KHARKIV STATE ACADEMY OF DESIGN AND ARTS

Research on the Renewal Design of Historical and Cultural Blocks Based on Scene Theory (using the example of China)

graduation defense

Name: 季灿 (Ji Can)
English name:Olivia
Full name of the supervisor:Iryna Bondarenko
Student ticket:S24101357024

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The backgronnd

壹·The backgrounnd

Guided by China’s national cultural plan, we have changed our ways to protect old cultural areas. We no longer only keep old buildings unchanged. Instead, we pass down cultural heritage actively. The old model of pulling down many old buildings is given up because it breaks the connection between city culture and people’s life. Now we use small renewal: we make small, slow and lasting changes. Researchers and workers are trying to solve a key problem: how to stop too much business from ruining the real features of old places and get good social, economic and cultural results at the same time. As city people’s consumption habits change, context theory helps develop old neighborhoods. It comes from American scholars. This theory tells planners to focus on cultural stories and feelings in spaces, not only buildings’ looks. Luxu Old Street in Suzhou is a typical Jiangnan water town. It sits at the border of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Long ago, it was a busy trade town with good water transport. But in the 1980s, fast urban development hurt this old street. Old and new buildings mixed together. So we need proper ways to reuse it. We should keep its water-town beauty and let it fit modern life.



The purpose and significance of the research

贰·The purpose and significance of the research

This study intends to explore feasible scenario-based transformation paths applicable to the historical and cultural heritage sites of Luxu Old Street. These heritage resources cover tangible heritage represented by traditional water-town architecture, together with diverse intangible cultural heritage including Luxu folk songs and local folk customs. Meanwhile, it examines how the three dimensions of scenario theory can be implemented and function throughout the whole transformation process of the historic block.

The core objective of this research is to investigate the rational application logic of scenario theory in the conservation and revitalization of ancient Jiangnan water towns. Taking Luxu Old Street as a typical case study, this research attempts to tackle two prominent dilemmas widely seen in the regeneration of Jiangnan water towns. The first dilemma lies in the difficulty of converting abundant local cultural resources into attractive, immersive experiential spaces for visitors. The second is that large-scale tourism development tends to disturb and break the stable daily life of local communities. By analyzing practical problems and summarizing applicable strategies, this research ultimately aims to establish a complete scenario construction system that carries distinctive regional features and maintains strong practical operability for similar historic water towns.

贰·Theoretical development

Proposed by Professor Clark, the scene theory serves as a theoretical framework that explains the formation mechanism of urban lifestyles and cultural attractiveness. It aims to reveal how amenities deliver value signals of authenticity, theatricality and legitimacy through specific combination logic, thereby attracting specific groups of people to gather and form a unique socio-cultural atmosphere. This definition highlights the dual attributes of the scene theory. On the one hand, it provides an objective description of the physical configuration of spatial environments. On the other hand, it constitutes a subjective construction of cultural connotations and social values. Rather than regarding urban space as a static background, the scene theory treats it as an active participant in urban development, whose inherent structural characteristics profoundly shape people's behavioral choices and social relationships.

Based on the basic theoretical framework of scene theory, this study further focuses on its research object: historical and cultural districts. As the physical carrier of urban memory and the spatial unit of cultural inheritance, historical and cultural districts possess distinctive academic definitions and classification characteristics. In general, they refer to areas with abundant cultural relics, concentrated historical buildings, complete traditional layouts and original historical styles, which boast high historical, artistic and scientific research values. More than mere relics of the past, these districts are vibrant living communities that carry residents' daily lives and collective cultural memories.

Example from practice





壹 • Cangqiao Straight Street Historic District in Shaoxing: Authenticity Restoration and Continuity of Daily Life under the Micro-renewal Model

Cangqiao Straight Street Historic Area lies in the Yuezi City historic and cultural protected zone of Shaoxing. It covers 6.4 hectares. It is a typical water-town block with ancient Yue city style. People live, run shops and welcome tourists here. The area has a special layout: one river without side streets. Buildings along the river have covered walkways and docks. They show local people’s dependence on waterways and form a complete old-town look. However, before the renewal work, this block had many problems: old buildings in poor condition, not enough public facilities, dirty environment and new buildings that did not match the old style.

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If we look at the riverside scenery building, the practice of Cangqiao Straight Street pays great attention to “keeping local people’s daily life”. The renewal not only fixes buildings and spaces, but also improves people’s living conditions. For example, workers built better sewage pipes and improved kitchen and bathroom facilities. So local people can still live and work here. This “living protection” keeps the real water-town style and stops the area from becoming empty because local people move away. Visitors can see real water-town life here. This case tells us: when we repair riverside spaces with small renewal, we also need to fix public facilities. Only in this way can we both protect old town scenery and improve people’s living environment.



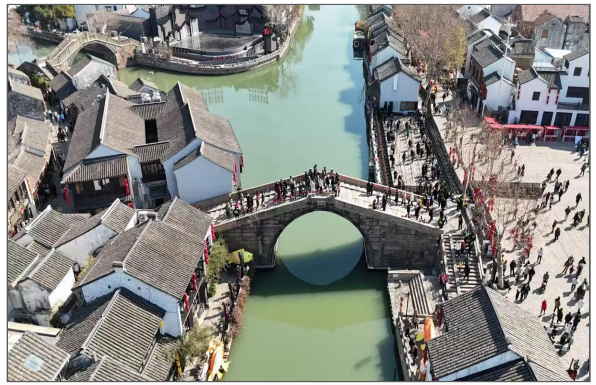
贰·Qingmingqiao Historic and Cultural Block in Wuxi: The "Front Stage – Back Stage" Coexistence Model under Culture and Tourism Integration

Qingmingqiao Historic and Cultural Block in Wuxi is a well-preserved "water alley" block along the Grand Canal. It has special canal views, old buildings and rich local Wu culture. Studies show that canal scenery, cultural exhibition places and water-town atmosphere are the key parts of visitors' experience. However, as more businesses opened here, the block met some problems. Too many shops took over the area, fewer local people stayed, and the river was polluted. These made some visitors less satisfied.

贰·Qingmingqiao Historic and Cultural Block in Wuxi: The "Front Stage – BackStage" Coexistence Model under Culture and Tourism Integration







To solve these problems, Qingmingqiao Block tried the "Front Stage – Back Stage" coexistence way to mix culture and tourism. The rebuilt business streets like Nanchang Street and Nanxiatang Street act as the "front stage". They use cultural shows to attract visitors and add creative shops and restaurants. For riverside scenery, workers focused on cleaning the river and managing the environment. They called on visitors, shop owners and local people to protect the nature together and create a better experience for everyone.







叁·South Bank of the River Thames in London:

Rebuilding Public Space and Bringing Energy through Cultural Scene Building

South Bank is a world-famous example of renewing waterside historic areas. Long ago, this place was home to industrial docks and storehouses. When local industries declined, it slowly turned into one of London’s most important cultural and leisure centers. The key idea of its renewal is to protect old industrial heritage and build modern cultural scenes together. By rebuilding large public spaces, it changed from a working shore for factories to a living shore for people.

叁·South Bank of the River Thames in London : Rebuilding Public Space and Bringing Energy through Cultural Scene Building







South Bank does very well in building cultural scenes. For “authenticity”, it keeps some old dock structures, warehouse walls and industrial remains. These old buildings are turned into art galleries, theatres and creative offices. The old physical forms become the main parts of people’s experience. For “theatricality”, it built famous cultural places such as the Royal Festival Hall, the National Theatre and Tate Modern. It also holds street shows, festivals and open-air markets all year round to create lively public life. For “legitimacy”, it uses a joint management model: the government makes plans, professional organizations run places, and local people take part. This keeps public spaces open and welcoming to everyone.

View the project





Luxu Town is a town in Wujiang District, Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province. It is 24.5 kilometers away from the downtown of Wujiang. It has the Taipu River to its north and Nanzha Port to its south. Across Luxu Pond, it faces Zhejiang Province. To its west is Fenhu Lake, and to its east is Huaizi Port.

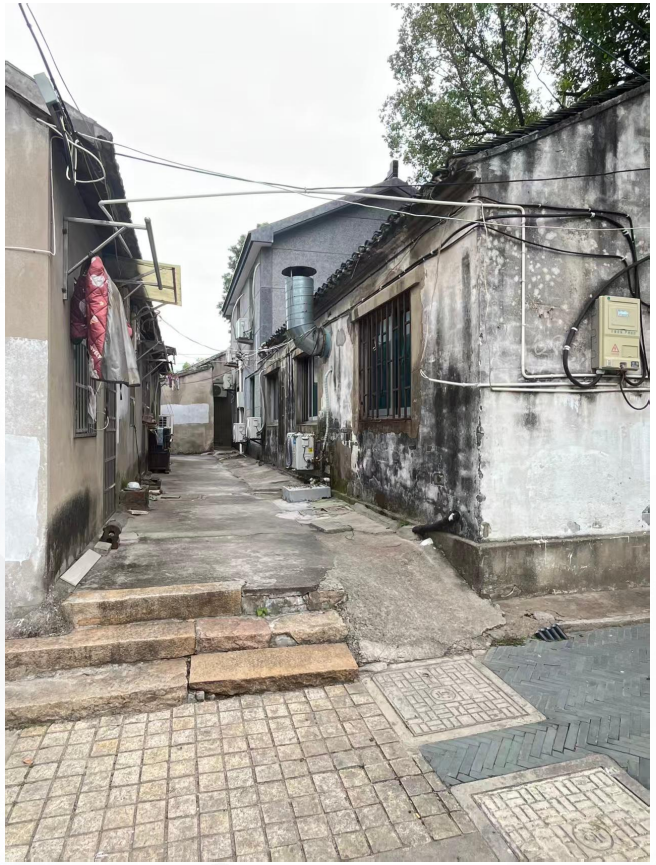
The Luxu Historic and Cultural Block lies on both sides of the city river. It starts from New Bridge in the north and ends at Tanqiao Bridge in the south.



I choose the entrance of the old street and waterside space as my design site.
This area is at the gate of the ancient town's central part. Next to the north-south city river that runs through the town, it works as an important link between outside traffic roads and the small streets inside the ancient town.

The site keeps the special space pattern of Jiangnan water towns. For example, "shops in front and rivers behind", or "shops on the ground floor and homes upstairs". Some old river banks, ancient dock remains and traditional houses are well kept here.







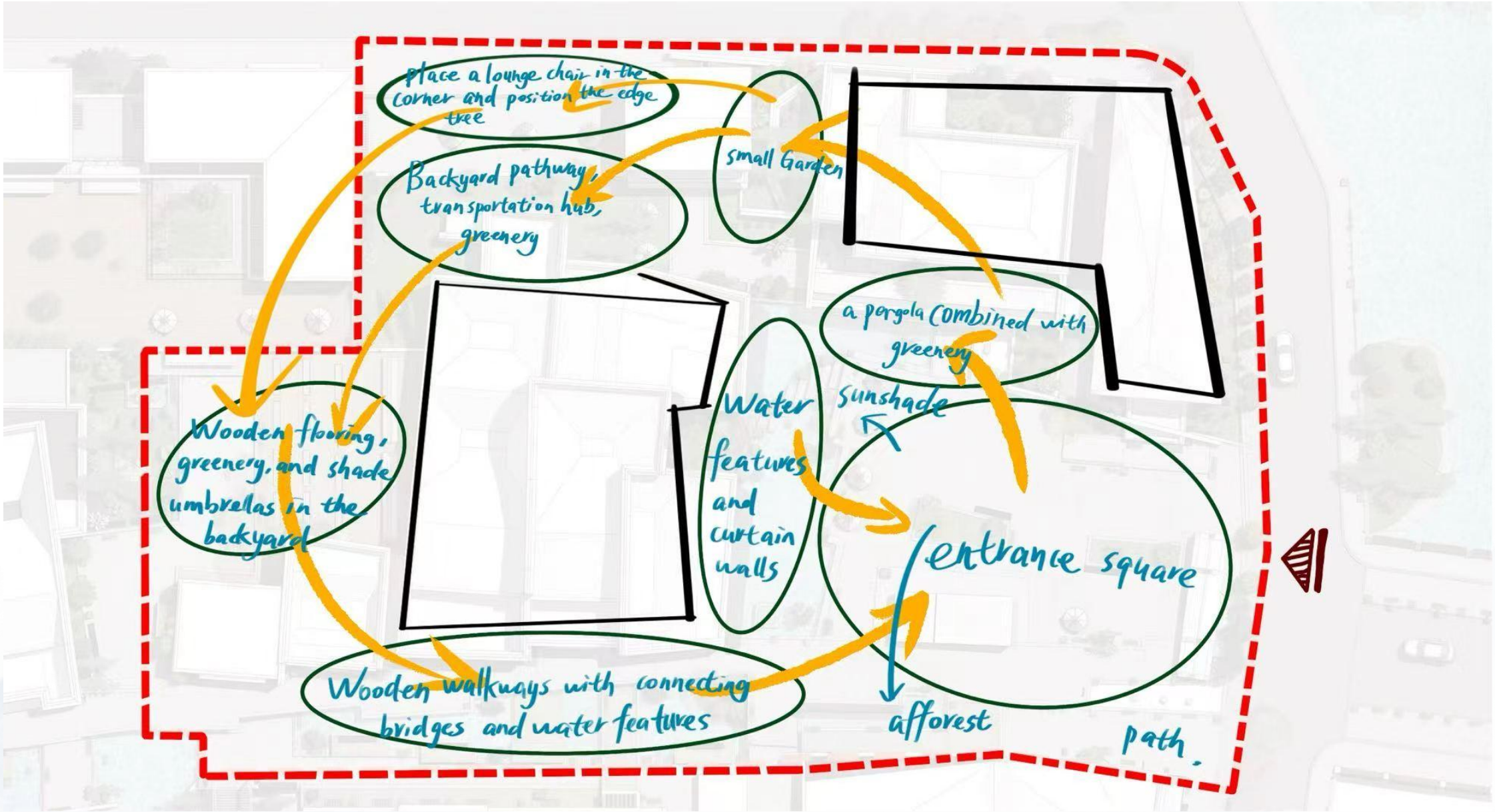
However, this site now faces several problems. The entrance sign system is not complete. The waterside surface has too much hard pavement. There are few supporting facilities along the river. Also, some waterside buildings are losing their special features.

Solutions:

Based on the original space layout of Jiangnan water towns. It has parallel waterways and land paths next to waterside streets. We should first repair the historic look and ecological strength of this site.

We will clean up and fix the damaged river banks and messy buildings. We make sure the historic space and local features of the old street are well protected during all the building work.

We keep the original size of streets and lanes, as well as the direction of water channels. At the same time, we plan different areas for different uses: At the old street entrance, we build a landmark square and guide sign system. It makes the entrance easy to recognize and special. Along the river, we create a continuous waterside walkway. We add stepping steps into the water, viewing platforms and small pavilions. People can enjoy different experiences near the river. We change the outside walls of river-side buildings and redesign their uses. These spaces can be light businesses like tea houses and cultural show rooms. Besides, we set special areas for transport and management. It separates tourist activities from daily site work.



Functional zoning and dynamic line analysis bubble chart (Source: Self-drawn by the author)



Planar schematic diagram (Source: Self-drawn by the author)

Rendered image

This spot is the first waterside scene at the entrance of the historic block. Centered on waterside steps and a water-close platform, it forms the gateway waterside view.



With water scenes, green plants and resting facilities, this public space welcomes visitors and local people to rest. It shows the traditional look of the water town block.

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Figure 3 Rendering of central pavilion leisure node (Source: Artist's own drawing)



Located in the centre of historic block, this leisure node takes traditional pavilion as the core. Combined with waterside courtyard layout, it provides a tranquil resting space and inherits the historic architectural context.

Figure 4 Rendering of waterscape landscape bridge node (Source: Artist's own drawing)



As a key crossing in the historic block, the landscape bridge spans the water courtyard. It connects different functional areas and becomes the visual centre of central waterscape

Figure 5 Rendering of waterscape landscape bridge node (Source: Artist's own drawing)



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Figure 6 Rendering of waterscape landscape bridge node (Source: Artist's own drawing)



This view shows the landscape under the bridge. Layered terraced steps and waterside planting create unique under- bridge waterfront space and enrich the block's multi- level landscape

Figure 7 Rendering of terraced waterfront node (Source: Artist's own drawing)



With multi- level terraces, this waterfront node leads visitors towards water. Combined with planting beds, it forms a layered waterside walkway and enriches the waterfront space of historic block.

Figure 8 Rendering of main pedestrian street (Source: Artist's own drawing)



As the main pedestrian axis of historic block, this street links each waterfront node. It forms a continuous slow- walking route and presents successive waterscape views for visitors









These renderings show the entrance, new buildings, public facilities and recreation centre of the historic block.New buildings match the old- style houses. They provide public space for visitors and local people.

Ask the teacher to
criticize
and correct