

# DECODING THE CULTURAL CONNOTATION OF JIANGNAN GARDENS: THE IMPLICATIONS OF SCHOLARS' GARDEN-MAKING SPIRIT FOR MODERN GARDEN AND BUILDING DESIGN

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## ABSTRACT

Jiangnan gardens, as treasures of classical Chinese gardens, contain profound cultural connotations and showcase the long history and splendid cultural style of the Chinese nation. This study focuses on Jiangnan gardens, analyzing the unique spiritual attributes of literati garden design in China, providing theoretical support for future garden and architectural design. Through qualitative research methods, the cultural connotations of Jiangnan gardens are deeply explored and analyzed, interpreting the spiritual pursuits of literati garden design. On this basis, the study further elaborates on the enlightenment that Jiangnan gardens offer to contemporary design practices. Using semiotics as a theoretical tool, the study deciphers the cultural genes of Jiangnan gardens through literature analysis, field investigations, and expert interviews, revealing the philosophical thoughts (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism integration), aesthetic paradigms (The imagery of poetry and painting), and spiritual aspirations (reclusion and patriotism) conveyed by the literati class through spatial symbols. A three-dimensional design transformation pathway, "imagery translation - functional adaptation - symbolic reconstruction," is proposed to validate the contemporary adaptability of traditional garden wisdom. The research fills the gap in systematic studies of garden cultural connotations from a semiotic perspective, providing methodological references for the inheritance of regional culture under globalization. This study provides strong support for expanding the design ideas of modern living environments in China, making the design more in line with people's actual needs, but also promotes the vigorous development of the design industry. At once, it also helps to enhance people's awareness of garden culture, promote the inheritance and promotion of garden culture, and better showcase the excellent cultural traditions of the Chinese nation.

**Keywords:** Jiangnan Gardens, Cultural Connotation, Men of Letters Spiritual Pursuit

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the reform and opening up, China has made great achievements in the construction of human settlement environment. A large number of buildings and garden works have emerged that borrow design elements from traditional Chinese classical gardens. However, due to a pursuit of speed at the expense of quality, these works generally lack in-depth and mature consideration in their design, resulting in finished effects that fall short of the artistic heights of traditional classical gardens. Meanwhile, as a precious gem of traditional Chinese culture, Jiangnan gardens are also facing dual challenges of preservation and development. The field of architecture and garden design urgently needs to engage in a profound reflection to address the complex challenges facing the industry.

The service subject of Jiangnan gardens during the Ming and Qing dynasties was the literati, and gardens were an ideal space for the literati to express their ideals, cultivate their temperament, cultivate themselves, and reflect on themselves. In today's society, the main service providers of park landscapes are tourists, including cultural intellectuals and ordinary people. With the changes of the times, the attributes of gardens have changed, and the service objects of ancient gardens and modern parks have differentiated. Although the development speed of modern human settlement construction is fast, the overall artistic level is not high, and the works lack inherent artistic conception and charm. Obviously, there are conflicts and contradictions in the use of functions, construction methods, material craftsmanship, aesthetic concepts, and other aspects of human settlement construction in different eras. From this phenomenon, we begin to reflect on where the root cause of the decline in artistic quality lies. Researchers hope to decipher the spiritual code of Chinese gardens, draw lessons from the past, and find a breakthrough to promote the development of contemporary Chinese design.

Researchers have distilled and categorized the essence of Jiangnan gardens, analyzing the unique spiritual attributes of Chinese literati garden design, thereby providing theoretical support for future garden and architectural design practices. The scope of the study encompasses mature Jiangnan literati gardens from the Ming Dynasty to the Republican era, with field investigations concentrated in Suzhou, Yangzhou, and Shanghai. The sample types are diverse, balancing the representativeness and diversity of Jiangnan literati garden regional cultures. The research content includes the historical development, aesthetic characteristics, aesthetic experience, spiritual pursuit, and design methods of gardens. It deeply analyzes the ideological connotations contained in Chinese gardens and explores the application of these aesthetic spirits in garden design.

### Research Objectives

- 1) To study history architecture cultural connotations in Jiangnan gardens. To lay a solid theoretical foundation for the study of the cultural connotation of the meaning of the Jiangnan gardens.
- 2) To analysis the unique spiritual attributes of Chinese literati in garden design and provide theoretical support for future garden and architectural design practices.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

### Exploration of Modern and Contemporary Landscape Design Direction

In 1922 (the 11th year of the Republic of China), Mr. Chen Zhi returned from studying in Japan and devoted himself to the research of Chinese gardening. His book "Introduction to Gardening" became the earliest modern Chinese gardening work. In terms of organizational structure, Wang Juyuan, Liang Sicheng, Wu Liangyong, and others co founded the "Landscape Design Group" at Beijing Agricultural University in 1951. In 1952, under the advocacy of Professors Chen Congzhou and Feng Jizhong, Tongji University established the discipline of landscape architecture. Since then, various comprehensive universities in China have also established landscape architecture disciplines. In 2008, Japanese scholar Okada da compiled

"A Study of the History of Chinese Palace Gardens", which systematically sorted out historical documents related to palace gardens in various dynasties of China, analyzed the literature in detail, and summarized the characteristics and styles of garden architectural design in different periods of China. In 2019, British scholar Coleridge published "The City of Charm: Chinese Ming Dynasty Garden Culture", which takes literati gardens as the starting point for the study of Ming Dynasty gardens. From the perspective of historical materialism, it analyzes the gardening activities and theories of Jiangnan gardens in the Ming Dynasty, and depicts the aesthetic phenomena of the elite class in the Ming Dynasty. In 2018, Yang Xiaoqin's doctoral thesis "The Influence of Ancient Artists on Chinese Gardens" at Southeast University analyzed the life experiences, spiritual world, artistic works, garden theory and practice of ancient literati and artists, and further explored the diversity and complexity of the framework system of garden art theory.

### **Research on Chinese Landscape Aesthetics**

In 2012, Dr. Fu Zhiqian from Shandong University completed his thesis "Research on the Aesthetics of Xie Lingyun's Landscape Architecture". This paper systematically elaborates on Xie Lingyun's landscape aesthetics, revealing his aesthetic orientation of emptiness, beauty, cleanliness, and brightness under the influence of Taoism, Buddhism, and metaphysics. Dr. Fu Zhiqian's research shows that Xie Lingyun's landscape ideas have had a profound impact on the natural landscape aesthetic characteristics of ancient Chinese literati gardens, and can be regarded as the starting point of Chinese literati gardens. In 2017, Dr. Zhang Lili from Tianjin University completed her thesis "Research on the Construction of Jinan's Landscape City from the Perspective of Chinese Landscape Aesthetics". The paper describes the aesthetic concept of "perfection" pursued by classical Chinese gardens. From the perspective of Chinese garden aesthetics, a systematic sorting and extraction of the cultural connotations of mountains and waters in mountain and water cities has been carried out, deepening the understanding of the characteristics of mountain and water cities in theory and providing new cases and perspectives for the study of Chinese garden aesthetics.

### **Research on Landscape Architecture and Chinese Literati Painting**

Dr. Chen Weixuan from South China University of Technology in 2019, titled "The Spatial Environment Logic of Lingnan Gardens from the Perspective of Landscape Painting," demonstrated the spatial environment logic of using painting to create gardens through extensive empirical research, hand drawn drawings, and long scroll manuscripts of landscape painting. In 2019, Dr. Song Yang from Nanjing University of the Arts published a paper titled "A Study on the Visual and Spatial Interpretation of Visible Gardens". Starting from the perspective of landscape painting and viewing, this paper explores the interpretation and presentation of Chinese gardens in contemporary visual art through the analysis of painting, imagery, experimentation, and reconstruction. It reveals reconstruction of traditional spaces in Chinese gardens through visual art. Zhang Gaoyuan's "On the Literary Sentiments of Ming Dynasty Elegant Collection, Gao Shi, and Garden Paintings" analyzes the different literary sentiments of different cultural groups in the Ming Dynasty through the method of schema research, providing a research method of graphic evidence for study of literary garden ideas.

### **Research on Chinese Gardens in Some Foreign Countries**

In 1991, British scholar Coleridge published a book titled 'Long Things: The Material Culture and Social Conditions of Early Modern China'. Presenting the deep structure of society through material entities, explaining cultural consumer goods and garden art during the Ming and Qing dynasties from a power perspective, and interpreting the cultural discourse system of early modern China. In 2018, Singaporean scholar Kang Gwynn's "Garden Metallurgy and Fashion: Garden Consumption and Cultural Activities of Ming Dynasty Literati" took "Garden Metallurgy" written by Ming Dynasty scholar Ji Cheng as the research starting point, and viewed the garden life of literati from the perspective of Jiangnan literati, analyzing and

interpreting the garden fashion and consumption activities of the Ming Dynasty. Professor Norberg Schultz, a Norwegian architectural critic, initiated an early and systematic discussion of architectural phenomenology in the field of architecture. His book "The Spirit of Place - Phenomenology towards Architecture" published in 2010 pioneered use of phenomenological methods and Heidegger's philosophical ideas in the study of architectural concepts and history.

### **Related research papers**

According to the statistics from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure database in July 2024, a total of 303 doctoral theses and 1449 master's theses related to Chinese landscaping were included. These papers cover a wide range of topics, including landscape architecture, garden aesthetics, classical gardens, scenic spots, comparative studies, and more. From the perspective of disciplinary classification, the paper covers fields such as architecture and engineering, forestry, literature, art, environmental science, horticulture, archaeology, tourism, meteorology, biology, and more. Among them, architecture and engineering papers are the most common, followed by papers in the fields of art and forestry. According to data analysis, the number of doctoral and master's theses directly related to the cultural connotations of Jiangnan gardens is relatively small at present.

### **Implications of existing research for this study**

This study is based on existing academic research and draws on the academic foundations of traditional Chinese garden design theory, cultural geography, and the aesthetics of literati from the Ming and Qing dynasties. By integrating current research achievements in garden spatial analysis and symbolic metaphor interpretation, it innovatively incorporates modern ecological concepts, The concept of revitalizing and inheriting intangible cultural heritage, and a digital humanities perspective into the research framework of Jiangnan gardens. Unlike the traditional academic focus on material forms and poetic-pictorial analogies, this research constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework of "spatial narrative - cultural memory - emotional interaction" to Systematically explained the spatial philosophy of "virtual and real coexistence" in Jiangnan gardens and its inspiration for contemporary life aesthetics, Through spatial techniques and emotional mapping, it demonstrates the modern translational mechanisms of garden spiritual connotations, achieving an academic leap from static symbolic interpretation to dynamic cultural gene decoding in garden culture.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research collects information related to Jiangnan gardens by consulting ancient books, academic works, papers, and other means, and studies the cultural connotations of Jiangnan gardens. Conduct in-depth analysis of typical garden examples and analyze the spiritual attributes of literati gardening. Comparing traditional gardens with modern gardens, identifying similarities and differences, and inspiring the design of modern gardens and architecture, the following are specific research methods:

### **Qualitative research methods**

The research mainly adopts qualitative research methods, such as literature analysis, field research, and expert interviews, to gain a deeper understanding of the spiritual attributes of literati gardening, explore the cultural connotations of gardens, and their impact on modern gardens and architecture. Explore the evolution laws of aesthetic experience and spiritual pursuit in the historical process of gardens, and look forward to the value and development trend of garden spirit in the future society. This qualitative research method is very suitable for analyzing the aesthetic characteristics and cultural significance behind Jiangnan gardens, which helps to transform the cultural connotations of these gardens into specific design techniques in the later stages of research.

## Data collection

Literature analysis: This mainly conducts a systematic study of representative garden designers and their theoretical works from the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1912), the Republic of China period (1912-1949), and the modern and contemporary period (1949-1949) according to the historical context. It systematically sorts out the historical and ideological background of the literature, and summarizes the garden ideas, aesthetic experiences, and spiritual pursuits in the literature. The sources of literature include books, journals, research reports, articles, and cultural relics, which will lay a solid research foundation for the study of the cultural connotations of Jiangnan gardens.

Field Research: Researchers carefully selected 18 garden research samples from three locations in the core area of Jiangnan—Suzhou (9 cases), Yangzhou (5 cases), and Shanghai (4 cases)—to collect data. The types of gardens included private gardens, governmental gardens, and public gardens. These samples can comprehensively represent the overall characteristics and attributes of Jiangnan gardens, and effectively demonstrate the diversity and distribution characteristics of garden types in the region. Research is beneficial for a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural functions of Jiangnan gardens and their specific manifestations in different social classes. This multi angle research helps to comprehensively evaluate the historical value of Jiangnan gardens, while also providing a more intuitive source of inspiration for modern design. The relevant technical drawings, historical literature, publications, photos, and audio recordings of gardens and architecture provided first-hand data for this study.

Expert Interviews: The research team carefully selected nine interviewees with rich experience in gardening, including experts in garden and architectural design and research, staff from garden construction companies, and investment and management personnel from garden user units. The selection considered the diversity and breadth of the interviewed experts to ensure the universality and applicability of the research results. Through interviews and exchanges with the experts, the aesthetic characteristics of Jiangnan gardens were systematically explored, their cultural origins traced, and the unique spiritual attributes of literati garden-making in China were analyzed. After completing the interviews, the research direction and objectives were further clarified, field investigation samples were selected, and the core research topic of Jiangnan garden aesthetic experience and literati spiritual pursuits was established, with in-depth exploration and analysis being conducted. Additionally, the experts also discussed the future development trends of gardens and architecture, inspiring future work in garden and architectural design.

**Table 1** Interview Expert Information Survey Form

expert Serial Number	expert full name	work in duration	Relationship with gardens	Job	educational background
001	Liu Xuguang	21 years	Literary Theory Research Research on Aesthetic Theory Art theory research, on-the-job teaching at universities	Dean of the School of Literature, Shanghai University Changjiang Scholars professor Ph.D. supervisor	Bachelor's degree from Lanzhou University Shaanxi Normal University master of philosophy Fudan University Doctor of Literature and Art
002	Deng Yaoxue	35 years	Research on Landscape Theory	Chief Engineer of the Planning and	Tongji University Bachelor of

Serial Number	expert full name	work in duration	Relationship with gardens	Job	educational background
003	Jiangbin	35 years	Landscape Design Practice Research on Architectural Theory Architectural Design Practice Part time university teaching	Landscape Institute of China Shipbuilding Ninth Institute Tongji University visiting professor Master's Supervisor	Architecture
004	Zeng Ying	25 years	Research on Landscape Theory Landscape Design Practice Research on Architectural Theory Architectural Design Practice University on-the-job teaching	School of Design, Shanghai Normal University associate dean professor Ph.D. supervisor	China Academy of Art
005	Chen Lichao	23 years	Research on Landscape Theory Landscape Design Practice Research on Architectural Theory Architectural Design Practice University on-the-job teaching	School of Architecture, China Academy of Art assistant dean professor Ph.D. supervisor	Bachelor of Arts Bachelor of Arts China Academy of Art Master of Architecture China Academy of Art Doctorate in Architecture
006	Lin Jie	24 years	Landscape Design Practice Architectural Design Practice Part time university teaching	Chief Architect of China Academy of Fine Arts Landscape Architecture Design and Research Institute China Academy of Art visiting professor	China Academy of Art Bachelor of Arts
007	Jiang Hao	22 years	Landscape Design Practice Research on Landscape Theory University on-the-job teaching	President of the Construction Engineering Institute of the China Academy of	China Academy of Art Bachelor of Arts China Academy of Art

expert Serial Number	expert full name	work in duration	Relationship with gardens	Job	educational background
				Art Landscape Architecture Design and Research Institute In-service teacher at China Academy of Art	Master of Arts and Design
008	Pan Heping	37 years	Landscape Design Practice Landscape construction management Development of Antique Architecture Wooden furniture processing	Mount Huangshan Huijiang Garden Ancient Construction Co., Ltd executive director General Manager	apprentice carpenter become talented through self-study
009	Liu Sheng	28 years	Landscape development investment Construction development investment construction project management Building Property Management	Jiangxi CITIC Jiahe Cultural Industry Development Co., Ltd chairman	Jiangxi Agricultural University Bachelor of Arts

### Data analysis

Semiotics analysis: Semiotics mainly studies cultural symbols and their operation in human society, providing a unique perspective to understand how humans communicate and interact through symbols. This study is based on the theory of semiotics to construct an analytical framework, with the Pierce ternary symbol model as the core methodology, systematically deconstructing the modeling imagery and cultural connotations of Jiangnan gardens. This model decomposes symbols into three dimensions: signifier, signified, and interpretable: signifier refers to the concrete expression of the material form of the garden, such as perceptible visual symbols of architectural form, plant configuration, etc; The abstract concepts hidden behind symbols carry philosophical ideas, ethical values, and aesthetic concepts in traditional Chinese culture; The explanatory item emphasizes the dynamic generation mechanism of symbolic meaning, achieving the continuity and innovation of cultural genes through the interaction between historical context and contemporary interpretation. Taking the Humble Administrator's Garden as an example, the lotus flowers in the plant configuration serve as signifiers, forming a visual landscape of "infinite green lotus leaves connected to the sky", and also pointing to the personality metaphor of "noble and noble"; Its explanatory items cross the boundaries of time and space, and are endowed with a new connotation of "clean culture" in the contemporary context, satisfying the self value determination of literati. Through the borrowing of materials, traditional symbols are activated as cultural carriers that uphold virtue and embrace the world. This hierarchical analysis model not only reveals the multidimensional meaning of garden symbols, but also provides an empathetic path of "decoding translation regeneration" for modern design, allowing traditional creative wisdom to be revitalized in contemporary spaces.

Image analysis: American scholar Panofsky divided the study of artistic images into three levels: 1. Accurately and accurately describing everything seen in the image. 2. Explain the relationships between various objects in the image. 3. Analyze the deeper meaning or

connotation behind the image. This study uses image-based methods to analyze Chinese gardens and reveal the representations and connotations behind visual elements of gardens. Analysis and statistical processing: Classify and statistically process the data to clarify the main viewpoints of the 9 interviewed experts. And use descriptive language to summarize experts' opinions on the aesthetic characteristics and spiritual attributes of gardens, forming a basic judgment on the future development trend of gardens and architecture. The study also collected data from 18 garden samples and used tables to compare the social and cultural functions of gardens and their aesthetic characteristics.

### **Design applications and reliability checks**

The theoretical results formed based on data collection and analysis will be used to guide the design of a residential environment construction project in the future. The project is located in Wuyuan County, Jiangxi Province, China, and is a design for a "Ziyang Garden Cultural Hotel" themed around Sinology. The project comprises two parts: the garden and the architecture. "Ziyang Garden" is the garden section of the hotel project, aiming to create a garden space imbued with the traditional charm and cultural essence of China. "Cultural Hotel" is the architectural section of the project, dedicated to crafting a lodging environment that seamlessly integrates elements of Sinology while offering a modern and comfortable experience. The implications of the research findings for design can be realized through a creative transformation via the "decoding-translation-regeneration" pathway. The study extracts the value orientations of scholarly pursuits, the ideological principles of garden design concepts, and the macro-level design strategies from gardens. By employing semiotic analysis, it deconstructs the symbolic meanings of elements such as landscapes, plants, and architecture, uncovering the cultural genes they embody, including Confucian ritual order, Daoist naturalism, and Buddhist emptiness. These are then translated into modern design language, transforming traditional garden design concepts into contemporary principles such as "ecological priority," "narrative of humanity," and "blurred boundaries." Through techniques like parametric modeling and digital projection, traditional craftsmanship (e.g., "borrowed scenery," "framed scenery") is revitalized, and combined with low-carbon materials and intelligent systems to 赋予 spaces multifunctionality and interactivity. The final realization of innovative public space creation will transform the spirit of scholarly gatherings into a healing urban environment and a place memory for cultural heritage, forming a contemporary design paradigm that integrates Eastern aesthetics with sustainable development wisdom. After the completion of the "Ziyang Garden Cultural Hotel" design plan, a model and renderings will be produced, and nine experts in the fields of landscaping and architecture will be invited to evaluate the project proposal. The experts will assess the feasibility of the plan and the appeal of the design, with the evaluation results being used to optimize the design plan.

### **Research Summary**

This stage of research summarizes the unique spiritual attributes of Chinese literati gardening. The research conclusion can provide theoretical support for future landscape and architectural design practices. The theoretical achievements of the research can not only provide theoretical support for design project of "Ziyang Garden Cultural Hotel", but also provide methodological references for other design activities with distinct cultural or local characteristics.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

### **The aesthetic characteristics of Jiangnan gardens**

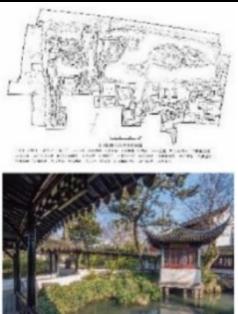
The development process of Jiangnan gardens has spanned multiple historical periods in China, witnessing the changes of the times and the rise and fall of society. Every landscape, building, and plant in the garden tells stories of the past. For example, the Humble Administrator's Garden built in the Ming Dynasty has undergone multiple renovations, reflecting the lifestyle

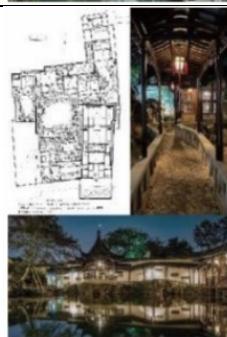
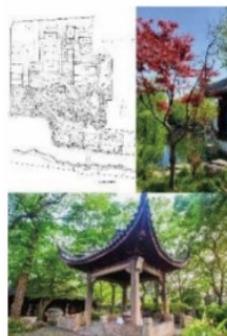
and aesthetic pursuits of literati at that time. The winding water system and scattered rockeries in the garden showcase the elegance and delicacy of Ming Dynasty gardens. This historical accumulation has become an important material for studying Chinese garden culture.

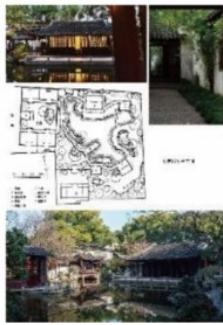
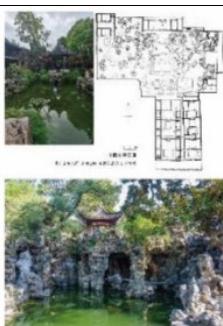
Jiangnan gardens blend with literary and artistic forms such as poetry and painting, presenting a unique poetic and artistic beauty. Garden construction often takes inspiration from poetry, transforming the artistic conception in poetry into actual garden scenes. For example, the name Canglang Pavilion in Suzhou is derived from a poem by the Northern Song Dynasty poet Su Shunqin. The layout and landscape creation of the garden reflect the transcendent and leisurely state of mind expressed in the poem. At the same time, Jiangnan gardens also provide rich materials and creative inspiration for painters. These paintings not only vividly depict the scenery of the gardens, but also capture the charm and temperament contained in the gardens. At the philosophical level, Jiangnan gardens deeply embody the philosophical ideas of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The philosophical view of ancient Chinese literati pursuing harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. Like the Jichang Garden in Wuxi, which draws the spring water from Huishan into the garden, it symbolizes that a gentleman is like water, tolerant of all things, and embodies the moral qualities and principles of social conduct advocated by Confucianism. Taoist philosophy pursues the realm of "Dao follows nature" and "unity of heaven and man", advocating conformity to the laws of nature and not deliberately changing nature. The Lion Grove in Suzhou showcases a natural and unadorned beauty, reflecting the Taoist reverence and adaptability towards nature. Buddhist thought emphasizes "emptiness" and "silence", pursuing inner peace and liberation, which is also well reflected in gardens.

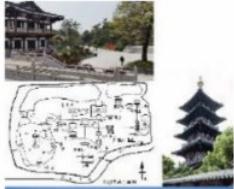
The aesthetic characteristics of these traditional Chinese gardens are particularly evident in the following 18 research samples of Jiangnan gardens, demonstrating typical aesthetic traits of Chinese literati. The research results on the aesthetic characteristics of Jiangnan gardens are summarized in the following table:

**Table 2** Aesthetic Characteristics of Jiangnan Gardens

No.	Garden name	Garden overview	Aesthetic characteristics
1	Humble Administrator's Suzhou Garden	 The image contains two parts: an architectural plan of the garden's layout and a photograph showing a traditional pavilion with a curved roof overlooking a pond.	<p>Layout: Centered around water, divided into three major parts: east, west, and center, with mountains and waters interdependent between them. Architectural style: quaint and natural, with the characteristics of a Jiangnan water town.</p> <p>Landscape: Surrounded by mountains and waters, scenery is beautiful. Plant configuration: lush flowers and trees, with scenery throughout 4 seasons.</p> <p>Garden function: integrating viewing, leisure, and cultural experience, it is an excellent place to understand the vast and ancient natural art style of Ming Dynasty gardens.</p>
2	Lingering Garden Suzhou	 The image contains two parts: an architectural plan of the garden's layout and a photograph showing a large, intricate rockery (shishi) in the foreground.	<p>Layout method: tight layout and clever use of space.</p> <p>Architectural style: The hall is grand and magnificent, and the courtyard is full of changes.</p> <p>Landscape: Lakes and mountains, small bridges and flowing water.</p> <p>Plant configuration: The bamboo color is cool and contrasts with other plants.</p> <p>Landscape function: With high artistic and ornamental value, it is an important example for studying art of classical Chinese garden architecture.</p>

No.	Garden name	Garden overview	Aesthetic characteristics
3	Lion Grove Garden Suzhou		<p>Layout method: rectangular plane, unique layout of rockery maze. Architectural style: Yuan Dynasty style, antique and charming.</p> <p>Landscape: rockeries and strange rocks, lake and mountain scenery.</p> <p>Plant configuration: lush pine and cypress trees add a rustic atmosphere. Landscape function: Provides a unique travel experience, allowing people to feel the artistic conception of "recreating the universe within a short distance".</p>
4	Garden of the Master on Nets Suzhou		<p>Layout: Pavilions, towers, and pavilions are built facing the water, with a compact layout.</p> <p>Architectural style: Ming Dynasty style, elegant and exquisite.</p> <p>Landscape of mountains and waters: centered around a pool, mountains and waters depend on each other.</p> <p>Plant configuration: shaded by green trees, adorned with flowers and plants.</p> <p>Landscape function: Suitable for quietly enjoying the beautiful scenery of gardens and experiencing the tranquility and elegance of the water towns in Jiangnan.</p>
5	Canglang Pavilion Suzhou		<p>Layout: Built along the river, with exquisite leaky window design. Architectural style: Northern Song Dynasty style, quaint and elegant. Landscape of mountains and waters: Green water surrounds outside the garden, and ancient trees stand tall in the garden.</p> <p>Plant configuration: Ancient and famous trees, lush greenery.</p> <p>Landscape function: With a profound historical and cultural heritage, it is a great place to taste the classical gardens of Jiangnan.</p>
6	Garden of Couple's Retreat Suzhou		<p>Layout: The residence is centered, with symmetrical gardens on the east and west sides.</p> <p>Architectural style: Love themed, romantic and elegant.</p> <p>Landscape: Mountains and waters are interdependent, with lakes and mountains shining brightly.</p> <p>Plant configuration: Plum blossoms in full bloom, with a subtle fragrance and sparse shadows.</p> <p>Garden function: The beautiful garden is a witness to a romantic love story.</p>
7	Yipu Suzhou		<p>Layout method: The water pool is centered, and the building is built around the pool.</p> <p>Architectural style: Ming Dynasty style, concise and elegant.</p> <p>Landscape: Water scenery is the main feature, with matching mountains and rocks.</p> <p>Plant configuration: lush vegetation and evergreen throughout the year.</p> <p>Landscape function: It is a peaceful living environment that allows people to feel a sense of tranquility and comfort away from the hustle and bustle.</p>

No.	Garden name	Garden overview	Aesthetic characteristics
8	Tuisi Garden Suzhou		<p>Layout: Simple and elegant, with half of the water surface. Architectural style: Jiangnan garden style in the late Qing Dynasty, with unique shapes.</p> <p>Landscape of mountains and waters: Mountains and waters are interdependent, and the scenery is pleasant.</p> <p>Plant configuration: Covered with vegetation and trees, with scenery at all times.</p> <p>Landscape function: It has high artistic and ornamental value and is a good place to learn about the style of Jiangnan gardens in the late Qing Dynasty.</p>
9	Individual Garden Yangzhou		<p>Layout method: mainly made of bamboo and stone, with exquisite layout. Architectural style: Yangzhou style, elegant and beautiful.</p> <p>Landscape: Mountains and waters are interdependent, with profound artistic conception.</p> <p>Plant configuration: swaying bamboo shadows and lush greenery. Garden function: Private gardens of salt merchants in the Qing Dynasty, mainly used for living and leisure entertainment, as a gathering place for literati, poetry and painting.</p>
10	He Yuan Yangzhou		<p>Layout method: a combination of Chinese and Western elements, with exquisite layout.</p> <p>Architectural style: It has both traditional charm and modern atmosphere. Landscape of mountains and waters: Mountains and waters are interdependent, arranged in a staggered manner.</p> <p>Plant configuration: Flowers, plants, and trees, lush and green.</p> <p>Landscape function: Known as the "first garden of the late Qing Dynasty", it combines residential, social, and ornamental functions.</p>
11	Skinny West Lake Yangzhou		<p>Layout method: Combining inward and outward layouts.</p> <p>Architectural style: Combining the elegance of the southern and northern regions.</p> <p>Landscape: The river meanders, the stone bridge lies on the waves, and the scenery is beautiful.</p> <p>Plant configuration: In spring, flowers bloom like brocade, and each season has its own characteristics.</p> <p>Landscape function: It has the functions of viewing, leisure, cultural inheritance, etc., and can be used for tourists to stroll and appreciate the beautiful scenery, and feel the historical culture.</p>

No.	Garden name	Garden overview	Aesthetic characteristics
12	Daming Temple Yangzhou	 	<p>Layout method: Symmetrical axis, clear hierarchy, solemn and atmospheric.</p> <p>Architectural style: Tang Dynasty style, grand and majestic, quaint and solemn.</p> <p>Landscape of mountains and waters: Built against the mountains, the environment is tranquil and shaded by green trees.</p> <p>Plant configuration: Ancient trees and flowers add a sense of historical weight and religious atmosphere.</p> <p>Garden function: a Buddhist activity venue for believers to worship and pray for blessings, and an important place for studying Buddhist culture and history.</p>
13	Qionghua Temple Yangzhou	 	<p>Layout method: Compact layout, independent space.</p> <p>Architectural style: Local style, unique design, exquisite decoration.</p> <p>Landscape: A small garden landscape that is peaceful and elegant.</p> <p>Plant configuration: Ornamental plants such as Qionghua, highlighting the unique characteristics of viewing.</p> <p>Landscape function: mainly used for religious activities and cultural exchanges, it is an important carrier of Taoist culture.</p>
14	Guyi Garden Shanghai	 	<p>Layout method: Natural layout with intricate and deep effects.</p> <p>Architectural style: Simple and unadorned, rustic and natural, fresh and elegant.</p> <p>Landscape: Surrounded by mountains, pavilions, towers, and picturesque landscapes.</p> <p>Plant configuration: There are a wide variety of species, and scenery varies throughout four seasons.</p> <p>Landscape function: It is a great place for leisure and entertainment, enjoying natural scenery and cultural experiences, and is the top of the five classical famous gardens in Shanghai.</p>
15	Qiuxiapu Shanghai	 	<p>Layout method: Exquisite layout, surrounded by corridors, unique scenery.</p> <p>Architectural style: Ming Dynasty characteristics, rigorous structure, and exquisite decoration.</p> <p>Landscape: The pond is clear and visible, adorned with rockeries and stone bridges, creating a pleasant scenery.</p> <p>Plant configuration: Air is filled with fragrance of flowers, plants, and trees, creating a stunning beauty.</p> <p>Landscape function: One of the typical representatives of classical garden art in Jiangnan, with high artistic and ornamental value.</p>

No.	Garden name	Garden overview	Aesthetic characteristics
16	Daguan Garden Shanghai		<p>Layout method: Exquisite layout, surrounded by corridors, unique scenery.</p> <p>Architectural style: Ming Dynasty characteristics, rigorous structure, and exquisite decoration.</p> <p>Landscape: The pond is clear and visible, adorned with rockeries and stone bridges, creating a pleasant scenery.</p> <p>Plant configuration: The air is filled with the fragrance of flowers, plants, and trees, creating a stunning beauty.</p> <p>Landscape function: One of the typical representatives of classical garden art in Jiangnan, with high artistic and ornamental value.</p>
17	Fangta Garden Shanghai		<p>Layout: Centered around a square tower, surrounded by ancient buildings and garden landscapes, with a simple layout.</p> <p>Architectural style: Jiangnan ancient pagoda, Song Dynasty style, quaint and elegant.</p> <p>Landscape: Gardens and square towers complement each other. Plant configuration: Ordinary trees and flowers, full of vitality. Landscape function: It is one of the iconic buildings in Songjiang, with historical and cultural value as well as tourism and viewing value.</p>
18	Shenyuan Shanghai		<p>Layout method: Classical garden layout, winding and twisting, with diverse scenery and rich space.</p> <p>Architectural style: Jiangnan water town, with pink walls and black tiles, light and elegant.</p> <p>Landscape of mountains and waters: With water systems as the backbone, there are charming landscapes such as rivers and ponds. Plant configuration: Numerous flowers, plants, and trees, fragrant throughout the four seasons.</p> <p>Landscape function: A newly built garden with park characteristics, which is one of the components of the Shanghai World Expo Park, showcasing the charm of traditional Chinese culture and garden art.</p>

### The aesthetic taste of literati gardens

The spiritual pursuits of ancient Chinese literati are rich and diverse, covering multiple dimensions such as spiritual freedom, social responsibility, self-worth, and cultural arts. It is vividly reflected in both hermit and bureaucratic literati with different living conditions. Overall, both types of literati pursue the spirit of "harmony between heaven and man" in garden design, and both admire natural landscapes and take nature as their teacher. They all strive to create a garden atmosphere that resonates emotionally with people. Both hermits and bureaucrats advocate continuous innovation on the basis of inheriting traditional culture, endowing gardens with new connotations. The research results on the pursuit of literati spirit in gardens are summarized in the following table:

### DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

From the research on the aesthetic characteristics of literati garden design, it can be seen that Chinese literati emphasize the inheritance and innovation of culture in garden design concepts, pay attention to the creation of garden atmosphere, advocate the freedom and flexibility of garden layout, and use natural and cultural elements to enhance design quality. The aesthetic and spiritual pursuits of ancient Chinese literati and officials in gardens have profound

enlightening significance for modern garden and architectural design, which can be mainly reflected in the following four aspects:

- 1) Maintain the integration of design and nature. Ancient Chinese gardens were adept at imitating natural forms, while modern designs adopt similar forms in appearance, layout, or decoration, and utilize the symbolic meaning of garden symbols to showcase the unique charm of Chinese culture.
- 2) Follow the development concept of people-oriented. Modern design should meet the functional needs of users while paying attention to their spiritual perspective. In addition, ecological principles should be followed to achieve sustainable development of environment.
- 3) Adhere to a positive and uplifting attitude towards life. Modern design ensures the unity of aesthetics and practicality, avoiding exaggerated and wasteful designs.
- 4) It embodies the integration of art and technology. Modern design should integrate local styles, materials, and technologies, and combine them with social needs and technological levels for artistic innovation and design.

The ancient people had a slow pace of life, and the aesthetic of gardens was quiet, subtle, and introverted. However, the modern people's pace of life has accelerated, and their lifestyles and needs have undergone significant changes. Therefore, it is necessary to consider more factors such as functional practicality, spatial openness, and comfort and convenience in design. The creation of classical gardens relies on traditional materials and techniques. Although modern design can also draw on these traditional elements and techniques, it must also adapt to the development of modern architectural technology and the needs of industrial production. It cannot be limited to imitating surface form of traditional gardens, but should actively explore innovative design techniques and expression methods to create works that have both traditional charm and meet modern functional requirements and aesthetic trends.

**Table 3** Chuxiong Traditional Architecture

Covering dimensions	The garden where hermits reside	The garden where bureaucrats reside		
The pursuit of spiritual freedom	Get rid of the shackles of officialdom and worldly troubles, and choose to retreat to the mountains, forests, and countryside	Explore the inner world, Enjoy leisure and tranquility outside the secular world	Pursuing fame and fortune, emphasizing quality of life, seeking balance between material and spiritual aspects	Maintain independent exploration of the spiritual world and find your own spiritual sanctuary
Responsibility for social responsibility	Transmitting criticism and reflection on reality through words, actions, and works	Seclusion is an expression of dissatisfaction with society	Shouldering more social responsibilities and seeking welfare for the people through practical actions	Directly facing complex interpersonal relationships and political struggles, possessing high wisdom and courage
Realizing self-worth	Cultivate oneself and cultivate one's character, teach and instruct students, and focus on shaping noble character through self-cultivation	Pay attention to one's own spiritual growth and cultivation improvement	Standing on virtue, kind-hearted, entering the officialdom, engaging in activities such as writing books and giving speeches	Having a strong sense of social responsibility and patriotism, taking on cultural, academic, and educational responsibilities

Covering dimensions	The garden where hermits reside	The garden where bureaucrats reside		
Love for culture and art	Reciting poetry and painting in the pastoral landscape, recording the beauty of nature and one's own life insights	Pursuing the restoration of the natural state, The reclusive life provides rich creative inspiration for artistic creation	Devoting oneself to literature and art, reciting poetry and painting, appreciating antiques and showcasing elegant taste.	Gardens are a place for literati to communicate and a reflection of their love for culture and art

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