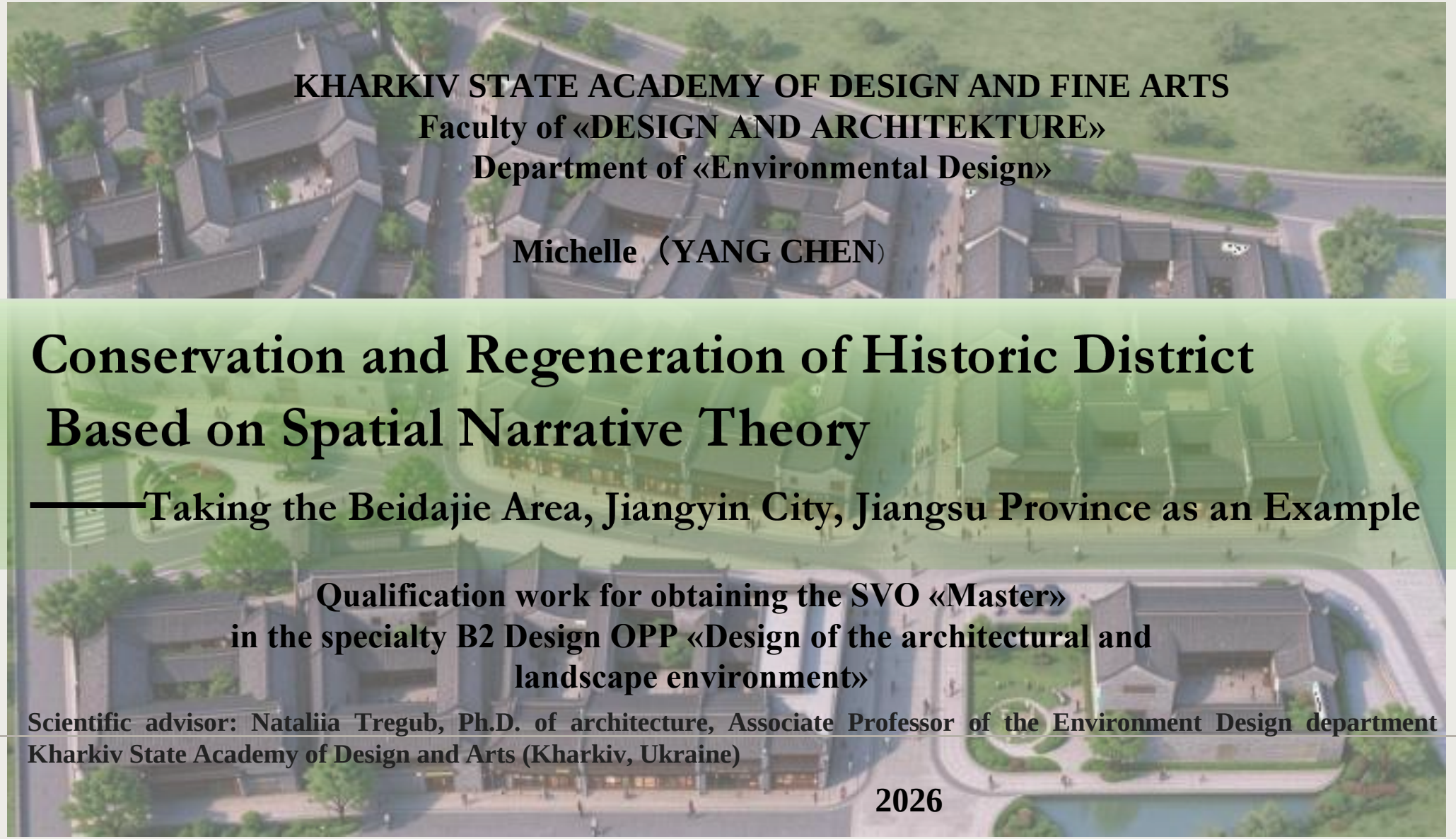

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Conservation and Regeneration of Historic District Based on Spatial Narrative Theory

——Taking the Beidajie Area, Jiangyin City, Jiangsu Province as an Example

Qualification work for obtaining the SVO «Master»
in the specialty B2 Design OPP «Design of the architectural and landscape environment»

Scientific advisor: Nataliia Tregub, Ph.D. of architecture, Associate Professor of the Environment Design department Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Arts (Kharkiv, Ukraine)

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Research Overview

RESEARCH SUBJECTS

This study focuses on the historic district of Beidajie in Jiangyin City, Jiangsu Province. It examines how spatial narrative theory can guide the conservation and regeneration of historic urban blocks — moving beyond physical restoration toward creating meaningful, participatory, and culturally resonant spatial experiences.

RESEARCH TOPIC

The study explores how spatial narrative theory can resolve the tension between preservation and development in contemporary Chinese historic districts. It opposes both wholesale demolition and superficial cosmetic renewal, advocating a precise, narrative-driven, and experience-based regeneration model that activates the district's intrinsic cultural vitality.

RESEARCH TASKS

01 Literature & Theory

Review spatial narrative theory and historic block renewal research; build the theoretical framework.

02 Adaptability Analysis

Analyze how spatial narrative theory adapts to historic districts across material, temporal, social, and emotional dimensions.

03 Design Concept

Develop a multi-stage narrative design concept and ten operational principles for the Beidajie renewal project.

Historic Block Renewal: Domestic Research Cases

Case / Scholar	Method / Approach	Key Finding
Chaozong Street, Changsha	Space syntax + nuclear density + AHP	Narrative intensity follows "main-axis concentration, deep-alley attenuation"; high-value nodes cluster on high-reachability main streets.
Jingyu Street, Harbin	Space syntax + GIS analysis	Activation strategies across four dimensions: semantic integration, semantic generation, grammar weaving, and context reshaping.
Changhua Street, Guangzhou	Multi-scale networked narrative	Cross-shaped street pattern as macro metaphor; narrative pocket squares at medium scale; activated waterfront and street furniture at micro scale.
Xiguan District, Guangzhou	Systematic literature review	Existing research emphasizes spatial form and architectural features but significantly lacks attention to intangible elements: emotion, memory, and lived experience.
Chinese Baroque, Harbin	Narrative clue mining + theme intention	Practical path for inheriting traditional style and cultural connotation in contemporary context, from cultural, economic, environmental, and living

Historic Block Renewal: International Research

Western countries have prioritized historic heritage conservation since the 18th century. In 1967, Britain introduced the Urban Leisure Act advocating systematic protection and adaptive reuse of historic commercial streets. Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* emphasized small-scale street layout, functional mix, and frequent social interaction as the foundation of urban vitality.

Year	Milestone / Case	Contribution
1961	Jane Jacobs — Street diversity & community vitality	Founded the modern understanding of small-scale, mixed-use urban vitality.
2010s	Chatzitryfonos — Participatory speculative narrative	Combines creative workshops with AR and cross-media design; residents co-author narratives as citizens.
2020s	Lychee Bowl Shipyard, Macau	Industrial heritage revitalization through spatial narrative, transmitting cultural value while promoting sustainable development.
2020s	Shougang Park — Author–Text–Reader framework	Provides practical strategies for experiential tourism and adaptive reuse of industrial heritage.

Conclusion

Block renewal is shifting from material repair toward narrative and experiential design. Yet four critical gaps remain:

01 Systematic Integration

Lack of research on how to systematically integrate narrative themes, plot sequences, and spatial media into a coherent design framework.

02 Long-term Empirical Data

Long-term behavioral data on users of spatial narrative blocks remains very limited; existing evidence is mostly short-term.

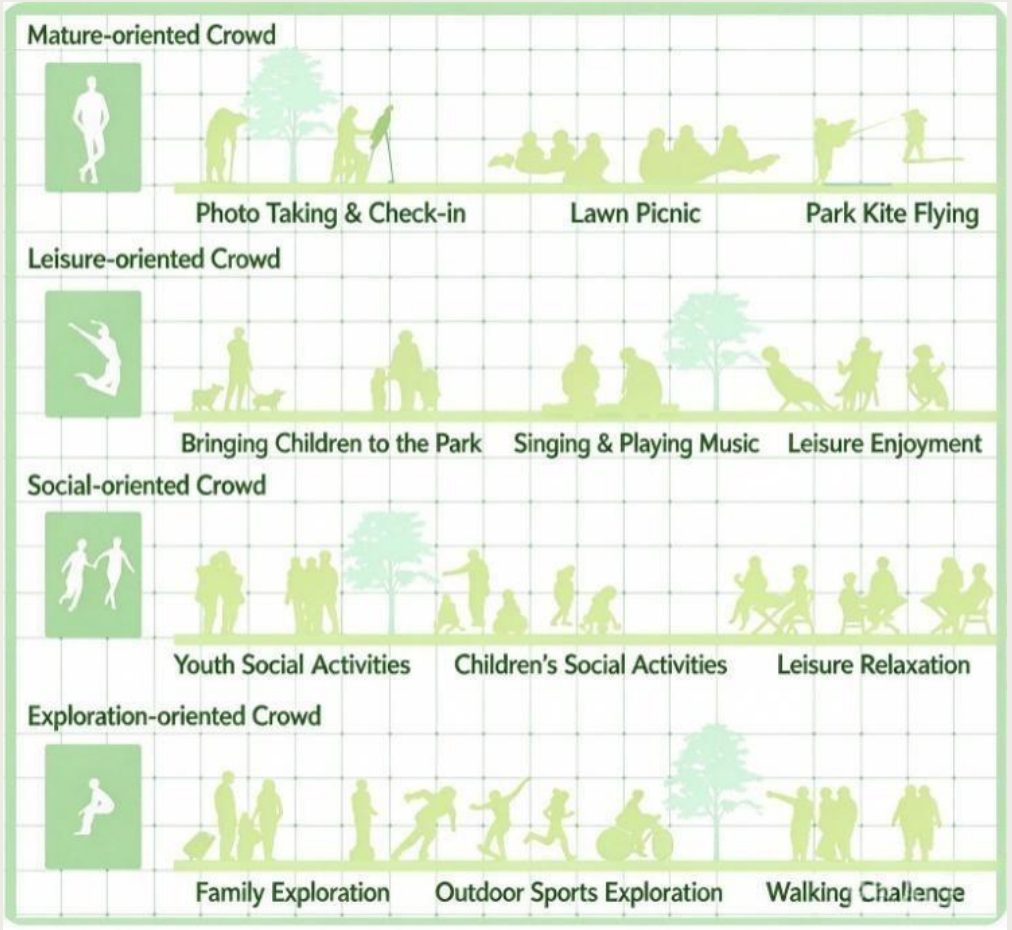
03 Post-use Evaluation

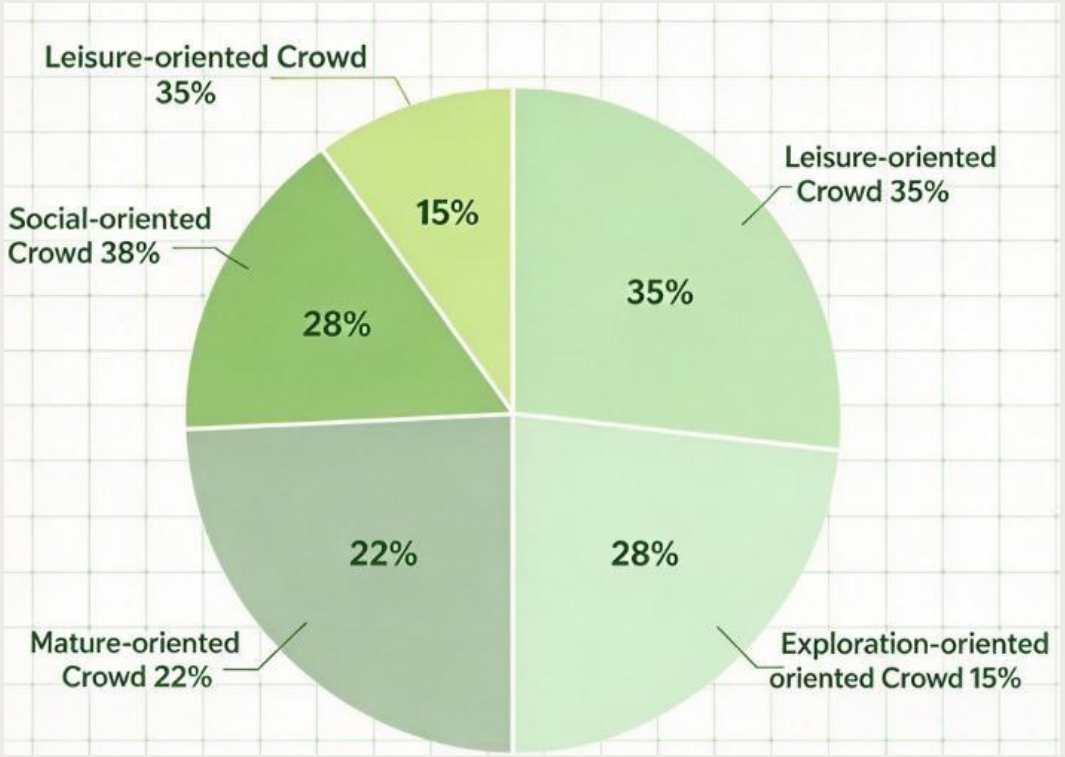
Design and evaluation are based on short-term studies; post-occupancy evaluation and quantitative verification are insufficient.

04 Interdisciplinary Collaboration

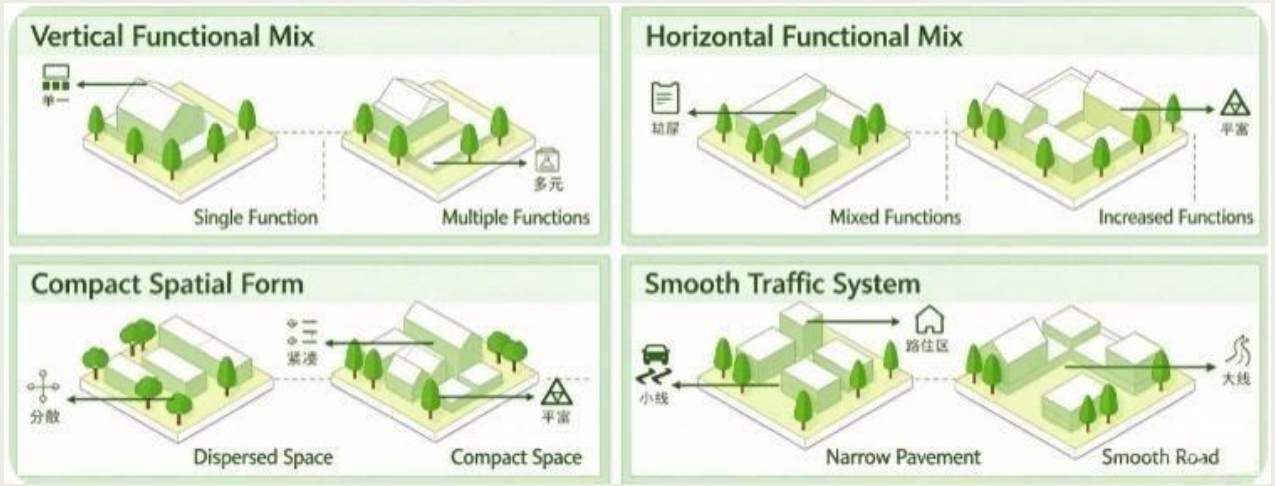
Collaboration between design, urban planning, and cultural research communities remains weak; multi-stage narrative paradigms are underexplored.

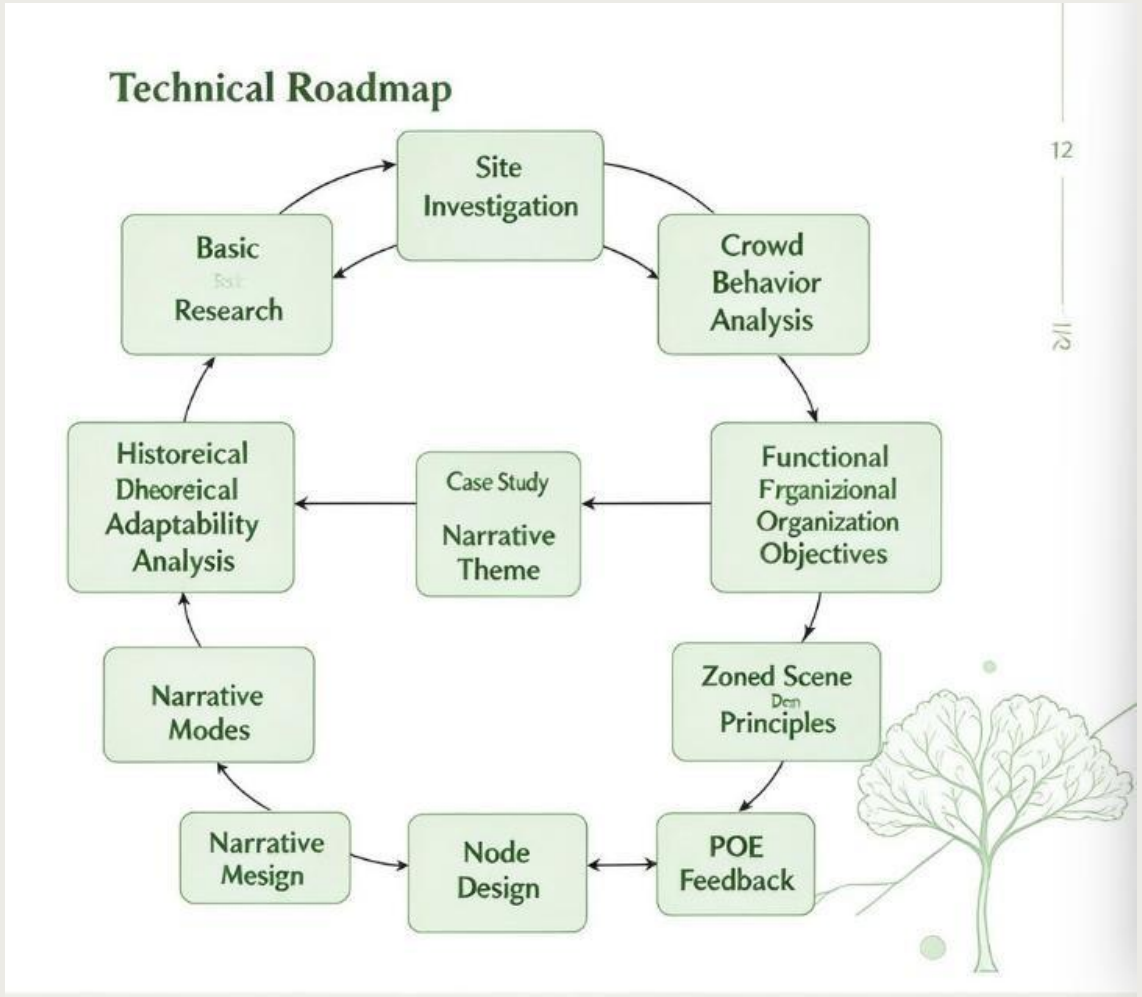
Population analysis





Planning strategy





Four Core Characteristics of a Narrative District

01 Narrative Nodes

Narrative events are defined through the systematic layout of nodes. Each node hosts specific interactive tasks — historical reenactment, collaborative puzzles, cultural experiences — forming a goal-oriented experiential framework.

02 Narrative Paths

Experience processes are constructed through path maps. Rather than functional zoning, the district uses narrative paths — starting, middle branching, and ending points — guided by ground markings, light, sound, and color gradients.

03 Situational Adaptability

Spatial diversity is expanded through situational adaptation. Designs respond to terrain, vegetation, and water features — "the place is the narrative" — reducing construction cost while enhancing authenticity and interaction with nature.

04 Cultural Integration

Narrative experience is deepened through cultural integration. Local history, folklore, and symbolic images are woven into the narrative structure — nodes represent story fragments, paths connect them into a complete cultural journey.

Five Core Links of Narrative District Design

01 **Establish Narrative Theme** — Through coupling "geographical-cultural characteristics × specific events," distill main, secondary, and branch clues into a unifying cultural thread.

02 **Arrange Narrative Paths —** Use main streets and alleys as the narrative axis; adopt a composite of linear narrative (temporal rhythm) and collage narrative (multi-clue dialogue).

03 **Create Narrative Nodes** — Systematically lay out entrance, middle, core, and exit nodes, forming a spatial rhythm of introduction, development, climax, and resolution.

04 **Translate Narrative Media** — Convert abstract cultural information into perceivable spatial language via public art, paving, wayfinding, lighting, and digital technology.

05 **Feedback & Optimization** — Apply a cyclic method: "review → extract → diagnose → translate → feedback," integrating space syntax, GIS, and post-use evaluation.

Conclusion and Summary

Guided by spatial narrative theory and using Jiangyin's Beidajie Historic District as a case study, this research — from theoretical exploration to design practice — verifies that spatial narrative, with its core concept of **meaningful, participatory space-making**, is an effective path for historic district revitalization.

Theoretical Contribution

- Clarified the relationship between cultural motivation and spatial experience.
- Established the six-dimensional adaptation system between spatial narrative theory and historic blocks.
- Proposed the five-link cyclic design method: theme → path → nodes → media → feedback.

Practical Contribution

- Developed a three-stage experience framework: exploration → challenge → continuation.
- Distilled ten operational design principles from practice.
- Translated abstract theory into concrete spatial strategies for Beidajie.

Top view



Forest rest area





Activity and fitness area





Entrance area





Cultural Corridor





Public conversation area



Cultural landscape wall



Parking



THANK YOU