjoy the sight on the viewing gallery; secondly, have a birds’-eye view of the whole stunning falls on one of the three observation towers; thirdly, take a cable car across the deep valley to overlook the spectacularity; fourthly, hover over the falls in a helicopter; fifthly, take a boat trip into the waters at the base of the falls...” [5] Step by step, the tourist is led into newer and bigger views, in a continual series of surprises and astonishments, which arouse a train of mind pictures with imagination, thereby producing mental gaiety. Such scenic zone planning is completely in accordance with the laws of human’s aesthetic acceptance. The sigh “better imagining than seeing” can hardly be heard of in such a well-planned scenic zone.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In order to meet the aesthetic expectations of tourists and cultivate their aesthetic imagination in accordance with the psychological acceptance of tourists, it is essential for

tourism planners of the scenic zones to design aesthetic attractions with originality and ingenuity for tourism destinations. Aesthetic gratification obtained from tourists' aesthetic imagination is proved to be a relief from the lament "better imagining than seeing". It is obvious that many other improvements can be made by scenic zone planners to arouse the tourist aesthetic imagination, such as tour guide commentary and presentation, food and accommodation, which will not be discussed one by one due to the limited space.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] To Develop Tourist Industry into an Important Industry in National Economy—An Interview with Shao Weiqi. *China Tourism News*, 2008, 3, pp. 14.
- [2] Ye Lang, Tourism is Inseparable with Aesthetics. *China Tourism News*, 1988, 1, pp. 20.
- [3] Hans Robert Jauss, "As to the Challenge of Literary Theory in Literary History," in *Aesthetics of Reception and Reception Theory*. Liaoning: Liaoning People's Publishing House, 1987, pp. 29.
- [4] Yu Xuecai, *Tourist Culture*. Beijing: China Forestry Press, 2002, pp. 144.
- [5] Shen zuxiang, Zhang Fan, *Travel Planning Studies*. Fujian: Fujian People's Publishing House, 2000, pp. 241-242.