

ARTISTIC STYLE AND CULTURAL CONNOTATION OF THE PARTITION PATTERNS IN SUZHOU GARDENS

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ABSTRACT

Suzhou Gardens, as exemplars of classical Chinese garden art, feature partitions not only as spatial components but also as crucial vehicles for cultural significance and aesthetic sensibility. With their rich and diverse forms and profound cultural connotations, partition patterns constitute an indispensable visual symbol of garden art. However, research on partition patterns is still in its early stages, with relatively fragmented content and a need for greater systematicity and depth. This paper seeks to address this gap and delve deeper into their artistic style and cultural value. Using a comprehensive literature review, on-site research on typical Suzhou gardens, and image analysis of partition patterns, this paper collects and categorizes pattern styles, summarizing their artistic style and cultural connotations. The study finds that partition patterns are primarily divided into two categories: abstract geometric and thematically realistic, combining both formal beauty and cultural significance. The craftsmanship demonstrates a fusion of mortise and tenon joints, carving techniques, material combinations, lacquer finishes, and metal decoration. The cultural connotation level reflects religious philosophy, social culture, regional characteristics and national culture and art. This study reveals the comprehensive value of Suzhou partition patterns in traditional art, providing a reference for contemporary design and cultural cognition.

Keywords: Partition Patterns in Suzhou Gardens, Artistic Style, Craftsmanship, Cultural Roots and Ideological Background

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INTRODUCTION

As the pinnacle of Chinese classical garden art, Suzhou gardens are renowned both at home and abroad for their natural style and superb spatial organization, which is "man-made, yet seemingly created by nature." The partitions in the gardens, as architectural components with both practical and aesthetic value, not only serve the functions of space division, lighting and ventilation but also display profound artistic character and cultural connotations with their exquisite and diverse patterns. As a visual carrier for the intersection of art and philosophy in garden spaces, the patterns on the partitions not only construct a decorative aesthetic order but also embody the spiritual core of traditional Chinese aesthetics with the artistic conception of "the coexistence of the virtual and the real, and the oblivion of the self and the object." (Zhou, 2008).

However, as traditional architecture gradually fades from daily life, the dissemination and recognition of partition patterns as a "living heritage" in the contemporary context face challenges. On the one hand, the public's understanding of traditional patterns has gradually faded, and their cultural connotations have been simplified to surface decoration. Traditional patterns often appear "shallow decoration" and "out of context" in modern design (Sun et al., 2023). On the other hand, existing research has mostly focused on pattern classification and content analysis (Qian, 2016), lacking a systematic exploration of the artistic characteristics, craftsmanship, and cultural connotations of partition patterns. In particular, an effective connection has not yet been established between formal beauty and cultural roots.

To address this research gap, this paper takes the patterns of Suzhou garden partitions as the object, and comprehensively uses methods such as literature review, field research and image analysis to systematically analyze their pattern composition and cultural roots from the two aspects of artistic style and cultural connotation, revealing their comprehensive value in formal characteristics, aesthetic expression and cultural imagery, aiming to provide a new theoretical perspective and value framework for the contemporary expression and cultural inheritance of traditional patterns.

Research Objectives

This research aims to explore the artistic style and cultural connotation of the patterns on the partitions of Suzhou Gardens. Specifically, it conducts a systematic analysis from the aspects of pattern type, artistic characteristics, craftsmanship characteristics and cultural roots to reveal the comprehensive value it carries.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Classical Chinese texts on architecture and gardens provide an important theoretical foundation for the art of doors and windows in Suzhou gardens. *Yingzao Fashi* (compiled by Li Jie in 1103), the earliest extant Chinese architectural specification manual, systematically documents the proportions, structure, and decorative methods of doors and windows, providing a standard for later woodworking techniques (Li, 2013). *Yuanye* (written by Ji Cheng in 1631), the most influential Ming Dynasty treatise on garden design, proposes the spatial design principles of "designing objects according to the scenery" and "using the scenery to convey emotions," which profoundly influenced the relationship between garden partition patterns and the environment (Ji, 2017). *Treatise on Superfluous Things* (written by Wen Zhenheng, 1620s) and *Leisure Notes* written by (written by Li Yu, 1671) discuss the artistic standards and artistic expression of partition patterns from the perspective of literati's aesthetic life, reflecting the pursuit of home decoration and cultural taste by scholars in the Ming and Qing dynasties (Wen, 2010; Li, 2016).

In recent years, academic research on Suzhou garden partitions and their patterns has steadily increased. Chen Xin (2020), through field research on the woodcarving patterns of the Lion Grove Garden, systematically analyzed the pattern's composition and craftsmanship. Huang

Shixiong (2009) explored the re-creation of traditional patterns in contemporary interior design, proposing their emotional evocation and cultural identity. Zhang Pengxiang (2021) employed the Taoist aesthetic of "purifying the mysterious mirror" to reveal the abstract thought structure of garden patterns. Furthermore, numerous studies have focused on the landscape design intent of partition patterns as components of doors, both in terms of "framing" and "leaking" views, as well as the cultural implications of auspicious symbols and mythological figures in woodcarving patterns.

Although relevant research has achieved certain results, there are still some shortcomings: first, the systematic research on "Suzhou Garden Partition Patterns" is relatively weak, and is often attached to the overall research on doors, windows or woodwork; second, the analysis of artistic style often remains at the level of subject classification, lacking a detailed discussion of modeling language, carving techniques and visual rhythm; third, cultural interpretation mainly focuses on religious or auspicious meanings, and rarely conducts comprehensive analysis from multiple dimensions such as regionality, literature and philosophy; fourth, there is still a lack of in-depth research on the aesthetic function and usage logic of partition patterns in spatial composition from the perspective of "visual-spatial integration".

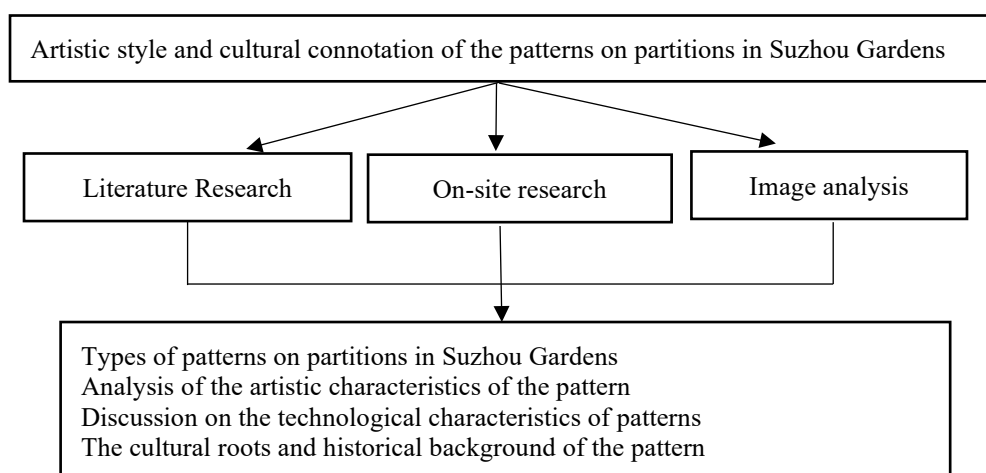


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study mainly adopts qualitative research methods, combining literature review, on-site investigation and image analysis to systematically explore the type characteristics, artistic style, craftsmanship and cultural connotations of Suzhou garden partition patterns.

First, during the literature review phase, the researchers systematically collected materials related to the patterns of Suzhou garden lattice screens, encompassing a variety of sources, including academic papers, books, images, ancient texts, exhibition materials, and news reports. Using XMind software, they constructed a mind map of the literature to organize the logical threads of relevant research; Zotero document management tools were then used to categorize and cite all the materials. The literature primarily covered the historical background, types, materials, craftsmanship, symbolic meanings, and examples of their application in modern design. Through content analysis, visual analysis, and historical analysis, they identified core cognitive features of lattice screen patterns, laying the theoretical foundation for field research and image analysis.

Secondly, during the field research phase, the researchers visited representative garden buildings in Suzhou, including the Humble Administrator's Garden, the Lion Grove Garden, the Lingering Garden, and the Master of the Nets Garden. Using observation and field

recording methods, they gained a deeper understanding of the specific placement and visual aesthetic characteristics of the partition patterns within the garden architecture. They also took numerous photos of the partition patterns in real life, documenting their interaction with the architectural scale, spatial hierarchy, and light and shadow effects. Furthermore, they visited the Suzhou Museum and the Xiangshan Gang Woodcarving Museum to obtain information on the production techniques, material usage, and traditional craftsmanship of partition patterns, supplementing first-hand information difficult to obtain in the literature. The researchers categorized and organized all field data by theme, and coded and labeled them to ensure the systematicity and traceability of subsequent analysis.

Finally, during the image analysis phase, researchers conducted a categorized and detailed analysis of the collected image data. Approximately 150 images were collected and categorized by subject matter and historical period. This image analysis employed formal language analysis, examining composition, modeling characteristics, carving techniques, and color palettes. The images were then analyzed in relation to the relevant cultural context to explore the symbolic meaning and aesthetic expression of the patterns. Software such as Photoshop was used during the analysis process to accurately annotate and extract details from the images, ensuring the accuracy of the analysis results and the clarity of the visual representations.


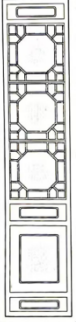




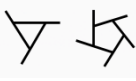
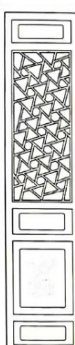

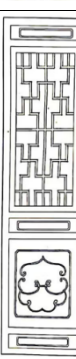










RESEARCH RESULTS

Types of partition patterns in Suzhou Gardens

The partitions in Suzhou gardens are not only spatial components but also carry profound cultural and aesthetic connotations. Their patterns can be broadly divided into two categories: abstract patterns and thematic realistic patterns, embodying the two expressive techniques of imagery and figuration, respectively (Zhao, 2019).

Abstract patterns primarily feature geometric shapes and natural symbols, such as circles, squares, octagons, diamonds, cloud patterns, water ripples, ice cracks, and grass patterns. They often symbolize order, eternity, abundance, and longevity, and are a condensed expression of traditional culture. The following table presents some examples of abstract patterns used in partitions, the pattern is mainly reflected in the ge xin (central panel) part of the partition.

Table 1 Abstract patterns on partition doors and their symbolic meanings

Abstract pattern basic elements	Partition Pattern	Symbolic meaning	Abstract pattern basic elements	Partition Pattern	Symbolic meaning
 Eight-Pointed Star Pattern		Symbolizes cosmic order and harmony, conveys blessings and wisdom, and carries protective meaning.	 The Huiwen pattern		Symbolizes good fortune, longevity, prosperity, and endless depth.
 Grid Pattern		Originated from the well-field system, implying an orderly home, the convergence of water and wealth.	 Ice Crack Pattern		Symbolize the perseverance of studying hard and also imply the pure and innocent character.
 The Auspicious Swastika		An auspicious and sacred mark on the Buddha's chest, symbolizes infinite goodness, eternal harmony, and ultimate perfection.	 Begonia Pattern		Symbolizes a house full of wealth and splendor, abundant treasures, and ultimate auspiciousness and happiness.
 Vertical Stripe Pattern		A pattern of bamboo segments and straight lines representing scholarly scrolls and conveying flourishing academic prosperity.	 Ancient Coin Pattern		Symbolizes abundant wealth, great prosperity, and enduring good fortune.
 Combined "Xi" and "Ji" Character Pattern		The Xi Ji pattern uses characters like "囍" and "吉" to boldly express wishes for double happiness, luck, and prosperity.	 Tortoiseshell Pattern		The tortoiseshell pattern, inspired by the hexagons of a tortoise shell, represents longevity, stability, and wisdom.

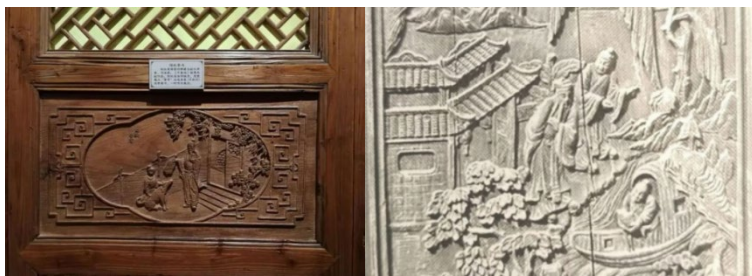


Figure 2 Themed realistic patterns on the partitions

Thematic realistic patterns are rich in content and are mainly divided into five categories: 1) Plant patterns, such as plum, orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum, peony, lotus, etc., which symbolize noble character and seasonal interest; 2) Animal patterns, such as dragon, phoenix, bat, fish, crane, etc., which imply auspiciousness, exorcism and blessing; 3) Object patterns, such as eight treasures, ruyi, square wins, etc., which are introduced into wood carving patterns because of their beautiful appearance or cultural connotations, carrying symbols of wealth and culture; 4) Historical and opera character patterns, selected from historical legends, classical novels, opera repertoires and Buddhist and Taoist myths, such as "The Peach Garden Oath", "King Wen Visits the Sages", "The Legend of the White Snake", etc., embodying the education of loyalty and narrative; 5) Landscape poetry and painting patterns, which show the interest of poetry and painting and the atmosphere of literati, and are often combined with poems and couplets to form a "three-dimensional scroll" with artistic conception (Cao et al., 2009).

Analysis of the artistic characteristics of partition patterns

The artistic characteristics of the patterns on the partitions of Suzhou gardens combine the beauty of form, the connotation of literati aesthetics, the beauty of materials and functional aesthetics, constituting the most representative artistic elements in traditional Chinese gardens.

1) Formal composition analysis

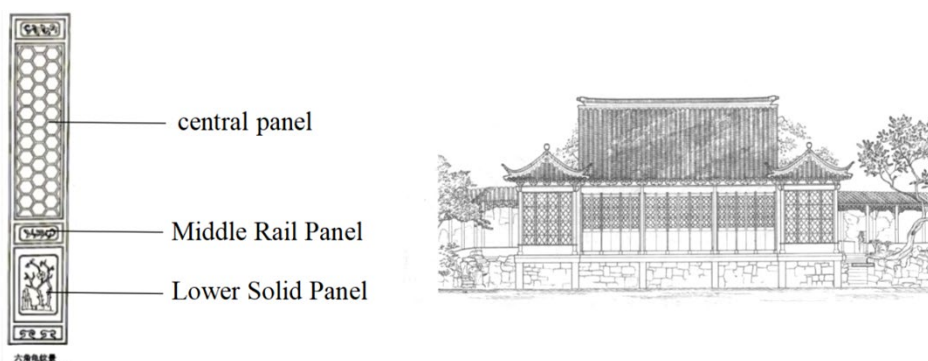


Figure 3 Single-leaf partition patterns and their formal composition in Suzhou garden architecture

The formal composition of Suzhou garden partition patterns embodies a highly rational order and decorative aesthetic. The ge xin (central panel) are primarily abstract, creating a sense of rhythm and overall rhythm through repetition, symmetry, gradients, and reflections. This embodies the visual logic of "variety within symmetry, rhythm through repetition." Within the constraints of traditional mortise and tenon joints, the hollowing technique cleverly combines solid patterns with interstices, creating a complementary relationship between positive and negative shapes, enhancing the pattern's visual transparency and layering.

The tao huan ban (Middle Rail Panel) and qun ban (Lower Solid Panel) often feature thematic, realistic motifs, creating a narrative and symbolic language. The style emphasizes fluid lines and integrated composition, with clear outlines and full compositions. These depictions not

only convey the craftsman's meticulous observation of natural objects but also demonstrate a respect for and utilization of the natural texture of wood. In particular, carvings depicting literary allusions or scenes from traditional life feature a patchwork arrangement of figures, architecture, flowers, birds, trees, and rocks, creating three-dimensional patterns that evoke a sense of "miniature scenes," complementing the spatial experience of Suzhou gardens, where "every step brings a different view."

In terms of proportion and scale, the overall height of the partitions is approximately 1.8 to 2.2 meters, with a single panel typically around 0.6 meters wide (Gu, 2012). The upper panel's center pattern typically occupies two-thirds to three-fifths of the space, visually enhancing the verticality and slenderness of the pattern. The partitions are often paired, with a combined width of 1.2 to 2.4 meters, forming a continuous horizontal pattern array that enhances the building's façade's sense of order and tranquility.

From the overall perspective of architectural aesthetics, the garden architecture itself tends to be composed of straight lines and white walls, and the partition patterns are contrasted and harmonized with soft curves. The changes in the density of its lines form a visual rhythm that is sparse and dense, and combines movement and stillness, allowing the garden architecture to achieve a good balance between decoration and functionality.

2) *Influence of literati aesthetics*



Figure 4 Wood carvings of lower solid panel patterns and women school landscape paintings

Suzhou gardens were often designed and constructed by scholars, whose overall layout and detailed decoration reflect the Jiangnan scholars' naturalistic perspective and aesthetic taste (Cheng, 2022). As a key visual element in garden spaces, the patterns on the partitions were deeply influenced by the literati's aesthetic values. They not only conveyed decorative beauty but also became the embodiment of the literati's desire to "express their feelings for nature and express their elegant thoughts."

The Wu School of Painting, a Ming Dynasty art movement renowned for its literati style, profoundly influenced the composition and stylistic development of partition designs. This school emphasized layering and visual balance, resulting in designs that maintain exquisite detail while also imbuing them with an open and airy sense of space. The Wu School's artistic characteristics primarily influenced partition designs in their composition and spatial manipulation. Breaking away from the traditional single perspective, it employed multiple perspectives to enhance spatial depth. It emphasized white space and contrast between density and sparseness, creating a transparent and elegant visual rhythm. Human figures were appropriately enlarged to become the central narrative element, while maintaining a more naturalistic relationship between figures and scenery, imbuing the overall composition with both freehand artistry and lived-in context.

At the same time, Suzhou scholars valued the integrated aesthetics of poetry, calligraphy, painting, and seal carving. The designs on the partitions were often supplemented with inscriptions and poems, creating an artistic form that combines both image and text. These cultural roots imbue garden partitions with not only visual beauty but also a three-dimensional scroll imbued with scholarly and cultural connotations.

3) *Material aesthetic expression*

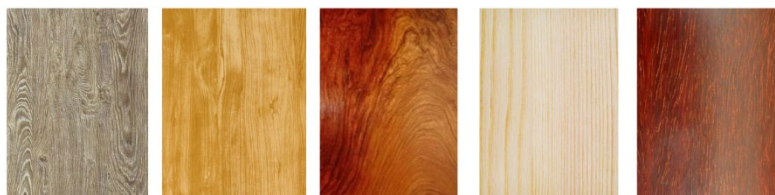


Figure 5 Common materials for partitions: chicken wing wood, golden nanmu, huanghuali wood, pine wood, red sandalwood

Traditional Suzhou woodcarving emphasizes "applying the material to the artist, and composing the image according to the grain." The material serves not only as a medium for carving but also as a crucial component of the artistic language. Decorative elements of partitions, such as the centerpieces, loops, and skirtings, are often crafted from precious hardwoods such as nanmu, huanghuali, red sandalwood, and wenge. These woods, with their rich color, distinct grain, and solid texture, lend themselves to delicate carving and imbue the designs with a natural sense of color and tactile beauty (Jiang, 2008).

Certain woods, such as nanmu and red sandalwood, exude a natural fragrance, enriching the sensory experience and contributing to a tranquil and elegant atmosphere. Artisans employ techniques such as intaglio, openwork, relief, and ground carving, tailored to characteristics of the wood, to create distinct layers and a strong sense of three-dimensionality. This not only enhances the decorative effect but also embodies the artistic pursuit of Suzhou woodcarving, characterized by meticulous craftsmanship and profound meaning.

4) *Functionality and spatial experience*



Figure 6 Partition patterns and architectural space

The patterns on the partitions are not purely decorative elements, but rather artistic compositions that balance functionality and aesthetics. Their design guides the eye, creating a focal point for the space, while also providing practical benefits in terms of lighting, ventilation, and privacy. The hollowed-out structure, in particular, allows light and shadow to evolve over time, creating a rich, dynamic effect. The sounds of wind, rain, tree shadows, moving clouds, flower fragrance and moonlight in nature can penetrate the partitions and enter the room, creating a poetic experience of "scenery entering the room, emotion blending with the scenery," enhancing the transparency and dynamic feel of the space (Ye, 2007). This "function-as-beauty" compositional approach embodies the traditional Chinese craft's "unity of practicality

and aesthetics," and demonstrates ancient artisans' profound understanding of the rhythms of nature and the aesthetics of human habitation.

Discussion on the Technological Characteristics of Partition Patterns

The exquisite craftsmanship of Suzhou garden partitions not only stems from the highly developed Xiangshan carpentry techniques, but also embodies a unique fusion of regional culture, aesthetic values, and the spirit of craftsmanship (Cui, 2004). These stylistic features are reflected in structural design, carving language, material combination, and craftsmanship, forming a uniquely Suzhou aesthetic system.

1) Beautiful craftsmanship and structure

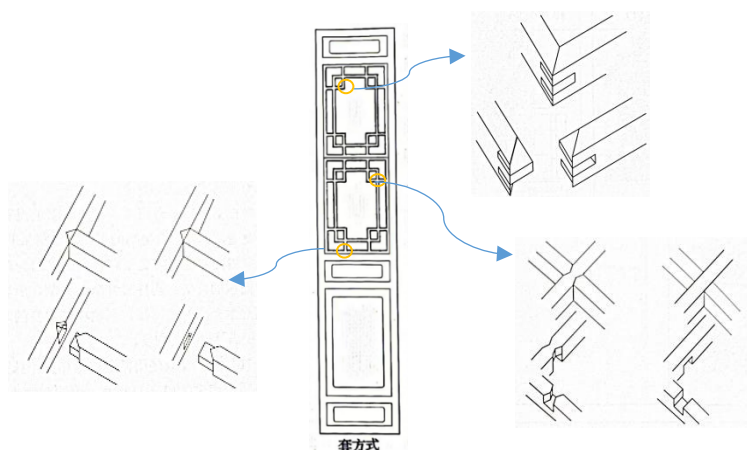


Figure 7 Schematic diagram of the mortise and tenon joints in the Suzhou garden partition pattern

Suzhou garden partitions widely utilize mortise and tenon structures, including cross-jointed mortises, diagonal mortises, tongue-and-groove joints, through-ribbon mortises, and dovetail tenons. These structures achieve high-strength connections and precise coordination, embodying the beauty of rational construction. These structures are more than simple connections; rather, they embody the creative logic of "beauty through structure." The proportions, angles, and load-bearing design of the mortise and tenon joints all follow the laws of nature, achieving a harmonious unity between function and form in the partitions, imbuing the gardens with a sense of transparency, agility, and seclusion.

2) Characteristics of carving language



Figure 8 Partition patterns using openwork, semi-mixed engraving, and relief engraving

Partition door carving techniques include hollow carving, openwork carving, and line carving, creating a distinct and exquisitely crafted decorative effect (Gu, 2012). Hollow carving (figure 8, upper right) often combines layered carving and polishing to create a contrast of light and dark; openwork carving (figure 8, left) creates a spatial aesthetic of "virtual and real

coexistence" through a continuous hollow structure; and line carving uses shallow, fine lines to create a calligraphic effect reminiscent of literati paintings. The process for hollow carving and openwork carving is generally similar, primarily consisting of: design—copying the draft onto the board—carving the outline—scraping the ground to retain the shape or drilling holes to hollow it out—deepening the shaping—layered carving—and meticulous polishing. This process is particularly crucial for controlling the carving depth, knife angle, and wood thickness, reflecting the artisan's precise balance between skill and aesthetics, and embodying the Eastern spirit of creation, "hand follows heart."

3) *Material matching logic*

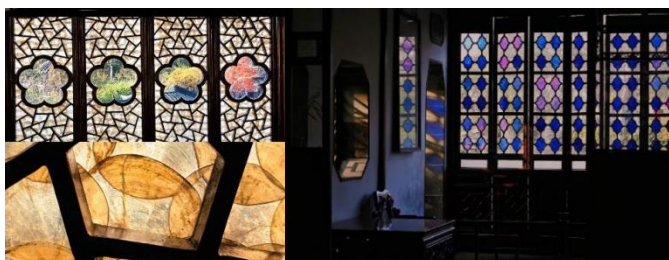


Figure 9 The pattern of the partitions inlaid with Sea-moon-shaped tiles and glass in Humble Administrator's Garden

The materials used in the patterns of Suzhou garden partitions demonstrate a sophisticated logic of coordination, responding to functional needs while enhancing the overall aesthetic. Partitions are often inlaid with materials such as gauze, tiles, and glass, creating an organic transition between the wooden frame and the transparent materials, creating a play of light and shadow, reality and illusion. Green gauze creates a quiet and elegant atmosphere, providing excellent shelter and ventilation. Sea-moon-shaped tiles (figure 9, left) exude a warm luster, enhancing the softness of the space. Stained glass, introduced during the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, (figure 9, right) blends exotic influences and adds a cultural dimension. These materials not only enhance the practicality of the space but also create a rich visual experience through light refraction and color shifts, enhancing the cultural charisma and contextual appeal of the garden partitions, thereby achieving a unity of sensory beauty and spiritual conception.

4) *Fusion of paint finishing techniques*

Lacquer application unifies and brings together the patterns on the partitions. Artisans undergo over ten steps, including sanding the wood base, applying lacquer, air-drying, lapping, and polishing, taking weeks to achieve a lacquer finish as smooth as jade. This process not only enhances the wood's moisture resistance and durability but also enhances its overall visual and tactile beauty. The controlled thickness of the lacquer layer and the careful use of color demonstrate the artisans' precise mastery of both technique and aesthetics, creating a restrained and subtle artistic style that embodies the Eastern aesthetic principle of "silently nourishing."

5) *Metal decoration technology*

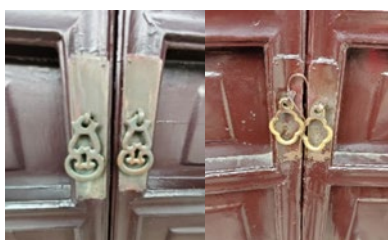


Figure 10 Door knocker shape (gourd and crabapple)

The main material of partition door knockers is bronze alloy, which is cast by the lost wax method or the mold casting method. After gilding, grinding, polishing and other finishing processes, the metal surface and the wood grain form a contrast of cold and warm, which not only enhances the sturdiness and durability of the components but also enriches the overall decorative level. The door knocker pattern often echoes the wood carving pattern, playing a "finishing touch" role in the decorative system. (Dong, 2011).

The cultural roots and ideological background of the partition pattern

The patterns on partitions of Suzhou gardens are not only artistic and functional architectural components but can also be seen as cultural texts that carry philosophical implications, religious symbols, regional characteristics, literary conception and artistic techniques.

1) The Imprint of Religious Thoughts in partition Patterns



Figure 11 Buddhist lion pattern and Taoist Eight Immortals ritual instrument pattern

The patterns on Suzhou garden partitions are deeply influenced by Buddhism and Taoism (one of China's indigenous religions, emphasizing harmony between man and nature and the principle of "Tao follows nature"), becoming important carriers of religious symbolism within garden spaces. Buddhist ideals of purity and transcendence permeate architecture and decoration. Common Buddhist totems in partition patterns include lotus flowers, treasury flowers, palm leaf patterns, Dharma wheels, and auspicious clouds, symbolizing perfection, tranquility, and holiness (Zhu, 2008). Taoist motifs, more closely aligned with folk beliefs, often employ symbols such as the Eight Trigrams (symbolizing cosmic balance and harmony), gourds, cranes, deer, and Ganoderma lucidum to convey longevity, happiness, and a celestial realm, reflecting people's pursuit of the transcendental world and spiritual transcendence (Tian, 2017). These religious symbols, combined with the transparent composition and dynamic lines of partition patterns, create a tranquil and transcendental spiritual atmosphere within the garden space, reflecting the traditional Chinese aesthetic of "expressing meaning through form and expressing emotion through objects," and showcasing the unique charm of the fusion of art and faith.

2) Projection of social and cultural values in partition patterns



Figure 12 Wooden carving of the skirt panel depicting *The Tattooing of Yue Fei's Mother*, a theme of Confucian thought

The patterns on Suzhou garden partitions are more than just decorative elements; they represent a visual transformation of traditional Chinese social culture and philosophy, reflecting the influence of Confucianism, Daoist philosophy, and Mohism. Confucianism emphasizes order

and ritual, as reflected in the symmetrical composition and balanced density of the partitions, symbolizing moderation and order (Guo et al., 2023). The patterns and material quality also align with the status of the owner, embodying the cultural principle of "using objects to convey ritual." Daoist philosophy advocates for nature and inaction, emphasizing the importance of conforming to the laws of nature. This influence is reflected in the curvaceous beauty of patterns, the use of white space, and the use of light and shadow. Through the interplay of existence and non-existence and the integration of the virtual and the real, a transparent and tranquil atmosphere is created. Mohism advocates practicality and restraint, prioritizing functionality and avoiding redundant ornamentation and extravagance. The natural and simple style of partition patterns embodies these values, balancing aesthetics and practicality. These ideals are vividly expressed through pattern, allowing garden components to carry profound cultural significance beyond their formal form.

3) *The influence of regional features on the imagery of partition patterns*



Figure 13 Middle rail panel woodcarvings depicting fishermen's daily lives

As a major center of Jiangnan culture, Suzhou's unique natural geography and cultural environment have profoundly influenced the stylistic evolution of partition wall patterns. Located in the Taihu Lake basin, Suzhou boasts a dense network of waterways and a mild climate. This environmental characteristic has led garden architecture to prioritize ventilation, lighting, and moisture-proofing, thereby promoting the widespread use of openwork carving techniques in partition wall components (Gu, 2012). Abundant water resources have not only nurtured water-related industries such as agriculture, fisheries, and silk weaving, fostering the prosperity of handicrafts and commerce, but have also profoundly shaped the lifestyles and aesthetic tastes of residents. Aquatic plants and animals such as fish, shrimp, lotus flowers, and mandarin ducks, as well as scenes of waterside life, frequently appear in partition wall patterns. These elements convey a strong sense of local life while symbolizing auspiciousness, happiness, and abundance, reflecting the visual transformation and cultural sublimation of regional landscapes through garden patterns.

4) *The Literary and Artistic Origins of partition patterns*



Figure 14 Wood carving of the lower solid panel from the Kunqu opera *Romance of the West Chamber*

Suzhou has been a cultural hub since ancient times, with a rich tradition of literature, calligraphy, painting, and opera that has profoundly influenced the themes and styles of garden partition screen designs (Feng, 2021). Kunqu opera and historical dramas, such as "Peach

Blossom Fan," "The Romance of Yue Fei," "King Wen Visits the Sages," and "Guo Ziyi's Birthday Celebrations," are often incorporated into designs, symbolizing traditional virtues such as loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness. Novels such as "Romance of the Three Kingdoms," "Journey to the West," and "Water Margin" are also widely incorporated into designs. These designs often draw on the techniques of meticulous brushwork and traditional printmaking, resulting in rigorous composition, distinct layers, and a strong narrative and symbolic quality.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the artistic style and cultural connotations of Suzhou garden partition patterns, systematically analyzing their pattern types, artistic characteristics, craftsmanship, and cultural background. Results indicate that partition patterns can be categorized into two main types: abstract and thematically realistic. Abstract patterns express symbolic meaning through geometric order, while thematically realistic patterns convey auspicious meanings and cultural narratives through plants, animals, artifacts, historical, and literary themes, showcasing the diversity and layers of traditional Chinese visual language. Their artistic expression blends formal beauty, literati aesthetics, material characteristics, and functional logic, creating a visual experience that blends movement and stillness, density, and poetry and painting. Craftsmanship-wise, partitions embody the sophisticated craftsmanship of the Xiangshan Gang, showcasing the beauty of craftsmanship in details such as mortise and tenon joints, carvings, materials, lacquer finishes, and metal fittings. Culturally, they are influenced by a combination of religion, philosophy, regional characteristics, and traditional culture and art.

The results of this study corroborate previous research. Gu Beibei (2012) categorized sash patterns into abstract and realistic. Cao Lindi (2019) further subdivided them into six categories based on subject matter, but overall, they can be summarized into these two main types. Some studies have explored the craftsmanship characteristics of sash patterns. This study further validates and deepens these insights through field research, corroborating literature research with on-site observations.

This article expands on existing research from three perspectives: pattern systematization, artistic detail, and cultural integration. Regarding pattern systematization, Qian (2016) focused on the characteristics of partitions and architectural spaces or single patterns. This article systematically analyzes the relationship between single patterns and overall composition, and explores its formal characteristics in conjunction with the beauty of materials. It also reveals the influence of the Wu School's artistic style on pattern design. Regarding cultural integration, Zhang Pengxiang (2021) and Ji Xiong (2016) discussed the influence of Confucian and Taoist philosophy on the overall style of gardens. This article further analyzes the manifestation of these ideas in the subject matter and visual expression of partitions, and explores the continuation of the Mohist concept of "thrift and pragmatism" in craftsmanship and aesthetics in light of Ming Dynasty social trends. Gu Beibei (2012) pointed out the shaping effect of Suzhou's regional characteristics on partition patterns, and Lei Qian (2022) explored the interplay between Kunqu Opera and garden art. Based on this literature review, this article proposes a research perspective on the "deep influence of regional culture in shaping partition patterns."

However, this study has limitations. Due to sample size and limited preservation conditions, some partition patterns were not systematically included, and researchers' judgments on their value may be subjective. Nevertheless, existing practices have demonstrated the regenerative potential of partition patterns in contemporary design. For example, the Suzhou Museum's cultural and creative products have incorporated partition patterns into bookmarks and hairpins, and the home furnishing brand "Yili" has applied crabapple patterns to modern folding screens. These explorations confirm the value of modern translation of traditional patterns. From a

cross-cultural perspective, Suzhou garden partition patterns share commonalities with decorative forms such as Islamic geometric patterns, Japanese shoji doors, and Gothic stained glass windows, revealing their universal value and cultural connectivity in global decorative art. Future research can combine diverse design theories with emerging technologies to further expand the contemporary expression of partition patterns and promote the revitalization and continuation of traditional culture.

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