

Article

Traditional Regionalism or Modern Minimalism? Unveiling the Psychological Impact of Architectural Styles in Sustainable Urban Planning

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Abstract: Life satisfaction is one of the key indicators of people's well-being. However, the choice between traditional regionalism and modern minimalism in urban planning remains controversial from a human-centered perspective. Using a sample of 438 respondents from Huangshan City in 2024, we explored the relationships between architectural style, general belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction through structural equation modeling (SEM). The results indicate significant correlations among the four variables in the model, with general belongingness and social identity acting as mediators in the relationship between architectural style and life satisfaction. Furthermore, residents living in traditional regional architecture scored higher on the scales of general belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction compared to those living in modern minimalist architecture. These findings provide new insights for urban planning, highlighting the importance of considering the potential psychological and social welfare impacts of architectural styles on residents during the design process. Additionally, they emphasize the value of preserving and promoting traditional regional architecture. This study provides empirical evidence for urban planners and architects, supporting the integration of more human-centered design principles into modern urban environments to enhance residents' well-being.

Keywords: architectural style; life satisfaction; urban planning; city life; sustainable design



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1. Introduction

In the rapid urbanization process, enhancing life satisfaction is a fundamental human objective [1]. As urbanization progresses, residents' life satisfaction has become a crucial indicator of the effectiveness of urban planning. Improving life satisfaction is not only about enhancing residents' psychological health and quality of life but also directly impacts social stability and harmony [2]. From an urban planning perspective, advocating for life satisfaction as a goal to enhance residents' social welfare, healthy behaviors, and physical health outcomes emphasizes its value in policy-making aimed at improving population well-being [3]. This approach seeks to counteract the bland abstraction of modernism by emphasizing local needs and potential, thereby resisting the homogenizing forces of globalization and preserving local social identities.

In urban planning, the choice between modern minimalism and traditional regionalism architectural styles has long been debated for their roles in creating sustainable, resilient, and culturally rich urban environments [4,5]. Traditional regional architecture emphasizes walkability, connectivity, and community-oriented spaces, reflecting regional characteristics and offering valuable lessons for contemporary urban design [6]. Traditional urban forms, such as the combination of urban regional architectural styles in Kurdish settlements in Iran, excel in sustainability principles like form and density, walkability, and energy efficiency due to their compactness, high intersection density, and optimal

solar gain [7,8]. In contrast, modern urban planning often faces multiple issues, including rapid urbanization, inadequate response to living needs, and failure to implement coherent urban design strategies [9]. The reaction to modern minimalist architecture's disregard for local values has sparked a renewed appreciation for traditional urban environments, highlighting the necessity of sustainable development and good urban design [10].

From the works of critical regionalism, it can be seen that traditional regional architecture attempts to resist the homogenizing forces of global modernism by emphasizing local needs, climate, materials, and sociological context [4]. This approach is evident in architectural practices that integrate local elements to maintain cultural identity amidst globalization [5]. Ashita argues that meaningful creativity in architecture requires a sense of historical continuity, indicating that modern minimalism often lacks the nuanced experiential qualities embodied in traditional regional architecture [11,12]. Modern minimalism in architecture is a design philosophy that emphasizes simplicity, functionality, and achieving maximum effect with minimal elements [13]. This minimalist aesthetic aims not only to reduce clutter but also to create efficient and purposeful spaces, often using industrial materials and avoiding excessive ornamentation [14]. This design style has been widely applied in the planning of modern urban architecture since the post-modernist movement.

The sustainable combination of modern minimalist architecture and traditional regional architecture is recognized in both academic and practical fields of urban planning [7,8,15], but there are gaps in the existing research. Traditional regional architecture typically focuses on preservation, while modern minimalist architecture aligns with the fast-paced rhythm of modern development [16,17]. However, in the context of increasingly stabilized urban development, comparative discussions on the impact of these architectural styles on residents' life satisfaction are relatively scarce. Furthermore, the psychological aspects of general belongingness and social identity have not been collectively discussed in this relationship. In other words, previous studies analyzing the path from architecture to life satisfaction have overlooked the chained mediation effects of general belongingness and social identity.

To address these gaps, we applied structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine how traditional regional architecture and modern minimalist architecture in urban areas impact life satisfaction through general belongingness and social identity. Based on data from Huangshan City in 2024, this study aims to address the following two questions: First, does the chained mediation model proposed in this study hold? Second, what are the differences in the impact of traditional regional architecture and modern minimalist architecture within this model? These research questions closely align with the study's objectives and hypotheses. The study aims to validate a theoretical model linking architectural style, general belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction. It hypothesizes that traditional regional and modern minimalist architectures significantly influence general belongingness and social identity, which in turn mediate the relationship between architectural style and life satisfaction. Additionally, the study compares the influences of traditional regional and modern minimalist architectures. It hypothesizes that residents in traditional regional architecture score higher on general belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction than those in modern minimalist architecture.

The significance of this study is reflected in three dimensions. First, it provides empirical research on the life satisfaction of residents living in traditional regionalism and modern minimalism architecture in urban areas, offering valuable references for future research. Second, by evaluating the relationships between architectural style, general belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction, this study reveals how architectural environments impact residents' psychological experiences and social interactions. This promotes the theoretical understanding of the intersection between psychology and architecture, highlighting the complex pathways through which architectural styles impact psychological outcomes. Third, the research findings offer actionable insights for urban planning and architectural design practices. They suggest that greater consideration should be given to

the interactions between architecture and residents' general belongingness and identity in the design and planning processes to enhance residents' life satisfaction.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: The "Section 2 Literature Review" provides an overview of related studies on urban planning and life satisfaction from both conceptual and empirical perspectives and constructs a conceptual framework. The "Section 3 Research Methods" briefly introduced the research location, samples, instruments, and approach of data collection and analysis. In the "Section 4 Results", we present the analysis results of the survey data and verify the validity of the model. The "Section 5 Discussion" compares the findings of this study with existing research. Finally, we summarized the main findings and offer suggestions for future research based on the limitations in the "Section 6 Conclusions".

2. Literature Review

2.1. Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a frequently discussed self-reported measure of quality of life and has become an important social indicator widely used to assess and compare various trends and policies [3,18]. It is correlated with physical, psychological, and social health and includes an individual's cognitive and evaluative judgments of their overall quality of life based on personal standards and expectations [19]. Life satisfaction is a crucial component of subjective well-being, reflecting an overall assessment of one's living environment and the extent to which individuals perceive these environments as meeting or exceeding their needs and desires [1]. The importance of life satisfaction encompasses a wide range of psychological, social, and health-related benefits. It is impacted by a complex interplay of personal and environmental factors, ranging from sociodemographic and physical health aspects to social support and psychological well-being [20,21].

The measurement of life satisfaction has significantly evolved, undergoing numerous assessments to validate this key concept. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) [22] has been a primary measure, praised for its simplicity and reliability in capturing individuals' assessments of their life satisfaction [23]. However, the quest for refined assessments has led to the development of improved measures, such as the Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale, which aims to broaden the construct's bandwidth and reduce bias [24]. Additionally, life satisfaction is a critical aspect of quality of life, and its measurement's effectiveness across different sociodemographic groups is essential [25].

Cross-cultural research utilizing the SWLS to compare life satisfaction across countries has highlighted the importance of ensuring measurement invariance. Studies have found that while configural and metric invariances generally hold, scalar invariance often does not, indicating potential cultural impacts on how life satisfaction is perceived and reported [26,27]. The SWLS has been adapted for various cultural contexts, with modifications such as reducing response options to enhance its practicality, further supporting these observations [28]. Despite its widespread use, the SWLS and its derivative scales require ongoing adjustments to better capture the multifaceted nature of life satisfaction, reflecting the impacts of different philosophical assumptions and sociodemographic, cultural, and health-related factors [29].

2.2. Life Satisfaction and Architecture

Life satisfaction is closely related to the architecture in which residents live [30]. It is increasingly recognized that architecture is an upstream contributor to life satisfaction as it impacts individuals' overall satisfaction with various aspects of their daily lives [31,32]. Urban planning and design interventions, particularly those emphasizing inclusivity and sustainability, have been shown to improve the well-being of disadvantaged groups, highlighting the role of architecture in creating equitable and happy places [33]. The design of residential buildings and their correlation with residents' satisfaction further illustrate the profound impact of architecture on life satisfaction. Architectural environmental elements,

including street space design features, greatly impact residential satisfaction, and this spatial heterogeneity suggests the need for targeted urban development policies [34].

The planning of traditional regional architecture and modern minimalist architecture not only impacts the appearance of cities but may also have a profound relationship with residents' life satisfaction. Oktay emphasizes that urban design and physical environmental features significantly impact residents' sense of community, neighborhood attachment, satisfaction, and perceived quality of life, indicating that well-designed cities can enhance residents' life satisfaction [35]. Historic traditional regional architecture often carries rich cultural value and historical significance, providing residents with unique opportunities for communal interaction. These buildings allow inhabitants to establish deep connections with local traditions [36,37]. In traditional regional architectural environments, neighborhoods often maintain closer social ties, collectively preserving their shared cultural heritage [38,39].

Conversely, modern minimalist architecture, with its functional and contemporary design philosophy, may offer advantages in enhancing residential comfort and convenience [35]. Modern minimalist architectural designs typically emphasize maximizing space utilization and energy efficiency, using the latest technologies and materials to meet the needs of modern living [15,40,41]. Additionally, the flexibility and innovation of modern minimalist architecture attract young people and professionals pursuing a modern lifestyle, providing them with living spaces that meet contemporary aesthetic and functional demands [42]. Both architectural styles shape residents' lifestyles and social interactions in their own ways, playing significant roles in fostering sustainable life satisfaction within urban settings.

This juxtaposition of traditional and modern perspectives brings solutions to contemporary urban planning issues, including challenges related to social interaction and human identity. Additionally, integrating traditional design elements can meet specific cultural and environmental needs, such as visual privacy in residential areas [43], and inspire modern urban open space designs, exemplified by comparisons between traditional Chinese and modern landscapes [44]. Historical evaluations of visionary urban planners underscore the enduring relevance of traditional planning principles in addressing today's urban crises [45]. Lastly, incorporating traditional architectural parameters—such as those from the hot and dry climate region of Diyarbakir, Turkey—into modern housing can achieve significant energy savings and create sustainable environments, demonstrating the potential of traditional design in contemporary urban planning [46]. Therefore, considering both traditional and modern architectural planning factors is crucial for creating urban spaces that are both functional and reflective of cultural heritage.

2.3. General Belongingness and Social Identity

General belongingness and social identity are closely intertwined concepts that play significant roles in shaping human behavior, health, and social dynamics [47]. Belongingness is an emotional assertion of attachment that is indispensable for identity. This emotional bond defines group membership and shapes social life through the politics of belonging [48]. Social identity, derived from cognitive awareness, emotional attachment, and value content related to group membership, encompasses how individuals define themselves in relation to groups, influencing behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions, rooted in psychological connections to certain groups [49]. The relationship between belongingness and identity is complex due to the emotional dimension of belongingness, which defines group membership and shapes social life [50]. These concepts are interwoven across various domains, impacting individual and collective experiences, behaviors, and outcomes, highlighting the importance of emotional connections in shaping identity.

General belongingness refers to the fundamental human need to form and maintain positive, stable interpersonal relationships, which contributes to emotional patterns, cognitive processes, and overall well-being [51,52]. It is moderated by our affinity and complementary differences, promoting human well-being [53]. The measurement of general

belongingness, especially in academic contexts, has been explored through tools like the General Belongingness Scale (GBS), emphasizing the importance of understanding and assessing this basic human need across different domains and populations [54].

Belongingness is often considered in relation to social identity. Social identity theory and self-categorization theory posit that individuals derive self-awareness from group membership, which can profoundly impact their mental health and behavior. For example, meaningful group connections can combat feelings of loneliness, foster a sense of purpose and support, and highlight the role of social identity in psychological well-being [55]. Social identity also plays a crucial role in policy-making and implementation, as the behavior of policy actors aligns with their group affiliations, influencing policy content and outcomes [56]. Measurement scales for social identity have demonstrated reliability and validity across different group contexts, showing significant correlations with group-related behaviors and attitudes [57].

2.4. Conceptual Framework

The success of urban planning can be gauged through residents' life satisfaction [32,58]. By positioning life satisfaction as a core metric, urban planners can more precisely adjust and optimize urban development strategies to better serve the needs and expectations of urban residents [35]. Such planning not only promotes sustainable urban development but also ensures the continuous enhancement of residents' well-being. Additionally, incorporating general belongingness and social identity as intermediary variables allows us to gain deeper insights into how the architectural style impacts these psychological dimensions, thereby further impacting residents' life satisfaction.

Critical regionalism aims to mediate the tension between global modernism and local traditions. It emphasizes the importance of local environments, communities, and cultures in architectural design, resisting the homogenizing forces of globalization [59,60]. This philosophy advocates for design based on a region's specific geographic and cultural context, fostering a strong sense of place and identity among inhabitants [61,62]. In our study, critical regionalism provides a framework for understanding how traditional regional architecture enhances residents' general belongingness and social identity. By integrating local materials, historical forms, and cultural symbols, traditional regional architecture creates environments strongly connected to local heritage [59,63]. This connection helps residents feel more attached to their surroundings, fostering general belongingness and social cohesion [64,65]. The concept suggests that this approach not only preserves cultural heritage but also enhances residents' mental health by creating spaces that resonate with their identity and values.

Social identity theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how group membership influences an individual's behavior, attitudes, and perceptions [66]. The theory emphasizes the cognitive and emotional significance of group belonging, which affects behavior, attitudes, and perceptions [67]. Social identities form through self-categorization, where individuals identify with groups based on shared characteristics, values, and norms [67,68]. Applying social identity theory to our study helps us understand how architectural style affects life satisfaction through the mediating roles of general belongingness and social identity. Traditional regional architecture emphasizes local cultural elements and provides a tangible representation of the social group residents belong to. This architectural style reinforces group identity, making residents feel more connected to their community and enhancing their social identity. Consequently, residents experience higher life satisfaction due to an enhanced general belongingness and identity.

Our conceptual framework integrates critical regionalism and social identity theory, arguing that architectural style affects life satisfaction by influencing general belongingness and social identity. Residents living within architectural spaces experience emotional responses impacted by the architectural style [69]. These emotional responses to space are not merely subjective but are shaped by the dynamic interactions between architectural style and individual emotional states [69–71]. Moreover, the emotional attachment to a place,

cultivated through its social significance and material practices, is a crucial component of how individuals connect with their environments, thereby impacting their identity [69,72]. Architecture, by mediating between global influences and local traditions, nurtures general belongingness and significantly impacts social identity.

Based on this, we have developed a chained mediation model as the conceptual framework for this study, aiming to explore the comprehensive impact of architectural style on residents' general belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction. As illustrated in Figure 1, the model establishes connections between several interrelated key elements, providing the theoretical foundation for our data collection and analysis. Architectural style is the independent variable in this study. It refers to the type of architectural design in the residential environment, specifically comparing traditional regional architecture with modern minimalist architecture. This variable is crucial for understanding how the physical design of living spaces affects residents' psychological and social outcomes. Life satisfaction, the dependent variable, represents residents' overall happiness and satisfaction with their lives. This variable is influenced by various factors, and it is hypothesized that architectural style influences life satisfaction through two mediating variables: general belongingness and social identity. The core focus of this study lies in the direct relationship between architectural style and general belongingness, as well as the potential impact on life satisfaction mediated through general belongingness and social identity. Chain mediation modeling suggests that architectural style positively impacts general belongingness and social identity, which in turn increases life satisfaction.

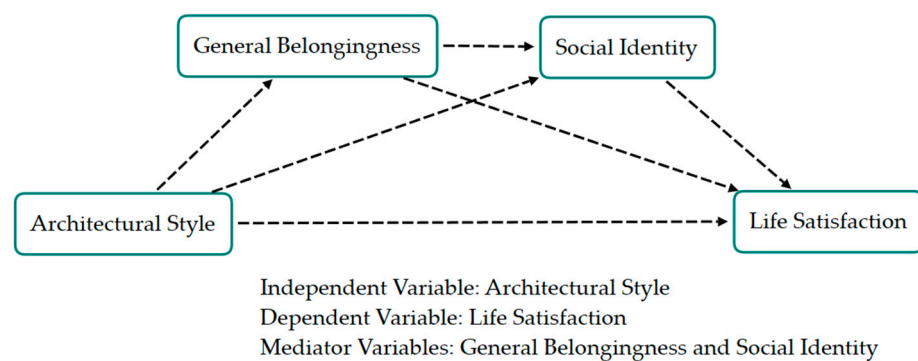


Figure 1. The chain-mediated model of architectural style and life satisfaction. Constructed by the first author based on literature review.

3. Research Methods

This study employed a survey research design. The objective was to examine the model relationships among the four variables in the conceptual framework through a questionnaire, providing insights for urban planning and architectural design practices. After successfully obtaining approval from the Ethics Review Committee, we officially launched this research project. The entire research process, from the initiation of participant recruitment to the conclusion of data collection, spanned from 26 March 2024 to 28 April 2024. This phase included the recruitment and screening of potential participants, followed by subsequent data collection efforts, ensuring the smooth progression of the study in compliance with ethical review requirements [73].

3.1. Research Location

Huangshan City was chosen as the study site for its unique architectural features and urban planning. Located in southern Anhui Province, China, Huangshan City blends rich traditional Hui-style architecture with modern minimalist architecture [74]. The city is renowned for its spectacular natural beauty and deep cultural heritage, and it is listed as a World Heritage Site for its natural and cultural significance [75]. The coexistence of traditional and modern architecture in Huangshan makes it an ideal place to study

the impact of architectural styles on residents' life satisfaction. Additionally, the diverse demographics of the city's residents provide a varied sample for the study.

In Figure 2a, we have illustrated an outline map of the urban planning for Huangshan City, depicted with grey lines. This area represents the main residential zone for the residents of Tunxi District and serves as the urban core of Huangshan City. The regions highlighted with yellow lines indicate our sampling areas, which are characterized by a rich presence of both traditional regionalist architecture and modern minimalist architecture. Within these highlighted areas, we have used blue dots to mark the coordinates of the residential neighborhoods that were selected through random sampling. These selected neighborhoods encompass a diverse range of architectural styles, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the impact of architectural design on residents' life satisfaction.

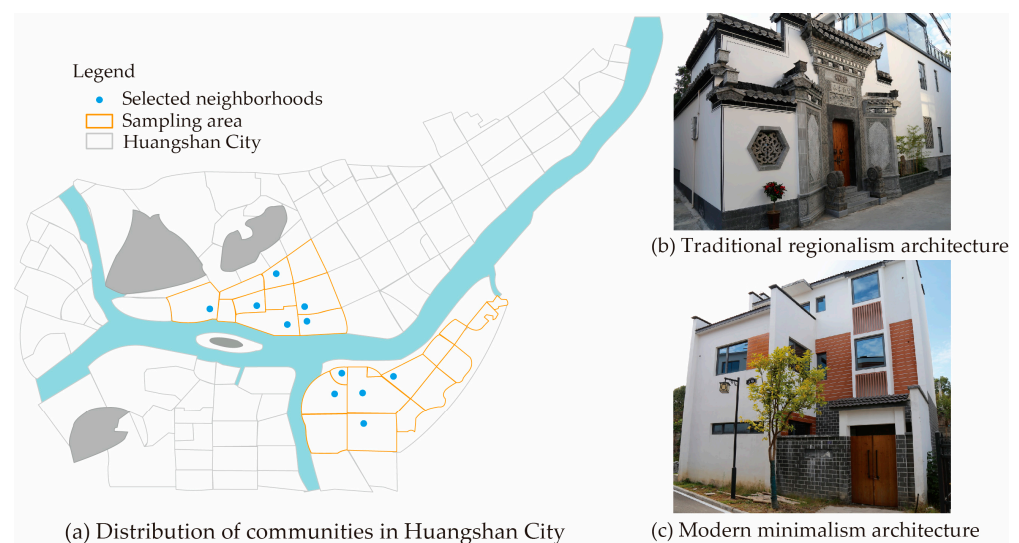


Figure 2. Research location in Huangshan City. Photographs by the first author.

The architectural landscape of Huangshan City features the harmonious coexistence of traditional regionalism and modern minimalism, providing an ideal environment to study how these styles affect residents' life satisfaction in urban planning. Huangshan boasts many well-preserved traditional Hui-style buildings, exemplifying traditional regionalism architecture. As shown in Figure 2b, these buildings are known for their exquisite carvings, elegant yet rustic shapes, and harmonious integration with the natural environment [76]. Hui-style architecture, with its uniform black, white, and grey color scheme, embodies centuries of ancestral architectural wisdom, reflecting the integration of social hierarchy and family values within the built environment [77]. The finely carved ornamentations on arch gates and beams depict specific regional characteristics, emphasizing the importance of cultural heritage and artistry in architectural design [78].

With the advancement of urbanization, Huangshan has started incorporating modern minimalist architecture into its urban planning and design [79]. As shown in Figure 2c, emerging modern minimalist buildings adopt contemporary design language, demonstrating the city's modernization trend while providing minimalist residential and commercial spaces [80]. Reflecting changing aesthetics and lifestyle needs, these buildings feature clean lines, open floor plans, extensive use of ceramic tiles and steel, and an emphasis on functionality and simplicity [80]. The minimalist form of these buildings contrasts with the ornate traditional architecture of Huizhou, highlighting the city's architectural diversity. Huangshan city has planned both traditional and modern minimalist styles to create a vibrant built environment reflecting its historical heritage and modernization aspirations. This case study provides a rich context for understanding the impact of architectural style on residents' life satisfaction and serves as a valuable reference for urban planners and architects balancing heritage preservation with modern development.

3.2. Participants

To ensure the statistical power, we aimed to obtain a minimum effective sample size of 384 participants [81]. For this purpose, we designed a stratified sampling scheme targeting residents living in traditional regional architecture and modern minimalist buildings. Specifically, our recruitment area covered two densely populated residential areas in Huangshan City, Anhui Province, from which we randomly selected 10 neighborhoods as recruitment targets. Subsequently, with the assistance of community leaders, we accessed WeChat groups for each neighborhood and conducted random sampling within these groups.

Through this strategy, we successfully recruited 514 residents to participate in the study. After screening and data cleaning, 438 valid questionnaires were retained. The demographic statistics are presented in Table 1, which include 210 female and 228 male participants. The gender ratio of the sample is fairly balanced, enhancing the generalizability of the research findings. In terms of age distribution, the study sample spans multiple age groups, demonstrating a certain level of diversity. Regarding educational levels, the distribution reveals a broad range of educational backgrounds among the participants.

Table 1. Demographic frequency statistics in the questionnaire.

Item	Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	210	47.95
	Male	228	52.05
Age	18–25	59	13.47
	26–30	155	35.39
	31–40	117	26.71
	41–50	65	14.84
	51–60	42	9.59
	Middle school and below	37	8.45
Education	High school	126	28.77
	Specialized college	127	29.00
	Undergraduate	88	20.09
	Postgraduate and above	60	13.70

3.3. Instrument

We utilized a structured questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire design adhered to the principle of informed consent, ensuring that participants fully understood the study's content and purpose before completing the formal questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into four main sections, totaling 20 questions, aiming to comprehensively assess participants' basic personal information, the architectural style of their residence, general belongingness (GB), social identity (SI), and life satisfaction (LS). Specifically, the initial part of the questionnaire collected participants' basic information, including three indicators: gender, age, and educational background. The subsequent section inquired about the architectural style of participants' residences, distinguishing between modern minimalist architecture and traditional regional architecture, presented in the form of one question. The detailed scale items are shown in Table 2. To ensure the smooth flow of the questionnaire, the order of the scales was arranged as GB–LS–SI.

After the questionnaire was designed, we conducted a pilot study on 26 March 2024, involving 80 participants from two residential areas in Huangshan City. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.899, indicating good reliability. Additionally, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value was 0.886, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity showed a significance level of 0.000, which is less than 0.01, demonstrating good validity of the data. Following the data analysis, we discussed any ambiguous statements in the questionnaire with professional researchers and made minor revisions to the formal questionnaire to ensure that more reliable statistical results could be obtained in subsequent administrations.

Table 2. Statements of variables.

Variables	Statements	Sources
General Belongingness (GB)	When I am with other people, I feel included. (GB 1) I have close bonds with family and friends. (GB 2) I feel accepted by others. (GB 3) I have a sense of belonging. (GB 4) I have a place at the table with others. (GB 5) I feel connected with others. (GB 6)	[54]
Life Satisfaction (LS)	In most ways, my life is close to my ideal. (LS 1) The conditions of my life are excellent. (LS 2) I am satisfied with my life. (LS 3) So far I have gotten the important things I want in life. (LS 4) If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. (LS 5)	[22,23]
Social Identity (SI)	I feel part of a group to which I belong (e.g., family, friends, colleagues). (SI 1) I have strong ties to my social group (e.g., ethnic, religious, cultural groups). (SI 2) I am proud of the traditions and values of my social group. (SI 3) Members of my social group have a strong influence on me. (SI 4) Spending time with members of my social group is very important to me. (SI 5)	[57,82]

3.4. Data Collection

To ensure the effectiveness and reliability of the data collection process, we implemented a series of rigorous steps. First, we actively established contact with the heads of ten neighborhood committees within the target areas. Through communication with them, we not only gained their support but also ensured their understanding of the research objectives and process. Based on ensuring transparency and building mutual trust, we reached reciprocal compensation agreements with each committee head, agreeing to pay them RMB 50 as a token of appreciation for their assistance with the study. This compensation was intended to express our gratitude for their time and help.

With the assistance of the neighborhood committee heads, we detailed the purpose, significance, and meaning of their participation to potential participants, ensuring that each one signed an informed consent form fully understanding the research content and their involvement. This process upheld the respect for participant rights and the principle of informed consent, ensuring the ethical standards of the study [83]. The survey was voluntary, and all participants were free to discontinue filling out the questionnaire at any time without any obligations. Additionally, to further increase participation rates and express respect for the participants' time and contributions, we offered a monetary compensation of RMB 3 to each participant who completed the questionnaire as a participation incentive. This compensation mechanism helped to enhance the response rate, thereby ensuring the quality and representativeness of the collected data.

3.5. Data Analysis

To accurately test the hypothesized model of this study, we employed statistical methods for in-depth analysis. In the pre-test phase, we used SPSS to test the reliability and validity of the scales, examining the questionnaire content. These tests ensure the scales' reliability and validity, providing a solid foundation for subsequent analyses [84]. Reliability tests assess internal consistency, while validity tests ensure the scale accurately measures the intended construct [85]. After collecting the formal questionnaire data, we conducted correlation analyses to explore relationships between architectural style,

general belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction. Pearson's correlation coefficient examined the statistical associations between these variables, determining the direction (positive or negative) and strength of these relationships [86]. Correlation analyses provide preliminary evidence supporting the hypothesized links between constructs, setting the stage for more complex analyses. Understanding these initial associations is crucial for testing mediation models [87].

After the correlation analysis, we performed structural equation modeling (SEM) of the chained mediation model using SmartPLS 4.0. This powerful statistical technique allows simultaneous analysis of multiple relationships between observed and latent variables to assess the model's fit and the significance of path relationships comprehensively [2,88]. This technique was chosen because it handles complex models with multiple mediating variables and provides insights into direct and indirect effects [89]. In the path analysis, architectural style (traditional regional architecture = 1, modern minimalist architecture = 0) was the independent variable, general belongingness and social identity were the mediating variables, and life satisfaction was the dependent variable used to analyze the chain-mediated relationships. Finally, we assessed the overall fit of the model using specific indices to comprehensively evaluate how well the hypothesized model fits the observed data.

These quantitative methods were chosen for their statistical rigor and ability to generalize findings to large populations [90]. Quantitative methods effectively identify patterns and relationships in large datasets, which is invaluable for validating complex theoretical models [90,91]. By conducting reliability and validity testing with SPSS, preliminary analyses with Pearson correlations, and SEM with SmartPLS, we established a robust methodological framework capable of comprehensively addressing our research questions. In summary, the chosen methodology allows for a rigorous and detailed analysis of the relationship between architectural style, general belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction. This approach enables accurate validation of our hypothetical model and allows us to draw meaningful conclusions to inform urban planning and architectural design practice.

4. Results

4.1. Correlation Analysis

A correlation analysis was conducted among the measured variables to explore the relationships between architectural style, general belongingness, life satisfaction, and social identity. As shown in Table 3, significant positive correlations were found between all pairs of variables.

Table 3. Results of correlation analyses of variables.

	Architectural Style	General Belongingness	Life Satisfaction	Social Identity
Architectural Style	1			
General Belongingness	0.263 **	1		
Life Satisfaction	0.327 **	0.683 **	1	
Social Identity	0.411 **	0.320 **	0.389 **	1

** $p < 0.01$.

4.2. Chained Intermediary Modeling Analysis

In the reliability and validity analysis of the measurement constructs, the Cronbach's alpha values and composite reliability scores for different dimensions were around 0.9, indicating high internal consistency. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) values for each dimension were above the threshold of 0.4, confirming adequate convergent validity. Therefore, the reliability and validity levels of the measurement dimensions are considered appropriate and robust for further analysis (Table 4).

Table 4. Reliability and validity test.

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	Average Extraction Variance (AVE)
General Belongingness	0.931	0.936	0.946	0.745
Life Satisfaction	0.881	0.920	0.918	0.701
Social Identity	0.884	0.891	0.914	0.681

The analysis of path relationships revealed that when the architectural style is traditional regionalism (TR), the impact coefficients for the paths “TR → GB”, “TR → SI”, and “TR → LS” are 0.528, 0.222, and 0.699, respectively. These results indicate that traditional regionalism architecture has a significant positive impact on general belongingness (GB), social identity (SI), and life satisfaction (LS) (Table 5).

Table 5. Analysis of pathway relationships.

	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T-Statistic	<i>p</i>
GB → LS	0.620	0.042	14.829	0.000 ***
GB → SI	0.236	0.050	4.724	0.000 ***
TR → GB	0.528	0.085	6.191	0.000 ***
TR → LS	0.222	0.075	2.978	0.003 **
TR → SI	0.699	0.082	8.565	0.000 ***
SI → LS	0.134	0.051	2.655	0.008 **

** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The data suggest that when the measured architectural style shifts from modern to traditional, the impact of architectural style on general belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction is positively impacted. In other words, traditional architectural style results in higher statistical scores in general belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction compared to groups opting for modern architectural styles.

Table 6 presents the results of the mediation impact relationships obtained through structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. In this table, we can see the path coefficients, standard deviations, T-statistics, and corresponding *p*-values for different paths. These values collectively describe the extent to which architectural style impacts life satisfaction (LS) through general belongingness (GB) and social identity (SI). In testing the mediation impact relationships of the measured paths, the significance levels of all five groups of mediation relationships are below 0.05, thereby confirming the validity of the indirect impacts of the variables.

Table 6. Analysis of the mediation impact relationship.

	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T-Statistic	<i>p</i>
GB → SI → LS	0.032	0.014	2.313	0.021 *
TR → GB → SI → LS	0.017	0.008	1.998	0.046 *
TR → GB → LS	0.327	0.056	5.849	0.000 ***
TR → GB → SI	0.125	0.038	3.251	0.001 **
TR → SI → LS	0.094	0.037	2.512	0.012 *

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Based on the statistical tests of the questionnaire data, the proposed model of this study is validated, with the specific relationships between variables illustrated in Figure 3. This model reveals how different architectural styles impact residents' quality of life through various psychological mechanisms. The path coefficients in the model represent the strength

of relationships between variables, and the values in parentheses indicate the statistical significance levels of these relationships.

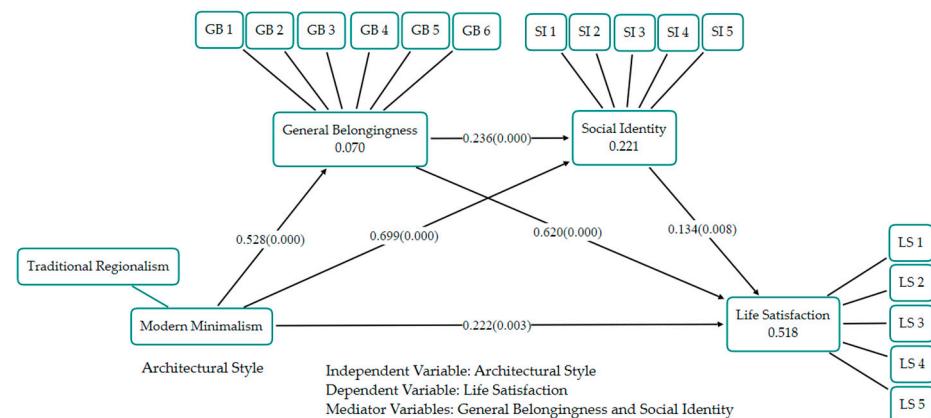


Figure 3. Significant standardized direct impacts of variables in the model.

In the architectural style variable, the study examines two types of architectural styles: traditional regional and modern minimalist. General belongingness (GB) measures residents' general belongingness to their architectural environment, reflected by six indicators (GB1 to GB6), with a value of 0.070 indicating GB's overall contribution to the model. Social identity (SI), impacted by the surrounding architectural styles, is measured by five indicators (SI1 to SI5), with a value of 0.221 reflecting SI's overall contribution to the model. Life satisfaction (LS), the dependent variable in this study, is assessed using five indicators (LS1 to LS5), and the value 0.518 represents the variance in life satisfaction explained by the model. These values indicate that the architectural style significantly impacts residents' life satisfaction by impacting their general belongingness and social identity.

The arrows in the diagram represent the hypothesized relationships between variables, with path coefficients and significance levels provided in parentheses. For example, the path from modern minimalist architecture to general belongingness has a coefficient of 0.528 with a significance level of 0.000, indicating a strong and statistically significant positive relationship. Similarly, the path from general belongingness to life satisfaction has a coefficient of 0.236 (0.000), showing a significant positive impact. The model also illustrates the mediation effects, where general belongingness and social identity mediate the impact of architectural style on life satisfaction. The combined indirect effects (e.g., from modern minimalist architecture to life satisfaction through general belongingness and social identity) highlight the pathways through which architectural styles impact residents' life satisfaction.

5. Discussion

Our analysis confirmed the validity of the model proposed in this study, demonstrating significant relationships between architectural style, general belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction. This underscores the prominent role of social identity theory and critical regionalism in contemporary urban planning and architectural design. Residents in traditional regional architecture scored higher on the model scales compared to those in modern minimalist architecture, highlighting the value of traditional architectural styles in urban planning. Residents living in traditional regional architecture scored higher on the model scales compared to those residing in modern minimalist architecture, highlighting the value of traditional regional architectural styles in urban planning. Specifically, traditional regional architecture showed positive correlations with general belongingness ($\beta = 0.528$, $p < 0.001$), social identity ($\beta = 0.699$, $p < 0.001$), and life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.222$, $p = 0.003$). These results indicate that traditional regional architecture can foster a stronger sense of community and identity, ultimately enhancing residents' overall well-being.

The findings of this study align with the existing literature, providing new perspectives and empirical support for understanding how architectural styles impact residents' life satisfaction through psychological and social mechanisms. Glanz et al. provided an initial framework for studying the relationship between residential architectural style and life satisfaction [30]. Additionally, Hess-Lüttich noted that architectural style significantly impacts residents' life satisfaction, a finding echoed in our study [92]. The consensus in the literature suggests that the design style of buildings is a key element of urban planning, having both direct and indirect profound impacts on residents' perceptions, behaviors, and psychological well-being [93].

Building on this foundation, our study incorporated analyses of general belongingness and social identity as mediating variables. This not only deepened our understanding of the factors impacting life satisfaction but also provided new insights into how these influences manifest. In our analysis, general belongingness and social identity were revealed as mediators linking architectural style to life satisfaction. General belongingness provided an intuitive and emotional foundation for residents' connection to their community, while social identity offered residents a more concrete and meaningful sense of self [50,94]. This aligns with social identity theory, which suggests that a significant part of an individual's self-concept derives from their membership in a social group, influencing their behavior and attitudes [55,95].

The emotional connection fostered by traditional regional architecture strengthens residents' interaction with the community and deepens their understanding of their social status [70,71]. Giamarelos supports this view by revealing the link between architectural style and residents' identity, arguing that architecture is not only a physical container for habitation but also a symbol of the social identity of its inhabitants [63]. Similarly, Broto et al. highlighted that the bond between architecture and identity is forged through emotional connections, affirming the significance of emotions in building relationships between individuals and their living environments [68]. This underscores that the relationship between architectural style and life satisfaction is mediated by psychological constructs such as general belongingness and social identity, in addition to being direct.

Specifically, general belongingness and social identity are mediating channels through which architectural style impacts residents' life satisfaction. General belongingness, as a perception of individuals' relationship with their living environment, impacts how residents view their place and role within the community [96]. Social identity further refines this perception by focusing on how individuals define themselves based on their social groups and cultural settings [55,95]. General belongingness and social identity not only serve as mediating channels through which architectural style impacts residents' life satisfaction but also provide emotional bonds that connect people with spaces. These bonds not only strengthen residents' emotional engagement with their community but also deepen their understanding of their social standing [70,71]. The findings of our study resonate with those of Cao et al. [76], who confirmed the significant mediating role of emotional factors in the pathway from architecture to identity. These discoveries have been further supported and expanded in previous research, where we not only confirmed this linkage but also further dissected the mechanisms of this impact.

Furthermore, the results of this study underscore the importance of traditional regional architectural styles. Firstly, our findings align with those of Cassarino et al. [33], who observed that residential areas with traditional regional architecture foster more interaction and connectivity within communities, thereby enhancing residents' sense of community belonging and satisfaction. This aligns with the human social group concept discussed in critical regionalism [60]. The strong community ties observed in areas with traditional regional architecture may explain the higher scale scores of residents in our study. This tight-knit community connection may be a contributing factor to the superior scale scores observed among residents in our study. Additionally, existing research supports this view, suggesting that traditional regional architecture often incorporates more natural materials and open space layouts, which can enhance overall resident well-being [97,98].

This finding not only reveals the potential impact of residential environment styles on residents' psychological and behavioral performance but also provides important insights for urban planning and architectural design.

However, it is important to note that while traditional regional architecture appears to excel in certain psychological and social metrics compared to modern minimalist architecture, this does not imply that modern minimalist architecture lacks unique advantages and value. For example, Salameh & Touqan [15] and Švajlenka et al. [99] have pointed out in their research that modern minimalist architecture, through the use of innovative technologies and sustainable materials, can more effectively address the environmental challenges of contemporary urban settings. Therefore, in urban planning and architectural design, it is essential to consider the strengths and challenges of different architectural styles, seeking balance and innovation. By incorporating modern minimalist principles, these buildings use local materials and environmentally friendly techniques, highlighting the feasibility and advantages of combining modern design with sustainable development goals. The complementary strengths and challenges of different architectural styles should be considered in urban planning and building design. Balancing traditional regional architecture with modern minimalist design can lead to innovative solutions that preserve cultural heritage while promoting sustainable development.

6. Conclusions

This study is among the first to explore how architectural styles in urban planning impact life satisfaction through general belongingness and social identity. Utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM) with data from residents of Huangshan City, we examined these relationships and discovered significant correlations: architectural style, general belongingness, and social identity all correlate with life satisfaction. These findings suggest that residents' life satisfaction may be associated with the architectural style of their residences, mediated by feelings of belongingness and social identity. This research extends prior findings, indicating that these correlations are both direct and moderated by psychological constructs such as general belongingness and social identity [30,92]. This provides a foundation for further exploration of the possible causal relationships between these factors.

In SEM, general belongingness and social identity act as mediators in the relationship between architectural style and life satisfaction, illustrating that residents' feelings of general belongingness and social identity are key psychological mechanisms through which architectural style impacts life satisfaction. This mediation effect aligns with the theoretical framework proposed in social identity theory, which posits that social environments contribute to personal identity formation [66]. Our findings are also supported by Broto et al. [68], who emphasized the emotional bonds between individuals and their living environments. By integrating these mediating factors, our study provides a more nuanced understanding of how architectural styles impact life satisfaction, advancing previous research that primarily focused on direct impacts. Moreover, compared to modern minimalist architecture, residents living in traditional regional architecture performed better in terms of belongingness, social identity, and life satisfaction, suggesting that traditional regional architecture has unique advantages in supporting community cohesion and individual identity.

The second finding suggest that traditional regional architecture enhances people's general belongingness, social identity, and, ultimately, life satisfaction compared to modern minimalist styles. This underscores the unique advantages of traditional regional architecture in promoting community cohesion and individual well-being. These findings provide important insights for urban planners, indicating that people's life satisfaction can be effectively enhanced by adapting architectural design in urban planning. To translate these findings into workable design guidelines, consider the following recommendations (Table 7).

Table 7. Feasibility recommendations for urban planning.

No.	Recommendations
1	By incorporating traditional features, modern architecture can benefit from the territorial characteristics of traditional regional architecture [60,62]. For example, ornamental elements like brick carving, wood carving, and stone carving in Hui-style regionalism architecture are not only beautiful but also convey rich regional characteristics. These traditional features can be absorbed and integrated into modern architecture and combined with traditional carving ornamentations in the planning of new neighborhoods. This integration helps preserve cultural heritage and regional identity, which is essential for fostering general belongingness among residents.
2	The principle of critical regionalism is emphasized, advocating a balance between global modernist practices and local architectural traditions [65]. This balanced approach helps create urban spaces that are both contemporary and reflective of the local cultural and historical context, thereby increasing residents' life satisfaction [100]. The modern minimalist buildings in Huangshan were designed to incorporate elements of Hui-style architecture, such as traditional rooflines and material choices, making them modern without losing their local character. The open spaces created by minimalist design cater to contemporary lifestyles, providing adaptability and ease of use that traditional design may lack.
3	Urban planners should design residential areas and public spaces that facilitate social interaction [101]. In urban planning, social interaction among residents can be encouraged and social stability enhanced by incorporating open layouts, public facilities, and pedestrian-friendly environments in residential spaces. Public spaces like community parks and plazas not only enhance architectural aesthetics but also promote interaction and communication among community members, thereby enhancing residents' social identity and life satisfaction.
4	Human-centered architectural design considers the psychological and social impacts of building design [15]. For example, in the planning of Huangshan, incorporating traditional regional features into architectural design not only provides an aesthetically pleasing living environment but also enhances social stability through community activities. This design considers not only the physical function of the building but also its impact on the psychological and social interactions of the inhabitants, resulting in more humanistic urban planning. Considering the impact of architectural design on residents' psychological and social interactions makes urban planning more humane.

By integrating critical regionalism and social identity theory into the study of architectural styles, this research advances theoretical developments in urban planning and architectural design. The study enriches the theoretical horizon by combining critical regionalism with social identity theory. Critical regionalism advocates a balance between global modernism and local traditions, emphasizing the importance of local context, community, and culture in architectural design. This approach fosters a strong sense of place and identity by integrating local materials, historical forms, and cultural symbols, enhancing the emotional connection between residents and their environment [31]. This study provides empirical validation of a conceptual model based on the literature, expanding the understanding of how architectural style affects the psychological and social well-being of residents [36,37]. While previous studies have focused on direct effects, this study incorporates social identity theory to delve deeper into the mediating roles of general belongingness and social identity. This nuanced approach suggests that the emotional and social bonds fostered by traditional regional architecture play a crucial role in enhancing life satisfaction.

Additionally, urban planners and architects can leverage these research outcomes to foster sustainable urban development. By opting for architectural styles and planning strategies that boost resident satisfaction and community welfare, cities can achieve better balance across environmental, economic, and social dimensions [102]. This perspective

encourages further exploration of how architectural aesthetics and functionality impact individual psychological perceptions, emphasizing the need for an urban planning approach that respects regional characteristics and prioritizes individual life experiences, reflecting the essence of critical regionalism [65]. Traditional regional architecture can seamlessly blend cultural heritage, environmental sustainability, and personal well-being into daily living experiences, significantly impacting life satisfaction. The challenge lies in balancing these traditional elements to meet contemporary needs without compromising the social and environmental benefits they offer.

It is difficult to find a perfect study, and this research is no exception. While the study's investigation into how architectural style impacts life satisfaction is notable, it also acknowledges certain limitations that provide directions for further exploration. Firstly, this study employed a cross-sectional design, which means that data were collected at a single point in time. This design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions. Future research could benefit from using longitudinal designs to track the long-term impacts of architectural style on residents' life satisfaction more effectively. Secondly, the research sample primarily consisted of residents from Huangshan City, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Cultural backgrounds and architectural styles vary across different regions, which could impact the relationship between architectural style and life satisfaction. Therefore, it would be beneficial for future studies to be conducted in a broader geographic area to determine whether the findings are applicable to other cultural and architectural contexts. Thirdly, this study relied exclusively on quantitative methods for analysis. This approach may restrict our understanding of the deeper, more complex social and psychological drivers behind the relationship between architectural style and life satisfaction. Incorporating qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could enhance future studies. These methods would allow researchers to explore how individuals perceive and experience their living environments and to reveal more about how these perceptions impact their life satisfaction. Deeper analyses of the architecture itself can enhance the role of architectural design in future urban planning. Future research could explore innovative design solutions that harmonize historic architectural aesthetics with modern environmental and functional requirements. Case studies of successful hybrid designs that incorporate traditional and modern elements can offer practical guidance for architects and urban planners.

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