

# Exploring Art Education in Historic Sites: A Case Study of Public Space Design in Wuxianguan

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**Abstract.** This paper explores the application of Wuxian Temple as an important historical site of Maritime Silk Road culture in art education and its design innovation path. It reveals the role of art education in protecting the cultural connotation of historical sites and realizing modern design innovation. Wuxian Temple is not only a place for cultural communication and historical inheritance, but also an ideal place for interdisciplinary educational practice. Combining cultural narratives, multimedia displays and augmented reality (AR) technology in art education of historical sites can enhance the cultural depth and visual appeal of public space design works. At the same time, it enhances students' creativity and cultural identity. This process highlights the unique value of art education in site art design, provides new ideas for innovation in public space design of historical sites, and provides valuable experience for the reform of teaching models of art education.

**Keywords:** Art Education; Cultural Preservation; Sustainable Design; Interdisciplinary Innovation; Heritage Revitalization.

## 1. Introduction

The culture of the Maritime Silk Road (MSR culture for short) is an important channel for economic and cultural exchanges between China and other countries. Under the diverse cultural impact, the Belt and Road Initiative from China inherits and promotes the MSR culture. China is going to share the prosperity and mutually beneficial development with the countries along the Belt and Road. [1] MSR culture has not only witnessed a thousand years of commerce and trade prosperity, but also spawned a rich variety of historical and cultural sites where carrying valuable cultural information. MSR culture is also an important resource for deepening historical research, promoting tourism development, academic research and design practice. Wuxianguan, where locates in the city center of Guangzhou, is a landmark historical site in the Lingnan region. It has existing cultural symbols and spatial forms, which provides a valuable case study on the innovative mode of MSR cultural narratives and public space design. However, there is a lack of systematic research and clear paths to explore the specific role of art education in the design practice of historical sites.

This paper uses Wuxian Temple as a practical carrier to explore the path of integrating art education into the spatial design of historical sites. It analyzes the role of exploring the cultural connotation of public space, improving design quality, promoting the development of students' comprehensive abilities, and responding to modern needs while analyzing the protection of sites. Through a combination of literature analysis, case study and field research, a theoretical framework of Maritime Silk Road culture and art education is constructed to explore the educational effectiveness in public space design practice, and to extract a collaborative model of historical site protection and art education innovation. In the study, a design strategy driven by practical teaching is proposed, which integrates historical and cultural heritage and modern innovation. This not only provides new ideas for the cross-border integration of art education and heritage protection, but also lays a theoretical and practical foundation for the reform of art education models. The final result aims to deepen the empowering value of art education for cultural heritage protection, and cultivate students' deep understanding and innovation ability of cultural heritage. It is a new paradigm of expandable art education, which injects sustainable development momentum into similar cultural projects and art education innovation.

## 2. Case Study - Design of Public Space in Wuxianguan

### 2.1 Historical and Cultural Background of Wuxianguan

Wuxianguan got its name from five immortals drove sheep into the city in ancient times, bringing a good harvest and peace to Guangzhou. In the historical development of MSR culture, the unique natural and social environment has formed the long religious history of Guangzhou, which has achieved the status of 'Four Religious Places' in the history of religion in China. [2] So Wuxianguan is not only a place of religious worship, but also a node of cultural exchanges, which connecting the diversity of beliefs and cultures. providing a unique platform of practice for art education and modern design innovation platform.

### 2.2 Art Education Practices in Design

An interdisciplinary teaching mode is applied to traditional cultural studies. Firstly, the narrative of venue culture is introduced into the teaching, helping students to understand the historical background and cultural heritage of the Wuxianguan through a variety of ways, such as images, documents, site visits and cultural art installations. The Chinese educational system, rooted in its cultural heritage, is a cornerstone for understanding the national identity of Chinese educational science. [3] Secondly, from design concept generation to later spatial refinement, students work in teams. Finally, in the deepening process of the schematic design, students combine historical and modern design to form a design that is both functional and culturally expressive. Students not only mastered the design skills, but also deepened their understanding of cultural heritage and cultural sites, and improved their cultural heritage and innovation ability. (Figure 1)

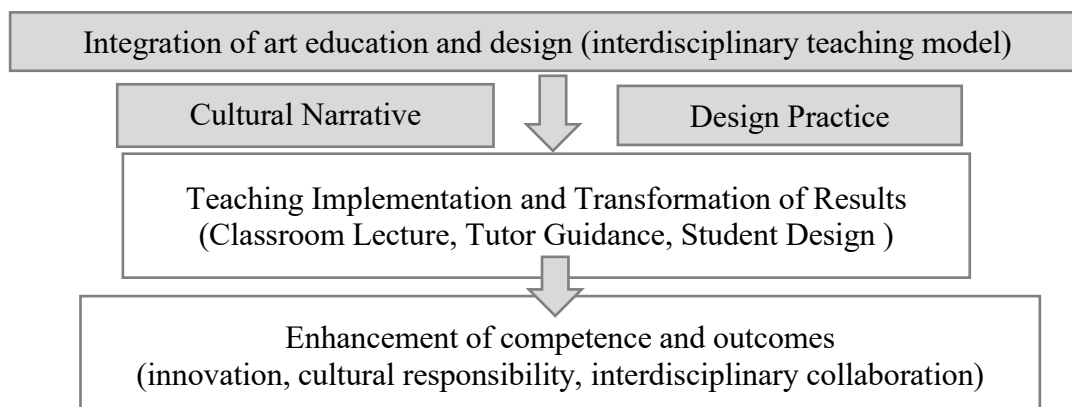


Fig. 1 A Practical Framework for Art Education in the Design of Public Space in Wuxianguan

### 2.3 Design Strategies and Technology Applications

The design of the public space in Wuxianguan adopts different design strategies and technologies. Firstly, with a virtual explanation of AR technology and interactive projections, Audience can experience the dynamic stories of Wuxianguan, which not only attracts young audiences, but also enhances youthful expression of traditional culture.[4] Secondly, modern materials and technologies are used maintaining the original Lingnan traditional architectural elements. For example, without changing the original building, the use of glass and steel structure makes the space more transparent and open, which also saves the electricity cost of indoor lighting. It ensures the safety and comfort of the function and presents the harmonious coexistence of tradition and modernity visually. Finally, the space of artistic integration includes core cultural relics display, cultural relics stone carving exhibition area, viewing platform, etc are divided. This partition not only ensures the continuation of traditional rituals, but also combines the public cultural service system. It promotes the establishment of a modern inheritance method combining school and community education, aiming at serving and improving people's livelihood [5]. Through these strategies of balancing between history and modernity, Wuxianguan goes vital (Table 1).

Table 1: Design Strategies and Technological Applications for Public Space in Wuxianguan

| Design Dimension                                    | Specific Strategies                                                   | Technologies & Methods                                         | Achieved Outcomes                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spatial Narrative Strategies                        | Multimedia displays, interactive projections                          | AR<br>VR                                                       | Cultural stories, enhance audience immersion                             |
| Architectural Restoration and Renovation Strategies | Integration of traditional Lingnan elements with modern style         | Glass materials, steel structures                              | Preserve traditional aesthetics while improving spatial transparency     |
| Spatial Function Strategies                         | Core cultural relics exhibition, cultural displays, viewing platforms | Clear zoning of spatial functions, outdoor public space design | Balance traditional ritual preservation with modern cultural experiences |

## 2.4 Design Effectiveness and Educational Outcomes

This project not only enhances cultural communication and audience experience, but also develops students design ability and innovative thinking. With AR technology, WuxianGuan is no longer a static historical relic, but a dynamic platform for cultural communication, which helps visitors to understand deeper in MSC culture and Wuxianguan. Furthermore, a practical approach is applied with the enhancement of practical thinking as an educational goal. [6] Students have accumulated rich practical experience in the design process: from integrating traditional cultural elements into modern design, using advanced technology to enhance design expression, and solving problems effectively in teamwork (Fig. 2). It benefits students' career development.

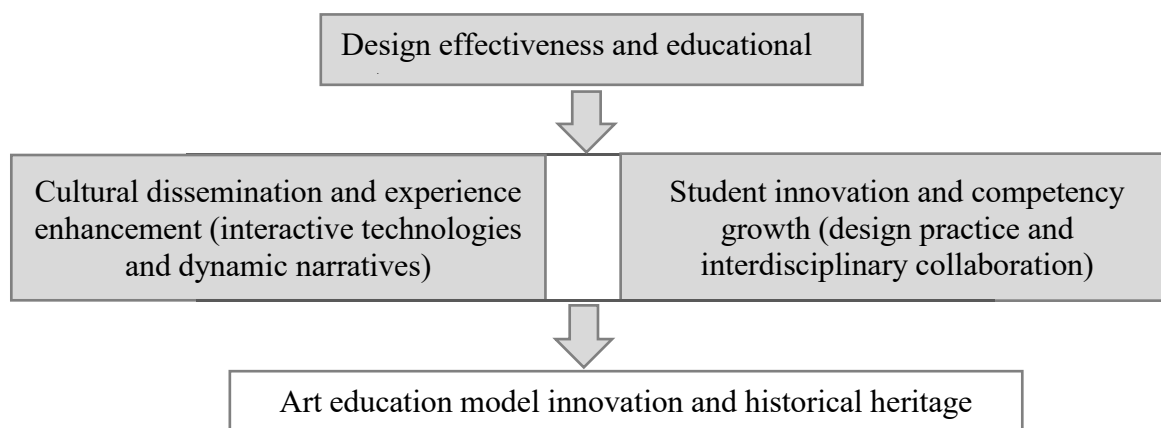


Fig. 2 Public Space Design Effectiveness and Educational Outcomes

## 3. Innovative Models of Art Education in the Design of Historic Sites.

### 3.1 Combination of Historical Heritage and Educational Innovation

Historical site design serves dual imperatives of cultural conservation and pedagogical innovation in art education. As an interdisciplinary mediator in public space design, art education bridges heritage preservation with creative activation through two operational mechanisms. The pedagogical framework integrates site-specific historical narratives into curricula via three core components: 1) field investigations cultivating spatial literacy, 2) archival analysis developing contextual understanding, and 3) symbolic decoding of cultural motifs. This tripartite methodology strengthens students' multiscale conservation awareness through resource optimization, platform development, and instructional adaptation. Concurrently, the discipline fosters critical innovation through dialectical design processes. Students systematically deconstruct traditional paradigms to extract temporally transcendent elements, employing experimental methodologies to reconcile historical authenticity with contemporary relevance. This iterative practice cultivates meta-cognitive skills in balancing preservation ethics with technological adaptation, transforming cultural

sensitivity into actionable design intelligence. The resultant pedagogical model advances both technical proficiency and conceptual flexibility, positioning heritage sites as living laboratories for artistic experimentation. Through this symbiotic approach, art education redefines historical spaces as dynamic interfaces between collective memory and future-oriented creativity, establishing new paradigms for culturally sustainable design practice. (Fig. 3)

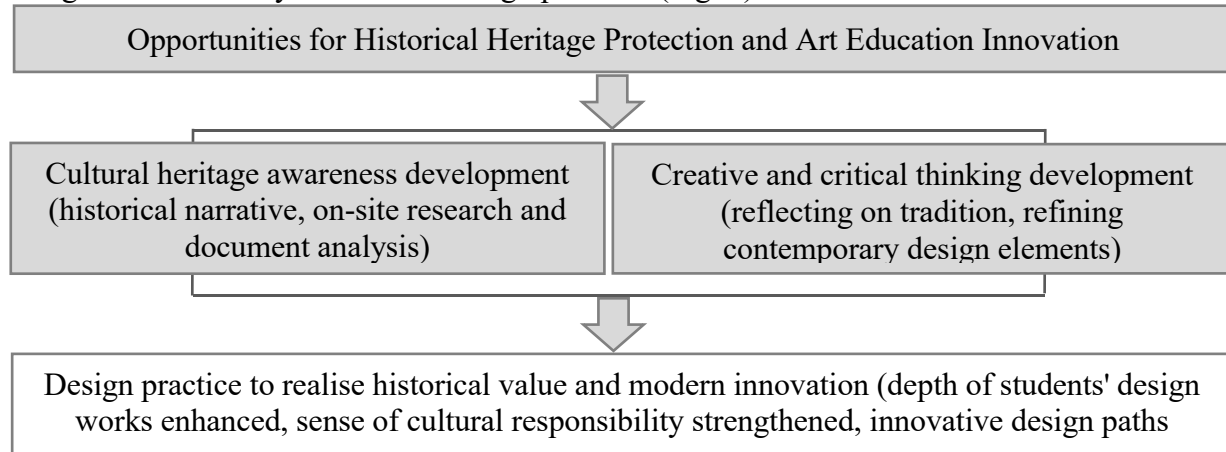


Fig. 3 Historical heritage and art education innovation combined

### 3.2 Educational Value of Interdisciplinary Co-Operation

As an evolving discipline, art studies require dual development in modern humanities: clarifying disciplinary positioning through academic categorization while strengthening intrinsic quality via systematic enhancement[7]. The curriculum integrates artistic education, design practice, historical analysis, and technological applications to cultivate multifaceted problem-solving skills. Students learn to analyze historical contexts, apply digital tools, and adopt sustainable strategies, translating interdisciplinary knowledge into practical design solutions. Collaborative projects further develop teamwork competencies, requiring students to collectively address site-specific challenges, negotiate interdisciplinary demands, and optimize resources. This model promotes integrated perspectives for historical site design, balancing cultural preservation with technological innovation and academic research with creative experimentation. By merging theoretical rigor with practical execution, the approach establishes a framework for advancing art education through three pillars: critical historical engagement, technical proficiency, and environmental consciousness. Such interdisciplinary synergy not only enriches design education but also addresses complex societal needs through academically grounded, culturally responsive solutions. (Table. 2)

Table 2: Interdisciplinary Collaboration in the Wuxian Temple Public Space Design Project

| Educational Dimension                       | Interdisciplinary Collaboration Content                                         | Student Competency Enhancement                               | Manifestations and Outcomes                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Knowledge Integration & Vision Expansion    | Art education, design practice, historical research, technology application     | Comprehensive skills, multi-perspective analytical abilities | Expanded design perspectives, deepened academic rigor, cross-domain knowledge application    |
| Team Collaboration & Communication Practice | Team-based analysis of site issues, proposal development, resource coordination | Communication skills, teamwork, and management capabilities  | Improved student collaboration and problem-solving abilities in interdisciplinary contexts   |
| Theory-Practice Integration                 | Guidance from faculty and external experts, project implementation              | Ability to integrate theory and practice                     | Students gained hands-on experience, strengthened theoretical understanding through practice |

### 3.3 Suggestions for Future Applications and Teaching Models

Building on the Wuxianguan case study, future art education can advance historical site design innovation through three dimensions: First, systematically integrating cultural narratives, digital technologies, and participatory design to enhance cultural depth and creativity. Second, strengthening theory-practice interaction via case studies, design competitions, and feedback mechanisms to improve talent development. Finally, expanding cross-disciplinary collaboration through partnerships with heritage authorities and international workshops to promote knowledge sharing. This innovative educational model not only cultivates design talents but also pioneers new approaches to cultural preservation, with this project serving as an exemplary prototype.

## 4. Conclusion

This study shows that art education can provide cultural heritage and innovation drive for spatial design practice. At the same time, it enhances students' creative and critical thinking and teamwork skills. Through multidisciplinary education and diverse practices, students will be able to address complex design challenges from a broader perspective and retain historical and cultural heritage while promoting design innovation. It also demonstrates the potential of art education for design innovation, combining cultural narratives and modern technology to provide multiple avenues for the preservation and renewal of historic sites. Students' direct participation in hands-on teaching deepens their understanding of regional cultures, while enhancing their sense of responsibility for cultural heritage. Looking to the future, the potential for the application of art education in site design teaching is vast. By improving the educational content, strengthening interdisciplinary cooperation, and promoting successful cases, art education will play a greater role in cultural heritage, design innovation, and talent cultivation, and contribute to the opening up of a new direction for monument preservation and design.

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