

Reexamining the Cultural Significance of Aranya City Space- A Critical Analysis Based on Bourdieu's Capital Theory

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Abstract. The spatial and cultural significance of a city can be re-created and re-constructed in the current context of commercialization. The so-called spiritual and cultural values, when examined critically, may even be the result of the commodification of capital. In this paper, we focus on Aranya, a newly developed tourism and art city in China, and adopt Bourdieu's theory of capital as the basis for our critique. Firstly, the background of Aranya's construction - the developer's branding of the architectural space - is described. It then takes the developer's pre-construction perspective to analyze how Aranya is constructed as a class-symbolizing commodity in the pre-construction period. The remaining two subjects, the owners and the tourists, continue to use the symbolic meaning of capital implicitly after the formation of the Aranya community, which reconsolidates and constructs the cultural meaning of capital behind Aranya. Ultimately, the conclusion is reached that Aranya's cultural value is nothing more than essentially the sale and purchase of economic, cultural, and social capital by developers and consumers.

Keywords: Urban space culture; constructive interpretation; Bourdieu; commercialization; symbolic meaning; criticism.

1. Introduction

As an important place for human daily living, the city also carries the collision and blending of different cultures, forming a unique urban cultural space. However, in the formation process of urban space, the influence of capital has become increasingly significant. With the commercialization and commodification of urban space, commerce and capital gradually occupy the cultural significance of urban space. Based on this background, this article focuses on a specific urban space - the Gold Coast community of Aranya, using Bourdieu's capital theory as the analytical framework, re-examining the cultural significance of Aranya from a critical perspective, and further revealing the cultural significance of Aranya. The logic of capital behind urban space and the relationships between class, power, and culture are involved.

2. Geographical Location and Construction Background

Aranya is located in the Beidaihe area of Qinhuangdao, a hinterland of the golden coast which is some distance from the urban area of Qinhuangdao. However, it only takes 3 hours to drive from Beijing. It can be seen from the geographical location, that Aranya is not a traditional urban space. In fact, it is a coastal community carefully built by developers, a cultural and artistic space for people who are struggling in big cities to breathe.

However, before founder Ma Yin took over, Aranya was an unfinished tourism real estate. After Ma Yin took over, he originally wanted to build and sell properties in Aranya according to the fixed model of cultural tourism real estate, but he realized that people nowadays pay more attention to spiritual rather than material needs. As a result, he changed his mind and examined Aranya's development model from the perspective of the lifestyle of the target customer group, providing community residents with cultural activities such as art, music, and drama, and building diverse spaces to stimulate people's exploration and creation. Aranya has been very successful on the transformation path from selling houses to selling values and lifestyles and nowadays, Aranya has become a lifestyle brand.

3. Create Products that Serve as Class Symbols

Ma Yin realized that Beijing is a giant city with a complex population, and the emotions between people are missing. The middle class working hard in Beijing needs a place to enjoy their life after work. Therefore, when building the Aranya community, Ma Yin set his sights on Beijing's middle class.

In 2018, Hurun Research Institute defined China's new middle class as people who have received higher education, have an annual family income of not less than 200,000 and have total family assets of more than 3 million. The "New Middle-Class White Paper" released in 2022 points out that the new middle-class has the characteristics of pursuing cultural enjoyment and growth experience and loving "luxury" experience.

As a result, we combined the universal definition given by scholars and Ma Yin's definition, and combined the three dimensions of economic level, consumption level, and aesthetic needs to give the positioning of Aranya's target customer group: Beijing's new middle-class born in the 1980s who are all professionals in their respective fields, often have families, have clear aesthetic tastes that are in line with contemporary business aesthetics, have the motivation to pursue a high-quality and beautiful life, like to travel, and have strong spending power.

Bourdieu proposed in his capital theory that people's status and opportunities in society depend on the various capitals they possess, and these capitals are not only economic but also include cultural capital, social capital, and other forms. Real estate developers undoubtedly have the strongest capital for property owners and tourists. As owners of the upper middle class, they desire to be closer to the lifestyle and values of the elite class. The developers of Aranya have an insight into the psychology of the owners and thus build the Aranya community into a commodity that consolidates the middle class. Provide them with cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital to meet the needs of the upper middle class for social status improvement and recognition.

3.1. As a Means of Accumulating Cultural Capital

According to Bourdieu's definition of cultural capital, cultural capital includes cultural resources owned by individuals or organizations, such as education, knowledge, cultural background, etc. The cultural significance contained in Aranya's architectural space and the cultural activities it carries is undoubtedly a kind of cultural capital. Developers use it to create an artistic and high-end atmosphere, attracting the middle class with certain purchasing power and cultural literacy, further helping them accumulate cultural capital.

3.1.1 The cultural value of the building itself

Different classes have different amounts of capital. The upper class has a large amount of capital, so they do not worry about daily living and food (Chen Xu, 2013). Therefore, their pursuit of taste tends to a "sense of difference" from other classes (Bourdieu, 1987). This "sense of difference" is also very prominent in the art field, what the middle class pursues is an abstract and artistic taste that cannot be easily understood by the public, a taste that requires the accumulation of cultural capital to interpret. aesthetics. What Aranya's architectural concept embodies is in line with the "sense of difference" pursued by the middle class, which is a kind of self-restraint and simplicity that combines asceticism and hedonism.

"Quality simplicity, restrained abundance" is Aranya's architectural idea. Aranya's architectural concept is not just verbal but is implemented in specific life scenes and spaces. Aranya's representative buildings are distributed along the coastline, forming a spiritual main axis on the seaside. From the outside, the styles of the buildings are simple and plain, consistent with "quality simplicity", but the internal space of each building is extremely flexible and full of changes, consistent with "controlled abundance".

Seaside Auditorium

When people mention Aranya, the first thing that comes to their mind may be the seaside auditorium which has already become Aranya's "landmark". The auditorium faces the sea, and the

location itself gives people a quiet atmosphere. The ship-like design is expected to form a natural connection with the sea and the use of white texture paint, light and shadow increases the tranquility and sacredness of the auditorium. Entering the interior of the building, the viewer's line of sight is continuously narrowed by the designer. Through simple but smart space construction, the designer hopes to make viewers calm down and focus on feeling the relationship between themselves and the sea.

Lonely Library

The exterior of the Lonely Library is very simple, like a square but angular reef. Different from the traditional reading space design, the designer cuts the library space into different fields according to different functional requirements. In addition to reading, the Lonely Library also provides people with space for rest, meditation, and viewing, allowing people to experience the joy of reading, socialize with others, feel nature, and explore their inner selves in different scenes. While meeting functional needs, the library responds to the natural environment with modern design. Its own aesthetics will also make people think differently about art, design, and aesthetics, and provide people with cultural significance on a deeper level.

3.1.2 Cultural significance as a venue for cultural activities

Provide space for various cultural activities.

Urban space not only includes static elements such as aesthetically significant buildings and natural landscapes, but also includes elements at various interactive levels such as daily life and recreational activities. Although Aranya is a new community, it already has the ability to host a wealth of cultural activities, such as equestrian festivals, the Aranya Life Festival, film screenings, and more. Most spaces in Aranya are comprehensive spaces where residents can engage in different cultural activities and daily interactions. For example, the original intention of the design of the Lonely Library is to provide a space for daily reading for community residents. However, now it regularly serves as a venue for music, lectures, and exhibitions. At the same time, it also began to assume the function of a community family history museum. The library is responsible for hosting a variety of activities, which not only broadens the boundaries of its architectural functions but also gives residents a sense of ritual in their lives and meets their spiritual and cultural needs.

Cultural activities bring spiritual and cultural value to people

"Life can be more beautiful" is Aranya's core value. There is a sentence in Aranya's WeChat account: "The good life we understand is the criticism of consumerism, the persistence of emotional life, and the pursuit of spiritual life." Aranya has always adhered to this concept to construct the cultural significance of its space and provide a platform for people to support their pursuit of a better life in this era.

Aranya pursues the aesthetics of life, which can be summarized as "artisticizing daily life and making artistic life daily". By resorting to various cultural activities, he conveys the cultural demand for beauty. As an art resort by the sea, theater festivals, literary festivals... culture and art have become Aranya's way of life over the years, permeating in daily life. During the Aranya Theater Festival, every space in Aranya, the auditorium, the seaside football field, and even the swimming pool may be hosting a reading for the play. Aranya hopes to break the boundaries between art and life, subtly integrate culture into all aspects of daily life, and then pursue a higher aesthetics of life aesthetics.

3.2. As a Means of Accumulating Social Capital

3.2.1 The Overview of Social Capital

Social capital refers to the social resources owned by individuals or collectives, which can produce benefits in terms of interpersonal communication, organizational interaction, etc. These benefits are realized based on the existence of interpersonal relationships and social networks. Social capital is divided into three categories: individual social capital, organizational social capital, and public social capital. Personal social capital refers to the interpersonal relationships and social networks held by individuals, such as friends, family, neighbors, etc.

Mr. Fei Xiaotong once highly summarized Chinese society as an "acquaintance society" based on blood and geography (Fei Xiaotong, 2004). As the saying goes, "distant relatives are not as good as close neighbors." Neighborhood is an important part of interpersonal communication in China. It is an important part of building an "acquaintance society" and is also conducive to the accumulation of social capital.

3.2.2 Establish interpersonal relationships in social activities

Aranya advocates "starting from vacation and being loyal to the community", euphemistically calling it the group experience of rebuilding public life. Aranya hopes to build a platform to connect people and establish intimate relationships through community practice. In 2014, as the first batch of owners moved in, a community was established in order to resolve customer complaints. Since its development, Aranya's community culture has evolved from "resolving customer complaints" to "spontaneously establishing relationships" (Architectural Archives, 2019).

Residents of Aranya live in the same public space and are connected through the Internet community. Nowadays, Aranya has more than a hundred communities which includes 9 owner groups as a public discussion platform and hundreds of other interest groups. Neighbors get to know each other in online communities and spontaneously organize offline gatherings of like-minded people. Aranya holds an average of more than a thousand community activities every year, more than half of which are voluntarily organized by residents (Architectural Archives, 2019).

For example, Aranya's annual owner drama. In March 2023, with the curtain call of Aranya's owner's drama "Teahouse" at the National Theater, the owner's drama in 2022 officially came to an end. This community activity started in 2015, and from the initial community theater experiment, it has now been able to successfully create a classic unique to Aranya residents.

Aranya labels social activities as "group experience", "community culture" and "interpersonal connections" and the owners also tacitly participate in such "wonderful" social activities. In fact, everyone knows that the process of participating in community activities is also a process of accumulating social resources. Residents expand their social networks by getting to know other owners of the same class, thereby increasing their social capital and benefiting from these relationships.

Behind the cultural meaning and value of Aranya's beautification is an invisible class interest. And through whitewashing and disguise, the ideal pure and simple cultural concept form is presented. However, starting from the positioning and packaging of consumers, the developers of Aranya have been creating such an abstract and tacit class commodity for peddling and selling - providing cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital for people of the upper level within the middle class. Later, the middle class was successfully persuaded to purchase and use it. The upper level within the middle class uses symbolic value to express their identity through purchasing real estate, while the lower class achieves the image of a higher class through travel consumption.

4. Consumption and Use of Commodities as Class Symbols

4.1. For the Owner:

For homeowners, they recognize the class-symbolic messages that developers hide in which they wish to sell, and they make purchases of Aranya properties as a result. After the purchase, they naturally used and continued to develop Aranya's class properties. In turn, they use Aranya's resources to highlight their own identity symbols, internalizing a sense of superiority and internal identity, which encompasses the owners' social, economic, and cultural capital.

4.1.1 Places of identity symbols

The developer's positioning of Aranya's owners is Beijing's middle class, and "middle class" means not enough compared to the top, but more than the bottom. To the top, he has to follow and imitate; to the bottom, he has to show difference everywhere and release his sense of superiority in a controlled

manner (Wang Jiajun, 2019). Their acquisition of properties in Aranya is to escape from the various pressures brought by the city of Beijing, such as the financial pressure of comparing with the top tycoons; here they aspire to find a sense of superiority, show off their identity, and to follow closely the class above the middle class.

For the Valentino show in Aranya in September 2022, the pink Aranya Auditorium attracted a lot of attention. Compared to the original purpose of Aranya's development, which was to be a "spiritual home," the auditorium, which was "whitewashed" for the Valentino show, seems out of place. It is worth thinking that fashion is a part of art, and whether the owner intended to use the Valentino show to show off his high status and taste.

One of the logics behind the selection of venues for luxury shows around the world is that it can highlight the brand's financial strength and power, and the organizers have also taken advantage of Aranya's popularity as a vacation spot for the affluent middle class to boost the purchasing power of the local clientele. This is also in line with the psychological expectations of the owners of Aranya, Valentino, as a major international fashion brand, will be held in Aranya show site, which indicates that the brand of Aranya is a "financial" recognition, subconsciously is also the recognition of the identity of the owners of Aranya. Based on this, Aranya owners can also get a strong sense of personal pleasure and social identity; just as many of the newly rich class through the purchase of luxury cars and watches to show their personal wealth, counting on this to get the recognition and respect of the social group.

In fact, fashion is a part of culture. Through such fashion activities, owners want to show their status on the one hand and their cultural capital, economic capital and social capital on the other. They are like international brands, highlighting their cultural taste is consistent with the international fashion circle recognized taste, in order to show off their cultural capital, and increase their status and power in society; at the same time, Bourdelle believes that individuals have economic resources, such as wealth, income and so on, are economic capital, the owners through the purchase of international brands of expensive commodities, but also in the show of their economic capital, indicating that By purchasing expensive goods of international brands, the owners are also demonstrating their economic capital, showing that they have the greater economic power to keep up with the more upper-class people; not only that, most of the audience invited to watch the show are also people with higher social status, and the owners can use this to enhance their social capital and obtain more opportunities and resources. These three types of capital influence each other and complement each other, helping owners to obtain better career opportunities, expand their own circle of people, and ultimately earn more profits; and the combination of these three types of capital is a symbol of the owner's status.

In addition to the activities organized to highlight the status of the owners, the attitude of the staff to treat visitors also reflects the status of the owners of the "rich" - in order to save money, many young people who go to Aranya to participate in the festival, choose to live outside the walls, but have to face the Aranya's class treatment - "Do you have a ticket? Do you have a physical ticket?" However, Aranya seems to "take care" of the "poor", and anywhere in the park, visitors may be "greeted" at any time and asked to show their physical tickets. (Wandering on a donkey, 2021)

Ironically, Aranya claims that "we do not advocate a material life, a life of possession, a life of consumption, a life of technology", and that "what we understand by a good life is a critique of consumerism, an adherence to the emotional life, and a search for the spiritual life"; however, the reality is that one must pay a high price to live in the park in order to be "in line" with Aranya's values, and this differentiation is undoubtedly a reflection of the class superiority of the owners. The reality is that you have to pay a high price to live in the park in order to become a person whose values are "in line" with those of Aranya, and this kind of differentiation undoubtedly does not reflect the owner's sense of class superiority as a way of widening the class gap between himself and the tourists.

4.2. For Tourists:

The high aesthetic taste of Aranya's artistic image established by the developer is tantamount to a cohesive and highly representative symbol - i.e., coming here for consumption and tourism means

that one can invisibly manifest one's cultural capital. And in the Internet era where social media permeates life, it is a hidden psychological need to expect social behaviors such as photo-taking and carding to further assist in image building. Demand and supply are seamlessly embedded, and tourists "place orders" for Aranya's goods through cultural tourism consumption.

When you enter Aranya, you will find that there are a lot of tourists with DSLR cameras in the houses, beaches, and libraries, but only a few of them turn the pages of the books, and "loneliness" probably exists only as a marketing tool in the copywriting. The few tourists who actually appreciate and immerse themselves in the cultural significance of the place are, on the one hand, tourists who subjectively wish to use the Aranya simply to convey a picture of class identity, and on the other hand, tourists whose actual cultural functions cannot be easily interpreted and utilized in their capacity to appreciate the Aranya.

4.2.1 Travel-Cultural Consumption for Higher-Class Identity Building

In a sense, Aranya is more like a large-scale open-air filming base, where everyone comes here as an actor, playing imaginary roles and imitating a life that is usually unattainable. Goffman puts the concept of "stage" in real life, and distinguishes the stage of our social interactions into "front stage" and "backstage" areas, the front stage is the area where the actors directly face the audience, and in the front stage the actors will put on masks to present the audience with their own performance. The front stage is the area where the actors directly face the audience, and in the front stage, the actors put on masks to present performances for the audience that meet their expectations. In order to improve the effect of interaction, people will consciously or unconsciously use techniques or tools to give others the image they want, this image management can help people in the interaction to achieve social purposes. The modern architecture, interesting and pioneering activities, etc. are all "props" that help to realize a higher aesthetic taste and identity. Because behind the cultural capital is the implicit matching of the class itself.

By visiting Aranya to consume and display culture, tourists complete the whole process of portraying their own image. In Bourdieu's theoretical interpretation, different consumers choose different objects to consume (invest) according to the total amount of their capital and the proportion of their capital, in order to change their own socio-spatial location, thus realizing the separation from other classes (Zhu Weijue and Yao Yao, 2012). As a tourist with a certain amount of capital accumulation, it is still more than enough to realize leisure tourism and cultural tourism vacations in Aranya. Every kind of consumption here, such as theater festival tickets, library reservations, café branches, etc., is incredibly close to the consumption patterns of the homeowner group, which is one class below them.

Bourdieu identifies the middle class as a sort of "conveyor belt", "the middle class serves as a conveyor belt, dragging into competition and consumption those classes that intend to differentiate themselves from it" (Liu, 2009, p. 85). Consumption serves as an intermediary means at this point to pull travelers' tastes to a higher level of elite attributes. By mimicking the consumption habits of owners with higher cultural capital, leaning into their daily residences, experiencing similar lifestyles, and other such habits, the traveler approaches a higher class in the entire process. Whether it's just an attempt to show off, a hidden expectation of voyeurism, or an attempt to "be" during the journey, Aranya gives them the opportunity to get closer to the upper class and does so in a less blatant and more ambitious package.

4.2.2 Cultural barriers

In addition to the invasion of social media, the cultural connotations of Aranya were reconstructed on another level because the culture that Aranya was trying to build was not fully accepted by the tourists as a group. Aranya's spiritual and cultural scrubbing is to a certain extent a more elitist cultural carnival. "Vinyl music festivals, theater appreciation, trend collision talks, fashion art, auditorium reading, etc., in fact, all require a higher level of education and knowledge, these invisible cultural assets behind the barriers constructed by the class. There is no lack of ordinary working-class people

among Aranya's travelers, although they may all belong to the middle class, the cultural education they receive is inadvertently differentiated.

Bourdieu proposes that cultural capital has three forms of existence, one of which is corporeality, which can also be understood as an individual's ability to decode art. The amount of cultural capital an individual possesses affects his or her ability to appreciate art, and the difference in the individual's embodied cultural capital leads to a difference in the way he or she understands and interprets the work and his or her ability to do so. For those who may not have received so much aesthetic education and related cultural training, the immersive reading of books in a lonely library may not be as real and comfortable as taking photos and enjoying a relaxing trip to the community cafeteria. After all, life is exhausting, and a higher level of cultural appreciation is not out of the question, but less cerebral activities are always prioritized at the back of the line.

The effects of "habits" are profound and difficult to overcome in the heat of the moment through simple consumption. Even if cultural consumption can be easily realized, the "habit" is difficult to reverse. At this point, the contradictory reality is easily highlighted, on the one hand, the tourists from the higher class of culture and aesthetics to express recognition, but in the doorway to enter the cultural field the wandering stopped. Because "entering" this quest implies a higher level of difficulty and unknown challenges. Therefore, everyone would rather take a photo at the door to show that they have been here before and stayed for a short time, so as to construct their own higher cultural and social identities. The barriers to the construction of cultural meaning are not unseen but are taken for granted and "naturalized" in the process.

5. Summary

This paper builds on a critical perspective, based on Bourdieu's theory of capital, to explore the nature of the cultural significance embedded in the artistic enclave Aranya. After briefly introducing the basic information about Aranya, we first explore the process by which the open house developer made Aranya a commodity of class identity symbols and explain how the developer whitewashed them into symbols of spiritual civilization, i.e., by creating aesthetically significant architectural monoliths and assigning unique interpretations of cultural significance, by using them as venues for cultural activities to carry the value of art and culture, and by using them as carriers of the culture of community and manifesting the culture of interpersonal relationship. Subsequently, we argue that owners and tourists unknowingly consume the class symbols sold by developers. We interpreted how owners and tourists accumulate their own capital and manifest their class identities through their consumption and activities in Aranya from their perspectives, respectively. From this, we conclude that Aranya's so-called spiritual and cultural values are essentially peddling economic, cultural, and social capital as symbols of class identity.

The Aranya developers whitewash and package utilitarian capital, glorifying cultural capital as the aesthetic connotation of architecture and the value of spiritual civilization brought about by cultural activities, and social capital as the rebuilding of neighborhoods, the establishment of interpersonal connections, and the creation of a community culture. In fact, what is being sold is a symbol of the consolidation of middle-class status, suggesting that tourists will be able to accumulate cultural and social capital if they spend money in Aranya. Both owners and tourists understand this connotation, either subconsciously feeling the value of the beautiful cultural significance as a symbol of class status, or consciously using consumption in Aranya as a means of accumulating capital.

Thus, the owners come in droves, and Aranya, which is labeled as a spiritually civilized home and a paradise to escape from the city, becomes a place for the owners to display their financial power and expand their connections, and spending money here is precisely the means by which the owners proclaim and consolidate their status as upper middle-class people. The implicit meaning of class status behind the cultural capital has led tourists to come here one after another as a tool to elevate their social status. However, the lack of accumulation of cultural assets has created barriers between them and the culture constructed by Aranya, and so we see tourists not being able to understand the

cultural meanings constructed by the developers, and the place of spiritual exploration being reduced to a Netflix mecca. In this huge commercial activity, the so-called "loneliness", "art", "sentiment", and "spiritual civilization" are wrapped in the surface of the goods. is wrapped in the surface of the commodity, but inside is a symbol of class status. Real estate developers precisely control people's sensitivity and demand for this, and at the same time harvest the upper and lower strata of the middle class.

"We do not advocate a material life, a life of possession, a life of consumption, or a life of technology; it is based on this philosophy that we understand a good life as a critique of consumerism, a holding of emotional life, and a pursuit of spiritual life." Ma Yin, the founder of Aranya, said this when introducing Aranya's spiritual and cultural philosophy. In fact, this precisely reflects that the logic of capital accumulation is shrewdly hidden behind the "sentiment", and developers and consumers understand each other to complete the transaction on the construction of class status.

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