

On the Construction of "field of memory" under the Nostalgia for the Missing Countryside

—Taking the Ancient Town of Fengzhou as an Example

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Abstract. The construction and development of historical towns, as one aspect of the historical process, have gathered a wide range of collective memories from the development of human society. Relative historical towns have also become regional, large-scale, multi-system built environmental heritage in the course of historical development. At present, fragmented historical towns have lost their original field, leading to the corresponding historical memories having no roots, and nostalgia arises accordingly. In response, based on the "memory field" theory, an attempt is made to explore the historical towns' social memory from multiple aspects, creating memory fields from three scales: town area, urban area, and place, to reactivate the fragmented historical towns. Furthermore, taking the ancient town of Fengzhou as an example, many historical memories are explored, and the memory field is constructed from three dimensions. From the perspective of social memory, the paper explores the practical issues of memory construction and environmental renovation in historical towns, providing a reference for the renewal of similar historical towns.

Keywords: historical town; field of memory; social memory; built environment; urban renewal.

1. Introduction

In the process of rapid urbanization, many historical towns are facing phenomena such as the continuous fragmentation of historical architectural complexes, traditional buildings being submerged by newly built high-rises, and the gradual disappearance of the social memory of ancient cities over time, hindering development and failing to preserve the nostalgia. Moreover, historical towns often suffer from issues such as disorderly demolition and construction, dense buildings, insufficient public activity spaces, and a lack of cultural landscapes. In the face of such historical ancient towns, this article attempts to apply the "lieux de mémoire" (field of memory) theory and uses the example of Fengzhou Ancient Town to protect, restore, and revitalize the town in the current environment, aiming for regeneration in both spatial and social senses, and to explore urban renewal paths in the new era.

2. Exploring "Field of memory"

2.1 Theoretical Analysis Of The "Field of Memory"

The concept of "field of memory" is the concept of localization proposed by Pierre Nora in the 1980s based on the concept of "collective memory" [1]. Since then, domestic and foreign scholars have focused on the theory of "field of memory" from the perspective of multiple disciplines. The initial theoretical exploration is focused on the collective memory level[2], and then the construction of memory place is combined with cases [3,4]. The current research content and scope of practice are further expanded and applied to protection planning [5-7](Table 1).

Table 1. The study of the memory field theory

Time	Scholar	Research content
1980s	Pierre Nora	In a comprehensive discussion of collective memory, the concept of "memory field" was put forward for the first time, hoping to retrieve the identity and belonging of national culture [8]

1998	Matthew Potteiger	Based on landscape narrative theory, the strategy combines combining awakening device with local historical memory [9]
2013	Douglas	Discuss the memory in the architectural landscape, and emphasize the importance of the historical memory in the building [5]
2015	GaoXiaokang	Research on the field of memory should not only focus on the architectural entity but also pay attention to the spatial context, emphasizing the protection of place memory [10]
2023	WangLin	It is proposed to excavate the historical memory in the heritage space from three scales of intercity, urban and place, and emphasize the social memory value of the heritage [11]

In application practice, the focus of "memory" gradually shifts from cities to towns, while "places" extends from exhibition Spaces such as museums, exhibition halls and monuments to living places such as squares, streets and villages. In the field of built environment, "place" is no longer only the medium of memory, but also can be used to guide the transformation of the field and space, so that the space becomes explicit, intuitive and readable. This paper refers to the three construction scales of intercity, urban and place adopted in WangLin's exploration of urban "memory field" in 2023 and further studies the construction of "memory field" of historical ancient towns.

2.2 The Construction Of The "memory field" Of The Ancient Town

The social memory carried by ancient towns mainly comes from both spatial and social aspects. First of all, the material level is mainly the traditional buildings left in the ancient town. Traditional buildings include dwellings, ancestral halls, temples, ancient city walls, tablet inscriptions, Bridges, etc, which are often damaged in modern construction. The traditional buildings in the ancient city grow in the ancient town, and are closely related to the production and life of the indigenous people. Compared with the intangible cultural heritage, such as belief and customs, these material cultural heritage is obvious to the masses, and living, belief, production and life are all spread out around these material space [12]. The historical value of the ancient town is mainly reflected in these material Spaces, which contain the historical information of the development of the ancient city and the humanistic connotation of the ancient city. As a historical witness, it can directly reflect the development and changes of the ancient city's history, and constitute the "field" bearing "memory".

Secondly, the social level is dominated by collective memory. Traditional buildings are not only the witness of the history of the ancient town, but also contain the collective memory of the history of the ancient town, which is often said in the mouth of the indigenous people. The history of the past has not been broken down by the change of times, and the indigenous people have inherited the memory of the ancient town from generation to generation."Collective memory has a dual nature, which is not only a material object, material reality, but also a symbol, or something with spiritual meaning, something attached to and imposed by the group [13]". The collective memory of the ancient town includes the glorious historical experience of the ancient town, the major historical events, the reproduction and changes of big families, etc. Its value connotation exceeds the "field" as the carrier and continues to this day.

2.3 The Historical Background Of Building The "memory field"

There are a large number of historical towns in China, but the protection planning has not yet formed a complete system, and problems such as different protection degree, different transformation scale and fluctuating construction quality occur from time to time. In terms of the planning status of historical towns in China, there are not many ancient towns that retain their original flavor after the planning. Although the planned historical towns have ancient appearance, the spatial image of their restoration and local reconstruction is based on public cognition rather than local history, resulting in the phenomenon of similar historical towns and images in different places. In the context of comprehensive urbanization, the historical towns with fragmented

traditional architectural groups gradually lose their original field, resulting in the corresponding historical memory without roots. In addition, "staying homesickness" is also one of the main tasks of China's new urbanization. The change of urban spatial style and the disappearance of cultural field aggravate the generation of "homesickness", which requires urban planning to enhance the collective memory, especially the cultural identity of the indigenous people. In this context, how to protect, restore and activate historical towns to obtain regeneration in the dual sense of space and society is a major topic of urban renewal.

3. Social Memory Mining In Fengzhou Ancient Town

3.1 The Starting Point Of The Maritime Silk Road

Fengzhou has a superior geographical location and convenient land and water transportation. Jinji ancient port connects Quanzhou Yitong port and inland areas, and overland connects all parts of Fujian. During the Song and Yuan dynasties, Fengzhou became an important place to pray for the wind and worship the sea. After holding the ceremony for the wind under Jiuri Mountain, sea ships set sail from Jinji Port and set foot on the "Maritime Silk Road" [14].

Jiuri Mountain retains nearly 80 stone carvings from the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, of which 13 are feng stone carvings that record the ancient overseas traffic and trade. These stone carvings are not only the written records of the "praying for wind" sacrificial activities held by the officials and the Quanzhou departments of the Northern Song and Southern Dynasties, but also the only real record of the official sailing ceremonies in ancient China. They show the prosperity of overseas trade at that time, reflecting the great importance that the ancient Chinese government attached to the development of overseas trade. It can be seen that Fengzhou ancient town is an important part of the Maritime Silk Road and a material space carrier, and an important part of social memory. Its historical connection with overseas trade therefore has the value connotation of economic and cultural exchanges at home and abroad.

3.2 The Beginning Of Minnan Culture

During the Eastern Han Dynasty, Fujian established the Jian'an Prefecture (located in present-day Jianou City), which included Jian'an (in Jianou), Nanping, Jiangle, Jianping (located in present-day Jianyang), Dongping (located in present-day Songxi), and Shaowu counties, as well as the Wuxing (located in present-day Pucheng) and Houguan (located in present-day Fuzhou area) counties in the eastern Min region. However, in the southern Min region, there was only one county, Dong'an, with its county seat located in Fengzhou Town, governing the current areas of Putian, Quanzhou, Xiamen, and Zhangzhou cities. The establishment of Dong'an County is a historical testament to the gradual increase of Han Chinese in the southern Min region, indicating that the southern Min officially entered the incubation period of regional Han culture .

In addition, the tombs in Fengzhou, Nan'an were concentrated and had a large number. A large number of ceramic objects were unearthed, and the tomb bricks were beautifully decorated, reflecting the strong strength of economic and social development at that time. The local artifacts excavated from the tombs also confirm the advanced culture brought by the Han people to the south. The continuous discovery of the period bricks with different years in the Six Dynasties fully shows that Fengzhou was the political and economic center of southern Fujian in the Six Dynasties. It can be seen that Fengzhou ancient town has deeply participated in the origin, formation and development of southern Fujian culture, and has carried the origin of southern Fujian culture.

3.3 Living Fossil Of Clan Society

The Fengzhou area is a typical representative of mature clan society in southern Fujian. Within the city, there are prominent families such as the Huangs of Yanshan, the Fuses of Wurong, and the Kes of Rongdong residing. Each generation of these clans has referenced ancient and modern

family rituals to construct ancestral halls (also known as "main halls"), branch halls, and family halls, forming an extensive system of ancestral temples within the ancient city of Fengzhou. The temples and halls are scattered throughout the city like stars in the sky, forming a typical settlement distribution feature centered around the temples and halls, with residential houses of the same clan clustering around them (Fig 1). To this day, the major families of the ancient town of Fengzhou remain prosperous and continue to develop towards southern Fujian and Southeast Asian overseas regions, with the clan memories within the ancient city still intact.

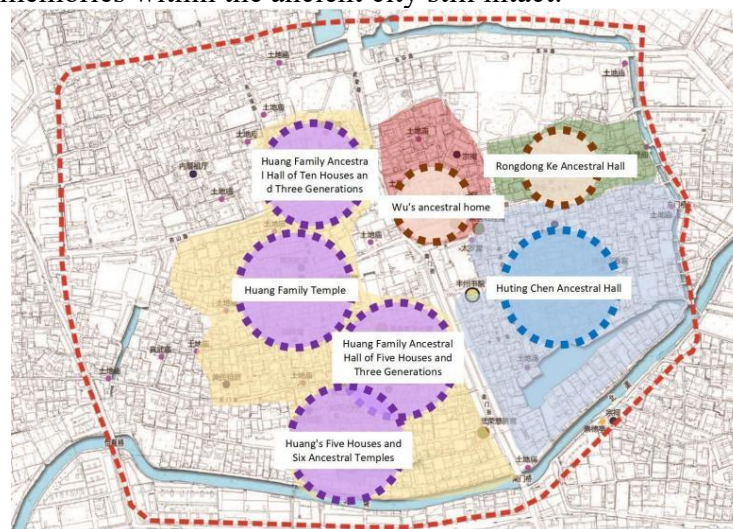


Fig. 1 Distribution Map of Ancestral Halls in Fengzhou Ancient Town

4. The Environmental Creation Of The Ancient City Of Fengzhou

In the 28th year of the Republic of China (1939), the ancient city of Fengzhou was ordered to be demolished by the Nationalist Government under the pretext of scorched earth tactics against Japanese aggression. Since the founding of New China, the surrounding area of the ancient city has been gradually developed, forming the current contiguous town area. From then on, the traditional Fengzhou ancient city became part of history, turning into a social memory. In response to the challenges of the scattered historical heritage of Fengzhou ancient city, the damaged historical pattern, and the difficulty in protecting and continuing the integrity of the city, this chapter presents specific practices based on the theory of "lieux de mémoire" and the memory of Fengzhou.

4.1 Event Combing, Rendering Field Narrative

Time has passed and the outline of the ancient city of Fengzhou has long since disappeared, replaced by Fengzhou Town. Although the scale of the town has changed, the traditional architectural complex, as the "prototype," still exists, with some of its forms, functions, and social memories continuing.

Based on the town scale, leveraging traditional architectural complexes, we provide the material conditions for the visitability and readability of the ancient town through intuitive narrative spaces, enhancing the storytelling of the place. We integrate the social memories of the town, relying on the cultures of the Maritime Silk Road, ancient city, folk customs, and religion as the core, and establish 8 cultural heritage display and utilization spaces based on existing traditional buildings, including 5 cultural exhibition halls, 3 specialized museums, and 1 appreciation center. We create three major narrative themes: "Tracing the Origins and Exploring the Ancient City's Cultural Context," "Exploring History and Appreciating the Traces of Famous Figures," and "Praying for the Winds and Admiring the Splendor of the Silk Road," which visually showcase the rich historical and cultural context of Fengzhou. Secondly, associate the spatial remains of various materials with the intangible historical events, restore the historical imprints of the ancient city, and use the exhibition space to visually render the narrative atmosphere of the town area (Fig 2).

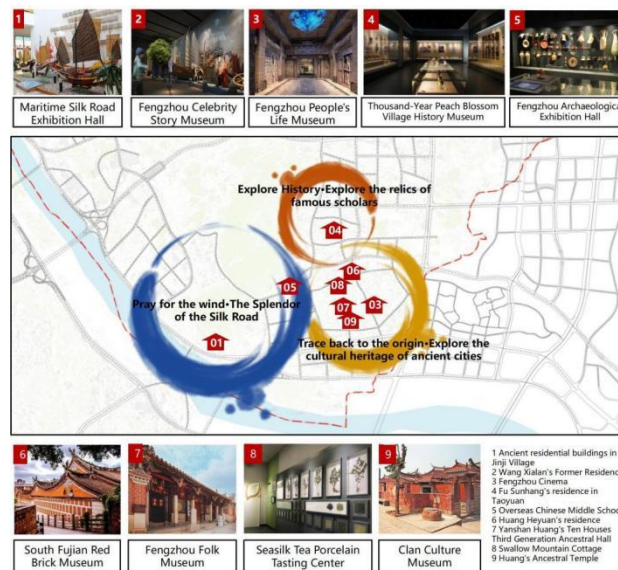


Fig. 2 Museum and cultural venues distribution map

4.2 Combining Points, Lines, And Planes To Create A Field Space

Based on the urban scale, interpret its historical space, and create a memory field for the ancient city of Fengzhou. Since the ancient city of Fengzhou was ordered to be demolished by the Nationalist Government under the pretext of scorched earth tactics against Japan, the ancient city walls are mostly gone. However, based on the existing moat, the remains of various city gates, and ancient map materials, the scope of the ancient city area can be roughly inferred.

Firstly, it involves sorting out the spatial memory of the ancient city of Fengzhou, including the locations of historical remains such as city gates, city god temples, ancestral halls, etc., and following the original spatial relationships. Then, by unifying the planning and design of landmark buildings and landscape features, it reflects social memories such as the Maritime Silk Road, family lineage, and the evolution of the city (Fig 3). When it comes to the specific design, it is necessary to improve and enhance based on the new environment and demands while respecting history, as Cohen said, "The historian's interpretation is neither a straightforward restoration of history, nor a simple reproduction of the historian's values and desires as a narrator of history... A balance must be found between the present and the past."

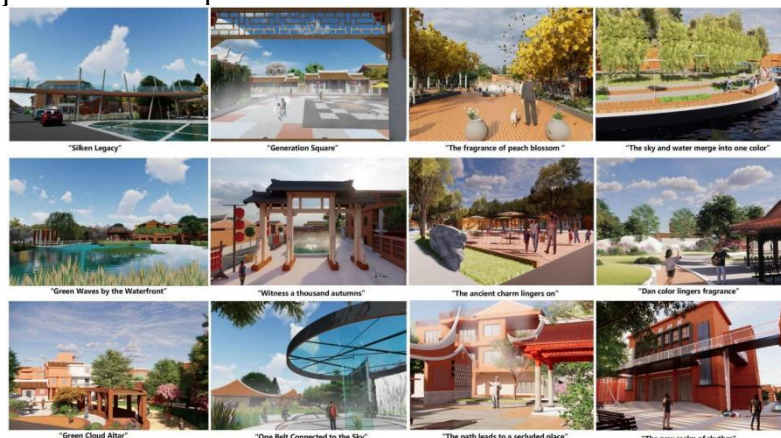


Fig. 3 Node effect diagram

Secondly, organize the historical alleys within the urban area, renovate the buildings along the streets, and create a memory field for the historical alleys. Based on the classification of historical alleys, the first and second category historical alleys in Fengzhou Ancient City are identified as historical alleys, with a total of 16 alleys after statistics. In terms of spatial proportion, refer to the scale of traditional alley spaces and make appropriate improvements on this basis, controlling the

D/H ratio to be close to 1 for aesthetic purposes; for the height of buildings along the street, maintain consistency with the height of the original traditional buildings, with a height limit of 7 meters for buildings on both sides of the core main axis, that is, within two stories, so as to maintain the traditional narrative space while optimizing the viewing perspective of the buildings along the street. For buildings along the street and low-rise buildings, consider stepping back to create space that can increase the sense of historical closeness and optimize the first contour line of the alley; in terms of alley style, use the same cultural elements to enhance the unity of the alley space and reflect social memory in the details. Incorporate elements such as red brick paving, walls with brick and stone, bottle vase railings, and sea silk cultural carvings into the alley space, blending the connection of the alley .

Finally, the restoration of historical buildings creates a tangible memory field. Some of the historical buildings in the ancient city of Fengzhou are in disrepair due to aging, leading to collapse, or have been modified, rebuilt, or even demolished, making it difficult to discern their traditional forms. The construction of the memory field concerning architecture first requires the restoration of the original building space, expressing its characteristic architectural forms and spatial patterns, providing a material carrier for historical memory. On the basis of restoring the architectural style, historical elements are further organically integrated into the building's exterior decoration and surrounding landscapes, promoting the current situation towards the historical prototype [11]. In addition to the historical architectural complexes that have suffered damage, modern buildings have long been integrated into the ancient town of Fengzhou. The handling of modern architecture is crucial in the creation of the urban field throughout the town.

Through the assessment of the architectural quality and style of the existing buildings within the ancient city of Fengzhou, the current buildings are classified and treated accordingly based on their type and preservation status. Restoration is the method of protection for cultural relics and historical sites; maintenance involves strengthening and conservatively restoring historical buildings and elements with well-preserved architectural patterns, styles, and main structures without altering their external features; improvement is for some historically significant buildings that are worn out and outdated, involving modern renovation and integrating them into the memory field; preservation is the approach for stone houses and modern buildings that are in good condition and do not conflict with the ancient city's style; refurbishment mainly affects the exterior facades of modern buildings that conflict with the ancient city's style but are of good quality and difficult to demolish, revitalizing the space outside the buildings; demolition is for buildings that conflict with the ancient city's style, destroy the historical environment, and are only removed without reconstruction, or for buildings that need to be demolished due to road widening or creating new roads; new construction involves building historical landscapes in vacant spaces to create memory fields (Fig 4).

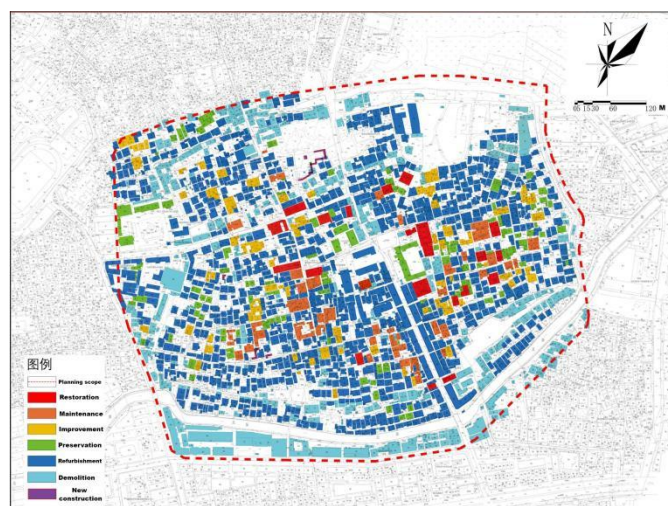


Fig. 4 Architectural rectification planning

In summary, after determining the scope of the ancient city area of Fengzhou, key historical spaces are selected to shape critical narrative nodes, mainly reflecting major social memories such as the Maritime Silk Road, cultural origins, and family legacies. By referencing the spatial texture of traditional streets and alleys, existing historical streets and alleys are revitalized, connecting points into lines to form the framework of the urban area. Existing buildings within the urban area are restored and transformed to fully create a sense of place that reflects the scale of the urban memory.

5. Summary

With the evolution of historical carriers and the destruction of historical environments, the physical relics of most historical towns have become relatively scarce, and their historical value has been more transformed into an implicit form of social memory. Therefore, although technical and engineering-level restoration and renovation of traditional buildings can achieve certain results, to realize the regeneration of historical towns in both spatial and social senses, and to retain the nostalgia, it is necessary to delve deeper into and develop the social memories they contain. The "field of memory" theory provides a theoretical framework for this purpose. This article first delves into the social memory of Fengzhou Ancient Town, then renders the field narrative at the town scale, creates the field space at the urban scale, and restores historical scenes at the place scale, exploring the revitalization development path of Fengzhou Ancient Town. This is intended to provide some reference for saving historical towns and memories that are about to be submerged by the times.

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