

The transformation of scenery to landscape in Zuber wallpapers from a cross-cultural perspective

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Abstract

As a pioneering type of industrial printmaking, wallpaper is a record of the landscapes of different cities in different countries and is the focus of our inquiry into the development of cityscape art. This paper takes Zuber&Cie wallpaper as an example, firstly, it briefly describes the development of wallpaper from a mere decorative commodity to a redesigned natural landscape painting in the 19th-20th centuries, and compares the process of transformation of land to landscape in Zuber wallpaper, i.e. the transformation process of scenery to landscape, and at the same time, by analysing the selected paintings in The second is an interdisciplinary analysis of the narrative content and narrative techniques used in Zuber's wallpaper painting using art historical research methods such as iconography and formal analysis. Finally, a cross-cultural perspective is adopted to examine the historical and socio-political significance behind the transformation of the landscape from a pastoral rustic to a national park and its cultural transmission and change as a result of international trade.

Keywords

cross-cultural, landscape preference, wallpaper, landscape painting, cultural change

How to cite

Sun, Yuan; Wu, Zixin, "The transformation of scenery to landscape in Zuber wallpapers from a cross-cultural perspective". In Carola Hein (ed.), *International Planning History Society Proceedings*, 19th IPHS Conference, City-Space-Transformation, TU Delft, 5 - 6 July, 2022, TU Delft Open, 2022.

DOI: 10.7480/iphs.2022.1.6526

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of using wallpaper in Europe dates back to the ancient Roman period, initially by covering walls with fabric to keep warm, and then slowly evolving into an essential element of interior decoration. Scenic wallpaper originated in China in the late 17th century, and in the 17th and 18th centuries, as a result of the boom in maritime trade, Chinese wallpaper was exported and enjoyed by the European aristocracy for its fine craftsmanship, bright colour sheen and pleasing ornamentation. These non-repetitive fresco-like scenes were usually produced in groups of twenty to forty, with popular themes including scenes of landscape and people, birds and flowers and scenes of domestic life. The popularity of Chinese wallpaper in Europe reached its peak after the mid-18th century, in keeping with the Rococo style of the time¹. Chinese landscape wallpapers could be considered the inspiration for French landscape wallpapers of the 19th century.

In the second half of the 19th century, many urban buildings that internalized the external landscape, such as streets with arcades, museums, and trade centers with various store corridors and windows inside, became popular in major cities in Europe and America. These urban buildings seek to embrace the original external landscape with internal space, thus highlighting the expressiveness, diversity, and cross-regional nature of the internal space. The widespread spread of this “interior” style of architecture has led to a significant increase in the demand for and quality of wallpaper. In this context, Zuber Panorama wallpaper was born.

THE HISTORY OF ZUBER WALLPAPER

Before the advent of photography, a number of illustrated books produced by Western travelers and artists in the early 19th century helped to stimulate public fascination with foreign places. The Englishmen Thomas and William Daniell published the most extensive visual record of India within a few years, *Oriental Scenes* (London, 1795-1807), in six volumes. Their prints depicted the stunning landscapes and historic buildings of India and introduced viewers to the sites and scenes of the distant land they had dreamed of. French wallpaper makers drew freely from these publications to create panoramic papers.

These painterly wallpapers change the atmosphere of a room, allowing the viewer to be transported to an exotic location or immersed in the exciting history of the period. Produced in full colour and in shades of grey or grey, panoramic wallpapers are generally hung at the eye level of the person in the room. Landscape wallpaper has seen a golden age in Europe and North America since the first decade, and Zuber&Cie is the most popular panoramic wallpaper.

Zuber& Cie wallpapers are part of the French cultural heritage. Founded in 1790 as a paper printing workshop, this French company is now the last manufacturer in the world to produce ‘panoramic’ wallpaper. This ornate, intricate and detailed wall decorations, called “Panorama”, depicting exotic landscapes, decorated the walls of countless 19th century mansions.

The Zuber company printed 25 panoramas between 1802 and 1860, with talented artists such as Pierre Mongin creating realistic, detailed and beautifully coloured wallpapers that are as fascinating today as they were when they were first created. The amount of work and time involved in each panoramic wallpaper is astounding: in 1804, it took Zuber a whole year to produce Zuber's first panoramic wallpaper, Swiss Scenery, using 1,024 blocks of wood and 150 colours. From the time the first wallpaper design was created, the exotic pleasures of a land far from the hustle and bustle of the world were the chosen subject of Zuber's wall accessories. Zuber went on to create the popular and exotic 'Brazilian Landscape', the historic 'North American Landscape', the exciting 'War of Independence' 'Horse Racing' and the classic 'Golden Country'. To this day, Zuber has over 130,000 design files saved and they still hand make papers using their collection of over 150,000 pear wood blocks which are used to create fine textures. Organising and using the blocks is a lengthy process and the number used depends on the complexity of the pattern and the number of colours in each sheet of paper. It could take up to a year to produce a complete set. The woodcuts, carved between 1797 and 1870, were stored in the 15th century vaulted cellars below the factory and are now listed as an important part of the Historic Monuments - France's national cultural heritage.

There is no repetition in panoramic wallpaper, which is one of its characteristics. beautifully detailed, colourful and romantic, Zuber wallpapers are as magical today as they were when they were first created over 200 years ago. They have stood the test of time as symbols of beauty and fine design. Today, however, the art is in danger of becoming extinct. The fragile plates cannot be restored or renewed, as the last French panoramic wallpaper engraver died in the 1970s.

BACKGROUND TO THE FORMATION OF ZUBER WALLPAPER

2.1 THE TRANSFORMATION OF LANDSCAPE TO SCENERY IN ZUBER WALLPAPER

Around 1840, Zuber began producing a large number of panoramic landscape wallpapers featuring lush, uninhabited forests depicting a variety of flora and fauna. zuber's striking gradient-coloured skies were particularly suited to their nature-themed papers. And the large plant scenes reflect the new 19th century fashion for greenhouses, conservatories and exotic plants. A number of illustrated books produced by Western travellers and artists in the early 19th century helped to inspire a public fascination with foreign places. The Englishmen Thomas and William Daniell published the most extensive visual record of India within a few years, *Oriental Scenes* (London, 1795-1807), in six volumes. Their prints depicted the stunning landscapes and historic buildings of India and introduced viewers to the sites and scenes of the distant land they had dreamed of. The designer Pierre-Antoine Mongin (1761-1827) drew inspiration from the first two volumes of Thomas and William Daniell's *Oriental Landscapes* to produce the 20 prints in *L'Hindoustan* (1807). The designer Pierre Antoine Mongin (1761-1827) drew inspiration from the first two volumes of Thomas and William Daniell's *Oriental Scenes* to produce the 20 works in *L'Hindoustan* (1807). Several other works were inspired by William Hodge's *Selected Indian Scenes* (London, 1786-1788). in the Zuber panoramic wallpaper, exotic scenes from several countries of the world, including the United States, Japan,

Brazil, China and India, are shown in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Landscapes were already artefacts before they entered art and became works of art. Exotic landscapes were shaped and interpreted as soon as they were perceived as 'landscapes'². Zuber and other landscape wallpaper makers produced mainly figurative landscapes illustrating travels, stories and battle scenes. Through the combined efforts of talented artists such as the French artist Pierre Mogin (who created seven designs), a selection of 'lands' from different countries is selected, somewhat edited and modified according to the usual notion of a beautiful scene, retaining the most characteristic cultural connotations, organising and reducing them to a degree. This allows the viewer of the wallpaper to understand its breadth and depth in a single frame or in a brief examination. The panoramic wallpaper *North American Scenes*, for example, shows scenes from the 1830s in the United States, including New York and Boston Harbours, West Point, the Natural Bridge in the Shenandoah Valley and Niagara Falls.

As the expansion and westward movement that began in the United States in the early 19th century had an impact in the 1920s, the average American became more interested in the sights and sounds of his country than in the worship of European culture. Portraiture, which had a strong European artistic tradition, began to decline and paintings of everyday Americans and native American landscapes became popular. The most popular paintings in the painting market and in art exhibitions were landscapes that were closer to the vibrant American ethos of the time. The landscape painters were concerned with the natural landscape of contemporary America - the American wilderness. Starting with the Hudson River valley on the East Coast, these landscape painters followed the expansion of American territory, extending their brushes across the vast western territories to the Pacific coast, as well as to South America, which Americans coveted and which greatly inspired the American national sensibility.

The Hudson River School was founded by Thomas Cole, who began painting contemporary natural landscapes in the Hudson River Valley in the 1820s. Early Hudson River painters such as Cole and Asher Durand confined their landscape subjects to the northeastern United States, particularly the natural beauty of the Hudson River Valley. For this reason, this school of landscape painting is known as the Hudson River School. However, as landscape painting became more popular, the painters gradually focused on subjects beyond the Hudson River Valley. Painters after Cole and Durand, such as Frederic E. Church, John F. Kensett, (Albert Bierstadt) and Thomas Moran, began to depict landscapes of the American West, the northern frontier, and even South America. At the height of the American migration to the West, both Bierstadt and Moran followed several expeditions or migrating groups of people deep into the West, recording the magnificent landscapes of the American West with their brushes, and their Western landscapes were extremely popular with the Americans of the time³.

Landscape, whether as an accessory or as a subject, is a medium of land, land that has been aesthetically processed. The landscape is a medium of exchange between man and nature, between self and other. By analogy, it is like money: it has no value in itself, but it represents a potentially infinite reserve of value. The exotic landscape is a culturally mediated view of nature. It is both a space to be represented and a space to be represented, a frame and a frame to be contained, and the exotic landscape in Zuber's wallpapers, as a land reorganised or or-

ganised by the artistic eye, allows the viewer's absorption of the real or painted landscape to be at the same time entertaining, aesthetic, and spiritual.

The North American Landscape and the War of Independence in Zuber's wallpaper are therefore a selection of classic American Wild West landscapes. Digging deeper into the cultural changes behind them we find a process in which the United States was essentially an agricultural country from its independence until the first half of the 19th century. The new territories acquired by the United States from 1803 onwards were vast and resource-rich, attracting more and more Americans to the West. The expansion and westward movement brought rich material rewards to the United States, and as the western agricultural states expanded in area and grew in population, these new farms and plantations gradually became the main growth area of the American economy. Economic strength contributed to the gradual dominance of the agricultural forces of the West and South in the contest with the industrial and commercial forces of the Northeast. In the midst of this economic growth, the American frontier was stimulated, and the wild west stimulated a reorientation of the relationship between man and nature. "Transcendentalists believed that nature was not an inanimate mechanical being, but a living being that embodied the spirit of God. Nature could nourish the human spirit, and one should be one with nature in order to become a perfect human being⁴.

The "transcendentalist" mindset occurred almost simultaneously with the American spirit of frontier exploration, both of which were centered on the American land or phantom night nature. If the spirit of the frontier greatly stimulated the American idea of the nation-state, the "transcendentalist" thinking that prevailed at this time taught Americans to contemplate and appreciate the immensity and beauty of the native wilderness. By the mid-nineteenth century, the wilderness had changed in the American mind from an unpleasant object to be conquered to a symbol of America, large and magnificent enough to rival the long history of Europe. As Americans turned their eyes to the wilderness of the West and the nature around them, and as expansion, pioneering and contemplation of the land and nature became themes of American spiritual life, the resulting sense of identity also became a divide between American and European cultural perceptions.

On this basis, in the mid-nineteenth century, a cultural identity based on the 'spirit of the wilderness' was formed in the United States, driven by the 'transcendentalist' ideas of the East Coast intellectual elite. However, this cultural concept did not go beyond the Western notion of Romanticism, and therefore, although it was widely accepted within the United States, it was not influential in the European world. Moreover, this ideal, which was rooted in an agrarian society, could hardly withstand the tide of industrialisation. As a result, by the second half of the nineteenth century, this cultural consciousness was quickly lost to the sweeping tide of industrialisation.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the European concept of modernism was introduced to the United States. From this period onwards, the modernist concept began its tortuous journey in the United States. The 1920s and 1930s also saw the emergence of a massive cultural revolt in the United States, with Americans seemingly wandering back to the late 19th century overnight. Eventually, the American middle-class elite made the idea of modernism the domi-

nant ideology in the United States. And America developed its own elite culture.

2.2 DIFFERENCES IN LANDSCAPE PREFERENCES BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

In the early 1970s, R. Kaplan and S. Kaplan proposed a framework of environmental perceptions that linked the evolution of human cognitive abilities to landscape preferences. Landscape preference is an assessment process to determine the extent to which the public prefers a landscape. Landscape preference emphasises the emotional and cognitive experience of the landscape for people, adding to the ecological attributes of the landscape. The Kaplans' theory of landscape preference identifies consistency, complexity, legibility and mystery as the four information elements that establish environmental and landscape preferences.

Landscape images are the medium and vehicle for determining the public's landscape preferences, and landscape photography truly reflects the ecological information of the landscape environment, providing a strong scientific basis for the assessment process. Unlike landscape photography, landscape paintings reproduce the observer's perceptual perception of the landscape environment, focusing on the observer's aesthetic emotions and providing an effective way to explore the observer's aesthetic perception of the landscape. Therefore, the analysis of the visual and psychological aspects of landscape paintings is a well-documented and feasible method to study the landscape preferences of observers⁵.

ZUBER WALLPAPER PICTORIAL STUDY

3.1 NARRATIVE CONTENT

Studied, the subjects of zuber panoramic wallpapers can be divided into several main types: history, war, landscape, religion, etc.

3.1.1 HISTORICAL, WAR THEMES

The largest number of panoramic wallpapers surviving today are on the subject of history and war, and are also the subjects that use the most modern technological and artistic means, and the related paintings have left many masterpieces in the world's art history. For example, Britain was more than happy with naval battles, and in the 18th century the British painter Barker painted "The Battle of Abu Ghir Bay", which was widely acclaimed; the French painter Pierre Prévot created "The Retreat of the British Army from Toulon in 1793" in 1800, etc.; the French painter Langlois also painted "The Battle of Moscow" and "The Great Fire of Moscow" in the same - period. Under the influence of these panoramic paintings, the creation of zuber panoramic wallpaper also has more historical war themes, the eternal nature of this subject itself also determines that it is more suitable for the creation of panoramic wallpaper to express, such as the emergence of the American War of Independence, the Spanish colonial period, etc. To a certain extent, it also records the habits of the people at that time and the historical and cultural landscape of different regions.



Fig. 1. The North American Landscape)

Designed by Jean Julien Deltil (1791-1863), Zuber presented North American Scenes (fig. 1) in 1834. The entire panoramic wallpaper uses 1,690 print blocks and 223 colours, totalling 49 feet. It is a French depiction of the New World in the 1830s, with several idealised scenes. It begins with New York Bay as seen from New Jersey; a grand stagecoach passes by leisurely strollers. In the next scene, cadets from the United States Military Academy form a procession along the Hudson River at West Point, with the Catskill Mountains in the background. The Catskill Mountains are in the background. This is followed by a spectacular view of Boston Harbor. Next, the Natural Bridge in Virginia forms the backdrop for a mixture of Native Americans, free African Americans and white people of European descent. Julien's depiction of a free mixture of European and African Americans, with Native Americans performing in front of both groups, certainly reflects the inaccurate times of pre-industrial life in America. In 1834, however, this harmonious interpretation offered a romantic panorama fit to hang in a home and in line with many European views of North America as a remarkable social experiment set in a magnificent landscape. Finally, the landscape culminates with a sublime natural wonder, Niagara Falls, the ultimate tourist destination in North America.

The Falls is the ultimate tourist destination in North America. At the time, steam-powered boats were a technological marvel. A technological marvel at the time, steam-powered boats pushed past the Falls. Views of North America were particularly popular with Europeans, who were fascinated by the emerging democracy and its intriguing landscapes and vistas. These scenic wallpapers later appealed to American audiences who saw them as nostalgic portraits of pre-industrial American life. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was posted in homes and hotels.

During the tenure of US President John F. Kennedy, First Lady Jacqueline followed the advice of historian Henry Francis du Pont to use the antique panoramic wallpaper North American Scenes in the decoration of the White House diplomatic reception room.

3.1.2 LANDSCAPE SUBJECT MATTER

Panoramic wallpapers first began by depicting landscapes and showing the face of cities. For example, the British painter Barker's 'Edinburgh Landscape' and 'London Landscape' both focus on depicting the landscape of a city. From the 200-year history of landscape wallpaper depiction in Europe and Australia, a large number of historical cities were depicted, presented and supplied for viewing, such as Rome, Pompeii, Florence, Jerusalem, Athens, Cairo and others⁵. The first Zuber panoramic wallpaper was the Swiss Landscape painted by talented artists such as Pierre Mongin in 1809 (see fig. 2). The painting, which depicts a romantic scene in the Swiss Alps in a delicate, realistic tone, was originally intended to promote the region's scenery with a view

to boosting tourism there. As a result, many people saw it and decided that it was a great way to see the scenery and save them the trouble of travelling, which led to a boom in panoramic frescoes. It was this trend that provided the conditions for the rapid development of panoramic frescoes in Europe at the time, and as a result, a large number of painters devoted themselves to the creation of panoramic realistic works of famous cities and places.

A Distant Place (fig. 3), first produced by Zuber in 1825, at a time when landscape gardens were becoming increasingly popular. Such gardens originated in England in the 18th century and evoked a romantic view of untamed nature. This novel garden style soon spread to the European continent, replacing the formal symmetrical garden of the English style. This landscape wallpaper depicts a vibrant garden with classical architectural elements throughout. Offering the illusion of being surrounded by a beautiful garden in one's own home, *Les Lointains* is intended to provide a calming, tranquil effect. Each detail requires an individual woodblock, and eleven colours were used to create 'A Faraway Place'. This version also includes a yellow dye. A Distant Place also offers a shade of green and an off-white colour with coloured flowers sprinkled across the foreground.

Panoramic wallpapers of landscape subjects subtly blend a mountain, a rock and a vast expanse into a single image, so that the character and mood of the mountains, rivers, towns and villages can be appreciated far better than if you were only inside the landscape⁷.

3.1.3 RELIGIOUS, MYTHOLOGICAL AND OTHER THEMES

Early works of art were closely related to religion, both in the East and in Western Europe, and they made an indelible contribution to the externalisation of religious teachings and the interpretation of images. In the West, Greek mythology occupies an important place in the history of Western art⁸.

3.2 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

3.2.1 THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE OF ROTARY CONTINUITY

In general, circular panoramic frescoes are composed in a cyclical narrative, which allows the viewer to see the whole scene from one place. In a circular narrative, the viewer only needs to stand in a central position to follow the author's narrative and appreciate the work in its entirety⁹. In addition, in such a viewing environment, the viewer's object of reference is usually erased and the visual context is recreated in a holistic manner, allowing the viewer to 'be there' in an enclosed space that is connected at the beginning and the end. According to the analysis, we can see certain features of the revolving continuous narrative technique, in which the landscape is depicted with street scenes, rooftops, urban areas, or houses of various colours connected one to the other in the near distance, presenting the urban landscape one by one. This circular layout forces the viewer's eye to rotate 360 degrees, thus immersing him or herself in the visual atmosphere created by the image. For example, in *Swiss Scenery*, the entire mountain range and lake are laid out in a circular pattern, allowing the viewer to take in the entire landscape¹⁰.



Fig. 2. Swiss Landscape



Fig. 3. A Distant Place

3.2.2 LINEAR PROGRESSION OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Panoramic frescoes are, after all, a kind of temporal and spatial reproduction, a visually oriented and comprehensive art, so the linear progression of narrative remains an important form of plotting. In film, television and literature, we can often find flashbacks and interludes that make the plot more convoluted and evocative. In the case of paintings, however, this has its limitations. In the case of panoramic frescoes, the narrative is mostly developed in a linear progression, due to the particular way in which they are viewed and the characteristics of the painting. For example, in *Eldorado*, a South American city is depicted, with various buildings appearing in the picture in a linear progression; in *The War of Independence*, the events of the war are depicted in a progressive manner, following the real logic of the events. All of this stems from the fact that the aesthetic intent of panoramic murals is to achieve a sense of immediacy, and if they do not logically correspond to the reality of events, they are prone to confusion and are difficult to reconcile with the aesthetic habits of the public¹¹.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From its beginnings as a marginal field of study in architecture, landscape has evolved into a discipline that encompasses multiple attributes and is both a science and an art. Taking Zuber & Cie wallpapers as an example, this paper first briefly describes the development of wallpapers from a mere decorative commodity to a redesigned natural landscape in the 19th and 20th centuries, and compares the transformation of land into landscape in Zuber's wallpapers, i.e. the transformation of landscape into scenery. The second is an interdisciplinary perspective that uses iconography to explore the differences in landscape preferences between the East and the West. The second interdisciplinary perspective uses art historical research methods such as iconography and formal analysis to analyse the narrative content and narrative techniques used in Zuber's wallpaper paintings. As the shape of artistic styles is influenced by many factors such as social, historical, political, cultural and technological factors, the landscape is studied from a broader perspective. The iconographic study of landscape treats

landscape as a product of art and culture in visual form, with landscape generally presented as a visual image. This paper takes iconographic studies as a perspective on the research topic, seeking to sort out the development of Western landscape in different historical stages since the Renaissance from a more holistic and deeper perspective. Finally, it adopts a cross-cultural perspective to examine the historical and socio-political significance behind the transformation of landscapes from rustic pastoralism to national parks and their cultural transmission and change as a result of international trade. The paper seeks to find new ways to enhance the impact of landscape, to expand the perspective of landscape studies, to look beyond the superficial formalism of wallpaper to the underlying causes of its composition, and to positively influence the future development of landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to everyone who helped me.

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