1. Introduction

Due to a recent heightened awareness of tourism industry and environmental preservation issues, the orientation and function of national parks, as well as methods of interpreting them, need to be reviewed. As for interpretive media, visual design concerns many types of visual communication. Therefore, this study focuses on visual design for the interpretation of national parks. The subjects of investigation include parks in: the United States (U.S.), the United Kingdom (U.K.), Japan and Taiwan.

The main purpose of this study is: (1) To clarify the different characters of visual design expression and planning in each of the countries above. (2) To generalize a visual design management model of the four countries and propose future issues of concern. The methodology of this study includes literature reviews, interviews and field investigations in each of the four countries above.

2. Field Investigation

The main media researched in the field investigations were park signage, brochures, visitor centers and so on.

2.1. The United State

The Yosemite National Park (YONP) and Harpers Ferry Historical National park (HFHNP) are recommended by the National Park Service (NPS). The Harpers Ferry Center (HFC) is the main interpretive design center under the NPS, managing all media design in U.S. national parks, with firm direction and development. Figure 1 (a) shows the boundary table for YONP. The identity of U.S. national parks is shown in the logo, graphic design and printed materials. Figure 1 (b) shows new devices developed by HFC for better park interpretation.

2.2. The United Kingdom

The Lake District National Park (LDNP) and Peak District National Park (PDNP) are the main sites recommended by the Association of National Park Authority (ANPA). The visual design management of U.K parks is controlled by each national park’s headquarters. For maintaining these precious natural areas, less artificial facilities are built. The visitor center in PDNP has also made use of the areas cultural heritage [Figure 2(a)]. Local communities in the U.K. national park enjoy a high level of cooperation. Figure 2(b) shows an audio trail as an interpretive method that reduces the need for signage. Figure 2(c) is the new ANPA logo, displaying an integrated identity for national parks.

2.3. Japan

In Japan, Nikko and Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Parks are the main recommended sites. The Ministry for the Environment developed the facilities guidelines for national parks; a good example of park practice is shown in Figure 3(a). However, in this case national parks are managed by different local and outsource design work, means most facilities are represented by different visual designs [Figure 3(b)].

2.4. Taiwan

In Taiwan, the main recommended sites are the Kenting National park (KNP) and Yomingsan National park (YMNP). Taiwan’s national park management is controlled by each park’s headquarters. Due to the lack of unified visual design guidelines from the central government, each park
develops design strategies individually [Figure 4(a) and (b)]. Moreover, as national park management is spread across different organizations, visual design developments are considerably different.

3. Character analysis

Based on the above, the three goals - “agency promotion, visitor inspiration and site preservation” - are used to analyze the different character of the four countries’ parks.

3.1. Agency promotion

In the U.S., for raising public awareness and understanding, unified designs are developed to create a unique brand [Table 1]. In the U.K., emphasis is on the parks’ special qualities, and a compound identity is used to display both local characteristics and the national park brand. In Japan, emphasis is shaping the innate image of the nature park. Taiwan focuses on each park’s individual requirements.

3.2. Visitor inspiration

The basic motives of four countries are similar, the U.S. stresses effective communication, the U.K. attaches importance to refreshing experience of body and mind. Japan focuses on design continuity to strengthen environmental education; whereas in Taiwan emphasis is on a concise, functional style, to reveal the natural environment’s value.

3.3. Site preservation

Besides developing facilities that are integrated with the natural environment, the U.S. also wishes to display ‘America values’. With a long rural history, the U.K. preserves sites of cultural heritage and reduces park signage. Japan embalishes the park landscape to emphasize particular regional identities and prevent environmental degradation. Taiwan emphasizes sustainability in harmoniously reconstructing the natural and cultural environment together.

4. Models of visual design management

Based on the above, models of visual design management of the four countries investigated are generalized.

4.1. U.S. — central management

The model of the U.S. visual design management is shown in Figure 5 (a). Under the powerful management of the NPS and HFC, designers in each national park display a unified approach, giving U.S. national parks a more integrated identity than in the other three cases.

4.2. U.K. — local community management

In Figure 5 (b), the ANPA has minor control, but has created the “British Breathing Space” logo to link the national park system. Although the local community system is the strongest of the three remaining countries, the ANPA tries to integrate this into a compound brand to also reflect the identity each national park.

4.3. Japan — central, local and outsource management

Although the central government draws up the design guidelines for national parks, national parks are managed by different organizations, making the overall visual identity weaker than in the three other countries. As Figure 5(d) shows, there is only a weak relationship connecting centralized administration and the local park authorities.

4.4. Taiwan — local management

As in Figure 5 (c), the model of Taiwan’s national park is similar to the U.K. case. Although each national park headquarters develops their own logos, the identity of national parks as a whole, and relationship to the local community, is weaker than in the U.K.

5. Conclusion

The following three observations can be made based on the above research: (1) Tendency towards establishing an integrated identity for national parks. (2) Tendency towards regional cooperation. (3) Tendency towards developing various new interpretive media.