

A Study of Architectural Design Approaches Informed by the Relationship Between Painting and Garden Aesthetics in the Context of Song Dynasty Literary Gatherings: A Case Study of Jiān Yú Garden

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Abstract: Garden art has always held a significant place in traditional Chinese culture. During the Song Dynasty, literati, with their unique aesthetic perspectives and creative methods, produced a wide range of garden designs, creating a high level of aesthetic value. Literati excursions served as a vital means of promoting cultural prosperity and artistic creation. Excursions, as a form of social gathering among Northern Song literati, emerged as a defining activity of the era. This paper aims to delve into the incorporation of painting and narrative into garden design and garden exploration by studying the literature and images associated with Song Dynasty literati excursions. Using Jiān Yú Garden as a case study, the paper discusses the corresponding architectural design approaches and their applicability in contemporary garden architecture practice. It explores a garden design methodology imbued with cultural and artistic value.

Keywords: Traditional culture, architectural design approaches, garden design

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to conduct an in-depth study of the cultural context of Song Dynasty literati excursions and the architectural design approaches influenced by the interplay between painting and the garden experience. It proposes an architectural design concept based on this cultural background, providing new perspectives and methods for contemporary garden design. Through the application of this design concept, modern garden design can be elevated in terms of artistic sensibility and aesthetic value, creating more beautiful, harmonious, and culturally enriched garden environments. These endeavors aim to offer people better living and leisure spaces.

2. Background of Northern Song Dynasty Literary Gatherings

The Song Dynasty, especially the Northern Song period (960-1127), marked a prosperous era in Chinese history. It was another golden age following the Tang Dynasty, characterized by significant developments in culture, technology, and the economy. Political stability was one of the essential factors that facilitated literary gatherings during the Song Dynasty. In contrast to the turbulent Five

Dynasties period preceding it, the Song Dynasty achieved political stability and unity. This stability and unity provided literati with a relatively safe and free social environment, fostering the vibrant development of cultural activities. Literati gathered in cities such as Nanjing and Bianjing, creating a unique and thriving cultural atmosphere (Figure 1).



Figure 1: "Literary Gathering" by Zhao Ji
(Northern Song)



Figure 2: "Spring Banquet" (Southern Song,
Anonymous)

The flourishing cultural atmosphere was another vital aspect of the background of Song Dynasty literary gatherings. According to Luo van Oost, landscapes are cultural constructs built upon a natural foundation but primarily narrated and categorized at the cultural level [1]. The Song Dynasty was a significant period in Chinese cultural history, marked by an unprecedented enthusiasm among literati for artistic creation and cultural studies. During this time, various art forms, such as painting, poetry, music, and calligraphy, experienced widespread development and promotion, becoming crucial foundations and mediums for literary gatherings. In terms of collective identity, the implementation of the "Promotion of Literary Culture over Martial Skills" policy during the Northern Song Dynasty created excellent conditions for literati to delve into academic studies. Common political and literary views often led to strong cohesion among literati. Regarding individual contradictions, under the influence of the revival of Confucianism and the blending of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, adopting the dual roles of scholar and government official became a way for Northern Song literati to maintain their personal independence. Individual contradictions necessitated the acknowledgment and understanding of like-minded friends. As the literati community continued to grow, both individual and collective awareness strengthened the demand for literary gatherings [2]. Literati deepened their emotions and interactions with each other through the creation and performance of poetry, calligraphy, and painting, as well as their exchange of ideas (Figure 2).

Furthermore, technological advancements and commercial development during the Song Dynasty provided more convenient and abundant social venues for literary gatherings. The Song Dynasty was renowned for its technological progress and the high level of manufacturing expertise in fields such as construction, agriculture, and industry, which led in Asia and the world. The prosperity of cities and the economy provided more opportunities and resources for literary gatherings. The thriving business environment filled teahouses and taverns in cities with people seeking communication and interaction. Literati gathered in such places to compose poems, conduct scholarly research, and broaden their horizons.

During the Northern Song period, literati sought moral discipline and accomplishments. They held multiple roles, including scholars, literati, and officials, enjoying high social status and prestige. They played the role of society's intellectual elite and cultural leaders, known for their talent and literary works, attracting widespread social attention. Interaction among literati was considered a form of social engagement, serving not only as a means of academic exchange but also as a way to display their social status. Literary gatherings allowed them to inspire each other, exchange ideas, and advance cultural prosperity and development. The historical backdrop of literary gatherings during

the Song Dynasty was built upon the prosperity and progress in politics, culture, technology, and the economy. This period's literary gatherings served not only as a form of social interaction but also as a significant avenue for cultural creation and academic research. Through mutual exchange and inspiration, literati collectively crafted a unique cultural landscape and social network during this era.

3. Entry through Painting: The Architectural Perspectives of Literati

During the Song Dynasty, literati's engagement with painting was closely intertwined with their architectural concepts. Literati expressed their understanding of architecture and aesthetic pursuits through their works of art. They regarded painting and architecture as closely related forms of art, utilizing painting to manifest the beauty and spiritual significance of architecture. Literati painting had a profound impact on the formation and development of architectural concepts.

3.1. Pursuit of Ambiance and Aesthetics

Literati painting and architectural concepts both emphasize the pursuit of ambiance and aesthetics. They create spaces and environments imbued with artistic sensibility and aesthetic value by using elements such as space, color, and lines. Literati painting is a distinct and rich art form that conveys individual perceptions and imaginations by depicting natural landscapes and human cultural situations, showcasing the essence of culture. To literati, painting serves as a means of reflecting on and expressing visual perception, emotional experience, and modes of existence. Through painting, literati express their understanding of nature, society, the city, and the world, exploring the relationship between people and their environment, as well as the impact of architecture on the human body and mind. The techniques in literati's painting compositions, lines, and color applications are used to express architectural forms and beauty. They translate elements from natural landscapes and art into inspiration and components for architectural design. They emphasize the harmonious coexistence of architecture with the environment, creating architecture that resonates with its surroundings and crafting beautiful and pleasant architectural spaces.

3.2. Emphasis on Spatial Arrangement and Proportions

Both literati painting and architectural concepts prioritize spatial layout and proportions. They create harmonious and aesthetically pleasing architectural spatial effects by dividing, combining, and utilizing space. Literati painting plays a significant role in garden architecture design. Literati integrate elements from their painting works, such as landscapes, flora, and fauna, into garden architecture design. They focus on creating ambiance and atmosphere by using various landscape elements, intricate layouts, and refined structures, resulting in architectural and garden forms that are poetic and philosophical. Literati advocate the concept of gardens that blend humanity with nature. Through garden design and layout, they create spatial experiences capable of influencing people's bodies and minds.

3.3. Drawing Inspiration from Painting's Composition and Ambiance

The composition and ambiance in literati painting provide substantial insights for garden architecture design. By borrowing and applying elements and techniques from painting, it is possible to create garden architecture spaces with aesthetic value that exude a sense of poetic beauty. Different art forms (literature, music, dance, architecture, painting, sculpture, etc.), whether they belong to "temporal art" or "spatial art," often reflect a shared cultural psychological structure when expressing their respective artistic qualities. Therefore, at a deep structural level, they frequently exhibit certain "isomorphism" characteristics [3]. The translation of architectural perspectives from literati painting primarily

involves applying elements like composition, color, and lines from painting to architectural design. Through architectural techniques and skills, the ambiance and aesthetic value of painting are transformed into architectural spaces and environments with aesthetic and artistic value.

3.4. Emphasis on Integration with Nature

Literati painting places a strong emphasis on integration with nature, a concept that is also reflected in garden architecture design. By using natural elements and borrowed landscapes, garden architecture harmonizes with the natural environment. The architectural perspective of "entry through painting" is not only a pursuit of architectural aesthetics but also a reflection on the relationship between architecture and people and the cultural significance. Through painting, literati express their sensory understanding and rational deconstruction of architecture, providing new perspectives and inspiration for architectural design. The architectural perspectives of literati add a spiritual dimension closely linked to human perception and emotions to architecture, emphasizing the impact and significance of architecture on the human body and mind.

4. Design Methodology Based on the Culture of Song Dynasty Literary Gatherings

The design methodology based on Song Dynasty literary gathering paintings uses literary gathering paintings as a point of entry, integrating their perspectives and architectural elements to achieve architectural design translation. Drawing from painting and poetry: Taking Song Dynasty literary gathering paintings as the source of design inspiration, these paintings and accompanying written works serve as foundational elements for design. From them, perspectives and architectural elements are extracted and translated into architectural design. Through this design, the expression of literati's pursuit of nature, culture, and emotional experiences is realized, transforming architectural spaces into places rich in poetry, ambiance, and emotions.

4.1. Design Principles: Space Layout and Relationship Matching Principle

Referring to the layout and interpersonal relationships in the literary gathering paintings, design the layout of architectural spaces and pedestrian flow, creating interactive and coherent spatial environments. Architectural Form and Structure Matching Principle: Observe the architectural forms and structural characteristics in the paintings and translate them into architectural design, creating classical aesthetics and stability in architectural forms. Material and Color Detail Matching Principle: Borrow from the use of color and material combinations in the paintings and apply them to architectural design, giving the architecture a unique artistic expression and cultural significance.

4.2. Design Elements: Garden Elements

Referencing the garden landscape elements in the literary gathering paintings, such as landscapes, artificial hills, ponds, etc., incorporate them into the architectural environment to craft garden architecture rich in poetic and atmospheric qualities. Decorative Elements: Draw inspiration from the decorative elements in the paintings, such as painted murals, carvings, window lattice designs, etc., and apply them to architectural decoration and detail design, enriching the artistic expression of the architecture. Lines and Shapes: Observe the postures, attire, and the lines and shapes of objects in the literary gathering paintings and translate them into architectural design, creating elegant and fluid forms and lines.

Through the application of these design concepts, principles, and elements, the design methodology based on Song Dynasty literary gathering paintings translates the perspectives, elements, and emotions carried by these paintings into architectural design. It re-creates the literati's

perspectives and imparts a unique cultural essence and artistic temperament to the architecture. This design approach combines the cultural value of architecture with that of literary gathering paintings, creating an architectural environment with emotional resonance and cultural depth. At the same time, this methodology enriches the architectural aesthetic characteristics and cultural taste to engage in a rich dialogue with humanities and history.

5. Concept and Practice of Jiānyú Garden Journey

5.1. Design Background

With social progress and the development of our times, the increasing demand for space has made relatively garden-like activity spaces scarce and precious. Chinese classical gardens, as a significant chapter in Chinese architectural and garden history, have always been our unwavering goal and vision. Furthermore, with the development of modernism, architectural modularity and geometric design have gradually become contemporary design trends. Based on these factors, we combine classical gardens with modern geometry to create our vision of a Chinese garden, Jiānyú Garden. The creative inspiration for "Jiānyú Garden Journey" is rooted in the fusion of traditional Chinese gardens and modern design concepts. It aims to preserve classical culture, explore ancient literary stories, and introduce modern geometric design elements into traditional gardens. This background reflects the urgent need for the integration of cultural heritage and innovation in today's society. Chinese classical gardens are treasures in the history of world gardens, representing the spirit of harmonious coexistence with nature in Chinese culture. Ancient gardens emphasized the creation of a sense of hierarchy, atmosphere, and integration with nature in their landscapes. These landscaping concepts are a microcosm of traditional culture and have had a profound impact on the field of architecture. However, as cities rapidly develop, classical garden spaces are gradually shrinking, and this precious cultural heritage is fading. The comprehensive demands of modern society for space utilization and development have led to the scarcity of traditional gardens, especially in contemporary urban environments. Therefore, preserving and promoting classical gardens have become a highly valuable endeavor. The design concept of "Jiānyú Garden Journey" aims to convey and highlight the value of classical gardens in modern urban settings. It combines the modularity and geometric trends of modern architecture, employing deconstructionism and topological geometry to bridge tradition and creativity, harmonizing classical and modern elements and injecting new vitality into traditional culture.

5.2. Cultural Inspiration for Design

The inspiration for "Jiānyú Garden Journey" is derived not only from the traditional aesthetics of Chinese classical gardens but also from ancient Chinese literature. During the initial stages of design, we conducted extensive research and experimentation, discovering the excellent compatibility between Chinese classical gardens and traditional Chinese poetry. Consequently, we drew inspiration from classical Chinese poetry as the foundation for our design. Furthermore, we used the famous Ming dynasty supernatural novel "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio" and its chapter "The Painted Wall" as a source of inspiration for designing the eight major scenic elements (Figure 3). Based on these sources and rooted in Chinese traditional culture, we focused on the inheritance and innovation of Chinese classical gardens. To achieve this goal, we used geometric deconstruction to reshape traditional garden architecture, combined with the novel's scenarios, creating a complementary relationship between the two. This approach gives rise to a fresh visual experience and cultural uniqueness. The design team delved into the poems of Ouyang Xiu, selecting the eight major themes from his poetry. These themes are: terrace, forest, stream, clouds, moon, return, wall, and half (Figure 4). They not only serve as formal elements but also carry rich cultural connotations.

Another source of inspiration was "The Painted Wall," a story in which the protagonist, Zhu Juren, has a fantastic experience entering a painted wall, blurring the lines between dreams and reality, the imaginary and the real. The design team incorporated these elements into Jiānyú Garden Journey, creating a mysterious and captivating garden space for visitors, immersing them in a world that resonates with literature and visual art. The design of Jiānyú Garden Journey not only respects and preserves classical gardens and ancient literature but also considers the trends in modern architecture and design. Modern architecture emphasizes geometry, modularity, and sustainability, which sharply contrast with the softness and natural integration of traditional gardens. Successfully merging the two is a challenge that requires a deep understanding of tradition and a strong innovative spirit to create a garden design that combines classical qualities with modern sensibilities.

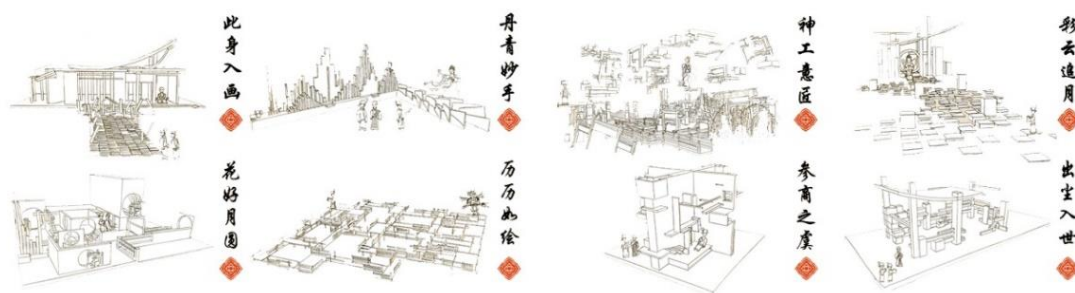


Figure 3: Narrative Presentation of Design: Eight Major Chapters (Self-made)

5.3. Design Concept

The design concept of "Jiānyú Garden Journey" is to merge classical garden elements with modern design principles to create a garden space that blends tradition and modernity, classic and contemporary. The concept emphasizes the fusion of traditional and modern elements, combining Chinese classical garden aesthetics with modern architecture and geometric design. This fusion aims to create a garden with a classical atmosphere while incorporating modern design trends, making it a space that embodies both traditional and modern characteristics. The buildings, landscapes, and decorations in the garden all reflect this fusion characteristic. The design concept also underscores the fusion of literature and art. The eight major themes in the garden, namely, terrace, forest, stream, clouds, moon, return, wall, and half, are not just formal elements but also symbols with rich cultural connotations. These themes draw inspiration from Ouyang Xiu's eight major themes in poetry, each representing aesthetic and cultural insights. Furthermore, the blending of dreams and reality is a focal point of the concept. Including elements from "The Painted Wall" in "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio," the design team combines dreams and reality. The design of "Jiānyú Garden Journey" aims to create an enchanting world for visitors, where they feel as if they have stepped into a literary and artistic realm. This narrative element makes the garden a place of mystery, fun, and emotional resonance.



Figure 4: Transformation of Poetic Intent (Self-made)

5.4. Design Research

During the design research phase, our team conducted extensive research in various areas, including resource integration, geographical environmental studies, literary and artistic exploration, architectural design, and garden planning. First, resource integration and geographical environmental studies: At the beginning of the project, our design team conducted thorough resource integration and environmental research using online resources like Amap and Google Earth to analyze the geographic environment of the location, determining the garden's position, topographical features, as well as potential challenges and opportunities. Next, literary and artistic exploration: The design team delved into classical Chinese literature, particularly Ouyang Xiu's "Eight Major Themes" poetry, to gain a profound understanding of ancient literature. These poems not only provided themes and inspiration for the design but also guided the team on how to incorporate literature and art into garden spaces. Furthermore, the team conducted in-depth research into the classic story "The Painted Wall" from "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio," analyzing the interplay between dreams and reality in the story and how it generates a sense of mystery and emotional resonance. These elements were integrated into the design narrative of Jiānyú Garden Journey. In architectural design and garden planning research, the team delved into issues related to the spatial layout of the garden, architectural forms, landscape features, and sustainability. These studies provided theoretical support for the specific design of Jiānyú Garden Journey.

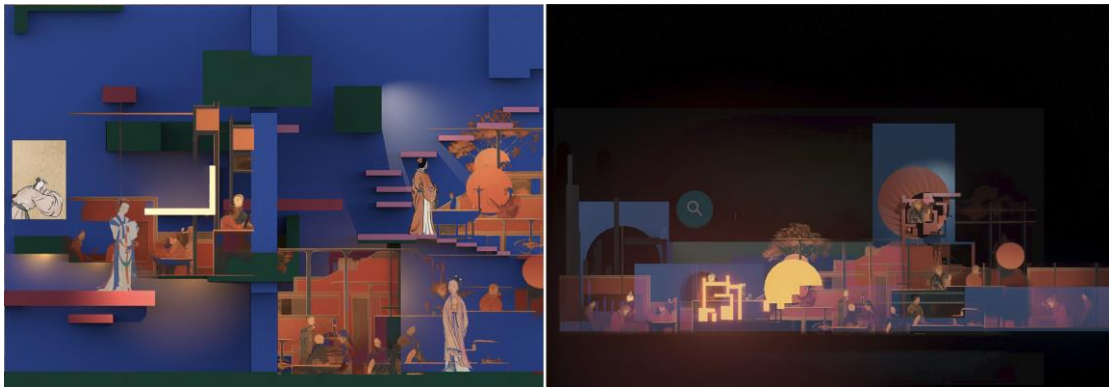


Figure 5: Design Scene Presentation (Self-made)

5.5. Design Narrative

The design narrative is the core of "Jiānyú Garden Journey," merging design concepts and research to create a captivating garden experience for visitors. The design inspiration originates from "The Painted Wall" story in "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio," making visitors feel as if they have entered a world inside a painting, immersed in the scroll, experiencing the wondrous interplay of dreams and reality (Figure 5). In the garden, there are the eight major themes, namely, terrace, forest, stream, clouds, moon, return, wall, and half. Each of them has unique symbolism and stories, allowing visitors to explore and experience each one, feeling the unique charm derived from the transformation of literary and artistic elements. As Böhme suggests, "Perceptual activity is fundamentally a way for people to be positioned next to something, or to be in the environment." [4] By incorporating the literary and artistic qualities into the elements of architecture, landscape, and decoration in the garden, the design aims to present a garden system that combines both interior and exterior qualities. This allows visitors to appreciate the presentation of classical aesthetics while experiencing the innovation of modern design. This narrative approach offers visitors a unique, astounding journey of garden experience.

5.6. Design Outcomes

The design outcomes of "Jiānyú Garden Journey" are reflected in spatial layout, architectural forms, landscape features, and the overall ambiance. The following are detailed descriptions of these design outcomes:

5.6.1. Diverse Spatial Layout

Through the design of the eight major themes, the garden is divided into multiple regions, each with a unique character. These areas not only have their own distinct styles but also reflect the design team's integration of traditional and modern design concepts. As visitors tour the garden, they can experience changes in different spatial layers and the spiritual qualities they encompass. This diverse spatial layout offers visitors a rich and varied experience where they can appreciate the beauty of the scenery while recognizing the designer's craftsmanship.

5.6.2. Classical and Modern Architectural Forms

The garden's architecture incorporates classical architectural elements and techniques, along with modern composite forms, creating a novel and innovative architectural style. This architectural form exudes the charm and aesthetics of classical architecture while showcasing the innovation and uniqueness of modern design. In terms of color and details, the designers also consider the connection between classical and modern elements, presenting the architecture with a unique artistic style. Visitors can fully appreciate the visual delight and artistic allure of this blend of classical and modern architectural forms during their tour.

5.6.3. Abundant Landscape Features

In modern landscape design, researching how to incorporate common scenes from life, spatial symbols, geographical landscapes, historical elements, and traditional landscape elements while respecting site context and regional characteristics is essential. It is important to explore the spiritual connotations of traditional garden landscapes such as "return to nature" and "enjoying the mountains and forests" and accurately present the typical cultural elements of a place to create a cultural space with local characteristics, reinforcing regional and inherited culture in the context of globalization and achieving the "symbiotic relationship" between cities, people, and nature [5]. In the design of "Jiānyú Garden Journey," the team carefully arranged various elements, including vegetation, water features, sculptures, and more, making the garden's content rich and fulfilling. These landscape features not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the garden but also provide visitors with a more sensory and detailed experience. For example, through clever plant arrangements, visitors can feel the changing seasons and the rhythm of life. The placement of water features brings a refreshing and pleasant atmosphere, making visitors feel as if they are in the heart of nature. Artworks like sculptures add more cultural flavor and artistic charm to the garden. These landscape features form the foundation of essential aesthetic elements, allowing visitors to continuously discover and experience beauty during their tour. In modern landscape design, it's essential to incorporate common life scenes, spatial symbols, geographical landscapes, and historical elements into the design.

5.6.4. Presentation of Literary and Artistic Elements

Literature's most powerful aspect is its ability to vividly depict images through words, allowing readers to have intense sensory experiences while reading. The translation of architectural and garden art takes this a step further, turning literary art's dreams into reality, allowing visitors to experience the scenic descriptions in words firsthand. This translation not only allows visitors to experience the

charm of literary art but elevates it. Through the presentation of architectural and garden art, the beautiful images in literature come to life in reality, making visitors feel as if they have stepped into literary works, experiencing their emotions and thoughts firsthand. This method of translation not only provides visitors with a unique experience but also offers new perspectives and approaches for the inheritance and development of literary and artistic culture.

6. Conclusion

This study has introduced an architectural viewing method based on the Song Dynasty literati's gathering paintings. By extracting perspectives and architectural elements from these gathering paintings and poems, they have been translated into architectural design, creating an architectural environment with cultural significance and artistic expression. This method, rooted in the pictorial, emphasizes designing through the "immersion in the painting" approach, highlighting the cultural value of architecture in relation to the literati gathering paintings and the commonality of emotional experiences. The design process of "Jiānyú Garden Journey" aims to inherit classical culture, explore classical literary narratives, and incorporate modern geometric design elements into traditional gardens as innovative practices. The design background underscores the challenges of preserving classical gardens while adapting to modernization. The design concept integrates elements of tradition and modernity, literature, and art. The design research encompasses resource integration, geographical environmental studies, literary and artistic exploration, architectural design, and garden planning. The design narrative combines these elements to create an engaging garden experience for visitors, and the design outcomes are reflected in diverse spatial layouts, a fusion of classical and modern architectural forms, and cleverly designed landscape features, contributing to an overall pleasant ambiance. "Jiānyú Garden Journey" not only represents the preservation and promotion of ancient Chinese culture but also showcases innovation and exploration in modern design concepts. It is hoped that this site will become a place where people can appreciate the charm of ancient culture and experience the allure of modern design, adding a unique cultural landscape to the city.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by:

The 2023 Industrial Design Research Center Open Project (GYSJ2023-05)

The Joint Project of 2023 Beautiful Rural Development and Research Center for Sichuan Rural Revitalization and Community Governance Practices (CCRC2023)

The 2023 Chongqing University of Humanities and Technology School-level Research Project (CRKZK2023009).

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Figure 3: Design Narrative Display – Presentation of the Eight Major Chapters. Image source: Created by the author.

Figure 4: Transformation of Poetic Themes. Image source: Created by the author.

Figure 5: Design Scene Display – Entering the Painting. Image source: Created by the author.

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