

# Landscape Evolution of Historic Campuses from the Perspective of Historic Layering

## A Case Study of Three University Campuses in Nanjing, China

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### Abstract

As China's social development enters a new stage of connotative progression, campus heritage is attracting attention as an essential part of the cultural landscape in historic cities. Historic campuses are the spatial carriers of campus heritage, a superimposed collage of campus landscapes from multiple historical periods with outstanding value. Campus space presents the development history of campus planning and construction concepts, showing the unique cultural connotation. Related research has expanded from studying "points" of historic buildings to the holistic study of "surfaces" such as spatial patterns and landscape environments. With the support of "Historic Layering" and "Anchoring-Layering" in the theory of historic urban landscape (HUL), this article takes the three cases of Southeast University (Sipailou Campus), Nanjing University (Gulou Campus), and Nanjing Normal University (Suiyuan Campus) to interpret landscape evolution of historic campuses in Nanjing. Combining the technical support of campus planning and construction drawings from different decades with historical photos, documents, and on-site surveys, the dynamic process characteristics and layering rules of campus landscape are investigated under the constant collision and compromise between planning ideals and social reality. The study found that the historic campuses show the evolutionary characteristics of the hybridization and collage of multiple landscapes and the spatial and temporal correlation between architecture and environmental elements in landscape shaping from the early architectural dominance to the late architectural and environmental co-action. Moreover, different campuses have unique landscape characters, especially the pre-1949 campuses dominated by Western classicism or the Chinese-Western fusion, which has become an essential cultural gene of the campus. This can serve as a reference for cultural interpretation of the historic campus landscape's dynamic evolution and characterizing the contemporary campus space.

### Keywords

Historic urban landscape (HUL), Campus landscape character, Historic layering, Dynamic evolution.

### How to cite

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## INTRODUCTION

Historic campus refers to a campus with a long history of school development, preserving rich and intact cultural relics or historical buildings inside the campus, reflecting the traditional pattern and historical landscape style more completely, and built for education and teaching, and still mainly used for higher education teaching, the unique architectural and landscape style of the historic university campuses promote them to become a nurturing place for cultural accumulation<sup>1</sup>, showing the development of campus planning and construction concepts in different periods. Historic university campuses' unique architectural and landscape features make them a place of cultural accumulation and education, showing the development of campus planning and construction concepts in different periods and becoming one of the essential spatial carriers of urban history and culture. Currently, several historic campuses have been included in the World Heritage List<sup>2</sup>. In China, more than 50 university buildings or old campus sites have been included in the list of national key cultural relics protection units.

As a dynamic heritage in which cultural heritage qualities are continuously superimposed and precipitated over time within a specific scope<sup>3</sup>, the historic campus has transformed university higher education from traditional to modern over the past hundred years. The introduction of the cultural landscape concept expands the historic campus's heritage vision, placing it in the spatial and temporal context of continuous evolution and paying more attention to the cultural landscape qualities in the process of dynamic evolution<sup>4 5</sup>. Historic campuses are the sum of campus landscapes with humanistic and natural factors accumulated over a certain period<sup>6</sup>. The current expansion and extrusion of artificial construction makes the local area of natural and humanistic anchoring imbalance. There is an urgent need to clarify the mechanism of landscape evolution and the generation law, with a view to multi-dimensional recognition and identification of its heritage value. The dynamic spatial and temporal stratification model has become a new trend in landscape evolution<sup>7 8</sup>, providing scientific references for characteristic identification and heritage value assessment.

## METHODOLOGY

Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) is a landscape approach for cultural landscape heritage conservation. This study adopts the theory of "Historical Layering" in Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) and the theoretical model of "Anchoring-Layering" proposed by Liu Yifei and other scholars to establish the landscape evolution of three historic campuses, namely, Sipailou Campus of Southeast University, Gulou Campus of Nanjing University and Suiyuan Campus of Nanjing Normal University, as research cases. Gulou Campus of Nanjing University, Sipailou Campus of Southeast University, and Suiyuan Campus of Nanjing Normal University are used as research cases to establish a research framework for the evolution of the landscape of historic campuses and to make a scientific and comprehensive value assessment<sup>9</sup>.

## THEORETICAL BASIS

Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) considers the accumulation of layers of culture and values, traditions and experiences as the diverse characteristics of the dynamic development of cities, leading to a new shift in the concept of heritage conservation in recent years, gradually expanding the focus from the “spatial level” to the “temporal level”<sup>10</sup>. Historic campus landscapes have a layered nature, and their layered value is also an important part of the campus heritage value. In urban renewal and preservation, the multi-perspective interpretation of historical layers has many application scenarios<sup>11 12 13</sup>, presenting interdisciplinary and multi-source data synergistic research characteristics.

In 2014, based on the “landmark-substrate” urban research paradigm, Liu Yifei, Tsinghua University, summarized the “anchoring-layering” theory of historic urban landscape by dividing urban historic landscape into “anchoring points” as landmarks and “layering spaces” as substrates<sup>14</sup>. Since then, some scholars have applied this theory to empirical research on different scales of historical areas, such as Guilin<sup>15</sup>, Duanzhou Ancient City<sup>16</sup>, and Songkou Ancient Town in Meizhou<sup>17</sup>. The theories of “Historical Layering” and “Anchoring-Layering” provide new perspectives for studying heritage conservation, cultural heritage, and the development of historic campuses.

The landscape of the historic campus can be mainly divided into two parts: material elements and immaterial elements, including tangible material forms such as buildings, topography, plants, spatial patterns, etc., and intangible immaterial elements such as campus history, traditions, activities and other intangible humanistic features, and the historical layering of material forms is more significant. By classifying and extracting the historical landscape, an analysis model is constructed with “anchoring points” composed of topography, historical buildings, and plants, and “layering space” composed of spatial pattern, axial space, and public space as the core.

## OVERVIEW OF UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES IN NANJING

Nanjing is an important center of science and education and the beginning of modern education in China. Since the preparation of the new-style school (Sanjiang Normal School) in 1902, the establishment of higher education institutions in Nanjing has a history of more than one hundred years of development, and the combination and accumulation of traditional culture and modern education have formed a unique campus culture and a rich campus form.

Located in the old city of Nanjing, Southeast University’s Sipailou Campus, Nanjing University’s Gulou Campus, and Nanjing Normal University’s Suiyuan Campus are the campuses of the modern National Central University, Jinling University, and Jinling Women’s University, respectively, and they are the typical representatives of historic university campuses in Nanjing. The three historic campuses are in the same lineage and are outstanding representatives of modern campus planning in China (Figure 1). In 2006, the three campuses were approved by the State Council of the People’s Republic of China as the sixth batch of National Key Cultural Relic Protection Units at the same time. In 2016 and 2017, they were selected as “China’s 20th Century Architectural Heritage Projects” list.

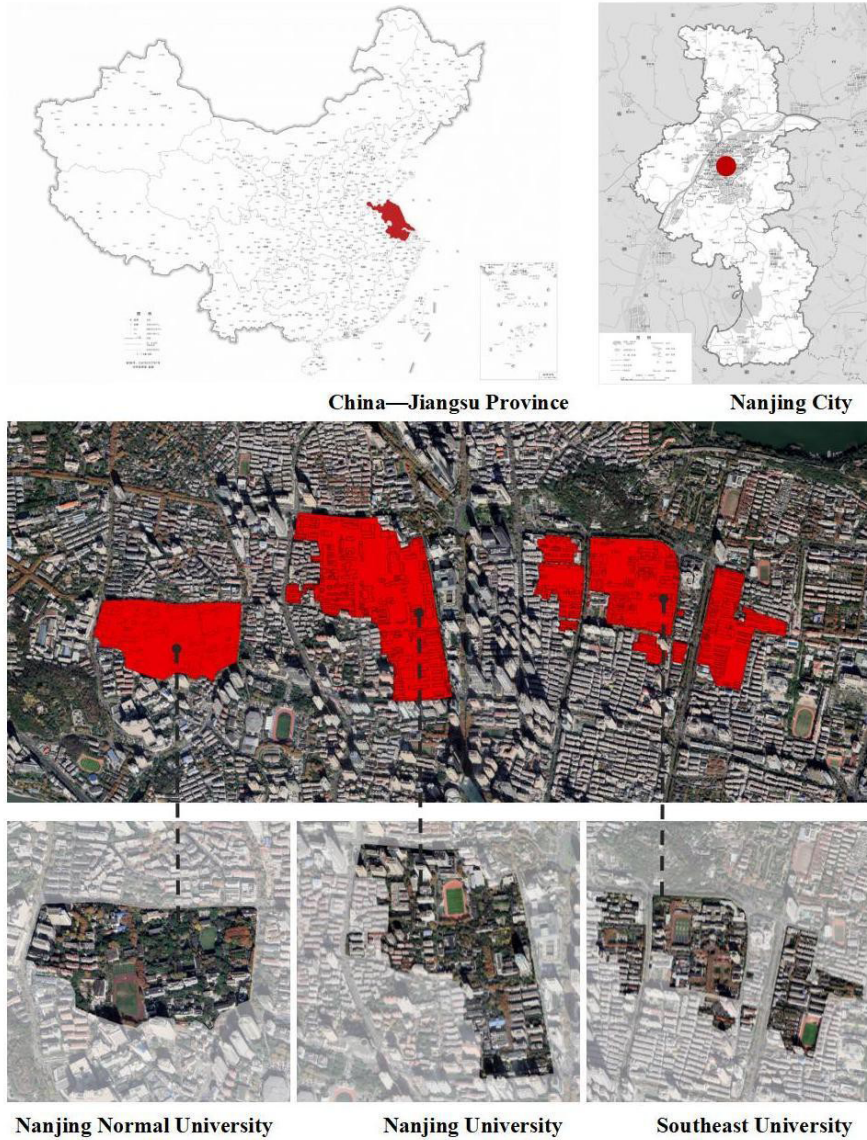


Fig. 1. Location of three historic university campuses in Nanjing.

### “ANCHORING—LAYERING” TIME SERIES OF HISTORIC CAMPUSES

Historic campuses generally go through multiple planning and construction periods, thus reaching a state of spatial saturation. The morphological representations and cultural genes of Nanjing’s historic university campus landscapes are organically integrated in the process

of spatial and temporal dynamic evolution, which can be roughly divided into five phases: the birth phase in the 1900s and before, the formation stage in the 1910s and 1940s, the development stage in the 1950s and 1970s, the renewal stage in the 1980s and 1990s, and the transformation stage in the 2000s and today.

#### BIRTH STAGE (1900S): TRANSFORMATION OF THE SHUYUAN AND THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE UNIVERSITY

At this stage, Chinese higher education realized the initial transition from traditional academies to new-style academies combining the East and the West. Sanjiang Normal School was the first government-run new-style school in Nanjing and one of the pioneers of higher teacher training schools in China. The campus base is roughly a 480m\*280m east-west flat rectangle, covering an area of about 13.3hm<sup>2</sup>. The buildings are independent and self-contained, and the overall shape of the enclosure makes the campus appear closed and inward-looking. Due to the influence of the traditional architectural space layout system, the campus space follows the symmetrical courtyard organization layout of the central axis space as much as possible.

#### FORMATION STAGE (1910S-1940S): CULTURAL COLLISION AND SPATIAL INTEGRATION

As the modern university model was gradually improved and the campus function changed from simple to complex, the spatial form also showed different characteristics, which was also the initial exploration of the early construction of modern universities in China. The mode of American-style university campus planning is one of the important sources of university campus planning ideas in this period, and the independent and complete community and continuous and open natural landscape are its most significant features and achievements<sup>18</sup>. The National Central University (expansion), Jinling University (new built), and Jinling Women's University (new built), which were planned and designed by Chinese and foreign architects, are typical university campuses with campus spatial patterns of this period (Figure 2). The structure of the three central campus areas at this stage is rigorous, and the pattern has already taken shape. However, the specific spatial organization and architectural design have their characteristics.

National Central University ( Sipailou Campus of Southeast University today) is located under the Jilong Mountain (present North Pole Pavilion), near Xuanwu Lake in the north, with a beautiful natural environment. The planning program uses the surrounding scenery as the borrowed scenery of the campus. It incorporates the natural environment into it to achieve the organic integration of the campus and the environment (Figure 2a-1). The campus space adopts the "Rotunda" of the American university as the center of the composition and the geometrically regular road network as the skeleton, constituting the Western classical spatial pattern of "axial openness". In contrast, the new buildings on the campus all adopt Western classical architectural features (Figure 2a-2,3).



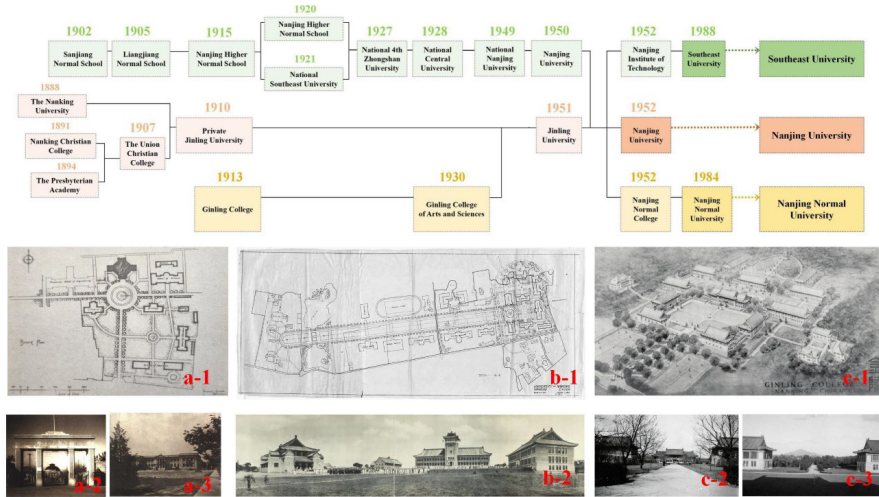


Fig. 2. Historic origins, key planned programs and implementation effects for the development of the three campuses.

Jinling University ( Gulou Campus of Nanjing University today) was one of the early church universities to adopt the architectural form of East-meets-West, setting a precedent for the fusion of Western architecture with the official architecture of northern China. The campus follows the original topography and unfolds the central axis from low to high along the north-south direction, creating a spatial effect of rich hierarchy and shifting scenery (Figure 2b-1). The spatial layout of the axis and the triad is typical of American university campus planning, creating the spatial atmosphere of a “university community” (Figure 2b-2). Also, using the semi- enclosed space to provide an open space for socializing can promote communication among students and between teachers and students.

The campus base of Jinling Women’s University ( Suiyuan Campus of Nanjing Normal University today) is close to the square. It fully draws on the compositional techniques of the Forbidden City of China, which sequentially adopts the contrast of vertical and horizontal space and the echo of lakes and hills on the axis (Figure 2c-1). The original hillock was fully preserved during the planning and construction. The high point of the western hills is used as the counterpoint of the campus axis, which coincides with the direction of the western ridge. The triple or quadruple courtyards are the basic units that form a building complex with a rich sense of spatial sequences. The outdoor public space not only has the characteristics of the western courtyard space but also contains the flavor of the classical Chinese garden (Figure 2c-2,3). Also, using Chinese garden corridors breaks down the courtyard walls, connects the campus buildings, and constitutes an open and interpenetrating spatial cluster within the campus.

## DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE (1950S-1970S): EMULATING THE SOVIET UNION AND COLLAGE OF CONNOTATIONS

In 1952, under the influence of the idea of a “comprehensive study of the Soviet Union”, the three universities were reorganized and carried out the first round of expansion and renewal with distinctive characteristics of the times, and the campus was characterized by its functional zoning.

The new buildings on the campus of Southeast University in this period are more in harmony with the original historical buildings in terms of volume and style, adopting the form of simple modernism with a few national symbols and no excessive decoration, which further improves the layout of the campus center, and sets an example for the new buildings on the campus in the later period.

The Soviet socialist form of the 1950s and 1970s became the cultural characteristic of Nanjing University's campus during this period. Campus buildings were built with a combination of traditional Chinese pitched roofs and Soviet-style roof bodies. The new north-south and east-west axes are re-planned on the west side of the former Jinling University, and the east-west axis between the Southeast Building and the Southwest Building allows for a better integration of the old and new axes, reflecting the spatial continuity and unity.

The new buildings on the campus of Nanjing Normal University have been influenced by the revivalist trend again, with the construction of the new South Building, the North Building, and the Middle Building. The new buildings continue the three-part classical Chinese architectural form with green stone plinths, red pillars and yellow walls, and extensive roofs with hermetic peaks. The scale of the campus gradually expanded and developed around the central axis, further extending the main axis of the campus during the period of Jinling Women's University.

## RENEWAL STAGE (1980S-1990S): STEADILY PROGRESSING AND CULMINATING IN A BURST OF ACTIVITY

The rapid urban expansion brought about by the reform and opening up and the popularization of higher education have pressed the boundaries of the campuses and demanded that the campuses increase their capacity, presenting a blossoming diversity of practices<sup>19</sup>. After this round of expansion, the construction of the three campuses tends to be saturated.

The construction activities of Southeast University's campus during this period were dominated by demolition and reconstruction as well as large-scale new buildings and insertions, which greatly changed the campus's landscape. New campus buildings such as the Center Building and the New Library became the focus and turning point for the continuation and strengthening of the axis of the National Central University period. With the completion of the Center Building and other buildings, the main axis along the “South Campus Gate - the Great Hall” has been further extended in the northern section, running through the entire campus.

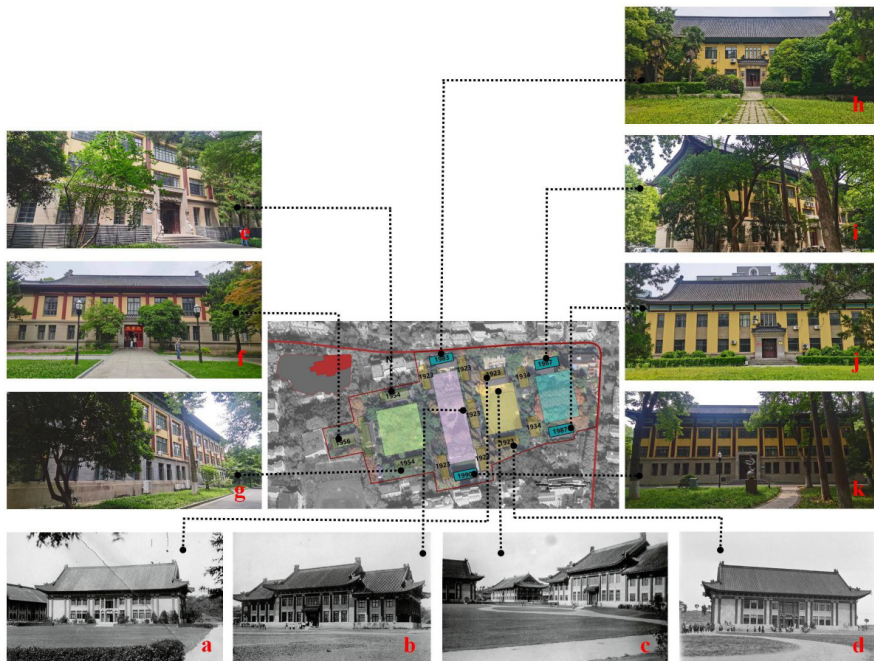


Fig. 3. Architectural landscape of Nanjing Normal University campus in different periods.

The new buildings of Nanjing University all adopted the same style of modern, simple form, no decoration, adapting to the needs of industrialized mass production and the trend of high-rise. Campus in the original building based on further strengthening the original Jinling University campus axis and the “entrance-teaching building” axis, and began to expand to the west side of the stadium, the formation of the chemical building, liberal arts building, and Yifu Hall formed the third campus axis. The three north-south axes gradually transition from east to west, complementing each other, and an east-west axis structures a prosperous and orderly campus space pattern.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Nanjing Normal University campus had no suitable development sites, except for demolishing some old buildings and constructing a few new ones. New campus buildings continued the three-stage classical Chinese architectural form during this period, although with more simplified decorations. The architectural forms under the influence of the three retro trends coexisted in the same overall spatial pattern, with primary and secondary courtyards and axial symmetry forming a spatially sequential architectural complex (Figure 3).

#### TRANSFORMATION STAGE (2000 TO PRESENT): FUNCTIONAL TRANSFORMATION AND COLLISION BETWEEN OLD AND NEW

The number, scale, speed, and reform efforts of university campus construction entered a new high gear during this period, with all three campuses being built in an infill high-rise mode, causing varying degrees of damage to the overall pattern of the historic campuses.



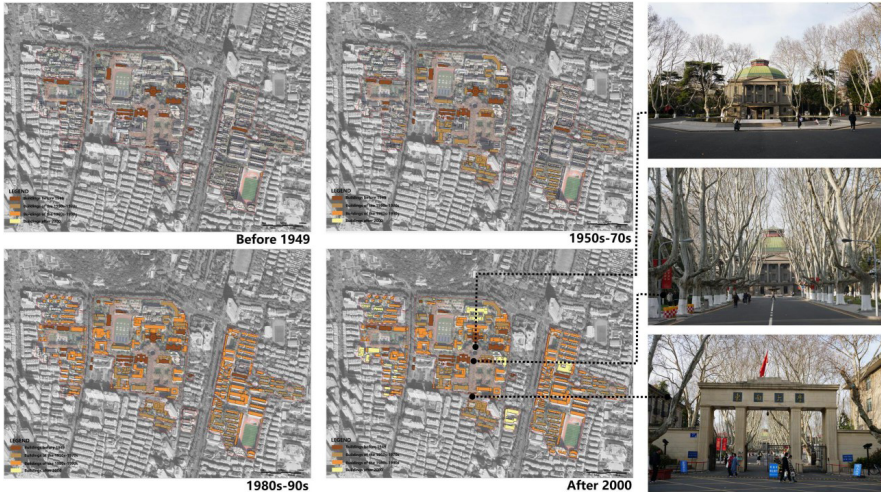


Fig. 4. Historical Evolution of Campus Space Patterns at Nanjing University.

The high-rise and infill construction activities of this period greatly changed the campus landscape of Southeast University, and a haphazard boundary enclosure appeared around the campus (Figure 4). The disorderly expansion of new buildings and the international turn of architectural forms severed the continuity of campus space and gradually weakened the overall spatial pattern of the campus. However, some new buildings are committed to continuing and strengthening the axes of the Central University period, such as the Li Wenzheng Building (2004) in the northern part of the Great Hall, which continues the main north-south axis while enriching the campus skyline through the use of appropriate massing and a small dome that echoes the Great Hall. In addition, the trees and other plant landscapes have grown for nearly 100 years, changing with the seasons, and play an important role in shaping the campus' humanistic environment.

Since 2000, the new buildings on the Nanjing University campus have been more extensive and flexible in space, no longer confined to a symmetrical layout. The modern campus space is more inclined to flow freely around the building clusters, forming an open and free campus space (Figure 5). The dozen or so new high-rise buildings built around the campus around 2000 have seriously affected the skyline of the campus landscape. Inside the campus, the historic campus located in the center of the old city was constrained by the limited land for development. The only way to cope with the development space problem at that time was to use high-rise buildings and increase the buildings' density, which negatively impacted the historic campus's landscape appearance (Figure 5, right).

After Nanjing Normal University constructed a new campus in the 1990s, which played a positive role in easing the conflicts of the old campus, the Suiyuan Campus had little construction activity after 2000 (Figure 6). The number of floors of the campus buildings is mainly two to four, and most are two-story, generally showing a spatial pattern of high in the west and low in the east, high in the south and low in the north. The campus landscape is centered on open green space. It adopts the traditional Chinese courtyard layout, which enhances the integration of the buildings with the landscape environment, thus enjoying the reputation of "the most beautiful campus in the East" (Figure 6, right).

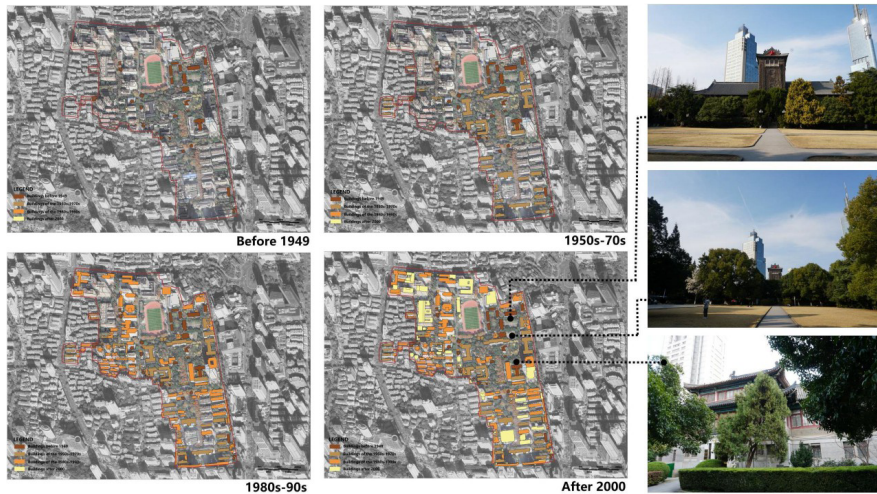


Fig. 5. Historical Evolution of Campus Space Patterns at Southeast University.

## “ANCHORING-LAYERING” FORMATION MECHANISM OF HISTORIC CAMPUSES

### DRIVING FORCE OF CULTURAL CONTEXT AND VALUE IDENTITY

The transformation of social and cultural backgrounds and value identities is the inherent driving force behind the anchoring and change of historic university campuses. University campuses have experienced three influxes of foreign architectural and planning trends, and the historic campuses in Nanjing have developed diverse landscape characteristics under different cultures and value identities<sup>20</sup>.

Between 1911 and 1949, the first foreign architectural and planning trends flooded into China. Western classicism, or the fusion of East and West, was the mainstay of the campus landscape in this period and an important cultural gene of campus space later. In the 1950s and 1960s, with the large-scale introduction of Soviet architectural and planning trends for the second time, the principle of Soviet classicism was implemented throughout the country. The second was the large-scale introduction of Soviet architectural and planning trends in the 1950s and 1960s when campus renovation practices based on Soviet classicism were implemented nationwide. The third time was after the reform and opening up in 1978, especially after 1992, when modernism, postmodernism, and cultural veins came in, contributing to the heterogeneous and diversified characteristics of the campus landscape in this period.

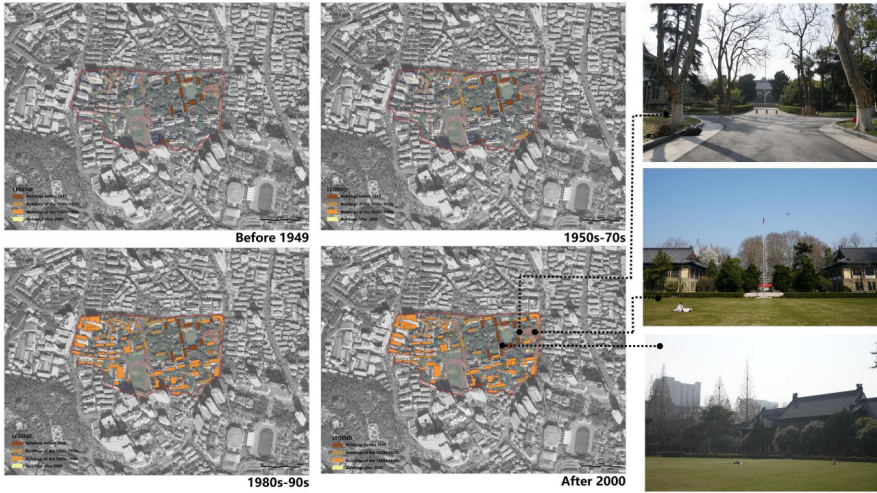


Fig. 6. Historical Evolution of Campus Space Patterns at Nanjing Normal University.

## ANCHORING SYNCHRONIZATION OF NATURAL GEOGRAPHY AND HUMANISTIC CONSTRUCTION

The evolution of the “anchoring-layering” process of Nanjing’s historic campus landscape is a synergy of natural geography and humanistic construction, with natural geography anchoring as the basis for the germination of layering and humanistic construction anchoring as the driving force for continuous layering. In planning and constructing the university campus, the surrounding mountain scenery is used as the borrowed scenery of the campus, which realizes the interaction and communication between the campus, the city, and nature. The terrain around and within the campus forms the base for the landscape features of the historical campus, which is the foundation for the heterogeneity and diversity of the campus landscape and then influences the spatial pattern of the campus, the skyline, and so on.

Campus architecture is an essential part of the campus heritage in terms of scale, function, and spatial combination. It is also the focus of campus humanistic construction at all stages, and Chinese and foreign architects play an important role in this. If there are only buildings on the campus, as when it was first built, the campus will lose much of its unique character. At the same time, plants and other landscape elements help to highlight the architectural features of the campus. The buildings on both sides of the central axis of the Sipailou campus of Southeast University and the sycamore trees planted in the 1920s reflect each other, forming a well-organized and unique campus landscape (Figure 4, right). Overall, in the spatial and temporal process of campus landscape shaping, the early and later architectural and landscape environment elements work together to create a natural and peaceful spatial atmosphere of the historic campus (Figure 2,4-6).

## LAYERING COMBINATIONS OF ORDERED CONSTRUCTION AND DISORDER EXPANSION

The layering of historic campuses is a dynamic combination of disordered expansion and ordered construction, where unified value orientation and clear anchoring influences lead to the more orderly layering of space. In contrast, value confusion and anchoring collapse lead to spatial shifts toward disordered development. From the 1900s to the 1940s, the construction of campus space was constrained by natural geography, spatial planning, and cultural anchoring, with most buildings being 2-4 floors. The spatial pattern was unified and harmonious, with a pleasant scale. In the 1950s-70s, the unified planning and construction of the accumulation period made it possible to continue the historical characteristics, and the campus space realized the connotative collage renewal. The high-rise buildings constructed in the 1980s and 1990s are squeezing the existing historic buildings. At the same time, the interaction between the university and the city has caused the growth of the campus edges, and the campus shows a disordered and fragmented spatial structure. Under the interweaving of the old and the new, as well as the replacement and renewal of order and disorder, the historic campuses in Nanjing present a layered space with diversified forms and combinations.

## CONCLUSION

This paper's historic laying study is carried out on three historic campuses in Nanjing: the Sipailou Campus of Southeast University, the Gulou Campus of Nanjing University, and the Suiyuan Campus of Nanjing Normal University. The research on the campus landscape development pattern was conducted, and the hidden natural, social, cultural, and other factors were further analyzed by the effectiveness of the anchoring points and the layering space in different periods. The historic Nanjing University campus's landscape has undergone five stages: birth, formation, development, renewal, and transformation. Under the synergistic anchoring of nature and humanity, the natural anchoring based on topography and geomorphology lays the foundation for campus spatial planning and development. At the same time, the humanistic construction influenced by Chinese and Western multicultural values is the anchoring power for the campus to continue accumulating. As an internal cultural factor, culture determines the layered elements' external representation. Through the dynamic layering process of order and disorder, it is finally endowed with the heritage value of the campus landscape. The interaction between the anchoring points and the layering space also reflects the wisdom of building the historic campus spatio-temporal construction by integrating the architecture with the landscape environment and shaping the historic campus space's natural and tranquil, stable, and introverted atmosphere.

The campus landscape has also gone from being dominated by buildings in the early years to a shared role of buildings and landscape environment in the later years. Historic campuses have distinctive landscape features, especially the pre-1949 campuses dominated by Western classicism (Sipailou Campus of Southeast University) or the combination of Chinese and Western features (Gulou Campus of Nanjing University and Suiyuan Campus of Nanjing Normal University), which has become an essential cultural gene of the current campus space. Given



the current campus situation of saturated land, complex functions, high-rise buildings, and motorized traffic, the anchoring and spatial changes in the campus landscape are analyzed in order to establish a “spatial and temporal view” for the preservation and development of the historic campus. This study is a preliminary application of the theory of “Historical Layering” and “Anchoring-Layering” in campus heritage. In future research, the anchoring-layering effect can be deepened quantitatively to realize the historic campus landscape’s scientific protection and fine management.

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## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR(S)

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## ENDNOTES

7. 1 Leigh, “Architectural Conservation.”,8.
8. 2 URL: <https://whc.unesco.org/>
9. 3 URL: <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-638-98.pdf>.
10. 4 URL: <http://www.getty.edu/foundation/initiatives/past/campusheritage/>.
11. 5 Rodwell, “Reconnecting the City.”, 38.
12. 6 Alfonso, “Politics, Architecture, and the Construction.”, 20-28.
13. 7 Rey-Pérez, “Historic Urban Landscape: A Systematic Review.”, 233-58.
14. 8 Zhang, “Landscape Approaches to Urban Heritage Conservation”, 112-118.
15. 9 Cao, “Construction of Heritage Value Cognition Framework from the “, 80-87.
16. 10 URL: <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-638-98.pdf>.
17. 11 Han, “Historic urban landscape research in China.”, 68-77.
18. 12 Lunecke, “The Layered City: Pedestrian Networks in Downtown.”, 336-53.
19. 13 Wang, “Contextualising a Heritage Assessment Toolkit at the Pre-Planning Stage.”, 273-94.
20. 14 Liu Yifei. *Anchoring and layering of historic urban landscapes: cognizing and preserving historic cities* (Beijing: Science Press, 2017). 43.
21. 15 Tian, “Interpretation of the spatial and temporal process.”, 26-31.
22. 16 Guo, “Research on the Conservation of the Historic Site of.”, 99-105.
23. 17 Pan, “Interpretation of ‘anchoring-layering’ in the historical.”, 87-95.
24. 18 Turner, *Campus: an American Planning Tradition* (Cambridge : MIT Press, 1984). 3-4.
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26. 20 Ibid. 243.



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## IMAGE SOURCES

- Figure 1 Created by the author; base map from the China National Standard Map Network, Review No. GS(2023)2767.
- Figure 2 a: Southeast University Archives; b: Yale Divinity School Library; c: Yale Divinity School Library.
- Figure 3 a-d: Yale Divinity School Library; e-k: photograph by the author.
- Figure 4 Created by the author; base map from Google Maps.
- Figure 5 Created by the author; base map from Google Maps.
- Figure 6 Created by the author; base map from Google Maps.