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## **THE IMPACT OF LANDSCAPE NARRATIVE FEATURES IN CHINESE URBAN HERITAGE PARKS ON VISITOR SATISFACTION IN FUYONG CITY, ANHUI PROVINCE, CHINA**

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, the number of Chinese visitors in urban heritage parks has been growing, fuelling the rapid development of the heritage site tourism sector. This study explores how landscape narrative features influence visitors' satisfaction in urban heritage parks to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical research in this field. Taking the visitors of Yingzhou West Lake in Fuyang City, Anhui Province, China, as the research object, a questionnaire survey was used to collect data, verify the influence of landscape narrative features on visitors' satisfaction, and analyse its mechanism of action. The study constructed a mechanism model of landscape narrative features affecting visitors' satisfaction and classified the features into three dimensions: physical space, narrative space, and heritage space. The results show that such features significantly positively affect visitors' satisfaction, and enhancing landscape narrative features can effectively improve visitors' satisfaction. This study provides important theoretical support for sustainable tourism development in urban heritage parks and proposes practical ideas for tourism management and design practices in heritage sites.

**Keywords:** urban heritage parks, landscape narrative features, visitors' satisfaction, sustainable tourism

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## INTRODUCTION

Historical and cultural heritage is a region's heritage and spiritual civilization that usually has an innate cultural and emotional connection with the inhabitants, giving them a sense of identity and belonging (Feng, Chiou, & Wang, 2021). As forms of historical and cultural heritage, urban heritage parks enhance a country's national self-confidence and have educational significance (Bischoff & Meckl, 2008; Hadiullina, Nugumanova, Bagautdinova, & Averiyarov, 2013). The primary distinction between historical cultural parks and other parks lies in their gradual development alongside urban growth, with landscape design elements deeply intertwined with local history and culture. Moreover, most urban heritage parks in China are built around historical and cultural relics, serving as new tourist destinations. They are places for people to relax, learn, and preserve traditional Chinese culture. Tourists can obtain local historical information and gain cultural knowledge, which is of great educational significance (Yu, Li, & Ji, 2001).

According to AECOM (2018), a global leader in urban planning and engineering, developing urban heritage parks should prioritize integrating historical and cultural elements into modern urban contexts. Their report highlights strategies such as the proportion of historical and cultural theme parks will increase rapidly due to China's deep cultural heritage (AECOM, 2018). The proportion increased from 12% 2012 to 20% in 2018, and by 2025, the proportion is expected to account for as much as 28%. In recent years, the visibility of China's historical and cultural heritage has been growing. Chinese tourists' needs and demands for historical and cultural experiences are increasing daily. Due to the uniqueness of heritage site tourism, tourists' preferences are influenced by individual characteristics, which has led to a limited number of relevant studies (Huete-Alcocer, López-Ruiz, & Grigorescu, 2019). More specifically, there are relatively few empirical studies on visitors' satisfaction in heritage site tourism (Gidey & Sharma, 2017). Higher visitor satisfaction means that the quality of the experience in the tourism area meets the needs of tourists, which is an important factor in the sustainable development of tourism in urban heritage parks (Wiwattanakantanga & To-ima, 2014).

This study attempts to fill this research gap by examining the relationship between the landscape narrative features of urban heritage parks and visitors' satisfaction with heritage sites. By constructing a mechanism model of the impact of these features on visitors' satisfaction, it divides the features into three dimensions: physical space, narrative space, and heritage space. It systematically analyses the effect of each dimension on visitors' satisfaction and explores strategies to enhance the landscape narrative features to improve visitors' satisfaction. The results not only provide theoretical support for the sustainable development of tourism in urban heritage parks in China, but also

offer practical guidance for the optimization of tourism management and the design of heritage sites. They also further promote the coordinated development of tourism and cultural protection in heritage sites, which is of great theoretical value and practical significance.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Landscape narrative features of urban heritage parks**

Previous research has taken landscape narrative as a way of interpreting the meaning of a place by incorporating stories and historical elements of the local past (Potteiger & Purinton, 1998), aiming to convey local identity, historical events, and stories (Dzegede, 2000). In other words, landscape narrative is how designers use tangible and intangible elements of the landscape to give meaning to places (Valois & Paradis, 2010). Historical landscapes presented through narrative techniques can trigger multiple interpretations and enhance the connection between local time, people, and places. Landscape narratives also represent public spaces with historical significance (Davis, 2022). As local historical archetypes in modern spaces, historic landscapes present a microcosm of history, and this presentation embodies spatial narratives (Garnier, 2015). Historic landscapes are therefore established as historic cultural heritage. Understanding the landscape narrative of historical cultural heritage helps in recognizing and interpreting historical cultural heritage landscapes (Li, 2020; Lin, 2023).

Urban heritage parks, as unique spaces that integrate cultural heritage and natural landscapes, have become an important focus in urban development and tourism research. Classical Chinese Garden elements, including water bodies, rockeries, plants, and garden architecture, serve as key components in shaping the aesthetic and cultural identity of these parks (Wang, 2022). These elements not only embody historical and cultural narratives but also contribute to the visitors' sensory experiences and emotional engagement. Previous studies have highlighted the significance of such features in enhancing the appeal and functionality of urban heritage parks, making them valuable assets for cultural preservation and tourism development.

Based on classical Chinese garden principles, this study categorizes the landscape narrative features of urban heritage parks into three dimensions: physical space, narrative space, and heritage space. Physical space serves as the structural foundation, encompassing tangible elements such as mountains, water, plants, and architecture, which form the visual and spatial framework of the park (Zhuang & Chen, 2022). Narrative space refers to the stories, legends, and historical events associated with the park, offering layers of meaning that resonate with visitors. Finally, heritage space focuses on the cultural and historical significance embedded within the physical and narrative aspects, emphasizing the

preservation and transmission of cultural values. Together, these dimensions create a comprehensive framework for understanding how urban heritage parks convey cultural narratives, enhance visitor engagement, and contribute to overall satisfaction.

Taking Yingzhou West Lake as an example, the physical space of the park is composed of two categories: natural landscape resources and man-made resources. Natural resources include lakes, rivers, and wetlands, which reflect the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Man-made resources, such as pavilions, bridges, and historical buildings, incorporate traditional Chinese architectural aesthetics and cultural symbolism. By analyzing these elements, it becomes evident how they contribute to the park's historical and cultural connotations while enhancing the visitors' immersive experience. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of natural and human resources within the physical space of Yingzhou West Lake, providing a visual representation of its landscape narrative features.



**Figure 1:** The physical space of Yingzhou West Lake.

*Source: Yingzhou West Lake Official Website*

Narrative space is the core element of landscape narrative and integrates history and culture into the experience of urban heritage parks through the design of themes, narrative structure and rhythm, and artistic conception (Li, 2020). Visitor's experience in the narrative space must be immersive and historical, achieved through thematic associations and spatial interpretation (Jiang, 2021). Taking Yingzhou West Lake as an example, the design of the narrative space focuses on the setting of narrative themes (e.g., the culture of the West Lake and the story of poems), the logical arrangement of narrative structure (e.g., the planning of tour routes and stopover nodes), and the expression of artistic conception (e.g., the design of borrowed scenery and cultural symbols). Through the combination of scenes and themes, these narrative techniques enable visitors to feel the interplay of history and culture more deeply (as shown in Figure 2).

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**Figure 2:** The narrative space of Yingzhou West Lake.  
*Source: Yingzhou West Lake Official Website*

Finally, the heritage space is the most culturally significant part of the landscape narrative, centred on local memories, folklore activities, and ceremonial events, reflecting lifestyles and cultural practices passed down from generation to generation (Niglio, 2014). By participating in local folk culture activities, tourists can experience authentic historical and cultural themes and enhance their sense of identity with the local culture, promoting the preservation and inheritance of urban heritage parks (Feng et al., 2021). In Yingzhou West Lake, the heritage space is expressed as a combination of local traditional folk activities and educational significance. Visitors experience the living inheritance of culture through participation in folk festivals, local operas, and traditional craft demonstrations. The heritage space also popularizes local history and cultural knowledge through cultural exhibitions and interactive projects (as shown in Figure 3). These designs contribute to realizing cultural and educational functions, further enriching visitors' experience and enhancing satisfaction.



**Figure 3:** The narrative space of Yingzhou West Lake.  
*Source: Yingzhou West Lake Official Website*

This study explores the landscape narrative features of urban heritage parks and how they influence visitors' satisfaction through systematic analyses of physical space, narrative space, and heritage space, so as to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the sustainable development of urban heritage parks.

### **Visitors' Satisfaction**

Visitors' satisfaction affects their willingness to revisit and recommend a destination (Huh, 2002). Complete tourist satisfaction is a basic requirement for any destination and can be defined as the customer's overall evaluation of the services received versus the services expected (López Guzmán, Pérez Gálvez, & Muñoz-Fernández, 2018). Visitors' satisfaction is important, because it predicts the future behaviour of tourists (Medina-Viruel, López-Guzmán, Gálvez, & Jara-Alba, 2019) and is also a way to assess the effects of the destination and sustainable development. Overall satisfaction is therefore relevant to the summary assessment of destination quality in tourism.

Landscape narratives have a significant impact on visitors' satisfaction by preserving cultural heritage, promoting traditional values, and providing an authentic tourism experience (Fan, Isa, & Mohamed, 2024), and they are a key factor in maintaining tourism sustainability in urban heritage parks (Popescu, Nita, & Iordache, 2020). Landscape narrative features of urban heritage parks provide tourists with high-quality experiences that positively influence visitors' satisfaction and help maintain the sustainability of tourism in urban heritage parks (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019). By analysing how landscape narrative features of urban heritage parks affect visitors' satisfaction, this study provides a useful addition to the sustainability of tourism in urban heritage parks. This paper's second research objective is to evaluate how landscape narrative features of urban heritage parks positively impact visitors' satisfaction (Chew, Zainol, & Goh, 2024).

In recent years, landscape narratives have evolved to provide visitors with an experience of immersion through narrative devices centred around specific themes and to seek a balance between education and entertainment to enhance visitors' identification with local cultures (Potteiger & Purinton, 1998). This kind of themed design also raises the controversy of authenticity versus commercialization, however. Some studies have pointed out that theme parks may weaken historical authenticity by focusing too much on attracting tourists, thus affecting visitors' experience (Davis, 2022); others argue that the combination of heritage preservation and tourism development can be achieved by modernizing narrative innovation to increase visitors' satisfaction while conveying cultural values (Garnier, 2015). In urban heritage parks, the question of how such a 'narrative' design can balance cultural preservation and heritage

authenticity while meeting visitors' needs and improving visitors' satisfaction remains an important issue to be addressed (Niglio, 2014). This study aims to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the conservation and management of heritage sites by exploring the impact of landscape narratives on visitors' satisfaction in urban heritage parks and clarifying their role in enhancing the tourism experience, promoting cultural dissemination, and achieving sustainable development.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study examines an urban heritage park in Yingzhou West Lake, Fuyang City, Anhui Province, China, focusing on the impact of its landscape narrative features on visitors' satisfaction. To fully understand tourists' views and feelings, opinions and feedback were collected from visitors to Yingzhou West Lake through a questionnaire survey.

The landscape narrative features scale was used to measure the three dimensions of physical space (PS), narrative space (NS), and heritage space (HS), with a Cronbach's alpha value of .91 for PS, .94 for NS, and .909 for HS. For the measurement of PS, the scale developed by Wang (2022) and Huang and Yao (2023) was used as a reference. It consists of five measurement items divided into two parts: two items on natural resources and three items on man-made sources. For the measurement of NS, the scale designed for Tao and Rodloytuk (2023) study was divided into three parts, including seven questions: one item on the narrative theme, five items on narrative structure and rhythm, and one item on the artistic context. For the measurement of HS, the scale designed by Feng, Chiou et al. (2021) was used, which consists of two sections with six items: five for folk culture activities and one for educational significance. In this study, these scales were integrated to comprehensively assess the performance of the dimensions of landscape narrative features in urban heritage parks and their impact on visitors' experience.

**Demographic variables.** Previous research has found that visitors' satisfaction is affected by the number of visits, gender, age, education, income, and place of residence (Kim & Thapa, 2018). To test the relationship between the key variables and increase the research's external effect, therefore, this paper selects number of visits, gender, age, education, income, and place of residence as control variables.

The researcher personally conducted a questionnaire survey of tourists at the West Lake of Yingzhou on September 16, 17, 23, and 24, 2023. Because minors' mental development is not mature enough to understand the questionnaire, the participants were tourists over 18 years old. A total of 380 questionnaires were distributed, and 340 questionnaires were retrieved. These

were then screened, resulting in 322 valid questionnaires by removing those with omitted questions. The effective recovery rate reached 94.47%.

This study is dedicated to the in-depth investigation of an urban heritage park located in Yingzhou West Lake, Fuyang City, Anhui Province, China, focusing on the impact of its landscape narrative features on visitors' satisfaction. To fully understand tourists' views and feelings, we plan to collect opinions and feedback from visitors to the Yingzhou West Lake through a questionnaire survey. Therefore, the questionnaire data for this study will be collected mainly from tourists to the Yingzhou West Lake.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

According to the results of the questionnaire (Table 1), first-time tourists accounted for 44.86% of the total, those visiting two to four times accounted for 38.89%, and those visiting more than five times accounted for 16.26%. The ages of the participants were distributed as follows: 25–30-year-olds accounted for 33.33% of the total, 31–40-year-olds 32.10%, 19–24-year-olds 24.69%, 41–50-year-olds 7.41%, and over 50-year-olds 2.47%. Regarding education, 55.76% of the tourists had a bachelor's degree, 15.02% had a college degree, 12.55% were in high school, 8.64% were in postgraduate studies or above, and 8.02% were in junior high school or below. In terms of income, 42.18% had a monthly income of RMB 2,001–5,000, followed by 30.86% with a monthly income of RMB 5,001–10,000, 17.28% with a monthly income of less than RMB 2,000, and 9.68% with a monthly income of more than RMB 10,000. Regarding the current residence, 65.43% were from within Fuyang City, 22.63% were from outside Fuyang City, and 11.93% were from other provinces and cities. These statistics show that the visitor group is young, highly educated, middle-income, and mainly local tourists. These characteristics provide an important background for the subsequent analysis of visitors' satisfaction.

**Table 1:** Distribution of basic characteristics of the valid sample.

Title	Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Times	1st	218	44.86	44.86
	2-4 times	189	38.89	83.74
	5 times or more	79	16.26	100.00
Gender	Male	221	45.47	45.47
	Female	265	54.53	100.00
Age	19-24 years old	120	24.69	24.69
	25-30 years old	162	33.33	58.02



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	31-40 years old	156	32.10	90.12
	41-50 years old	36	7.41	97.53
	Above 50 years old	12	2.47	100.00
Education	Junior high school and below	39	8.02	8.02
	High school, junior college, technical school	61	12.55	20.58
	College	73	15.02	35.60
	Undergraduate	271	55.76	91.36
	Graduate school and above	42	8.64	100.00
Income	Less than 2000	84	17.28	17.28
	2001-5000	205	42.18	59.47
	5001-10000	150	30.86	90.33
	More than 10000	47	9.68	99.79
Residence	Within Fuyang City	318	65.43	65.43
	Outside Fuyang City	110	22.63	88.07
	Other provinces and cities	58	11.93	100.00
	Total	486	100.0	100.0

The validation factor analysis results showed a good fit of the model (as shown in Table 2). For example, CMIN/DF = 1.319, GFI = 0.917, CFI = 0.985, and RMSEA = 0.026, which suggests that the research model explains the data well and is suitable for further analysis (as shown in Table 2).

**Table 2:** Results of validation factor analysis.

Model Fit Indicators	Statistical value	Standard value	Statistical results
CMIN/DF	1.319	1-3	Statistical value greater than 1 and less than 3
RMR	0.023	0.05	Statistical value lower than the minimum standard value, goodness of fit
GFI	0.917	$\geq 0.9$	Statistical value is higher than the minimum standard value, goodness of fit
AGFI	0.905	$\geq 0.9$	Statistical value higher than the minimum standard value, goodness of fit
NFI	0.941	$\geq 0.9$	Statistical value is higher than the minimum standard value, goodness of fit
IFI	0.985	$\geq 0.9$	Statistic is higher than the minimum standard value, goodness of fit
TLI	0.984	$\geq 0.9$	Statistic is higher than the minimum standard value, goodness of fit

Model Fit Indicators	Statistical value	Standard value	Statistical results
CFI	0.985	$\geq 0.9$	Statistical value higher than the minimum standard value, goodness of fit
RMSEA	0.026	$\leq 0.08$	Statistical value higher than the minimum standard value, goodness of fit

Correlation analysis showed that all three dimensions of landscape narrative features (PS, NS, and HS) were positively correlated with visitors' satisfaction (as shown in Table 3). The correlation coefficients between PS and visitors' satisfaction were .517, NS .575, and HS .649. This indicated that HS had the most significant effect on visitors' satisfaction, followed by NS, while PS had a relatively small effect.

**Table 3:** Variable correlation analysis, mean and standard deviation.

	M	SD	VS	PS	NS	HS
VS	3.188	0.717	1			
PS	3.328	0.818	0.517**	1		
NS	3.423	0.829	0.575**	0.556**	1	
HS	3.726	0.760	0.649**	0.558**	0.580**	1

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$

The results of the AMOS path analysis further validated these findings. Among the paths of influence of the dimensions of landscape narrative features on visitors' satisfaction, HS has the highest standardized coefficient (.333,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that it has the strongest positive effect on visitors' satisfaction; NS has a standardized coefficient of .129 ( $p < .001$ ), which also has a significant positive effect; and PS has a lower standardized coefficient (.013,  $p > 0.05$ ), with no significant effect on visitors' satisfaction.

**Table 4:** Main effects test coefficients

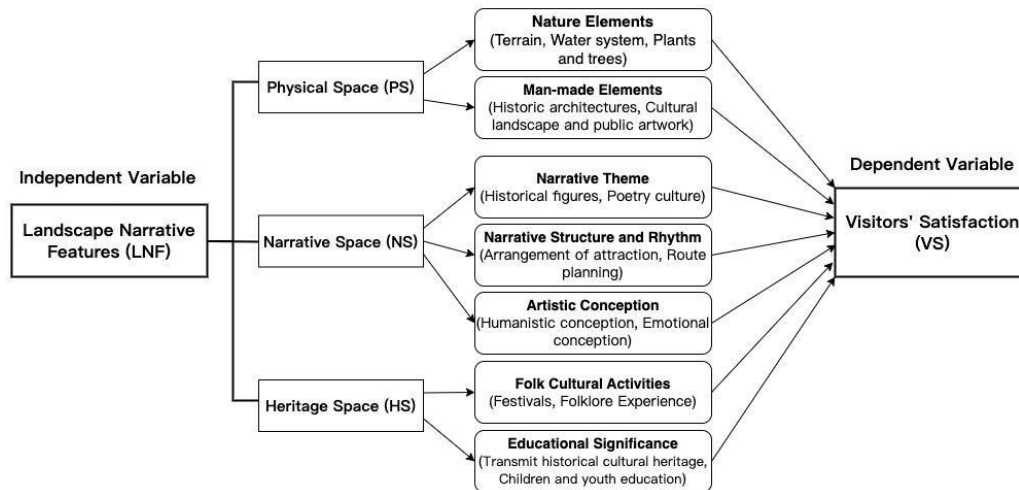
Latent variable	Observed variables	Standardization factor	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
VS	PS	0.013	0.044	0.238
VS	NS	0.129	0.042	2.42
VS	HS	0.333	0.055	5.563

The findings indicate that the three dimensions of landscape narrative features affect visitors' satisfaction differently. The positive effect of HS is the most significant, which suggests that visitors' satisfaction and identification with heritage parks can be substantially enhanced by designing landscape elements that can convey local memories, folklore activities, and cultural and educational

significance. The positive effect of NS reflects the importance of thematic design in enhancing visitors' experience of immersion, for example, through the combination of narrative themes, narrative structure, and artistic conception, so that visitors can feel the deep connection between culture and history. In contrast, although fundamental, PS has a weaker direct effect on visitors' satisfaction and may act more indirectly through other dimensions.

The findings provide the following insights for the design and management of urban heritage parks. First, enhancing the cultural connotation of heritage spaces, such as organizing folklore activities and adding cultural interactive projects, can significantly enhance visitors' experience. Second, through the optimal design of narrative spaces, such as emphasizing narrative themes and artistic conception shaping, visitors' emotional involvement and immersion can be enhanced. Lastly, the design of physical spaces should be closely integrated with narrative and heritage dimensions to better serve the presentation of the overall landscape narrative. Overall, this positive correlation provides theoretical support for research and practice, emphasizing the feasibility and necessity of using landscape narrative features to enhance visitors' satisfaction in urban heritage parks.

The three dimensions of the landscape narrative complement each other to build a complete narrative system. The HS enhances visitors' sense of cultural identity and protection through the display of local memories, folk activities, and cultural education; the NS provides visitors' experience through theme design, narrative structure planning, and artistic conception; and the PS shows the local environment and cultural characteristics through the combination of natural and man-made landscapes, providing visual and sensory support for the overall narrative. The interaction of the three dimensions effectively enhances the cultural experience and visitors' satisfaction with the urban heritage park. The final model of this study is shown in Figure 4, providing a clear representation of the core framework and key elements.



**Figure 4:** Model Illustrating the Influence of Landscape Narrative Features on Visitor Satisfaction.

## CONCLUSION

Taking Yingzhou West Lake urban heritage park as a case study, this study explores how landscape narrative features (including PS, NS, and HS) influence visitors' satisfaction. The positive influence of HS on visitors' satisfaction was most significant, indicating that the landscape design of local memory, folklore activities, and cultural education can significantly enhance visitors' cultural identity. NS provides visitors with an immersion experience and further enhances emotional resonance through narrative themes, structural design, and artistic conception. As the basis of landscape narrative, PS has a weaker direct influence. Moreover, combining narrative and heritage dimensions indirectly contributes to visitors' satisfaction.

The results of this study not only fill the research gap related to visitors' satisfaction in urban heritage parks, but also provide a theoretical basis for the balance between cultural conservation and tourism development. The study emphasizes the importance of landscape narrative features in the sustainable development of urban heritage parks, which can achieve the goal of cultural dissemination and optimizing visitors' experience. Through empirical analysis, this study provides practical guidance for the design optimization and management enhancement of future urban heritage parks.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be put forward. First, managers of urban heritage parks should further excavate and enrich the cultural connotation of the HS and enhance visitors' sense of identity and participation in local culture by organizing folklore activities and

cultural exhibitions and increasing interactive experiences. Second, in the design of the NS, attention should be paid to integrating the narrative theme and artistic conception to create a more immersive cultural scene, thus enhancing visitors' experience and emotional resonance. In addition, optimization of the PS should be closely integrated with the narrative and heritage dimensions to achieve the coordination and unity of the overall landscape narrative. This is the first study to systematically analyse the specific impact of the three dimensions of landscape narrative features on visitors' satisfaction, and it therefore provides important theoretical support and practical references for urban heritage parks in the areas of cultural value enhancement, visitors' experience optimization, and sustainable development and provides a new direction and a reference framework for future research.

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This study was conducted independently without external funding, relying on personal resources while adhering to ethical standards. The data were publicly available or self-collected without special permission, complying with the University of Malaya's ethical requirements.

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