

Study on the Exhibition Design of Red Museums Based on Semiotics

—Taking the Marshal Ye Jianying Museum as an Example

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Abstract

As a crucial cultural carrier of revolutionary memory and national identity, the exhibition design of red museums transcends simple artifact display, evolving into a practice of meaning construction and cultural storytelling. This paper explores the application and value of semiotic theory in the exhibition design of red museums, using the Yejianying Memorial Hall as a case study. Grounded in semiotic theory, it delves into the symbolic design language embedded in spatial configurations, display methodologies, and visual elements within the museum.

Semiotics and Exhibition Design

Semiotics studies signs; Zhao Yiheng defines "a sign as a perception carrying meaning". This research relies on two theories: Saussure proposed the "Signifier-Signified" binary model ; Peirce (USA) proposed the "Representamen-Object-Interpretant" tripartite model . Their difference lies in "focusing on system sociality vs. focusing on the three's interaction".

The museum is a large semiotic system, with spatial narrative realized by the interweaving of physical space and sign meaning: spatial paths not only guide movement but also imply narrative progress; "signifier" elements in exhibitions realize the "signified" function by transmitting information. Cultural translation is the core goal.

Semiotic Analysis of Exhibition Design in Yejianying Marshal Memorial Hall

3.1 Semiotic Logic of Exhibition Space

The exhibition space of the Marshal Ye Jianying Museum is laid out around a defined linear narrative. With a total exhibition line length of 505 meters, it establishes a clockwise visiting flow , ensuring the integrity and continuity of the visit. Each spatial node serves as a carrier for specific signs, realizing the design goal of "space as a sign".

As the first s visitors encounter, the Preface Hall undertakes the function of "sign activation"—quickly establishing a connection between "Ye Jianying" and "revolutionary spirit" throPreface Hal and Gantang Lake Clandestine Conferenceugh strong visual signs, and setting the narrative tone for the entire venue. The waterfall and stone landscapes in the hall form a highly metaphorical sign combination. The background relief adopts the Hukou Waterfall motif, with the preface and quotes from General Secretary Xi Jinping displayed on both sides.



Figure 1: Preface Hal

3.2 The Signifier System of Exhibition Narrative

The exhibition narrative of the Marshal Ye Jianying Museum adheres to the logic of "Signifier Stratification and Signified Progression." The localized expression design of its 17 key exhibition items closely revolves around the "display theme," using scene reconstruction or miniaturization highlighting to create a strong cultural atmosphere.



Figure 2: Gantang Lake Clandestine Conference and Yan'an cave dwellings
The scene of "the Gantang Lake Secret Meeting" centers on local water scene symbols. It simulates a water environment using lighting and shadow technology, integrates local-style boat designs, and recreates the secret meeting scene of 1927. This allows visitors to form an embodied cognition of the historical event's context through visual perception of local spatial forms. Similarly, the "Yan'an Rammed Earth Wall" uses the authenticity of its material as an icon and index, translating the revolutionary ethics of "hard work and frugality" into tangible and perceptible material memory.

3.3 Emotional Symbols of Color and Material

Color, as a vital symbol of spatial narrative, serves the functions of emotional guidance and atmosphere creation in the Marshal Ye Jianying Museum.The museum follows a color thread of "from simplicity to brilliance". It transitions from the initial gray-brown tones, to the dark red of the revolutionary period, and finally to vermilion, forming a progressive color narrative.Guided by these colors, visitors' emotions gradually intensify as they move along the exhibition route. They complete an emotional transformation from "a sense of immersion" to "reverence and admiration", which enhances the appeal and memorability of the narrative.

Conclusion

This study, supported by semiotic theory, conducts a systematic analysis of the exhibition design of the Marshal Ye Jianying Museum.

Studies have shown that the success of this museum lies in its transcendence of the traditional rut of "simple display of cultural relics" and "linear narration". It consciously constructs the entire exhibition space into a grand and sophisticated semiotic system.

By systematically applying the relationship between signifier and signified of symbols, and comprehensively utilizing the signifying functions of icons, indexes, and symbols, the designers have successfully translated the abstract red spirit, grand historical events, and noble personal demeanor into a series of spatial and visual experiences characterized by "universality, representativeness, and intuitiveness".