

# Urban Spatial Structures in Historic Cities

Subjects: Architecture And Design

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The role of culture in urban competitiveness is becoming increasingly important. How historic cities identify and protect the spatial structures formed since ancient times, which are the carriers of urban culture, has become an important issue.

Keywords: cultural protection ; cultural space ; multi-actor mechanism

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## 1. The Background of Cultural Spaces in China

In China, cultural traditions deeply value the interplay of historical philosophies and modern insights to address contemporary challenges <sup>[1]</sup>. Guided by this concept, Chinese cities inherit the traditional methods of urban construction, focusing on the unity of city, landscape, and humanity, and finally form a unique oriental urban planning tradition <sup>[2]</sup>. Cultural spaces are carriers of the nature order, the social order, and the faith order in cities, and can unite the region and realize cultural inheritance. Because of this, researchers should excavate the unique cultural space planning methods, in order to better understand and protect the cultural characteristics of historic cities.

## 2. The Typicality of Fuzhou

Fuzhou was awarded the first Global Sustainable Development City in 2023, showing its ability for sustainable development. Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian province, boasts over 2200 years of history and is renowned for its unique oriental aesthetic, often cited as a prime example of oriental urban design <sup>[3]</sup>. Moreover, Fuzhou also has excellent cultural space constructions, which form a rich number of cultural spaces. In addition to common types such as the Town God's Temple and the Confucian Temple, diverse types regarding local folk culture are also integrated, such as the Tianhou Temple and the Linshui Palace. During thousands of years of continuous construction, cultural spaces in Fuzhou have been derived from the same, which documents the city's history. Undoubtedly, Fuzhou has available experience in historical preservation and urban structure maintenance.

## 3. Theoretical Background on Cultural Spaces

The proposal of the "Venice Charter" states that urban or rural environments are equally worthy of protection if they have witnessed specific civilizations, significant developments, and historical events <sup>[4]</sup>. From then on, identifiable space has gradually become the focus of historic preservation <sup>[5]</sup>. The term, Cultural Space, first appeared in the works of Henri Lefebvre. He puts forward many types of spaces <sup>[6]</sup>, suggesting that space is not a given, but rather a context for social and cultural interaction <sup>[7]</sup>. Kevin Lynch refers to these memorable places such as Charles Riverside, Union Street, and Louisburg Square as urban cultural spaces <sup>[8]</sup>; anthropologists define them as regular "image spaces", where local residents express their folk culture <sup>[9]</sup>. Similarly, the concept of cultural space originated from ancient Chinese urban construction. Researchers have shown that Chinese ancient people generally integrated philosophical concepts, the pursuit of values, and cultural beliefs into pagodas, temples, academies, and other spaces in urban construction. So, the culture spaces not only become the humanistic spirit carriers, but also become the inherent genes of ancient urban culture <sup>[10]</sup>. Cultural Spaces, both East and West, are spaces that carry the regional culture. Currently, research on cultural spaces focuses on the participants, space types, related elements, and the function.

### 3.1. The Participants of Cultural Spaces

Sun Shimeng points out that central and local officials, local gentry, geographers, folk craftsmen, monks and literati are all involved in the construction of ancient cities to varying degrees <sup>[11]</sup>; Mao Huasong sums up that all the urban landscapes are constructed by the three groups, namely, officials, monks, and Yiren, which refers to people from the same county <sup>[12]</sup>; Wang Shusheng points out that the participation of officials and literati is particularly important in the construction of traditional cultural spaces, and emphasizes that the construction mode of "literati + craftsmen" fundamentally supports the lofty cultural realm of Chinese cities <sup>[13]</sup>.

### 3.2. The Space Types of Cultural Spaces

Wang Kai divides cultural space into four categories: educating the public, worshipping gods, praising moral models, and enjoying the scenery <sup>[14]</sup>; Wang Shusheng first puts forward the concept of the culture land system, and subdivides them into spiritual marking land, memorial land, religious land, cultural heritage land, and cultural facilities land; L. Kong, in his research on urban sustainability, selects two types of cultural spaces: state-led construction of state-vaunted edifices and spontaneous formation of more organically evolved visual arts clusters, representing the monumental and the everyday, the state-initiated, and the organic <sup>[15]</sup>.

### 3.3. The Related Elements of Cultural Spaces

Wu Yubin analyzes the correlation between cultural space, natural environment, and urban form, identifying the elements of cultural space at macro, middle, and micro scales <sup>[16]</sup>. Based on the function of humanistic space, Sun Shimeng analyzes the construction models of 12 types of cultural spaces and derives their respective layout characteristics <sup>[17]</sup>. Cao Yongmao extracts cultural and construction features throughout the whole construction cycle based on the perspective of diachrony <sup>[18]</sup>.

### 3.4. The Function of Cultural Spaces

From the perspective of cultural transmission, Lewis Mumford points out that the city has the ability to contain various cultures, and is able to transmit complex cultures to the next generation through storage facilities (buildings, archives, monuments, etc.), which indicates that the cultural space carries urban socio-cultural information <sup>[19]</sup>. From the perspective of maintaining the material spatial structure of cities, Li Xiaolong points out that the cultural space controls the construction of urban patterns in terms of height, scale, and skyline <sup>[20]</sup>; from the socio-economic point of view, cultural space is able to enhance the confidence of the residents and the competitiveness of the city. Moreover, it can transform into a tourism resource, promoting sustainable economic and social development <sup>[21][22][23]</sup>. Obviously, cultural space plays a crucial role in highlighting city features and inheriting urban culture in contemporary urban development <sup>[24]</sup>.

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