

The Expression of Religion in Chinese Classical Garden Art and its Cultural Connotation

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Abstract: This article explores the multi-dimensional manifestation of religion in Chinese classical garden art. The article first analyzes the use of religious elements in garden layout, including the integration of religious symbols and garden design and the layout and function of religious buildings in gardens. Then it interprets the expression of religious cultural connotation in garden art, including the use of religious symbolism in garden decoration and the influence of religious philosophy on garden design. The article also discusses the unique expressions of different religions in Chinese classical gardens, specifically exploring the integration of Buddhism and Taoism into garden design and decoration and their implications for garden layout and landscape design.

Keywords: Chinese Classical Gardens, Religious Elements, Garden Layout, Religious and Cultural Connotations

1. INTRODUCTION

In the dazzling galaxy of traditional Chinese culture, religious beliefs and classical garden art complement each other, and together they draw a cultural picture with far-reaching artistic conception. Religious culture has a long history (Qi, 2023). From the primitive beliefs in the pre-Qin period to the prosperity of Buddhism and Taoism, it has provided people with rich spiritual nourishment. At the same time, garden art has also continued to evolve with the precipitation of history. From royal gardens to private gardens, it carries people's yearning for a better life. The combination of religion and gardens begins with people's pursuit of spiritual sustenance. In gardens, people try to create a space that is detached from the world and close to the gods to obtain inner tranquility and peace (Turkan & Köksaldı, 2021). During the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the rise of Buddhist temple gardens injected new vitality into garden art; during the Tang and Song Dynasties, the popularity of Taoist palace gardens also integrated ideas such as nature and cosmology into garden layout and design, making gardens pay more attention to the relationship with nature harmony and symbiosis. Religious elements can be seen everywhere when entering a Chinese classical garden. Buddhist stone scripture pillars, prayer flags, Buddha statues, Taoist mythical beast statues, Bagua patterns, Taoist temple buildings, etc. are integrated into the landscape either explicitly or implicitly, enriching the garden's layers and giving it profound cultural

connotations (Johnson, 2010). They are like silent narrators, telling people religious stories and conveying religious spirit, making the garden a space full of mystery and sacredness. In terms of layout, the symmetry, balance, and sense of order pursued by religion are widely used to make the garden space well-organized; in terms of architecture, the unique style and skills of religious architecture are used for reference, adding to the agility and mystery of garden architecture; in terms of plant configuration, the symbolic meaning in religious culture has also been reflected, such as the lotus symbolizing the purity of Buddhism, and the pines and cypresses symbolizing the longevity of Taoism. Studying the expression and cultural connotation of religion in Chinese classical garden art is of great significance for understanding traditional Chinese culture, exploring the spiritual value behind garden art, promoting the inheritance and development of religious culture, and promoting the innovation and prosperity of garden art. Through this research, we can provide historical reference and cultural nourishment for contemporary garden design and construction, open up new paths for the inheritance of religious culture, and contribute to the construction of a diverse and inclusive cultural ecology.

2. THE EMBODIMENT OF RELIGION IN CHINESE CLASSICAL GARDEN ART

2.1 The Application of Religious Elements in Garden Layout

The embodiment of religion in Chinese classical garden art, as shown in Figure 1. It is first reflected in the use of religious elements in garden layout. Chinese classical gardens, with their unique artistic styles and profound cultural connotations, have become treasures in the history of world gardens (Akbari & Hasanzadeh, 2022; Xing, 2024). Among them, the integration of religious elements and garden design not only enriches the artistic expression of gardens, but also gives them profound cultural implications.



Figure 1: Religious Elements in Garden Layout

Among the many religious elements, the use of Buddhist and Taoist symbols in garden layouts is particularly prominent. The embodiment of Buddhist elements in gardens is often realized through temples, pagodas, stone carvings and other architectural and sculptural arts (Xing, 2024). With their unique shapes and symbolic meanings, these elements have become important attractions in the garden, attracting the attention of tourists. For example, in the Humble Administrator's Garden in Suzhou, the use of temple architecture and Buddhist sculptures not only adds a tranquil and peaceful atmosphere to the garden, but also reflects the harmonious symbiosis of Buddhist culture and garden art (Hendry, 1997). Compared with Buddhism, the use of Taoist elements in garden layout is more reclusive and mysterious. Taoism pursues nature, harmony and longevity, and these concepts are fully reflected in garden design (Xing, 2024). Taoist symbols, such as Tai Chi diagrams, Bagua formations, etc., are often cleverly integrated into the composition and landscaping of gardens, allowing visitors to feel the depth and mystery of Taoist culture while visiting the gardens. In addition to Buddhist and Taoist elements, other religious elements are also reflected in classical Chinese gardens. These elements add rich colors to the garden with their unique cultural connotation and artistic charm. For example, Islamic-style arches and domes are used in some gardens, showing the blending and coexistence of the Chinese nation's diverse religious cultures. The use of religious elements in garden layout not only reflects the breadth and depth of Chinese classical garden art, but also highlights the unique charm of the Chinese nation's diverse religious culture. The integration of these religious elements and garden design is not only the inheritance and development of traditional culture, but also the innovation and exploration of modern garden design. By in-depth study of the expression of religion in Chinese classical garden art and its cultural connotation, we can better understand and appreciate this unique artistic treasure and further promote the inheritance and development of Chinese classical garden art.

2.2 The Combination of Religious Architecture and Garden Landscape

In Chinese classical garden art, religious buildings such as temples and Taoist temples are often cleverly combined with garden landscapes to create a unique and mysterious artistic atmosphere, as shown in Figure 2. This combination is not only reflected in the layout, but also in the function, fully demonstrating the profound cultural connotation of religion and garden art (Gil-Mastalerczyk, 2016; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2013).



Figure 2: Religious Architecture and Landscape Design

First of all, from a layout perspective, the location of religious buildings in the garden is carefully designed. They are often placed at important nodes in the garden, such as the entrance, center or commanding heights, to highlight their religious status and cultural significance. The gates of temples or Taoist temples usually face the main axis of the garden, echoing the main landscape axis, forming a solemn and harmonious visual effect(Kaczyńska, 2020). At the same time, the architectural style of these religious buildings is also coordinated with the garden landscape, using similar materials and colors to ensure the harmony and unity of the overall landscape. Functionally, religious buildings not only serve as places for religious activities, but also become an important part of the garden landscape. For example, elements such as incense burners, Buddha statues and murals in temples not only reflect the mystery and solemnity of religion, but also provide tourists with a kind of spiritual sustenance and spiritual comfort. In addition, squares or courtyards in front of religious buildings often become spaces for tourists to rest and communicate, which enhances the interactivity and sociability of the garden. It is worth mentioning that the combination of religious architecture and garden landscape is also reflected in the respect and utilization of the natural environment (Yazdani & Lozanovska, 2016; Zhao et al., 2022). In many classical gardens, religious buildings are often built close to mountains and rivers, integrating with the surrounding environment. For example, in landscape gardens, temples or Taoist temples are often built on mountainside or waterside, which not only facilitates worship by believers, but also allows tourists to feel the solemnity and mystery of religion while appreciating the natural landscape. The combination of layout and function, religious buildings and garden landscapes are also closely

connected in cultural connotation. In traditional Chinese culture, religion and gardens are both important vehicles for people to pursue spiritual sustenance and aesthetic enjoyment. Art works such as sculptures, murals and couplets in religious buildings not only display religious doctrines and beliefs, but also embody the essence of ancient Chinese culture. The garden landscape creates an otherworldly artistic atmosphere through elements such as landscapes, plants, and architecture, allowing people to feel the profoundness of traditional Chinese culture while visiting the garden. In general, the combination of religious architecture and garden landscape is not only reflected in layout and function, but also in cultural connotation. This combination not only enriches the artistic expression of the garden, but also provides an excellent place for people to experience religious culture and natural beauty. In Chinese classical garden art, the integration of religious architecture undoubtedly adds a deeper cultural heritage to this unique art form.

3. INTERPRETATION OF RELIGIOUS CULTURAL CONNOTATIONS IN GARDEN ART

3.1 The Embodiment of Religious Symbolism in Gardens

In Chinese classical garden art design, religious cultural connotations are particularly profound, and the display of religious symbolism in gardens is even more original, as shown in Figure 3. Through carefully designed religious patterns and symbols, garden artists not only add rich visual elements to the garden, but also give it profound cultural and spiritual connotations.

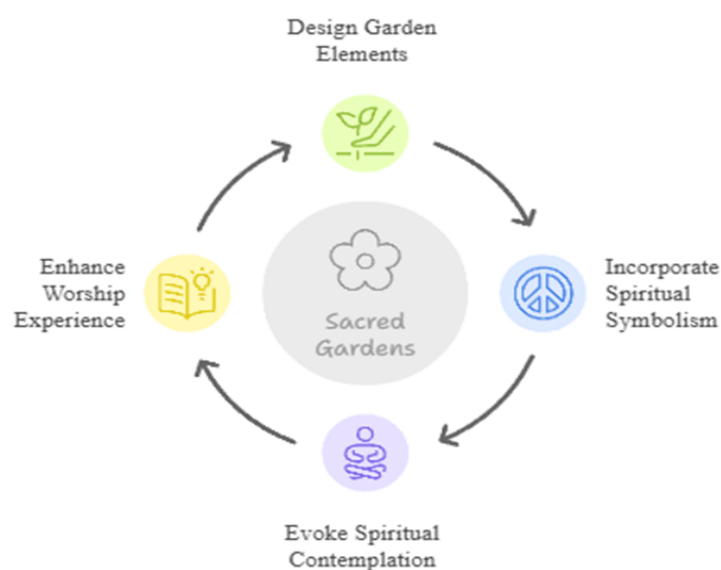


Figure 3: The Cycle of Sacred Garden Symbolism

The use of religious patterns in gardens is extensive and diverse. They may appear in the detailed decoration of buildings in the form of sculptures and paintings, or they may be integrated into the garden landscape in the form of paving and planting, as shown in Figure 4. These patterns are mostly taken from the classic teachings or myths and legends of Buddhism, Taoism and other religions, such as lotus, Tai Chi, Bagua, etc. Each pattern carries a specific religious symbolic meaning.

For example, the lotus, as a symbol of Buddhism, represents purity and transcendence. Its appearance in gardens often symbolizes the owner's pursuit of a pure mind and transcendence of the world (Biello, 2018; Curl, 1988). Tai Chi and Bagua, as symbols of Taoism, embody the philosophical ideas of harmony between yin and yang and the unity of nature and man. Their use in garden layout aims to create a harmonious and mysterious atmosphere.



Figure 4: Religious Pattern Elements in Garden Design

In addition to patterns, the use of religious symbols in garden decoration is equally wonderful. These symbols may express religious doctrines in abstract form, or represent myths and legends in concrete images. For example, the swastikas in Buddhism and the talismans in Taoism are all concrete expressions of religious beliefs and are cleverly integrated into every corner of the garden. The existence of these symbols not only adds a sense of mystery to the garden, but also allows visitors to feel the influence and baptism of religious culture during the tour. It is worth mentioning that the manifestation of religious symbolism in gardens does not exist in isolation, but is closely connected with the overall design style and theme of the garden. Designers will skillfully integrate religious elements into the garden based on the religious beliefs and aesthetic

preferences of the garden owner, so that they complement each other with landscape elements such as landscapes, buildings, and plants, and together form pictures rich in religious artistic conception (Nafisi et al., 2015). These scrolls not only show the artistic charm of classical gardens, but also inherit the profound religious and cultural heritage of the Chinese nation. The manifestation of religious symbolism in Chinese classical garden art is multifaceted and profound. Through the clever use of religious patterns and symbols, garden artists have successfully integrated religious beliefs and garden art, creating a religious garden culture with unique Chinese characteristics. This culture not only enriches the artistic connotation of classical gardens, but also provides us with valuable physical information and visual enjoyment for understanding and inheriting the religious culture of the Chinese nation.

3.2 The Influence of Religious and Philosophical Thoughts on Garden Art

In Chinese classical garden art, the influence of religious and philosophical ideas is far-reaching and multifaceted. In particular, the philosophical thoughts of Taoism and Confucianism have left a profound imprint on garden design and shaped the unique style of Chinese classical garden art (Ferrari, 2010; Groening & Wolschke-Bulmahn, 1989). First of all, 'Taoist philosophy takes nature, life, and harmony as its core, and advocates "governing by doing nothing" and "Tao follows nature." This idea is fully reflected in garden design. Taoism pursues harmonious coexistence with nature, and this concept can be seen everywhere in the structure of Chinese classical gardens. The layout of the garden often imitates the natural landscape, such as rocks, pools, flowers and trees, and other elements.

Through careful design and clever arrangement, it creates a natural beauty without sculptures. This design idea is the embodiment of the Taoist idea of "harmony between man and nature", that is, man and nature should be harmonious and integrated, rather than in rigid opposition. For example, in the Humble Administrator's Garden and the Lingering Garden in Suzhou, we can see the profound influence of this Taoist philosophy. The rockeries, ponds, pavilions and pavilions in the park all seem to be naturally generated and integrated with the surrounding environment, as shown in Figure 5. This design concept is not only reflected in the macro layout, but also permeates every detail. For example, the paths in gardens are often winding and lead to quiet places, guiding tourists to feel the rhythm and rhythm of nature during the tour.



Figure 5: Religious Culture in Garden Rockery Design

On the other hand, Confucian philosophy is also reflected in Chinese classical garden art. Confucianism emphasizes order, harmony and social responsibility. In garden design, this idea is manifested in the fine division of space layout and the pursuit of symmetrical aesthetics. Confucianism focuses on the harmonious relationship between people and society, which is also reflected in the structure of classical gardens. Take the Summer Palace in Beijing as an example, as shown in Figure 6. Its overall layout is rigorous and symmetrical, reflecting the Confucian pursuit of order and norms. The corridors, bridges, and buildings in the park all follow the strict principle of symmetry along the central axis, showing a solemn and harmonious beauty. At the same time, the design of the Summer Palace also fully considers people's activities and social needs. For example, the Seventeen-Arch Bridge on the bank of Kunming Lake and the surrounding pavilions and pavilions provide people with space for communication and rest.



Figure 6: Overall Layout of Summer Palace in Beijing

In addition to Taoism and Confucianism, Chinese classical garden art is also influenced by religious ideas such as Buddhism and Zen. These ideas are also reflected in garden design, such as using symbolic elements to express religious meanings, or creating a quiet space to guide people to introspect and meditate. In general, the expression of religious and philosophical thoughts in Chinese classical garden art is diverse and profound. They not only influenced the layout and design concepts of the garden, but also demonstrated the Chinese people's unique understanding of nature, life and society in subtle ways. These gardens are not only treasures of art, but also carriers of culture and witnesses of history.

4. THE UNIQUE EXPRESSIONS OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS IN CHINESE CLASSICAL GARDENS

4.1 The Manifestation of Buddhism in Gardens

In Chinese classical garden art, the integration of religious elements, especially Buddhist elements, adds rich cultural connotation and spiritual connotation to the design and decoration of gardens. Since Buddhism was introduced to China, it has gradually been integrated with local culture, forming Buddhist art with Chinese characteristics. This art is vividly reflected in classical gardens, which not only shows the spirit of Buddhist teachings, but also reflects ancient people's understanding and pursuit of nature and life. The "Zen" and "emptiness" of Buddhism are cleverly integrated into the garden layout. By using techniques such as borrowing scenery and contrasting scenery, a quiet and profound sense of space is created. For example, Zen rooms, Buddhist halls and other buildings are set up in the garden. These buildings are often located in quiet places in the garden, blending harmoniously with the surrounding natural environment, creating an atmosphere of staying away from the hustle and bustle and practicing meditation. At the same time, the plant configuration in the garden also reflects the influence of Buddhism. Plants with Buddhist symbolic meanings such as lotus and bodhi tree are widely planted, implying purity and wisdom. In terms of garden decoration, Buddhist elements are also widely used. Art forms such as sculptures and murals are used to express Buddhist themes, such as Buddha statues, Arhat statues, and Buddhist stories. These decorative works are not only exquisite in craftsmanship, but also rich in connotation, becoming a beautiful landscape in the garden. In addition, the text decorations such as plaques and couplets in gardens often contain Buddhist thoughts, such as "Zen

heart is like the moon " , " Bodhi has no trees " and other sentences, which not only highlight the theme of the garden, but also convey the profound meaning of Zen. It is worth mentioning that the expression of Buddhism in Chinese classical gardens does not exist in isolation, but blends with other religious elements and traditional culture. For example, under the influence of Taoist thought, elements that express " fairyland " often appear in gardens , such as rockeries, pools, etc., which complement the " Zen realm " of Buddhism and jointly create an otherworldly beauty. At the same time, the " harmony " and " order " emphasized by Confucian culture are also reflected in gardens, allowing Buddhist elements to maintain harmony and balance when integrated into gardens. The unique expression of Buddhism in Chinese classical gardens is not only reflected in the layout and decoration of the gardens, but also integrated into the life philosophy and aesthetic pursuits of ancient people. By in-depth study of the Buddhist elements in these gardens, we can better understand the interrelationship between religion and art, and the important role they play in the inheritance and development of Chinese culture.

4.2 The Influence of Taoism in Gardens

Taoism occupies an important position in Chinese culture, and its ideas have deeply influenced the design and structure of Chinese classical gardens. This influence is particularly significant in garden layout and landscape design, providing us with rich inspiration. First of all, Taoism's pursuit of nature, harmony and balance are fully reflected in the layout of Chinese classical gardens. Taoism emphasizes the " harmony of nature and man " , that is, man and nature should coexist harmoniously. This idea guides garden designers to strive to imitate and integrate nature when planning gardens. For example, common elements such as pools, rocks, flowers and trees in gardens all imitate and reproduce natural scenery. This layout not only makes the garden appear natural and harmonious, but also allows people to feel the tranquility and beauty of nature. Secondly, Taoism's use of space also brings inspiration to garden design. Taoism pays attention to the " coexistence of virtuality and reality " and believes that space is fluid and alive. In garden design, this idea is reflected in the clever use of space and careful layout. The designer created a sense of spatial hierarchy and depth through scattered plant configurations, meandering paths and clever water features. This layout not only increases the interest of the garden, but also allows people to feel the change and flow of the space. Furthermore, the Taoist idea of " governing by inaction " has also had a profound impact on garden landscape design. This idea advocates

following nature, not interfering excessively, and letting things develop according to their own laws. In garden design, this is reflected in respecting and retaining the natural landscape and minimizing damage to the original environment. For example, in landscape gardens, designers will try to retain the original rocks and water bodies, and highlight the beauty of the natural scenery through clever layout and vegetation configuration, rather than excessively transforming or destroying the natural environment. In addition, Taoist symbols and patterns are often used in garden design. These symbols and patterns not only have a decorative effect, but also carry profound cultural connotations. For example, Taoist symbols such as Tai Chi diagrams and Bagua diagrams often appear on stone carvings, brick carvings or murals in gardens. They represent Taoist ideas such as the balance of yin and yang and the interdependence of the five elements, adding a mysterious and profound cultural atmosphere to the gardens. The above-mentioned influences, the health culture of Taoism is also reflected in garden design. Many classical gardens have places dedicated to health cultivation, such as quiet rooms and tea rooms. The design of these places often incorporates Taoist health-preserving concepts, such as focusing on ventilation and lighting, planting healthy plants, etc., aiming to provide garden owners with a peaceful and comfortable cultivation environment. The expression of Taoist thought in Chinese classical garden art is multifaceted. It not only affects the layout and landscape design of the garden, but also injects profound cultural connotation into the garden. By studying the influence of Taoism in gardens, we can have a deeper understanding of the artistic charm and cultural value of Chinese classical gardens. At the same time, these influences also provide valuable inspiration and reference for our garden design and urban planning today.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Fujian Provincial Social Science Fund Standardization Project: Research on Innovative Patterns of Contemporary Ink Figure Painting in Multiple Contextures (No. FJ2018B136).

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