

Exploring Strategies and Approaches for the Inheritance of Traditional Chinese Landscape Garden Culture

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Abstract

With the development and changes in social background, usage demands, technological levels, and aesthetic preferences, the inheritance of China's classical landscape garden culture is inevitable. Currently, research on the inheritance and practice of Chinese landscape gardens often starts from the traditional gardening techniques, describing and summarizing their characteristics. This paper explores the cultural connotations of Chinese landscape garden, combining them with the current era's background, to investigate the inheritance strategies and pathways of Chinese landscape gardens. It aims to enrich the theoretical content of the inheritance and innovation of Chinese garden art, adhering to the path of garden construction with Chinese characteristics. The goal is to provide references and guidance for promoting the inheritance of traditional Chinese garden culture and the construction of modern gardens.

Keywords

Landscape Culture; Landscape Gardens; Strategies; Approaches.

1. Introduction

Culture is the soul of a country and a nation. A nation prospers with a flourishing culture, and a strong nation is built on a robust culture. Without a profound cultural self-confidence, cultural prosperity and abundance are unattainable. China, known as the originator of world gardens, should place significant emphasis on its garden culture, a vital component of the outstanding traditional Chinese culture. The distinctive Chinese landscape gardens, characterized by their unique gardening style and profound cultural connotations, have not only enjoyed a long history in China but have also stood out globally in the field of landscape architecture. The current construction and development of the discipline of landscape architecture play a highly positive and effective role in promoting the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, building ecological civilization, meeting the growing aspirations of the people for a better life, and fostering cultural confidence.

Chinese gardens, rooted in the context of Chinese landscape culture, weave together natural landscapes organically, endowing them with the artistic essence of Chinese culture. They represent both a typical material manifestation, with natural landscapes as their objective carriers, and a typical spiritual culture, epitomized by landscape culture. Chinese gardens, whether imperial or private, encapsulate the beauty of landscapes. Due to the prevailing trend of appreciating the grandeur of rivers and mountains through travel, garden art has evolved from imitating natural landscapes to expressing them in a freehand style, further fostering the trend of constructing gardens through earthmoving and mountain-building. Classical Chinese gardens reflect our deeply ingrained agricultural consciousness and the aesthetic style of revering nature. They embody the cultural spirit of "harmony between heaven and man" in China. The "beauty of landscapes" in landscape architecture is a spiritual value, representing the establishment and development of the aesthetic relationship between humans and nature.

Essentially, it is a symbol of the development of human civilization. With a rich and brilliant ancient garden culture and a modern garden culture that emphasizes both inheritance and innovation, today, we must further develop a new era of garden culture that aligns with the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

2. Overview of Classical Chinese Landscape Garden Culture

2.1. Landscape Culture in China

Landscape culture is a crucial and distinctive part of China's traditional culture, serving as a significant spiritual pillar in shaping the image of the Chinese nation. It is the product of the long-term interaction between humans and nature. The landscape culture in China is a unique cultural system that originated from the Daoist theory of "Dao follows nature" and evolved over thousands of years into a comprehensive cultural system. Landscape culture encompasses the cultural deposits inherent in natural landscapes and the cultural phenomena arising from them. It can be viewed as a cultural expression with landscapes as carriers or objects of representation. Landscape culture constitutes the artistic essence and cultural foundation of Chinese landscape architecture. Consequently, scenic elements, natural features, and mountains and rivers are often integral components and aesthetic objects in Chinese gardens. Examining landscape culture from a modern cultural perspective involves a broad and narrow perspective.

Broadly speaking, landscape culture refers to all related cultures formed throughout the long historical process of human cognition, development, utilization, and preservation of natural landscapes. Hence, broad landscape culture includes not only natural landscapes but also various cultural phenomena and forms created based on them. In a narrow sense, landscape culture primarily refers to the spiritual and cultural sum of all aspects that use natural landscapes as materials or objects.

2.2. Chinese Landscape Gardens

The development of Chinese landscape gardens, from their formation to complete maturity, is closely related to China's landscape culture. Philosophical, technological, poetic, and artistic aspects influenced the formation and development of natural landscape gardens, with landscape culture playing a leading or restrictive role. Throughout the development of landscape gardens, landscape culture consistently played a dominant role in various cultural aspects. For instance, the flourishing of Tang and Song landscape cultures contributed significantly to the extensive development of landscape gardens. In today's emphasis on ecological civilization, the simple and poetic philosophy of ancient landscape culture can still permeate the construction of modern natural landscape gardens.

Chinese landscape gardens represent the epitome of Chinese scenic gardens and are particularly characterized by literati-style landscape gardens. They constitute an essential component of traditional Chinese culture, nurtured by the "harmony between heaven and man" ideology, coexisting harmoniously with landscape culture. Landscape garden culture is more than a mere element or scenery in nature for the Chinese; it embodies the aesthetics and emotions of the Chinese people. The rise and development of landscape gardens signify changes in aesthetic trends, showcasing distinctive national character traits and gradually revealing artistic and aesthetic features in the eyes of later generations. The enduring appeal of humanistic sentiments within landscape garden culture is a testament to people's yearning and admiration for nature, showcasing infinite vitality within traditional culture and the unique artistic charm of Chinese culture.

3. Necessity and Significance of the Inheritance of Traditional Chinese Landscape Garden Culture

3.1. Necessity

In recent years, with the rapid advancement of urbanization, issues and drawbacks in the planning and design of landscape architecture have become evident. Despite the continuous emphasis on the importance of inheritance and innovation in the field of landscape architecture, there still exist problems such as blind admiration for foreign styles, formalism, denial of traditional culture, blind imitation, and a lack of differentiation between primary and secondary elements in project practices. Some projects overly prioritize form over suitability, failing to address the primary contradictions of the site and misapplying traditional gardening techniques. Modern landscape construction often neglects the inheritance of outstanding historical culture, leading to the repeated damage of classical gardens. The improper handling of the relationship between inheritance and innovation results in the destruction of classical landscapes and the emergence of vulgar works. Landscape is the product of the natural and cultural sedimentation, possessing regional characteristics that can instill a sense of identity and belonging among the local population.

While China can have diverse gardens, mainstream Chinese gardens should embody the spirit and soul of China. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the inheritance of Chinese landscape garden culture and promote its continuity and development. It seeks to provide reference and inspiration for contemporary landscape architecture, rectifying the issues of uniformity and confusion in landscape projects. The article hopes to guide modern landscape construction by preserving the vitality of traditional landscape gardens and properly managing the relationship between inheritance and innovation.

3.2. Significance

The development of traditional Chinese landscape garden culture spans thousands of years, embodying the artistic culture of the Chinese people and the spiritual essence of "harmony between heaven and man." Through a multi-faceted analysis of Chinese landscape gardens and exploration of their inheritance strategies and approaches, this study contributes to enriching the theoretical content of the inheritance and innovation of Chinese garden art. By considering the contemporary context, the design, and practice of Chinese landscape gardens can be thoughtfully examined. Qualitative logical deduction helps identify the correct path for the development of modern Chinese landscape architecture.

Through the exploration of the inheritance of Chinese landscape garden culture, this study provides guidance for contemporary projects, preventing the problems of uniformity and a lack of differentiation between primary and secondary elements in landscape architecture. Furthermore, it offers suggestions for the selection and research of historical cases in landscape architecture, evaluating whether projects exhibit the mainstream characteristics of Chinese landscape architecture and whether they inherit the essence and connotations of Chinese garden culture.

4. Strategies for the Inheritance of Traditional Chinese Landscape Garden Culture

4.1. Tracing Roots and Consolidating Foundations – Anchoring in Traditional Gardens, Delving into the Essence of Landscape

The birthplace of China's landscape culture lies in the famous mountains and rivers of the motherland. The unique formation of China's distinctive landscape culture can be summarized through three stages: natural worship, religious and aesthetic exploration, and the fusion of

science and aesthetics. An array of nature worship practices arose from ancestral bewilderment, with the most intimate connection found in the rituals and relationships with mountains, rivers, and streams. As understanding of nature increased and the ability to transform it grew, the relationship between humans and nature gradually evolved from fear and worship to closeness and affection. The shift towards aesthetic contemplation of nature, particularly landscapes, began roughly in the pre-Qin period and reached its completion during the Wei and Jin dynasties. The rapid development of landscape culture during the Han and Tang dynasties was influenced by literati who, discontented with their careers, indulged in the beauty of landscapes. Landscape activities enriched people's aesthetic experiences and promoted the formation of various landscape arts. During the prosperous Tang Dynasty, not only was society stable and culture flourishing, but religion also thrived, leading to the widespread expansion of scenic spots influenced by religion. Landscape culture experienced rapid development, witnessed in landscape poetry, paintings, and travel accounts. From the Sui and Tang dynasties to the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, landscape culture continued to develop. After the late Qing Dynasty, the influx of Western natural sciences into China broadened the understanding of landscapes to include geological and hydrological aspects.

In the thousands of years of China's developmental history, landscape culture has had a profound impact and has consistently been an indispensable part of the design and construction of gardens throughout the dynasties. It serves as a connecting thread that runs through the entirety of Chinese history. The contemporary development of landscape architecture requires a rooted foundation in excellent traditional culture, a deep exploration of the essence of traditional landscape garden culture, and an understanding of its core principles, providing theoretical guidance for the modern development and construction of gardens.

4.2. People-Oriented – Upholding the Core of Humanity, Embracing the Craftsmanship Spirit

The design philosophy of "people-oriented" is a crucial value orientation and aesthetic principle in garden design. In the contemporary era, the "people-oriented" design concept revolves around the people and their pursuit of beauty. In this regard, ancient Chinese landscape gardens differ fundamentally from modern ones. Historical gardens were generally constructed for the enjoyment or emotional pursuits of a small privileged group, often associated with the imperial court or affluent individuals. Modern landscape design, based on the inheritance of traditional landscape garden culture, should embody the spirit of "harmony between heaven and man" and the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. The "people-oriented" philosophy should be integrated, incorporating the concept into meticulous research. It should analyze people's actual needs for beautiful, comfortable, and harmonious environments and conduct humanized designs for aspects such as plant greening, water features, and spatial environments. This ensures that the landscape aligns with people's requirements for leisure, relaxation, nature appreciation, emotional cultivation, and the promotion of physical and mental health.

4.3. Innovative Integration – Upholding Innovative Ideas, Blending Diverse Cultures

Innovation is the primary task for the inheritance and development of contemporary landscape culture. It is essential to carefully consider how to promote and inherit Chinese garden culture globally. While using outstanding traditional gardens in China as the main root, we should merge landscape art with landscape poetry and paintings, maintaining the authenticity of the inheritance. Simultaneously, we must boldly innovate, applying scientific and technological solutions to address ecological challenges. In the process of technological transformation, it is crucial to deeply engage with each site, integrating modern technology and human experience into contemporary landscape gardens. Only then can gardens be novel, warm, and soulful.

Although significant progress has been made in the application and overall representation of landscape culture in landscape design, the expression of landscape culture should not be limited to borrowing from traditional landscape scenes. Instead, it should be more aligned with the characteristics of urban development, the needs of urban development, and contemporary development concepts. The expression of landscape culture should undergo innovation.

5. Approaches to the Inheritance of Chinese Landscape Garden Culture

5.1. Embracing the Concept of "Harmony between Heaven and Man"

The supreme ideal of Chinese garden art is "created by humans, yet appearing as if created by heaven," originating from nature, transcending nature, and primarily expressing the natural landscape. This concept is, in essence, the embodiment of the "harmony between heaven and man" philosophy within traditional Chinese culture. Ancient Chinese philosophy advocated maintaining a harmonious and unified state between humans and nature, proposing the theory of "harmony between heaven and man." This theory encourages a spiritual state where humanity and nature are closely connected, becoming a core principle in the spirit of traditional Chinese culture. The inheritance of this concept is a fundamental essence in continuing and promoting traditional Chinese garden culture.

5.2. Reflecting the Charm of Natural Landscapes

Fundamental to Chinese garden theory is an extreme reverence for nature. In the artistic conception of gardens, the imagery of natural landscapes is the main element. The composition of garden landscapes usually integrates both human and natural landscapes. Whether in the appreciation of natural beauty, landscape poetry, landscape paintings, or garden aesthetics, the imagery of landscapes holds a prominent and profound charm. Drawing elegant enjoyment from the vitality and charm of nature, it possesses significant emotional connotations. Through limited scenic representations, one can sense the infinite "Dao" within the imagery, comprehending the philosophies of the universe, history, and human life. The pursuit of artistic conception represents an advanced stage of natural aesthetic awareness, achieving aesthetic enjoyment directly from the observation of natural landscapes. It is a true discovery of the value of natural beauty. We should learn to discover and appreciate the beauty of nature in landscapes, perceive the unique style and artistic conception of landscape culture, and integrate Chinese philosophy and aesthetic connotations, allowing harmony between humans and architecture, landscapes, demonstrating the continued use of traditional Chinese landscape aesthetics in contemporary landscape planning.

5.3. Seeking the Artistic Conception of Poetry and Painting

Chinese classical gardens are often referred to as "frozen poetry and three-dimensional paintings." Chinese landscape gardens, as their core representatives, have had an inseparable connection with poetry over thousands of years of development. Garden scenery is poetic, and poetry describes the scenery; they complement each other. Classical Chinese literati gardens, emphasizing divine thoughts and elegance, create an artistic realm comparable to landscape paintings and pastoral poetry. It can be said that without poetry and painting, the landscape garden culture of China would not shine so brightly. Influenced by Chinese landscape poetry and painting, classical gardens focus on presenting the natural landscape pattern. The artistic creation of the traditional Chinese landscape garden often relies on the artistic expression of poetry and painting, commonly referred to as "poetic sentiment and artistic conception." Constructing the artistic conception of "poetic sentiment and artistic conception" should not be limited to the representation of couplets, famous scenes, and plaques. If the structural framework of literary works can be seamlessly integrated into garden design, it would be considered superior.

5.4. Inheriting the Ingenious Borrowing Technique

Borrowing scenery is the most crucial method in the construction of ancient Chinese landscape gardens, aiming to achieve infinite extension of space in modern urban garden construction. In contemporary urban garden construction, this method is often applied to very limited small spaces surrounded by high-rise buildings. The challenge lies in expanding these limited spaces into infinite ones, allowing garden enthusiasts to enjoy a panoramic view of harmonious beauty without any disruptive elements. The ingenious technique of "borrowing scenery" in classical Chinese landscape gardens is an exceptional method, creating a perfect and harmonious overall space by mutually borrowing scenic beauty from the surroundings. It is believed that "borrowing scenery" is crucial in Chinese landscape garden design, whether in urban or suburban landscapes. It often enlarges the spatial scope of gardens infinitely, achieving a harmonious coordination with the surrounding environment. Contemporary garden construction should inherit this essence, deeply understand the fundamental connotations of borrowing scenery, and incorporate it into modern landscape construction.

6. Summary and Outlook

This article explores the issue of inheriting Chinese landscape garden culture and proposes the viewpoint of constructing landscape cities under the premise of allowing natural conditions. It advocates borrowing the aesthetic concept of harmony between humans and nature and the reverence for nature in urban development, employing techniques such as stacking mountains and arranging water. While emphasizing the importance of drawing inspiration from tradition, it also highlights the complementary relationship with technology, including the selection of new materials and the application of technological means. In contemporary society, development is often prioritized, but achieving development often unavoidably requires the sacrifice of natural resources. When seeking the beauty of nature, we should recognize this issue. What we can learn from is the development concept of harmony between humans and nature in classical Chinese gardens. Applying this concept to contemporary urban construction still presents many issues that require further exploration.

Landscape gardens are meant to serve the public, so attention should be paid to the continuation of historical context and a return to the original purpose. Modern landscape gardens, compared to traditional ones that emphasized awe and admiration for nature, now place more emphasis on the practicality and pleasure of the touring experience while maintaining a focus on humanistic sentiment and scenic beauty. Traditional concepts such as "Bi De (comparison of virtue)" and "One Pond, Three Mountains, Immortal Thoughts" are gradually being overshadowed, as people pay more attention to the authentic use of landscapes and a healthy ecological environment. Future Chinese landscape gardens need to combine spatial and elemental compositions, absorb the essence of traditional gardens, and incorporate distinctive features of different ethnicities and regions by integrating traditional Chinese elements and details. Simultaneously, by combining with Feng Shui principles, create a modern garden style that reflects the characteristics of the times, regions, and cultures.

In future construction, we need to continue developing a landscape architecture discipline with Chinese characteristics, advocate theories guided by Chinese cultural perspectives, and adhere to the idea of combining science and art. We must persist in integrating cities into natural landscapes, collaboratively creating a picturesque scene of green mountains and clear waters, promoting the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature, and advancing the sustainable development of ecological civilization. We should express emotions through landscapes, promote Chinese culture with the humanistic sentiments of the Chinese people, ensuring the inheritance of Chinese culture for generations. At the same time, we should grasp and inherit the essence of traditional Chinese gardens, reflect the characteristics of the times, reestablish

core goals and values, and join hands with the people nationwide to build the beautiful Chinese dream.

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