

A Critical Interpretation of Kongjian Yu's Big Feet Aesthetics

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1. Introduction

The expression "big feet" and "small feet" originates from an ancient Chinese custom called foot binding. Foot binding is wrapping women's feet tightly with cloth to make them deformed and smaller. In the ancient Chinese concept of aesthetics, female beauty is often associated with petiteness and weakness. In the name of gentility and beauty, "small feet" were made to symbolize the nobility and beauty of women. In contrast, the feet of rural women who have not had their feet wrapped are big feet. Pathological aesthetics transformed the health and productivity given by nature into vulgarity and ugliness.

In the late 1970s, as China's urbanization grew, the problem of inadequate public space and infrastructure in cities emerged. At the same time, on the economic front, in order to attract global investment, Chinese cities were in dire need of renovation and beautification (Yu and Ji, 2000), so landscape became the medium for improving the image of the city. The City Cosmetic Campaign was then started in China. It is undeniable that the City Cosmetic Campaign has improved the poor condition of urban infrastructure and enhanced China's image to a certain extent. However, it ignored the practicality of the landscape, focusing on visual effects and the pursuit of decorative and monumental landscapes, resulting in the landscape in China becoming rigid, formal, and oversized. Such landscapes not only destroy the urban structure, but also cost a lot of construction funds and land resources (Yu and Ji, 2001). In the name of cosmetics, natural resources have suffered threats, and the native land has lost its productivity, self-regulation and capacity. Based on this background, Kongjian Yu recognized the necessity of a new way of thinking about landscape concepts and aesthetics, and thus he proposed a new aesthetic concept—"Big Feet Aesthetics".

This paper first introduces the background and content of "Big Feet Aesthetics" and its strategies in landscape design. Then the profound meaning of "Big Feet Aesthetics" is interpreted critically. Finally, there is a discussion of the necessity of the emergence of "Big Feet Aesthetics", the expandability and limitations of its application.

2. Big Feet Aesthetics

In Kongjian Yu's opinion, big feet are a symbol of health, productivity, and vitality. The Chinese landscape after the City Cosmetic Campaign is overly reliant on industrial technology and gray infrastructure, which Yu refers to as "Small Feet Aesthetics". "Small Feet Aesthetics" is the shallow aesthetics that emphasizes the delicate and elegant appearance, while "Big Feet Aesthetics" advocates the practical beauty of the landscape, i.e., the originality of the landscape. In the process of landscape construction, designers minimize human intervention and transformation, reduce unnecessary decorative design, and utilize the original practicality and beauty of nature. Therefore, the landscape under "Big Feet Aesthetics" is healthy, low-carbon and productive (Yu, 2012).

The "Big Feet Aesthetics" is also reflected in the landscape design concepts of Kongjian Yu and his design team. In 1998, Kongjian Yu founded "Turenscape", which consists of the words "earth" and "man", representing the two core elements of landscape design. This landscape design concept emphasizes the harmonious relationship between heaven, land, human beings and deity, and is known as the "Turenscape Concept" (Liu, 2014). In this concept, "earth" symbolizes nature and ecology. As an ecosystem, the native landscape has a strong self-regulating and restoring ability to maintain the ecological balance of the site. The design should trust this natural power and avoid excessive intervention or alteration. "Man" emphasizes the respect and protection of the native ecological communities, as well as the cherishing and inheritance of the urban history and culture. This means that in the design process, it is important not only to minimize human intervention, but also to emphasize the ecological characteristics and humanistic features of the site.

In the actual design process, "Big Feet Aesthetics" emphasizes harmony with water, aiming to restore the natural resilience of the riverbanks and provide nature-based solutions for the urban area. This design encourages the city to move from high carbon to low carbon or even negative carbon development, creating a vibrant urban agricultural landscape. It also emphasizes the regeneration and reuse of sites and materials, aiming to preserve the city's historical memory and reduce carbon emissions. By combining the concepts of "land" and "human", it is possible to design

low-cost, healthy and sustainable low-carbon landscapes. This design not only embodies the core value of "Big Feet Aesthetics", but also demonstrates the harmonious coexistence of human and nature and the new direction of sustainable development.

3. Critical Interpretation

3.1 The Meaning of Big Feet

The reason why Kongjian Yu chose the word "big feet" is inseparable from the context of the Chinese era and his childhood experience in the countryside. As an agricultural country for thousands of years, agriculture is important in China's social, economic and cultural fields. It provides the foundation for economic development, cultural heritage, natural resources and environmental protection, and is the cornerstone of China's urbanization. With this background, Kongjian Yu, who lived in the countryside in his childhood, learned that he must design and manage his fields rationally, follow the cyclical rhythms of nature, avoid waste, and know how to adapt in order to survive (Yu, 2020). Although rural fields are disappearing in the process of urbanization, the rural life of his childhood has become one of the fondest memories in the hearts of Yu's contemporaries as well as a guide for his future life. Therefore, "big feet" seems to be able to evoke nostalgia and the desire for beauty in Yu's generation. Kongjian Yu's landscape concept artfully combines local culture to convey the idea that "Big feet are beautiful" in an easy-to-understand way.

3.2 Big Feet as a New Aesthetics

Kongjian Yu encourages people to discover the deep formal beauty that emerges from the landscape. In this era of resource scarcity and ecological damage and threat, landscapes need to adapt to a new aesthetic based on an appreciation of the beauty of productive things. Rather than pursuing the formal beauty of landscape patterns, "Big Feet Aesthetics" is an aesthetic based on environmental ethics and ecological awareness. With the wisdom of China's traditional agricultural civilization, Kongjian Yu challenges the traditional view of aesthetics, evokes people's desire for the practical beauty of the landscape, and makes China's beautiful mountains and rivers visible again.

"Big Feet Aesthetics" also embodies Kongjian Yu's design thinking, which recognizes the existence of universal connections between things. Therefore, it can be said that he adopts a holistic view of understanding the relationship between humans and ecology (McDaniel et al., 2021), and tries to construct a community of humans and ecology. In the current context of the Anthropocene and the climate crisis and other ecological problems, as Latourer's Actor Network Theory states, humans and non-humans are both actors and translators. Humans are not the subjects of the city, nor are they naturally the objects of the city.

4. Discussion

The inherent meaning of "Big Feet Aesthetics" seems to extend to new fields of landscapes as well. "Big Feet Aesthetics" emphasizes agricultural production as an expression of beauty, which can be extended to modern production areas. A notable example is the process of producing new types of energy. Today new energy sources are not only production acts to satisfy people's demand for energy, but the process of their design and application can be seen as an art form in itself. For example, the process of producing wind energy in the natural environment of a wind turbine is an aesthetic experience in itself. Expanding the concept of "production" in "Big Feet Aesthetics" to the production of new types of energy may help to increase the sustainability and acceptance of the landscape. In addition, the application of these new energy facilities represents the positive response of mankind to the poor natural environment, which coincides with the "Big Feet Aesthetics" that promotes healthy, low-carbon and productive landscapes.

Kongjian Yu and his design team have faithfully demonstrated the strategy of "Big Feet Aesthetics" in the project, from the conceptualization of the design to the application of details, all of which reflect the design philosophy of the human-ecological community. However, there is still a lack of validation in the evaluation of the effects of the project after completion. Further research, analysis and evaluation are needed to determine whether the landscape constructed under the concept of "Big Feet Aesthetics" really fulfills the functions of preserving the ecology of the original site, meeting human needs and providing a sense of aesthetics.

Moreover, it is generally believed that Chinese traditional gardens are completely contrary to "Big Feet Aesthetics", even "Big Feet Aesthetics" criticized the traditional Chinese gardens from the very beginning. However, traditional Chinese gardens are the carriers of thousands of years of traditional Chinese culture and techniques, and it is obviously impossible for them to die out. As a result, this confusion makes it difficult for landscape practitioners to follow a reliable design paradigm. Perhaps there will be a new way to break the dichotomy and bring "Big Feet" to more

places in the future, while preserving and passing on the treasures of traditional Chinese gardens.

Kongjian Yu's "Big Feet Aesthetics" provides a unique new aesthetic that reflects the inclusiveness of nature and the diversity of landscape aesthetic trends. It reflects a new type of relationship between humans and nature, placing humans in the context of nature and emphasizing the aesthetic relationship of equality, symbiosis and harmony. This aesthetic idea not only emphasizes the visual beauty, but also includes the ecological dimension. Big Feet Aesthetics' critical view of traditional Chinese gardens helps people rethink the balance between traditional Chinese gardens and new-age "Big Feet Aesthetics" in the context of the Anthropocene.

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