

Bridging Gaps in Cultural Identity Graphics for Enhanced Space Perception in Qinzhou City: A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

This study employs cultural graphics to close the gaps in cultural and social identity in Qinzhou City, China, to enhance the urban spatial perception. To analyze existing studies and identify unexplored areas, the Critical Literature Review was performed on cultural graphics that fostered emotional and symbolic connections. The study develops 'cultural graphic resonance', a concept based on the Semiotic, Social Identity, and Cultural Identity theories of the emotional and symbolic effects of cultural symbols on urban identity and cohesion. The findings advance a mix of traditional elements, such as Nixing pottery and Lingnan motifs, with modern images to create a unified urban identity. It offers actionable strategies to bridge cultural identity divides and to improve the urban spatial perception. Finally, policy and design recommendations for culturally diverse cities like Qinzhou are given as a basis for future empirical research on the role of cultural graphics in urban planning and community cohesion.

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Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by developing a conceptual framework for 'cultural graphic resonance,' which refers to the emotional connection between cultural symbols and urban identity and how cultural graphic integration strengthens social cohesion and improves urban spatial perception.

1. Introduction

As a historical treasure of urban development, traditional cultural graphics will be deeply explored in this study to explore their existence and distribution in the city of Qinzhou and to investigate in detail the form, location, and historical origins of traditional cultural graphics to reveal their potential impact on the social identity of

urban residents. [Deng et al. \(2021\)](#) used the Yuexiu District, Guangzhou City, as an example to study the comprehensive evaluation of residents' perception of historical urban areas. Data was collected through an online survey questionnaire, and the results showed that large natural landscapes and public spaces were most prominent for residents in historic city centers. At the same time, we focus on introducing modern cultural graphics. Through in-depth research on the classification, positioning, and integration with the urban planning of these emerging elements, we aim to comprehensively understand the unique role of modern cultural graphics in urban spatial perception. [Harland \(2015\)](#) believes that urban graphic objects expand established ideas about readability and how urban objects have expected and unexpected graphic attributes. The dissemination function of modern cultural graphics is of great significance to cities and urban places.

This article addresses the social and cultural identity gap challenge and reviews and summarizes cultural graphic strategies in similar domestic and international cases. Through an in-depth analysis of the successful experiences and lessons learned from these cases, feasible and concrete cultural graphic strategies are proposed to serve Qinzhou's social and cultural integration. [Yip et al. \(2018\)](#) talked about how incorporating culturally relevant teaching principles in graphic communication design classrooms added value to the student's learning experience. Educators enabled creativity and cultural sensitivity by creating research and design processes that reflected students' cultural backgrounds. This also fits with [Alhajri's \(2017\)](#) argument, positing that the methods for problem-solving in graphic design were so tied to cultural contexts.

Through comprehensive and in-depth research, this paper will provide innovative insights for urban planners, designers, and decision-makers and is expected to provide practical and feasible solutions for addressing social and cultural identity issues. This also provides a rich experience and theoretical support for future urban spatial perception and cultural identity research.

1.1. Research Background

Qinzhou, located in southern China, is a coastal city with diverse cultural forms. Its unique regional cultural background provides a rich cultural heritage for urban development. The heroic culture represented by Feng Zikai and Liu Yongfu has made tremendous contributions to the country in history. They reflected the patriotism of the two heroes by studying the inheritance of the historical and cultural celebrity spirit of Qinzhou in the context of the " Belt and Road". The Lingnan architectural culture, represented by the Zhongshan Road arcade, showcases the unique style of Qinzhou. [Du \(2023\)](#) noted that the research on Nixing pottery culture has taken a multi-dimensional turn, including craftsmanship, pottery types, tea sets, and cultural innovation, which indicated that it played an important part in innovative design and academic research. There is also a rich and colorful intangible cultural heritage, such as tea-picking operas and Yandun drums. With the rapid development of cities, the gap between social and cultural identity is gradually becoming apparent, especially in the expression of cultural graphics. This issue directly impacts the spatial perception of urban residents, especially in Qinzhou, a city known for its multiculturalism.

Traditional cultural graphics play an important role in Qinzhou, carrying the sediment of history and the integration of diverse cultures. The graphic elements such as Nixing

pottery, Yandun drum, and hero images are reflected in various places such as carving, painting, and signage in the city. They are visual symbols of urban regional culture. However, with the advancement of urban modernization, some traditional elements have been impacted by the influx of new cultures. At the same time, introducing modern cultural graphics has also brought new visual symbols that contrast traditional culture. Using the dolphin image in Qinzhou Sanniangwan International Dolphin Park as a modern cultural graphic to promote the elements of Qinzhou city not only gives residents a new understanding of the city but also enhances the deep impression of Qinzhou as a tourist city for tourists from other places (Chen et al., 2019). Therefore, this study will focus on enhancing the overall spatial perception of Qinzhou City through the rational use of these cultural graphics, especially by bridging the gap between different cultural symbols.

By delving into the distribution of traditional cultural graphics in urban space, understanding how they integrate with urban structure, and paying attention to the positioning and expression of modern cultural graphics, we aim to reveal how they complement traditional culture and add new levels to urban space. In solving this problem, we will examine the role and function of cultural graphics in cities, clarify how these graphic elements guide residents to cross the cultural identity gap, and stimulate social and cultural resonance. Conducting in-depth research on the perceptions and attitudes of residents towards these graphics and exploring their actual impact on urban spatial perception provides strong theoretical support for bridging the cultural identity graphic divide and enhancing urban spatial perception. Exploring the existence, conflict, and integration of cultural graphics in cities, with a focus on how they cross the gap of cultural identity graphics, to develop cultural graphic strategies that are in line with Qinzhou's urban planning, which can help enhance residents sense of identity and the spatial sense of the city.

1.2. Problem Statement

With the advancement of urbanization, the gap between social and cultural identity is becoming increasingly prominent. Gong (2008) studied traditional Chinese folk patterns to promote the role of traditional cultural graphics in urban spaces. Digital media was becoming a medium for supplementing cultural graphics in urban environments. Oktay (2017) showed that urban design policies contributed to retaining local character and identity while globalization and technological advancement occurred. Digital media integration was a catalyst that renewed the urban spaces so that local culture and identity could be expressed through modern graphics and interactive installations. Mahira et al. (2023) emphasized the need for policies that preserve cultural characteristics during rapid urban development. In urban settings, where various populations interacted and defined their identities, the tension between a shrunk identity and a generic, more significant cultural identity was particularly pronounced. As the research object of this study, the diversity of society and culture in Qinzhou city provides rich conditions for the study. Gain a deeper understanding of the presentation of traditional and modern cultural graphics in Qinzhou, including their distribution in architecture, public spaces, and landscapes. How are these graphics reflected in the urban environment, and how do they reflect the cultural characteristics of the city?

Second, in Qinzhou, cultural symbols generated emotional connections and helped develop an identity to bridge the social and cultural gaps. Traditional and modern graphics help residents perceive their surroundings and influence emotions, behaviors,

and interactions (Castillo-Villar, 2016). Residents' attachment, community engagement, and cohesion in urban spaces were strengthened with graphics illustrating local history, and urban spaces became meaningful environments (An et al., 2022).

Cultural graphics need to be integrated into urban planning to bridge social and cultural identities. As Tanrikul (2023) showed, participation in the community brings ownership and collective identity and helps to integrate different cultures. According to Al-Zadjali (2024), cultural graphics were used to promote cohesion and challenge stereotypes and artistic representation. They enriched urban spaces, build communities, and create inclusive urban design.

1.3. Research Objectives

- i. To study the traditional and modern forms and functions of cultural graphics in urban environments with a case study of Qinzhou.
- ii. To create a theoretical framework for examining the emotional influence of cultural visuals on locals' views of urban area.
- iii. To suggest that "cultural graphic resonance" be used as a strategy to bridge identification divides in urban settings.
- iv. To produce practical insights for enhancing cultural identity and social cohesion through the use of cultural graphics techniques.

1.4. Research Questions

- i. How are traditional and modern cultural graphics characterized in Qinzhou' s urban space?
- ii. How can the emotional influence of cultural visuals contribute to a theoretical framework for urban identity?
- iii. What is it that can be conceptualized and applied in urban contexts as 'cultural graphic resonance'?
- iv. What are ways to design cultural graphics to promote cultural identity and social cohesion in urban settings?

2. Literature Review

There has been a lot of work on cultural graphics for cultural identity and social perception. According to Huer (2000), individuated from different cultural groups understand the graphic symbols differently, and the graphic signs serve to reflect and retain the cultural identity. A comparative analysis of cultural preferences and practices in website design in Pakistan was done by Nizamani et al. (2022), utilizing Hofstede's cultural dimensions as a framework. The focus of this study is on how cultural values influence both user preferences and the design practice and practice closely with the idea that visuals on websites can convey cultural dimensions. For example, according to Caneba and Maitland (2017), Indigenous communities use social media to protect cultural heritage and manage image rights in the same way. Taken collectively, these studies suggest that cultural graphics are central to identity in a variety of situations.

Cultural graphics enrich spatial perception and preserve the city's identity in urban environments. Januchta-Szostak (2010) showed how public visual art can increase the recognizability of urban areas and thereby enhance emotional relationships between residents. According to Torbati (2018), environmental graphics can reshape urban identity by integrating the signage into the urban fabric. The proposed holistic urban branding strategy in Nanchang, consisting of historical preservation and modern

branding through visual semantics, was suggested by [Huang and Liu \(2021\)](#). In addition, [Deng et al. \(2021\)](#) explored how residents' perceptions can be used to guide urban improvements and the function of cultural graphics in constructing significant urban encounters.

Traditional cultural graphics often coexist with modern ones, which creates distinctive problems and opportunities in urban design. [Chen and Romice \(2009\)](#) examined Suzhou's typological morphology, stressing the need for cultural traits in urban planning. At the same time, [Kendall \(2017\)](#) studied how traditional aesthetics are introduced into the urban identity of Guizhou to maintain authenticity. The results from these studies show that the blending of traditional and modern cultural elements can lead to a cohesive urban identity, but the dynamic interaction between these elements is under investigation in small-sized cities such as Qinzhou.

In addition, cultural graphic strategies provide practical solutions to urban development. Urban art in Lisbon, according to [Campos and Barbio \(2021\)](#), has redefined stigmatized areas while promoting social cohesion. In the dissertation, [Jiang \(2018\)](#) examined the application of digitized public art in interactive urban environments and identified its capacity for innovation in urban identity formation. Collectively, these studies suggest that cultural graphic strategies can have a transformative effect on urban branding, identity, and spatial perception.

2.1. Gaps in the Study

The paper identifies one of the major research gaps in the detailed descriptions and manifold analysis of how traditional and modern cultural graphics are presented in the urban environment of Qinzhou. The various forms of these cultural aspects, such as architectural designs, statues, billboards, signs, etc., all of which play a part in the character of the city, must be recorded and analyzed. Secondly, there is no proper awareness and assessment concerning the affective responses that residents may have to the kinds of cultural signs in the urban area. Understanding the locals' feelings of belongingness, pride, or dissonance, and how these affect their identity and attunement to the city, is crucial for both traditional and contemporary symbols.

In addition, little has been done to explore the differences between traditional and modern cultural graphics and the diffusion strategies affecting the residents' perception of urban space. Further, one must consider how these different VLs originating from different cultural environments affect people's mental positions, navigation in the urban environment, and spatial experiences. Finally, there is a lack of definite cultural graphic strategies and indicators concerning the possible discrepancies between the social and cultural self-identification in the urbanscape. Such strategies within the given context would be useful for creating a sense of belonging, promoting cultural sustainability, and integrating traditional and postmodern notions of identity to enhance the quality and relevance of life within urban settings.

3. Method

The Critical Literature Review (CLR) method is used in this study to systematically review and synthesize existing research on cultural graphics, culture identity and urban spatial perception. The databases used for the identification of the relevant literature, such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, have used keywords such as;

'cultural graphics', 'social identity', and 'urban spatial perception' to achieve comprehensive coverage. Theoretical and empirical works examining the integration of traditional and modern cultural graphics and their effects on urban identity in culturally important cities such as Qinzhou ([Chen & Romice, 2009](#); [Kendall, 2017](#)) were the focus. Theoretical contributions, methodological rigor and relevance of the studies to the research context were critically evaluated. Insights were organized into analysis by use of theoretical frameworks like Semiotic Theory, Social Identity Theory and Cultural Identity Theory. As shown in this thematic synthesis, cultural graphics played a symbolic role in helping urban residents form emotional and cognitive connections to their spaces ([Chen, 2024](#); [Hopkins & Reicher, 2011](#); [Yeo & Cao, 2021](#)).

Key research gaps identified by the CLR included the lack of comprehensive studies on the integration of traditional and modern cultural graphics in small-sized cities such as Qinzhou, insufficient investigation of emotional and perceptual responses to such graphics, and limited knowledge of how cultural symbols bridge social and cultural identity divides ([Lei et al., 2024](#); [Zhang et al., 2023](#)). Such gaps identify the need to fill these gaps in order to improve urban spatial perception and social cohesion.

Based on these results, the CLR served as a basis for developing a conceptual framework based on 'cultural graphic resonance.' It suggests that the emotional resonance of cultural symbols is the vehicle through which urban identity and spatial perception are generated. With the help of the literature, the CLR synthesizes theoretical and empirical insights to develop a robust conceptual foundation of how cultural graphics contribute to enhancing the urban experience in Qinzhou and other cities.

4. Theoretical framework

4.1. Semiotic Theory

Instead of being mere signs of cultural storytelling and social meanings or representations, cultural graphics in urban contexts can be interpreted. Semiotic theory explains their significance in the formation of urban identity and the development of citizen's affection. [Senkāne and Laganovska \(2023\)](#) described how changes in the materiality of rituals, such as the depoliticization of the Star of David in the urban cemeteries, index cultural change, and the reappropriation of symbols, have affected the Likewise. [Chen's \(2024\)](#) illustration of visual language in cultural communication stressed the part of pictures in constructing understanding and the exchange of cultures, and his opinion that visual parts created a link and fostered a modification in perceptions. These studies reveal how cultural graphics can mediate and manipulate perception, recall, and affective response to the environment in the context of the city.

4.2. Social Identity Theory

According to Social Identity Theory, people gain their identity from the groups they belong to, which they categorize themselves and others into, including membership in organizations, religious status, or generation sets. In their article, [Hopkins and Reicher \(2011\)](#) highlighted the active constitution of group identities and the active role of social practices in generating and promoting cultural diversity and social power. Similarly, [Feitosa et al. \(2012\)](#) studied the role of social identity in intergroup relations and its cultural specificity to create a cross-cultural dimension.

Social identity is very much tied to cultural graphic and symbol meanings in urban environments. The visuals included in these visuals include but are not limited to artwork, architecture, and signage, which all contribute to establishing the urban identity, pushing citizenship, and contributing to a sense of belongingness of a resident in a city. On the positive side, they can help strengthen the dominant civic identity, especially if the media promotes the groups that form it. This opens an understanding of the cognitive process through which the urban identity affects the self-concept as people strive to make their city unique while managing emotions directed towards other groups or perceiving threats to the group's identity.

4.3. Cultural Identity Theory

Cultural identity theory analyzes how urban culture shapes residents' self-perception and a sense of belonging. It is possible to explore how these cultural graphics express and constitute a city's cultural identity and shape inhabitants' cultural self-identification through traditional and modern cultural graphics. It studies how graphic design uses the different cultural components to show a city's multicultural personality, to help group memory, and to strengthen the community. As an example, [Yeo and Cao \(2021\)](#) used the integration of African visual language into modern graphic design in the Ivory Coast to demonstrate how the traditional graphic symbols, Adinkra and Akan motifs, have been integrated into contemporary design to contribute towards creating a national identity through visual storytelling. [Rohila \(2023\)](#) discussed the evolution of Indian graphic novels, stating that traditional art forms like Madhubani and Warli painting were incorporated to address contemporary social issues such as gender inequality and environmental awareness, establishing a distinct cultural identity. These studies demonstrated how traditional cultural elements and present-day graphics overlapped, illustrating that visuals were essential for representing cultural traits and reinforcing identity in an urban environment.

4.4. Urban Spatial Perception Theory

The ability of individuals to perceive and understand the urban space is the subject area of the theory of city space perception, while cultural graphics, as one of the urban space components, convey cultural information that influences the perception of the urban environment of the residents. The adaptive space concept emphasized the changing character of urban conditions, which could change according to the interactions and experiences ([Ganis et al., 2015](#)). The emphasis in this tripartite construct indicated that urban planners should have considered the physical attributes of space and the psychological and emotional responses to the space ([Lei et al., 2024](#); [Zhang et al., 2023](#)). Cultural graphic resonance is important for enhancing cultural graphic strategies. Extending the concept opens the door to a more profound understanding of cultural graphics beyond simple cognitive reception of cultural symbols to emotional resonance and an understanding of them.

4.5. Cultural Graphic Resonance

Cultural graphic resonance is the emotional resonance in which cultural symbols trigger people's minds. This resonance is a cultural graphic perceived and experienced as an emotional connection and resonance in which people are more likely to perceive and accept the culture represented by the cultural graphics, deepening their understanding and identification with the culture. Cultural graphic resonance emphasizes the role of

cultural symbols at the emotional level and their significant impact on individual emotional experiences and cultural identity. Resonance occurs when cultural objects help people overcome the practical challenges and confusions they face or construct. This research turned out that graphic design was not only about art and technology but also about psychology and communicate, which were important to make a sound with cultural nuances (Sutarwiyasa et al., 2022). Such a multidisciplinary approach became critical in designing graphics that resonate with many audiences, including inclusivity, accessibility, and cultural sensitivity as we move to the metaverse (Ibrahim, 2023).

4.6. Conceptual Framework

This conceptual paper constructs a cultural graphic strategy scheme based on five concepts: semiotics, social identity, cultural identity, urban spatial perception, and cultural graphic resonance. The following assumptions have been formulated based on the relationship between these theories.

H1: The diversity and symbolic significance of cultural symbols positively impact the perception of urban space

The relationship between semiotics and urban spatial perception: The presentation of traditional and modern cultural graphics in cities influences each other, jointly shaping urban residents' overall perception and identity towards urban space. Amen and Nia (2021) modeled cognitive symbolic elements to hint at how spatial allocation is influenced by the presence of symbolic values and changes of values accordingly.

H2: Social groups positively impact urban spatial perception regarding social interaction and cultural background.

The relationship between social identity and urban spatial perception: Urban spaces become dynamic and diversified through social activities and cultural backgrounds in social groups, which make people's perception and attractiveness to cities more powerful. According to Knipprath et al. (2021), urban space plays an important role in shaping intergroup cognition, as public and private spaces lead to different ways of intergroup cognition related to group interdependence and status.

H3: Cultural traditions, values, and identity positively impact urban spatial perception.

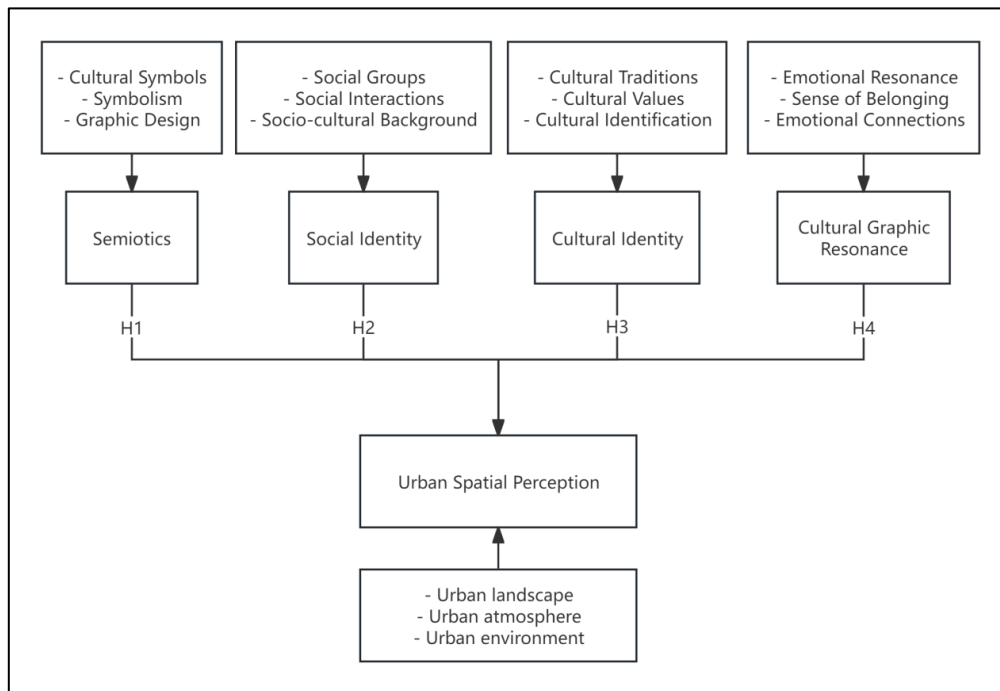
The relationship between cultural identity and urban spatial perception: Cultural traditions, values, and identity can strengthen residents' sense of belonging and identity towards the city and enhance their perception and experience of the urban landscape, atmosphere, and environment. Sochacka and Rzeszotarska-Pałka (2021) studied Poland's urban strategy of cultural guided expansion to improve urban quality of life and attractiveness, while indicators of urban landscape identity influence society's evaluation of cultural development.

H4: Cultural graphic resonance's emotional resonance, identity, and emotional connection positively impact urban spatial perception.

The relationship between cultural graphic resonance and urban spatial perception: Through cultural symbols with cultural connotations that generate emotional resonance and identity with residents, people's perception and experience of urban space can be

enhanced. Januchta-Szostak (2010) studied Poznan City and proposed a methodology for visual art positioning in urban public places to enhance residents' spatial perception of the city (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Author's original work

5. Conclusions

This study investigates the role of cultural graphics in the bridging of cultural identity gaps in social and cultural identity gaps to improve urban spatial perception in Qinzhou City. To analyze existing research and identify key gaps, the Critical Literature Review of existing research was conducted, particularly that which examined the emotional and symbolic connections that cultural graphics foster. It points out the ways in which cultural graphics can harmonize traditional components, including Nixing pottery and Lingnan architectural motifs, with contemporary representations of the dolphin imagery from Sanniangwan International Dolphin Park to enhance a united urban identity. The emotional and symbolic impact of cultural graphics is proposed as contributing to the shaping of urban identity and encouraging residents' sense of belonging through the notion of 'cultural graphic resonance.' This research is founded in Semiotic Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Urban Spatial Perception Theory, and proposes a conceptual framework that illustrates how cultural graphics have the ability to transform urban design.

The findings support cultural graphics to be introduced in urban planning to promote social cohesion and preservation of cultural heritage while responding to the societal needs of today. This approach especially applies to culturally diverse cities, such as Qinzhou. Theoretical insights and practical strategies for policymakers, urban designers, and planners are provided for further exploration and application in urban design.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study did not involve human participants. Therefore, no ethical approval or informed consent was necessary.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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