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A Study on Visual Design for Cultural Information Segmentation in Xian'an Village

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Abstract: Xian'an Lane stands as one of the best-preserved examples of Han Kou's traditional alley architecture, embodying the collective memory of modern Han Kou's fusion of Chinese and Western architectural artistry and its vibrant street life. However, as urbanization advances, physical restoration cannot simultaneously mend the fractures in the transmission of its underlying cultural narratives. This paper adopts a design studies perspective to address the fragmented presentation and limited dissemination channels of Xian'an Lane's cultural information. It proposes a systematic visual design strategy aiming to achieve the digital translation and revitalization of Xian'an Lane's culture—transforming it from physical objects to emotional resonance. This is accomplished through three interconnected phases: visual conversion of front-end resources, interactive construction of mid-end digital platforms, and narrative reshaping of back-end spatiotemporal scenarios. The approach offers an actionable design studies pathway for preserving the cultural heritage of historic districts.

Keywords: Xian'an Village; Neighborhood Culture; Cultural Information; Visual Design; Digital Preservation.

1. Introduction

Hankou Li District stands as a vital physical remnant in Wuhan's modern urban development history, serving as a tangible carrier of a specific historical era that embodies the social culture and civic life of its time[1]. Xian'an Lane, a quintessential example within this district, features distinctive red-brick textures, exquisite stone gateways, and a rich commercial-residential culture—all indispensable elements of Wuhan's urban heritage[2]. Current preservation efforts for Xian'an Lane primarily focus on the physical conservation of its structures, without systematically organizing its cultural layers or presenting them through multi-perspective, multi-dimensional visual forms[3]. Against the backdrop of today's digital and information-driven era, the key challenge in preserving and transmitting Xian'an Lane's cultural heritage lies in how to employ visualization techniques to transform hidden historical and cultural information into visual language, thereby building a bridge between people and historical memory.

2. Analysis of the Composition of Xian'anfang Cultural Information

Before formulating visualization design strategies, it is essential to conduct an in-depth deconstruction and categorization of Xian'an Lane's cultural information. As a classic example of Hankou's alley architecture, Xian'an Lane embodies cultural significance on both tangible material levels and intangible behavioral and spiritual levels. Together, these diverse cultural elements form a multi-layered cultural space, providing abundant material and logical foundations for subsequent visual translation. Through comprehensive organization of Xian'an Lane's cultural information, it can be divided into three major categories: architectural cultural information in its physical form, residential cultural information within behavioral patterns, and historical cultural information within spiritual concepts.

2.1. Architectural Cultural Information in Material Form

The architectural style of Xian'an Lane represents a high-level synthesis of eclectic aesthetic characteristics in modern Hankou architecture. As a historical microcosm of Wuhan's modern residential culture, Xian'an Lane's physical structure serves not only as a vessel for living spaces but also as tangible evidence of the collision, fusion, and symbiosis of Chinese and Western architectural cultures in Hankou. Its most striking visual feature is the urban texture formed by red brick exposed-concrete facades[4]. This distinctive material and color possess strong visual recognition, serving as the primary palette and texture extracted for the visual design. Simultaneously, Xian'an Lane's shikumen gateways ingeniously blend Western classical column orders with traditional Chinese auspicious carvings, embodying artistic fusion. This decorative artistry transcends mere elemental collage; it builds upon Western forms while preserving the Chinese pursuit of blessings like “fortune, prosperity, longevity, and joy.”

2.1.1. A Compromise Architectural Style

The architectural image of Xian'an Lane exhibits distinct eclectic characteristics in style[5]. This eclecticism does not mimic a single style but organically integrates various Western architectural elements—including classical, Baroque, Rococo, and Art Nouveau—with China's traditional timber-frame structure and courtyard-style layout. The facade treatment reveals both the rigorous proportions and symmetrical compositions of European classicism alongside the practical considerations of natural light and ventilation found in traditional Chinese dwellings. This multifaceted architectural style reflects the openness and inclusivity of modern Hankou society's aesthetic values, providing a rich visual vocabulary for design—from macro volumes to micro details. The design should emphasize extracting the rhythmic quality of its architectural contours and the complexity of its facade ornamentation, reconstructing the evolution of its architectural character through graphic means.

2.1.2. Decorative Arts Blending Chinese and Western Elements

At the micro level of decorative art, Xian'an Lane exemplifies exceptional craftsmanship and a distinctive aesthetic pursuit. Its ornamental details offer the most direct manifestation of Sino-Western cultural fusion. For instance, Western classical column orders, arches, and Baroque-style curvilinear volutes frequently serve as structural frameworks for lintels, window sills, balustrades, and walls[6]. Within these Western-inspired structures, however, an abundance of traditional Chinese cultural symbols are incorporated. These symbols include auspicious motifs like the swastika pattern, the swastika-like swirl, lotus petal designs, and carved characters signifying wealth and peace. This "Western form, Eastern spirit" decorative approach allows Xian'an Lane to retain the massing of Western architecture while preserving the charm and warmth of Eastern culture. In the visualization strategy, these decorative motifs can be extracted, categorized, and reconfigured as independent visual symbols. This forms a regionally distinctive decorative motif library for the in-depth design of the visual communication system.

2.2. Behavioral Patterns in Residential Culture

As a former high-end residential district, Xian'an Lane preserves the lifestyle and behavioral patterns of Hanzhong's middle and upper classes in modern times. From its mixed-use commercial and residential layout to the neighborhood interactions within its alleyways, these practices form a vibrant residential culture that holds the key to understanding Xian'an Lane's social value. Unlike mere physical spaces, behavioral patterns imbue spaces with life and emotion. Scenes such as residents gathering on bamboo beds for cooling respite within the alleyways, leisurely tea house gatherings, and festive folk customs reflect the authentic, down-to-earth character and optimistic outlook of Hankou's citizens. This human-centered cultural information serves as a vital source for constructing narrative logic in visual design, transforming static architectural data into dynamic scenes of lived experience.

2.2.1. Commercial and Residential Dual-Use Functional Layout

Xian'an Lane's functional layout profoundly reflects the characteristics of Wuhan as a modern commercial city, presenting a typical mixed-use model combining commerce and residential living. In its early planning and construction, to leverage Hankou's geographical advantage as a major trading hub, the ground floors of Xian'an Lane buildings were often designed as shops or workshops, while the upper floors served as living quarters. This layout significantly enhanced spatial efficiency and fostered a close integration of commercial activities with daily life. Over time, Xian'an Lane's functional layout evolved from the "front shop, back workshop" model to a "commercial-residential separation" approach. Internal space divisions became more rational, with dedicated areas for dining, bedrooms, bathrooms, and other functions emerging—reflecting a shift toward modern, comfortable living. In visualization design, analyzing the evolution of its floor plans and using infographics to compare spatial structures across different periods can vividly demonstrate the adaptive changes in its functional form.

2.2.2. Neighborly Interactions in Everyday Life

The residential culture embodied by Xian'an Lane centers on its rich neighborhood bonds and vibrant street-level life. With its high building density, the alleyways become essential extensions of daily living. Here, narrow lanes serve not only as passageways but also as social gathering spaces. Residents chat about family matters in the alleys, children play and frolic within them, fostering a harmonious community spirit where "a good neighbor is better than a distant relative." Especially during Wuhan's sweltering summers, households bring bamboo beds out into the alleys to cool off, creating the distinctive local scene known as the "bamboo bed array." This vividly illustrates the open, pragmatic, and resilient character of Hankou's citizens. These vibrant behavioral scenes and cultural customs provide rich narrative material for visual design. Through digital media technology, these scenes can be recreated or dynamically interpreted, enhancing audience emotional resonance and immersive experiences.

2.3. Historical and Cultural Information on Spiritual Concepts

Xian'an Lane bears witness to Hankou's modern commercial prosperity, social transformations, and the continuity of its urban cultural heritage, embodying profound and enduring cultural significance. Its name, "Xian'an Lane," symbolizes peace and good fortune, reflecting the prevailing ethical values and aspirations for a better life in that era. Simultaneously, the notable figures who resided within its lanes, the significant institutions established here, and the major historical events that unfolded collectively form a rich tapestry of historical memory[7]. This intangible cultural heritage constitutes the very soul of Xian'an Lane, fundamentally distinguishing it from ordinary architectural complexes. In the visualization strategy, conveying these spiritual concepts requires transcending material appearances to delve deeply into the underlying historical context and cultural DNA, constructing a temporal narrative that possesses both depth and warmth.

2.3.1. The Culture of Naming with Auspicious Meanings

he naming of Han Kou Li Fen carries profound cultural significance, often embodying the builders' values, aesthetic sensibilities, and aspirations for a better future. Xian'an Fang is no exception. The characters "Xian'an" derive from the concept of "Xianning'anhe" (harmony and peace), embodying wishes for residents' safety, smooth lives, and harmonious coexistence[8]. This naming approach reflects the profound influence of auspicious traditions in Chinese culture, showcasing reverence for moral virtues like benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and integrity, alongside the pursuit of life goals such as fortune, prosperity, longevity, and joy. A name is not merely an identifier but a spiritual totem, carrying the collective memory and social psyche of a specific era. In visual design, the semantic decoding of the courtyard names can be achieved through typography and graphic associations, visualizing the cultural connotations behind the names and reinforcing the audience's recognition and memory of Xian'an Lane's cultural symbols.

3. Visualization Design Logic for Xian'anfang Cultural Information

Visual design is not merely about drawing graphics; it is a process of information dissemination and cognitive restructuring. Given the cultural characteristics of Xian'anfang, its visual design should not merely replicate its physical form but delve deeply into its intrinsic cultural DNA and spatio-temporal logic[9]. Based on this, the visualization design logic for Xian'an Fang should adhere to the following

core principles to achieve the transformation from "data-driven" to 'digital' and ultimately to "intelligent digitalization."

3.1. Analysis of the Composition of Xian'anfang Cultural Information

Before formulating visualization design strategies, it is necessary to deconstruct and categorize the cultural information of Xian'an Lane. This cultural information encompasses not only visible physical forms but also intangible behavioral patterns and spiritual concepts, constituting the core essence of its significance as a vital heritage of modern residential architecture in Wuhan.

3.1.1. Deep Exploration of Comprehensive Value and Economic Value

The comprehensive value of Xian'an Lane encompasses multiple dimensions including history, art, science, and society, serving as the cornerstone of its visual design. Historically, Xian'an Lane bears witness to the prosperity of modern commerce and social transformation in Hankou, standing as tangible evidence of urban development and social structure during a specific historical period. Artistically, its architectural style epitomizes eclectic aesthetics: exposed red brick facades form a distinctive urban texture, while shikumen gateways blend Western classical columns with traditional Chinese auspicious carvings, showcasing a fusion of Eastern and Western artistic values[10]. These aesthetic features provide rich symbolic elements for visual design. On the scientific value level, its "one main, two secondary, three branch" alleyway structure and mixed brick-and-wood construction techniques reflect the ingenuity of modern architectural technology in adapting to Hankou's climate and geographical environmen[11]t. On the social value level, Xian'an Lane documents the lifestyle and neighborhood interaction patterns of Hanzhong's modern middle class, showcasing a harmonious and cohesive community culture. Visual design must translate these deep, integrated values into intuitive visual language, transcending physical appearances to convey its core spirit as urban cultural heritage.

Beyond its comprehensive value, Xian'an Lane's economic value is equally indispensable to the design logic. Economic value is primarily divided into utility value and potential value[2]. Utility value manifests in its continued use as residential or commercial space. Xian'an Fang was once a high-end mixed-use residential and commercial district. With urban renewal, its spatial functions have undergone replacement and reorganization—a functional evolution that should be reflected in the visualization[12]. Potential value refers to its immense potential as cultural capital in tourism, cultural creativity, and brand building. Design should focus on how visual methods can connect Xian'an Lane's commercial-cultural heritage with its existing commercial vitality, demonstrating its potential transformation from a purely residential space into a cultural consumption hub. For instance, visualizing the contrast between the historical and current states of its inner-lane shops reveals its dynamic role in urban economic activity, thereby providing data support and visual evidence for future revitalization strategies.

3.1.2. Building Added Value and Emotional Resonance

Added value primarily encompasses emotional and educational value, serving as the key to establishing a deep connection between audiences and cultural heritage. Xian'an Lane carries the urban memories and nostalgia of generations of Wuhan residents, and this emotional value possesses powerful appeal. The design logic should focus on using narrative visualization techniques to evoke emotional resonance among audiences for Xian'an Lane's everyday scenes—such as "neighborhood watch" and "cooling off on bamboo beds"—thereby strengthening social identity and a sense of belonging. These concrete, life-filled scenes serve as vivid carriers of abstract emotional value, making the visual content more compelling and immersive.

Simultaneously, unlocking educational value demands that visual design not only show "what it is," but also reveal 'why' and "how." By constructing a knowledge map of Xian'an Lane's construction context, architectural techniques, and anecdotes about notable figures, the design places Xian'an Lane within the broader narrative of Wuhan's modern urban development, transforming it into a living textbook of urban history. This necessitates a design approach that systematically organizes and presents Xian'an Lane's knowledge framework, helping audiences grasp its underlying cultural logic and historical significance. Thus, it fulfills its educational function in preserving urban cultural heritage and popularizing architectural culture. Through this deep knowledge translation and narrative construction, visualization design transcends mere information display, becoming an effective pathway to enhance public awareness and participation in cultural heritage preservation.

3.2. A design Approach Structured Around the Fusion of Time and Space

The cultural information of Xian'an Lane does not exist in isolation or static form. It is deeply rooted within specific temporal and spatial dimensions, forming an evolving, holistic entity. Therefore, the design logic must transcend the constraints of singular, static presentation. It should actively shape a four-dimensional information architecture that encompasses spatial texture and temporal evolution. This approach extends Xian'an Lane from a mere geographic location within its historical context to a series of pivotal nodes throughout its entire lifecycle. Through diverse multi-angle visualization techniques, it presents a comprehensive, three-dimensional representation of its existence as an urban organism. On one hand, within the spatial dimension, the visualization design must establish a display logic spanning macro, meso, and even micro scales. At the macro level, it positions Xian'an Lane within Hankou's broader urban context, highlighting its riverside location adjacent to the concession area. It also illustrates how its "front door facing front door" layout integrates into the city's street network, reflecting its structural connection as part of the urban fabric. At the meso level, the focus shifts to analyzing Xian'an Lane's internal spatial structure. This involves examining its traffic organization—primary alleys, secondary alleys, and branch alleys—along with how building clusters are arranged and combined. Three-dimensional maps or axonometric projections can be used to deconstruct the compact, highly efficient land utilization characteristic of Xian'an Lane[13]. At the micro level, attention is directed toward the details of individual buildings—such as the decorative patterns on Shikumen lintels, the styles of window grilles, and the craftsmanship of railings. Through a spatial visualization process that moves from distant to close-up views, audiences can fully grasp the uniqueness and complexity of Xian'an Lane's spatial form. On the temporal dimension, the design constructs a narrative timeline spanning Xian'an Lane's entire

history. This goes beyond merely documenting its founding moment, encompassing functional transformations and aesthetic shifts across different eras. For instance, visualization could depict Xian'an Lane's rise to prominence during the early 20th-century real estate boom as a prestigious residential enclave; its destruction and transformation following wartime turmoil; and its eventual designation as a historic preservation zone undergoing urban renewal. Employing visual tools like timelines, dynamic maps, or evolution animations to dynamically present Xian'an Fang's historical evolution allows clear observation of its functional shifts, demographic changes, and adaptive architectural adjustments over time. This enables audiences to genuinely perceive Xian'an Fang not as a static exhibit, but as a living, organic cultural entity that continues to grow and transform with the passage of time.

3.3. Spatio-Temporal Immersive Reconstruction Based on Digital Interaction

After achieving independent mapping of space and time, the ultimate logic of visualization design lies in realizing deep interactive integration between time and space—namely, "spatiotemporal retrospection." This phase requires designs to transcend physical spatial constraints, fully leveraging cutting-edge digital technologies such as digital twins, virtual reality (VR), or augmented reality (AR) to precisely reconstruct Xian'an Lane's historical scenes within virtual digital spaces. The core methodology involves overlaying or dynamically contrasting the spatial state of a specific historical moment—such as the bustling street scenes, interior furnishings, and residential ambiance of the Republican era—with the present-day spatial state. This creates a visual dialogue and narrative experience that transcends time and space. For instance, in specific interactive design, audiences could be provided with an immersive interface: while browsing high-precision 3D models of the present, they could "travel back in time" by dragging a "time slider," instantly viewing how the appearance, architectural components, and functional uses of the same location changed across different eras. This four-dimensional visualization architecture, grounded in digital interaction, not only significantly enriches the dimensions and depth of information delivery but also enables audiences to profoundly appreciate Xian'an Lane's weighty historical heritage and unique spatial aesthetics through immersive exploration and experience. This fosters deep emotional and cognitive connections with the cultural heritage, ultimately achieving a leap from formal observation to spiritual perception. This provides robust digital support and design rationale for the effective preservation and living transmission of Xian'an Lane.

4. Visualization Design Strategy for Xian'anfang Cultural Information

Based on the aforementioned design logic, this paper proposes a three-tiered visualization design strategy system—spanning front-end visual translation, mid-tier digital integration, and back-end narrative reconstruction—aimed at presenting Xian'anfang's cultural information in a systematic and multidimensional manner. The specific design strategy framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

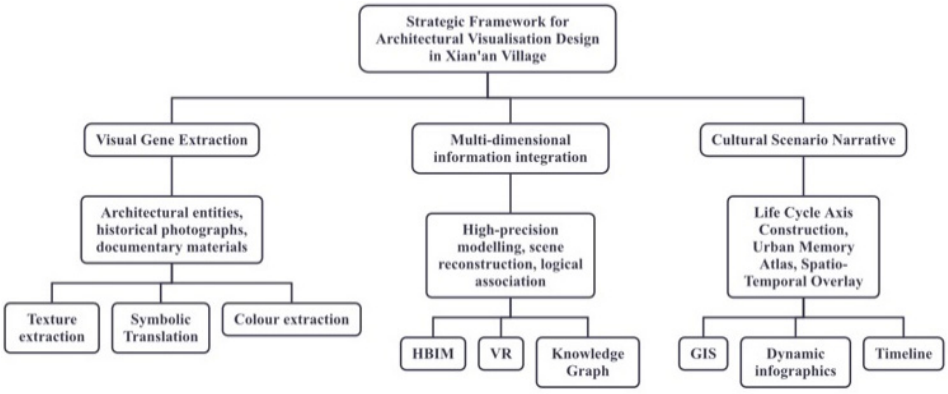


Figure 1. Strategic Framework for Architectural Visualisation Design in Xian'an Village

4.1. Front-End Resource Integration: Visual Gene Extraction and Translation

The core task during the front-end resource integration phase is to transform Xian'an Lane's material cultural information into a standardized visual symbol system, laying the foundation for subsequent design work. First, focusing on Xian'an Lane's most distinctive features—its exposed red brick walls and orderly lane layout—the design should employ digital capture and graphic processing techniques to extract representative architectural texture patterns. These texture patterns are not mere reproductions but artistically refined visual elements. They can serve as background textures for wayfinding systems, promotional materials, or digital interfaces, thereby reinforcing the audience's branded perception of Xian'an Lane's core characteristic—"red-brick lane houses"—on a visual level. Second, the rich eclectic decorative elements in architectural details—such as Western-style pediments, Chinese meander patterns, and coin motifs on shikumen gateways—require systematic vectorization and symbolic translation to establish a dedicated "Xian'an Lane Decorative Symbol Library." These symbols should not only serve as ornamental motifs but also, through annotation and interpretation, become visual carriers conveying messages of Sino-Western cultural fusion. Finally, color serves as a crucial medium for evoking historical memory and emotional resonance. The design should extract color samples from the building itself and historical photographs to establish a historical architectural color palette encompassing red brick, terracotta, bluish-gray, and warm wood brown tones. In subsequent visual applications, employing these authentic historical hues will cultivate a tranquil, nostalgic temporal atmosphere, effectively enhancing the visual expression's historical depth and

emotional impact.

4.2. Mid-Range Platform Processing: Multi-Dimensional Information Integration and Interaction

After completing the translation of front-end visual resources, the core task of the mid-end platform processing stage is to utilize digital technologies for the in-depth integration and dynamic presentation of Xian'anfang's cultural information. First, the design should fully leverage Historical Building Information Modeling (HBIM) technology to construct a high-precision digital model of Xian'anfang. This model should extend beyond mere geometric dimensions to integrate non-geometric data such as material properties, traditional craft practices, and historical restoration records. This enables detailed querying, analysis, and visualization of Xian'an Lane's holistic architectural information, providing a robust digital foundation for building conservation, exhibition utilization, and academic research. Secondly, to better convey Xian'an Lane's unique residential atmosphere, virtual reality (VR) technology can be incorporated to recreate its vibrant, life-infused spaces, such as alleyways and courtyards. Audiences can immerse themselves through VR devices in scenes of everyday life within Xian'an Lane a century ago—like bamboo bed arrays for summer cooling or neighborly chats—transforming static physical architecture into vivid, tangible sensory experiences. Furthermore, to reveal the underlying logical connections within Xian'an Lane's complex cultural information, the design could explore constructing a knowledge graph based on linked data technology. By setting entities such as the builders of Xian'an Lane, notable residents, historical events, architectural components, and commercial activities as nodes, and visualizing their interconnections through links, audiences can intuitively explore the complex network of relationships and socio-historical context behind Xian'an Lane within an interactive knowledge graph interface. This facilitates a deep understanding of the cultural information.

4.3. Backward Journey Through Time and Space: Cultural Narratives and Reconstruction

The final stage of visual design involves backend temporal and spatial reconstruction, focusing on weaving together the complete narrative of Xian'an Lane through the interplay of time and space. The design should incorporate a full-cycle narrative concept with a temporal dimension, constructing a lifecycle axis that spans Xi'anfang's journey from planning and construction through its period of prosperity to subsequent transformations. Utilizing visual forms such as dynamic infographics, evolutionary animations, or interactive timelines, the design can vividly present the architectural evolution, population migration patterns, and commercial fluctuations of Xi'anfang across different historical eras. This dynamic presentation not only visually reflects functional shifts and adaptive building renovations over time but also helps audiences clearly perceive Xian'an Fang not as a static historical artifact, but as a cultural organism that grows and evolves with time. Simultaneously, the design must situate Xian'an Fang within the broader urban space of Hankou, employing Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to construct a city memory map. Through visualization techniques, the spatial relationships and interactive influences between Xian'an Lane and other neighborhoods, concession areas, and major commercial streets in Hankou should be displayed, clarifying its geographical position and historical role within Hankou's modern urban landscape. This spatial-based construction of an urban memory map effectively reinforces Xian'an Lane's significance as a key node in the city's memory, ensuring its cultural value is highlighted and preserved within a broader urban context.

5. Conclusion

The visualization design of cultural information within Xian'an Lane represents a multidisciplinary endeavor integrating architecture, history, and design. The proposed strategy system—comprising front-end visual translation, mid-level digital integration, and back-end narrative reconstruction—aims to transcend the limitations of traditional static displays. Through multidimensional design approaches, it transforms the architectural artistry, everyday life, and historical memories embedded in Xian'an Lane into perceptible, interactive, and disseminable visual forms. This approach not only enhances Xian'an Lane's cultural outreach and public recognition but also offers a reference framework for the digital preservation and cultural revitalization of other historic districts in Wuhan. Future research may further integrate artificial intelligence and metaverse technologies to explore more immersive and intelligent methods of cultural presentation.

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