

# A Sense of Place: Reinterpreting Cultural Identity of Modern Bridges in Yangzhou through Printmaking

Jianhan Zhou<sup>1</sup>, Mohd Fauzi Sedon<sup>2\*</sup>

Faculty of Art, Sustainability & Creative Industry, Sultan Idris Education University, 39500  
Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia,<sup>1,2</sup>  
Email: 1034221409@qq.com<sup>1</sup>

Corresponding Author Email: mohd.fauzi@fskik.upsi.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v15-i1/24494> DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v15-i1/24494

**Published Date:** 26 January 2025

## Abstract

This project investigates the aesthetics of space and place through bridges and place theory. In the context of modernization, the space of urban bridges has changed dramatically. In Yangzhou, a new sense of place has been created as a result of the integration of the culture and environment. This research project uses printmaking as a medium to identify how traditional elements are presented in bridge spaces and explains what factors shape the city's unique sense of place. Gu Zhijun, Wen Zhongyan, and Mehretu are the artists within the scope of the research, who through deconstructing and reorganizing elements of place, have dedicated themselves to creating works that demonstrate sense of place. This research using transparent superimpositions and spatial interlacing, presenting multiple spaces in the same plane, causing visual confusion, and identifying a sense of place triggered by the overlap of memories and landscapes. The project also contains metaphors for the psychological feelings of people confronted with the process of urban development. The artworks created find a suitable possibility for the visual expression of time and space. In addition, the project provides a valuable reference for the preservation, renewal and sustainable development of modern cities.

**Keywords:** Sense of Place, Memory, Space and Environment, Cultural Identity, Modern Bridges

## Introduction

Modernization has led to the rapid growth of cities and their appearance is changing rapidly. With the emergence of a large number of new buildings and bridges, many cities are characterized by meaningless landscapes, and these new constructions are often disconnected and fragmented from their original environments, leading to a sense of disorientation among residents. These spaces appear featureless due to a lack of cultural uniqueness, which makes people feel uneasy, lose their sense of belonging and security, and

some even feel threatened by the environment. However, people living in Yangzhou city have gained a strong sense of place over time. The modernization of Yangzhou city is not accidental or overnight, but has its own deep and inevitable cultural genetic code, of which the modern bridge is an important carrier (Hou, Jin & Hu, 2022).

Yangzhou is a historical and cultural city that thrives on water, which witnessed the rise and fall of the Grand Canal and prospered because of it (Li & Li, 2021). Due to the vastness of the waters, Yangzhou has a large number of bridges in the city, which makes the cityscape richer. These bridges have shaped a unique urban space for Yangzhou, making it full of spirituality and flavor. As Qu (2003) argued this historical and cultural city famous for its water is also known as the “bridge city”, which is rich in bridge resources due to its intertwined rivers and lakes.

The modern Wanfu Bridge in the urban space is related to the architectural heritage of Yangzhou and the cultural beliefs arising from the canal. The form of the Lingbo Bridge is reminiscent of the waves of water and echoes the shape of the three bays of the ancient Yangzhou Canal. The design of the Jinse Bridge is related to Yangzhou's ancient Qin culture. The Paper-cutting Bridge integrates the lightness of Yangzhou's ancient architectural heritage with the heaviness of the steel bridge through rich imagination, deep structural skills and innovative courage (Huang, Lei, Yu & Xu, 2021).

These modern bridge spaces are influenced by Yangzhou culture, as well as its culture and people's sense of place. Yang (2020) explained this strong sense of place stems from the historical and cultural environment that Yangzhou people have been immersed in since childhood, and these new landscapes with coherence are often perceived as aesthetically pleasing and easily accepted. Yangzhou's modern bridges not only serve a practical function, but also convey the unique cultural spirit and lifestyle of Yangzhou. As an important part of the urban landscape, these bridges not only become visual focal points in the space, but also carry people's sense of identity and cultural belonging to the city.

### **Project Outline**

This project uses printmaking as a medium to explore the sense of place of environments influenced by bridges in the context of modernization. This research project explores the impact of cultural identity on urban space, and examines how modern urban space is imbued with meaning and thus transformed into a cultural space. The research project utilizing the layering technique and unique printmaking process to explore superimpose images and translucent effects.

The project pays special attention to the process of constructing cultural representation and it is specifically manifested in the following aspects:

- i. The interweaving and overlapping of landmark bridges and their related cultural elements in modern Yangzhou urban space and their compositional visual aesthetics.
- ii. Exploring the sense of place and illusion generated by bridge landscapes through the interplay between scattered juxtapositions, mutual interlacing and transparent superimpositions of related Yangzhou cultural elements.

By deconstructing, reconstructing, juxtaposing and transparently superimposing prints on the modern bridge space in Yangzhou, and utilizing the scatter composition method, this

studio creates a visual illusion of the intersection of tradition and modernity. This sense of place is not fictionalized, but rather delves into the visual and psychological realities of the experience, aiming to illustrate how people actually feel visually and psychologically in that space.

### **Related Theoretical Ideas**

#### *The Place Theory by Tuan, Relph, Norberg-Schulz and Lynch*

A sense of place is derived from human experience and is a response to interaction with the personality and characteristics of a locality, and is related to concepts such as place attachment and place identity. Zhang (2018, p.53) stated a sense of place is a universal emotional bond that satisfies people's needs, a deep emotional connection to a place that has been socially and culturally transformed, and an emotional experience mediated by the local environment. It is a socially and culturally transformed emotional experience mediated by the local environment. This feeling is similar to "home", an accumulation of meaningful memories, which can help people form a stable sense of familiarity, security, and belonging.

Tuan (1971) believed that people need to re-feel the environment they live in, to value the relationship between people and the environment, and to analyze the changing world we live in from an empirical point of view rather than from the methods of logical positivism and quantitative investigation. Chen and Liu (2019) argued when people are confronted with unfamiliar environments, space is an abstract existence, but when people live in them for a period of time, in the process of interacting with the space, they gradually feel the meanings embedded in it, which have value for them and form a certain sense of security, which is filled with pointing.

Each person is at the center of his or their own world, and the human body is able to feel the directions of front, back, left, right, up, and down. These six directions are not geometrical spaces, but value judgments and emotions generated by experience. Each of these directions is not cold geometrical data, but has a corresponding symbolic meaning. In the face of the rapid changes of modern cities, the meaningful space gives us more directions, thus creating a sense of place and home (Tuan,1971).

Relph (1976) explained that places are different from spaces, and that places are meaningful spaces, which are endowed with social and cultural significance. Places are influenced by social activities and are constantly influencing various social activities. The interaction between people and places gives people a sense of security and identity.

Places are not independent individual experiences, nor can they be explained by just applying simple descriptions; they need to be considered in the context of specific landscapes, daily life, culture, etc. The essence of place does not come from location, superficial experience, or service function, but rather the imaginative nature of selflessness. Therefore, Relph (1976) believed that the sense of place is an innate ability to bring the world and human beings together, and it should be noted that the sense of place can also be transformed and reshaped by the acquired environment, and that the sense of place can make artificial environments more beautiful, and can make people's lives better.

Norberg-Schulz (1980) described that places have their own unique spirit, and that the spirit of place is concretely and figuratively expressed in architecture, which provides people with coordinates and footholds. Places are different from abstract zones of space, which are jointly constituted by material shape, color, texture and other factors. They merge to form a unique environmental character and atmosphere.

The meaning of the natural and man-made environments together shapes place, and place simultaneously influences people's sense of place, which is related to both the physical and mental aspects of human beings, which correspond to orientation and identity, respectively. The orientation means that people identify themselves in relation to their environment and are able to clarify where they are in space. People's identification requires first acquiring a local identity, which is the cornerstone of a sense of belonging. Identity is linked to culture, which is combined with culture within the spatial environment through memory and perception, resulting in a sense of security and belonging.

Lynch (1960) argued the material forms of urban imagery into five basic elements: path, edge, district, node, and landmark. Lynch's theory of urban imagery associates the urban environment with the sense of place, explaining the influence of space on people's perception (Pan, 2021). According to his principle of imagery production, it can be found that the sense of place is visualized spatial imagery, which inspires me as an artist to interpret the sense of place visually, and can better help to interpret the visual cultural imagery patterns of the sense of place.

### **Related Art Practices**

*Gu ZhiJun*



*Figure1.* Gu Zhijun , Joy from Heaven, 2023, woodcut print, 82x162cm

This woodcut printmaking work utilizes traditional Chinese watermark printmaking techniques. The space of Chinese fans, houses, bridges, magpies and other objects are gathered in the same space in the picture. This creates a unique atmosphere that graphically illustrates the landscape of Suzhou, an ancient city by the water in China. This work is different from my previous printmaking creations. Based on the traditional printmaking of Taohuawu,

it integrates the expression of Chinese ink and wash with the light and shadow techniques of Western art, and although it is based on a realistic subject matter, its intention transcends reality.

The colors of the image are muted and richly layered, matching the city's slow pace and rich history. The space formed by the magpies interacting with each other as if they are happily perched, and one of the magpies appears to be in another space, as if it is flying into another. Gu (2023) argued that the composition provokes thoughts about tradition and contemporaneity, reflecting the relationship between past and present, and generating a sense of familiarity based on the local environment.

*Wen Zhongyan*



*Figure2.* Wen Zhongyan, Corner Tower of the Forbidden City, 2014, silkscreen print, 154x94cm

Wen lives in Beijing, and his works have a strong nostalgic atmosphere with vague ancient buildings in Beijing. A closer look at the picture reveals that what makes the picture indistinct is the circuit board made up of densely packed lines covering the top layer. Wen (2015) explained that through the technique of silk-screen printmaking, the artist uses Beijing's landscapes as his subject matter, enveloping them in a pattern formed by the layers of circuit boards covering them.

Sui (2019) stated this shows a special sense of place in which modernization and regional culture coexist. Such a strongly contrasting sense of time is united in a single plane by the rich and subtle tones of the overlay, producing a hazy, poetic aesthetic. It is the contemporary flavor of his works, which has never been disconnected from the historical lineage, that has brought him to prominence as a distinctive individual among Chinese contemporary artists.

*Julie Mehretu*



*Figure3.* Julie Mehretu, Stadia II, 2004, ink and acrylic on canvas, 274.32x365.76 cm

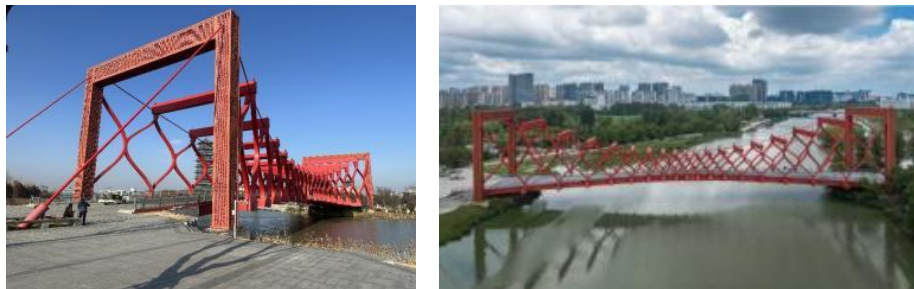
In the work Stadium II, Julie Mehretu draws in the forms and shapes of geography. Lu (2020) argued that the color maps in the work refer directly to maps, conveying the cultural identity of the stadium through the use of specific markers and layered planar shapes, including architectural silhouettes of the stadium, abstracted flags from countries all over the world, corporate logos, and other graphic symbols. The image contains the stadium's architectural silhouette, abstract flags of the world's countries, corporate logos and other pictorial symbols.

Ding (2023) argued that her work suggests that the individual in today's society possesses only a fragmented social identity, and that what we have today is a new kind of spatial consciousness. Her work expresses a personal insight into the evolving nature of the city, identity and the complexity of individual cultural identities in a globalized world.

### **The Studio Investigation**

The study focuses on representative of modern bridges in Yangzhou as an important landmark of cultural significance. While demonstrating exceptional artisanal skills, these bridges carries the unique historical and cultural representation, not only connecting various parts of the city, but also reflecting local architectural traditions in modern twist. Bridges play a great role in the social and economic development of modern cities, and becoming an integral part of the surrounding environment. Yangzhou is a historical and cultural city named for water, is also known as the bridge city. Therefore, the modern bridges become the highlights and symbols of Yangzhou's urban renewal construction. The bridges in Yangzhou is successful because it is heavily influenced by the local culture and thus fits the aesthetic of the Yangzhou people.

### **The first artwork: *Paper-cutting Bridge***



*Figure4.* The modern Paper-cutting Bridge

The first work is developed as a cultural identification and reconstruction of the bridge and its surrounding environmental space. The bridge, which spans the ancient canal in Yangzhou, is colored in red, a color commonly used in the art of paper-cutting. Although the bridge adopts a modern reinforced steel structure, its shape resembles the pulling flower in paper-cutting, presenting a hollow and dynamic aesthetic. Xu (2022) argued that the Paper-cutting bridge is inspired by the traditional Yangzhou art of paper-cutting and flower-pulling, and that it interprets the structure of these folk art forms through modern bridge materials and techniques.

Yangzhou paper-cutting is different from paper-cutting in other regions, and it is deeply rooted in the cultural identity of Yangzhou residents. Compared to the rustic and heavy paper-cutting of other parts of China, Yangzhou paper-cutting displays a beautiful, elegant and

delicate style. It is characterized by clear and smooth lines, delicate and elegant compositions, simple and exaggerated images, and innovative techniques.

The modern Yangzhou Bridge adopts simple lines and limited forms, but conveys unlimited urban cultural innovation and deep regional flavor. The combination of the lightweight paper-cutting pull-outs with the sturdy steel structure of the bridge creates a unique visual effect. This combination not only demonstrates the innovative aesthetics of the bridge, but also creates a visual spectacle that “looks like a paper cut from afar, but looks like a bridge up close”, reflecting rich imagination, profound skills and the spirit of innovation.



Figure5. Composition experiments

In the composition experiment, I used Adobe Photoshop software to help help with multiple experiments and modifications. By adjusting the proportions of the surrounding buildings, I made the viewer's eyes more focused on the bridge space formed by the bridge, and I also created a scattered composition by incorporating the scissors used by the Yangzhou masters in paper-cutting, the paper-cut flowers, and the logo of Yangzhou's intangible cultural heritage. By making the overall image semi-transparent, this design not only creates a more delicate and rhythmic visual chaos, but also adds a sense of hierarchy and haze, more closely reflecting the environment in which people view the bridge.

After completing the composition, I use the carving knife to organize and carve multiple types of knife techniques, while the knife marks map the true feelings of Yangzhou residents towards the place. In woodcut printmaking techniques, the organization of knife strokes is not only regular and specific, but also the core of emotional expression, giving the work a unique creative soul.

During the printing stage, I conducted extensive experiments to fully utilize the unique advantages of printing. The technique of letterpress is capable of creating delicate and aesthetic textures, so I experimented with making them controllable in order to enhance the visual appeal and artistic expression of my work. Unlike the thick ink overlays of traditional prints, I use transparent overlays and interwoven lines to create texture that not only symbolizes the integration of the different landscapes in the work, but also visually connects the parts.



Figure6. Paper-cutting Bridge, hand-printed woodcut, 120\*60cm

This work combines the Yangzhou Bridge and its corresponding architectural heritage and floral cultural imagery with its surroundings through a scatter composition. The scattered composition presents a moving perspective, as if one were in the middle of it, moving from one step to another. The bridge with its open view on the right side forms the entrance to the picture, drawing one through the multi-layered landscape to the back of the picture. The work suggests the modern bridge space of Yangzhou, which has been influenced by its cultural identity over the course of its long history, creating a unique local atmosphere. The effect of this image gives the impression of breaking through the limitations of time, space and reality, and observing the object from multiple perspectives, creating a stronger sense of depth and meaning.

The image consists of multiple layers superimposed on each other, with an overall color tone of deep red. Up close, the lines interspersed with overlapping textures create an illusion that awakens memories of Yangzhou culture. Therefore, this work is not only a manifestation of artistic expression, but also the inheritance and bearing of cultural memory. Through its unique panoramic scatter composition and color superimposition, it seems to cross the boundaries of time and space, evoking people's cultural memories, showing the harmonious coexistence of history and modernity, and interpreting the illusion of coexistence of multiple scenes brought about by the sense of place.

#### *The Second Artwork: Shuttle*

Yangzhou Modern Wanfu Bridge is a bridge project that perfectly blends automobile transportation with urban aesthetics. Every day, vehicles flow endlessly over the bridge. As a double-deck self-anchored suspension landscape bridge, it goes beyond the mere function of a bridge and demonstrates a marvelous combination of Yangzhou architectural culture and modern innovation. The bridge combines Yangzhou's deep architectural culture with avant-garde design concepts, and its integrated tower design has become a city landmark, demonstrating the bridge's exquisite balance between functionality and aesthetics.



Figure7. Yangzhou Modern Wanfu Bridge and the corresponding cultural heritage



The styling of the modern Wanfu Bridge in Yangzhou skillfully incorporates classic elements of Yangzhou's architectural heritage. The design of the city pavilion on the bridge instantly evokes images of Yangzhou pavilions and traditional city gates, and utilizes an elegant gray color palette. This design does not only give the bridge strong local cultural characteristics and unique recognition, but also reflects the inheritance and innovation of Yangzhou's architectural culture in the new era.

In addition, the giant buffalo sculpture at the head of Wanfu Bridge is very eye-catching and deeply symbolic of the history of Yangzhou. As a canal city, Yangzhou has suffered from frequent floods in history, so the buffalo shape was chosen to express the good wishes of calming the water to pray for the avoidance of floods. The water buffalo symbolizes stability and security due to its excellent water and strong physical strength, and also conveys the image of a generous and hard-working man.



Figure8. Composition experiment

I blend spatial representations of the modern Hail Mary Bridge photographed from different angles with its implied cultural and architectural heritage compositions. This treatment abandons focal perspective in favor of a scattershot composition to better accommodate the need for a multi-perspective study of bridge space.



Figure9. The overall impression of the city of Yangzhou presents a gray tone

The greenish-gray brick wall maps out the ancient architectural craftsmanship and artisanal spirit, and each brick and tile records the traces of time and cultural accumulation. This color not only visually reflects the simplicity and elegance of the ancient city of Yangzhou, but also emotionally outlines the city's long heritage and the sedimentation of time. Guo (2020) explained the color spectrum of Yangzhou's downtown is dominated by grey, and this grey, which has a sense of history and vitality, is a reflection of Yangzhou's unique style, which is able to express the historical and cultural traditions of Yangzhou as well as the essence of its natural colors.

In the next printing stage, the use of gray as the main color tone not only achieves visual unity, but also highlights an atmosphere that matches the history and cultural heritage of

Yangzhou. This color choice is not just a superficial presentation, but a profound expression and continuation of the spirit of the city of Yangzhou.

In addition, in this gray-toned picture, I have carefully added a faint yellow color, which is a texture effect that I have designed. This texture is carved by crisscrossing triangular carving knives, and the mottled traces left on the gray background symbolize the intertwining and entanglement of modernity and history and culture in the city of Yangzhou.

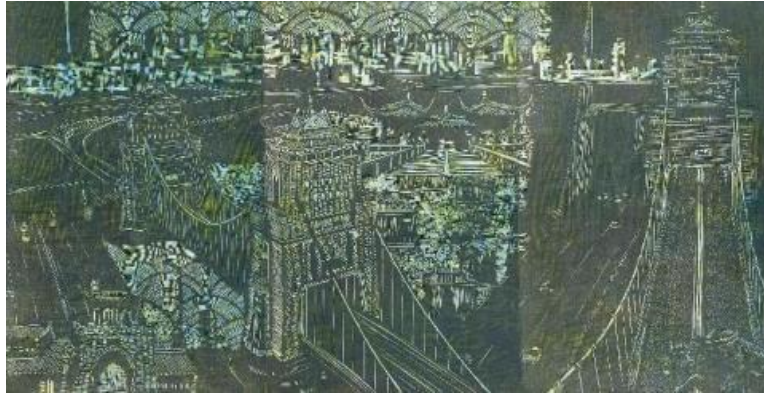


Figure10.Shuttle, hand-printed woodcut, 120\*60cm

The artwork presents the modern Wanfu Bridge from different perspectives, with echoing cultural elements such as the Dongmen Ruins, the Wuting Ancient Architecture, and the water buffalo visually presented in the same space, creating an illusion while visualizing the sense of place based on cultural identity. The bridge on the right side is like a passage into the picture, guiding the vision into the picture. The picture is divided into three sections to present the shuttle scene, which not only shows the busy daily life of modern people shuttling on the bridge, but also implies that the sense of place triggered by the bridge integrates the cultural traditions with the modern landscape to form a channel for memory shuttling.

The matching and overlapping of gray and yellow not only visually makes people feel stable and introverted, but also makes it easier for people's memories to match with the overall color of Yangzhou city, showing the multi-dimensional qualities of Yangzhou's urban spirit. This is not only a visual presentation of Yangzhou city space, but also an exploration and interpretation of Yangzhou's cultural heritage and spiritual connotations.

### **Conclusion**

This project investigates the utilization of printmaking art to explore a sense of place in modern urban environments. It adopts an aesthetic practice that utilizes scatter composition, transparent superimposition, and juxtaposition of space to interpret how the spatial environments constituted by bridges in modern urban landmarks are influenced by regional cultures and how they help to preserve and perpetuate cultural identity.

The project significantly illustrate the influence of Yangzhou's traditional culture on the shape, color and surroundings of the bridges, identifying the illusion that is triggered a sense of familiarity and belonging. Therefore, modern structure like bridges and their surrounding landscape in the urban environment constitute new landmark space in the city, which express the city's iconic territorial characteristics that reflect history and culture.

The contribution of this project to the field of printmaking is the technical aspect and process overlapping prints with transparent ink subtly display crisscrossing, texture and scattered compositions, simultaneously presenting different spaces and environments in the same plane, resulting in visual confusion. Such a sense of ambiguity and sense of place are the cause and effect of each other, realizing the transformation from a sense of visual vagueness to a sense of psychological precision and thus finding an appropriate possibility for the expression of sense of place in printmaking.

In addition, the project provides a new perspective for exploring cultural elements in modern space, redefining the sense of place, which consists of memory, identity and sense of belonging, from a visual perspective. This exploration not only opens up new paths for the theoretical interpretation of the sense of place, but also proposes a set of systematic reflections on the aesthetics of bridge space, expanding the framework of the relationship between space and culture. This research also provides valuable references for the preservation, renewal and reconstruction of modern urban spaces.

### Acknowledgment

The authors wish to thank my supervisor Professor Dr. Mohd Fauzi Sedon from Sultan Idris Education University for his patience and invaluable inspiration and assistance during my PhD research.

### References

- Ding, W. (2023). Weaving a Contemporary Tapestry Mapping Urban Complexity - A Study of the Abstract Paintings of Julie Meretto. *Art Observation* (12), 96-100.
- Guo, H. (2020). Research on the characteristics and application practice of traditional urban color in Pan-Jiangnan region. *Architecture and Culture* (12), 78-81.
- Gu, Z. J. (2023). "Joy from Heaven" is a landscape in a poem, and a poem in a landscape. Retrieved November 6, 2024 from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/14zdoUxHd7JXj0HYaFwKDg>
- Hou, B., Jin Y. & Hu, M. (2022). The process and mechanism of the rebirth of the cultural heritage of the Grand Canal from the perspective of spatial production--The case of Yangzhou Canal Sanwan Ecological and Cultural Park. *Economic Geography* (03), 160-171.
- Huang, T., Lei, Y., Yu, L. & Xu, H. (2021). Landscape design expressions of the Grand Canal Intangible Cultural Heritage in green spaces. *Modern Horticulture* (05), 126-127.
- Li, Y. & Li, M. (2021). Study on the cultural genetics of the Grand Canal and Yangzhou. *Chinese Agricultural History* (05), 122-130.
- Lu, M. (2020). Falling into the Urban Vortex - Julie Meretto's New American Abstraction. *Art Contemporary* (04), 54-59.
- Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of the City*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980). *Genius Loci: Toward A Phenomenology of Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli.
- Pan, H. (2021). City Branding under Personalized "City Imagery"-The Case of Hangzhou. *Urban Development Research* (03), 40-43.
- Qu, Y. (2003). The Ancient City of Yangzhou. *Studies in Chinese History* (02), 55-69.
- Relph, E. (1976). *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion.

- Sui, C. (2019). Anxiety-Superposition-Gaze: On Wen Wen's "City" Series. *Fine Arts* (01), 72-76.
- Tuan, Y. (1971). Geography, phenomenology, and the study of human nature. *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, 15(3), 181-192.
- Wen, Z. Y.(2015). *Narrative of Wen Zhongyan's artworks*. Beijing:Posts & Telecommunications Press.
- Xu, Y. (2022). Research on Urban Public Space Design from the Perspective of Regional Culture--Taking Yangzhou City as an Example. *Beauty and Times (Urban Edition)* (07), 56-58.
- Yang, L. (2020). Landscape Ecological Design in Eco-city Construction--A Review of Yangzhou Ecological Civilization-Yangzhou Park City Research Series. *Ecological Economy* (01), 230-231.
- Zheng J. (2021). How to develop the culture of the Grand Canal? --The China Grand Canal Museum in Yangzhou as an example. *Art Observation* (10), 27-28.