

Spatial Composition Principles of Chinese Landscape Painting in Urban Park Design: A Case Study of Sanqin Park, China

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Article Info :	Research Article
Article History :	Received February 03, 2026
	Revised May 21, 2026
	Accepted October 02, 2026
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Abstract

Changzhou has a rich historical heritage of Taoist culture, and the preserved Taoist cultural heritage there boasts a long history. Contemporary urban park designs in China predominantly adopt Western functionalist frameworks without integrating local cultural characteristics, resulting in increasingly homogeneous public spaces devoid of distinctive cultural identity. Research on how to incorporate Taoist indigenous culture into park design remains limited. Meanwhile, Taoist philosophical concepts have profoundly influenced traditional Chinese landscape painting. This study explores the spatial organizational logic of traditional Chinese landscape painting, analyzes the cultural and aesthetic characteristics underlying its spatial composition, and examines the transformation patterns and significance of these principles in the design of Sanqin Park. This study employs a research-through-design approach, analyzing representative landscape paintings from the Qing Dynasty to identify three key spatial features: spatial layering of foreground, midground, and background; water bodies linking spaces; and an S-shaped trail system. These spatial characteristics from landscape paintings were translated into a park design framework and developed into a conceptual renovation proposal for Sanqin Park. Analysis reveals that the spatial composition logic of Chinese landscape painting prioritizes not functionality but rather the modulation of spatial rhythm and sequence to create a harmonious natural atmosphere, effectively mitigating the sense of fragmentation caused by functional zoning. Compared with earlier design proposals for Sanqin Park, the optimized design demonstrates enhanced spatial continuity.

Keywords: Chinese landscape painting, Taoist aesthetics, Urban park design, Spatial hierarchy, Cultural identity

Introduction

American design scholar Donald Norman argued in his 2004 book *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things* that users' cultural backgrounds and emotional sensitivities profoundly shape their expectations regarding aesthetics, functionality, and symbolic meaning (Norman, D.A., 2004). Therefore, designers must recognize that products disconnected from users' cultural contexts create cultural barriers and fail to evoke emotional resonance. Truly excellent design is always aligned with the user's cultural environment. Enhancing cultural confidence and preserving traditional culture not only meet the public demands of contemporary social development but also serve as a vital means to boost international influence (Wu, J., 2025).

China's traditional landscape painting, as a high-level integration of China's traditional philosophy, art, and humanities, is a highly condensed representation of China's traditional culture, possessing unique aesthetic characteristics of China's culture. Urban parks, as green spaces in cities, are the most frequently used public spaces by residents and tourists, serving as one of the most effective means of cultural dissemination and influence, subtly exerting the impact of culture on people (Zhang, Q., 2024).

The earliest concept of the urban park originated in Britain. In the 1840s of the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution in Britain led to serious pollution of land, rivers, and air, resulting in continuous deterioration of the urban environment. At this time, the idea emerged of setting aside land within cities specifically for planting vegetation, with the aim of reducing air pollution. This marked the origin of the world's earliest park, Birkenhead Park (Wang, L., et al., 2022). In contemporary society, parks have become an essential part of urban development. They are also an important indicator for evaluating urban quality.

Especially in China, urban parks are important places for residents to walk, socialize, and relax. Urban park design in China is shifting away from strictly following Western functionalist principles. It is gradually transforming toward design principles that integrate ecology, culture, and function. Therefore, exploring urban parks with Chinese characteristics through traditional Chinese landscape painting is highly significant. It plays a crucial role in enhancing the aesthetic depth and cultural character of parks.

In recent years, landscape design scholars have argued that the cultural and perceptual dimensions of park landscapes are equally important as their functional dimensions. Theories such as "sense of place" and "regional spirit" all emphasize that spatial experience and cultural identity are essential conditions for high-quality public spaces. Against the backdrop of China's policy-driven revival of traditional culture, scholars have

begun exploring how to integrate traditional culture and philosophy into modern park design, transcending superficial symbolic imagery to delve into its transformative significance at both structural and experiential levels (Xie, X. & He, Y., 2025).

Traditional Chinese landscape painting originated during the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties period in China. During this era, Chinese literati and artists were profoundly influenced by Taoist philosophy, pursuing a life of natural harmony and detachment from worldly affairs. Consequently, Chinese painters employed primary artistic tools such as brushes and ink to depict natural landscapes including mountains, rivers, trees, and rocks to express the Taoist concept of unity between heaven and humanity, emphasizing harmonious coexistence between humans and nature as well as the pursuit of a reclusive spiritual lifestyle. Chinese landscape painting does not prioritize realistic representation but focuses on creating artistic ambiance and spatial rhythm, utilizing scattered perspective techniques to evoke richly layered, serene, and ideal living spaces (Shaw, M., 1988).

The spatial representation technique in China's landscape painting is uniquely distinctive: the pictorial space is divided into three levels: the foreground, middle ground, and background, each with distinct visual characteristics. The foreground exhibits a strong sense of depth, the middle ground extends horizontally, while the background rises upward. This spatial composition method is referred to as the "Three Distances Method" in traditional Chinese painting (Lu, X., et al., 2023).

The use of path elements in Chinese landscape painting follows the principle of "scenery changing with each step." S-shaped winding paths are used; as viewers walk, the scenery changes with each turn of the path.

The use of vegetative elements typically manifests in two forms: one involves placing a few scattered plants along water edges or near rocks to serve as spatial transitions; the other employs clustered arrangements that block visual lines, delineate spaces, and create a sense of depth and tranquility, thereby stimulating viewers' interest in exploration.

In Chinese landscape painting, water elements such as lakes and rivers are often represented through blank space. The solidity of mountains and plants contrasts with the emptiness of water, creating a spatial rhythm. It also corresponds to the Taoist philosophy of the interaction between emptiness and solidity (Zhou, W. & Zhang, Y., 2025).

The spatial wisdom inherent in traditional Chinese landscape painting is gaining increasing attention from scholars. In 2021, Hanying Sun pointed out in his article *Daoist Thought in Chinese Landscape Painting and Its Artistic Philosophy* that the spatial concepts in landscape painting can provide new inspiration for

contemporary design approaches to "landscape cities," with the core aim being to find a balanced point of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature (Sun, H., 2021).

Sanqin Park is located in Wujin District, Changzhou City, China, covering an area of approximately 13,000 square meters and was initially constructed in 2003. Its overall design adheres to typical Western functionalist principles, focusing solely on meeting functional requirements while lacking a sense of cultural identity. Changzhou boasts a long-standing Taoist cultural tradition and preserves numerous historical Taoist sites. However, it now faces decline and public neglect. In 2008, the Changzhou municipal government listed Taoist music and Taoist paper cutting as intangible cultural heritage for protection.

The spatial expression of landscape painting is strongly influenced by Taoist culture. Therefore, the cultural meaning contained in the spatial structure and aesthetic features of landscape painting is analyzed. These ideas are applied to the design of Sanqin Park in Changzhou. This spatial logic is reintroduced into the park not to restore history, but to continue an interrupted experience, making the park an open and reusable cultural container.

Through long-term use of space, these cultural features are remembered and a sense of identity gradually forms.

Numerous studies have already explored the Taoist philosophical concepts underlying China's landscape painting and their theoretical connections with urban design, yet most remain at a conceptual level, failing to translate into concrete design methodologies or supported by empirical data. To date, no scholar has successfully transformed the spatial logic of traditional Chinese landscape painting into actionable park design strategies (Yao, Z., & Zhai, Y., 2025). Addressing these gaps, this study proposes the following approach: starting from Qing Dynasty landscape paintings, we will establish a clear framework for analyzing spatial characteristics, derive three specific design principles, and ultimately validate the practical effectiveness of the final solution through expert comparative evaluations.

Research Objective

1. Discussion on the Spatial Organization Logic of Chinese Landscape Painting
2. Analyze the cultural and aesthetic characteristics behind it
3. Transformation Mode and Significance in the Design of Sanqin Park

Methodology

This study employs research-through-design approach, grounded in theoretical principles, to integrate systematic analysis with design interventions in developing solutions for existing challenges. The research process comprises four phases: 1) Identification and classification of spatial characteristics; 2) Analysis of design strategies; 3) design proposal of the design solutions at Sanqin Park; and 4) Expert evaluation of the design outcomes.

1. Spatial Characteristics Analysis Framework

To obtain objective analytical results within the spatial framework of China's landscape painting, this study designed a structured analytical framework to examine the spatial characteristics of landscape paintings. The analysis proceeded as follows:

Step 1, Sample Selection: Six representative Qing Dynasty landscape paintings were selected as samples: Qian Weicheng's *Shanshui Tu* and *Qifeng Tu*, Wang Jian's *Album of Ancient-Style Landscapes* and *Hut by the Stream in Mountain Hues*, Yun Shouping's *Yunlin Gaozhi Tu*, and Luo Mumu's *Distant Mountains Beyond Sparse Woods*.

As the last dynasty of China, the Qing Dynasty saw its landscape paintings fully absorb and integrate the compositional systems that had matured since the Song and Yuan dynasties, with spatial expression techniques already well-established. Focusing on the same historical period maximizes the exclusion of interference caused by stylistic differences across dynasties, ensuring a unified standard for analyzing spatial characteristics.

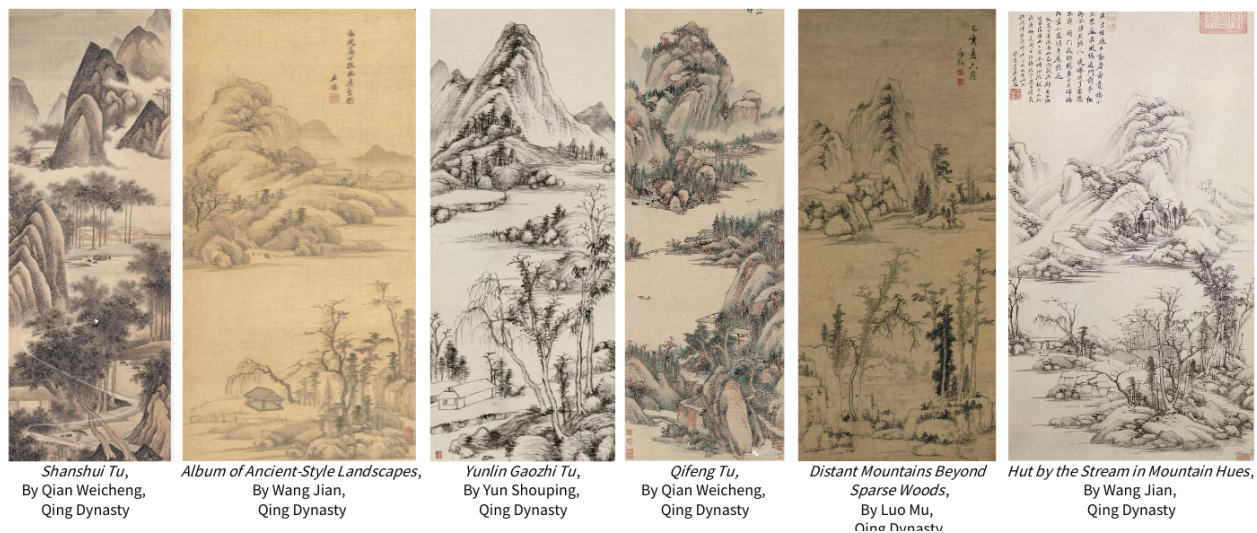


Figure 1 Six representative landscape paintings of the Qing Dynasty

Step 2, Spatial Layer Identification: The spatial composition of the selected landscape paintings and the characteristics of each spatial layer were analyzed.

Step 3, Pattern Induction: Analysis of the spatial composition revealed consistent spatial patterns in China's landscape paintings: 1) A distinct foreground–middleground–background spatial structure; 2) Water bodies serving as the primary connecting element across spatial layers; 3) An S-shaped path system with controllable visual rhythm.

2. Analysis of Spatial Characteristics

In Chinese landscape painting, space is divided from front to back into foreground, middle ground, and background. In the foreground, landscape elements are dense. Plants, rocks, and buildings block each other. Paths are winding and creates a sense of spatial depth. In Qian Weicheng's *Qifeng Tu* and Wang Jian's *Hut by the Stream in Mountain Hues*, winding paths in the foreground serve as visual guides. Dense plants are placed at turning points. They create partial visual blockage between front and back spaces.

This forms a semi-hidden and semi-revealed landscape character. It stimulates the viewer's desire to explore.

The middle ground space in Chinese landscape painting is relatively open. Water scenes are often expressed through blank space, when entering the middle ground from the dense foreground space, a visual contrast is formed and a sudden sense of openness appears.

In these six sample landscape paintings from the Qing Dynasty, the artists extensively utilized blank spaces: the water surfaces are vast and unobstructed, while rivers wind along both banks, forming a stark contrast with the densely rendered mountain and water scenery in the foreground. The backgrounds of China's landscape paintings primarily depict towering mountain ranges, whose slopes gradually ascend from low to high, guiding the viewer's gaze naturally upward and creating a strong sense of spatial extension.

Among the six samples of Qing Dynasty landscape paintings, lower mountains are placed in the front of the background. The mountains gradually increase in height toward the back. This subtly guides the viewer's gaze into the distance.

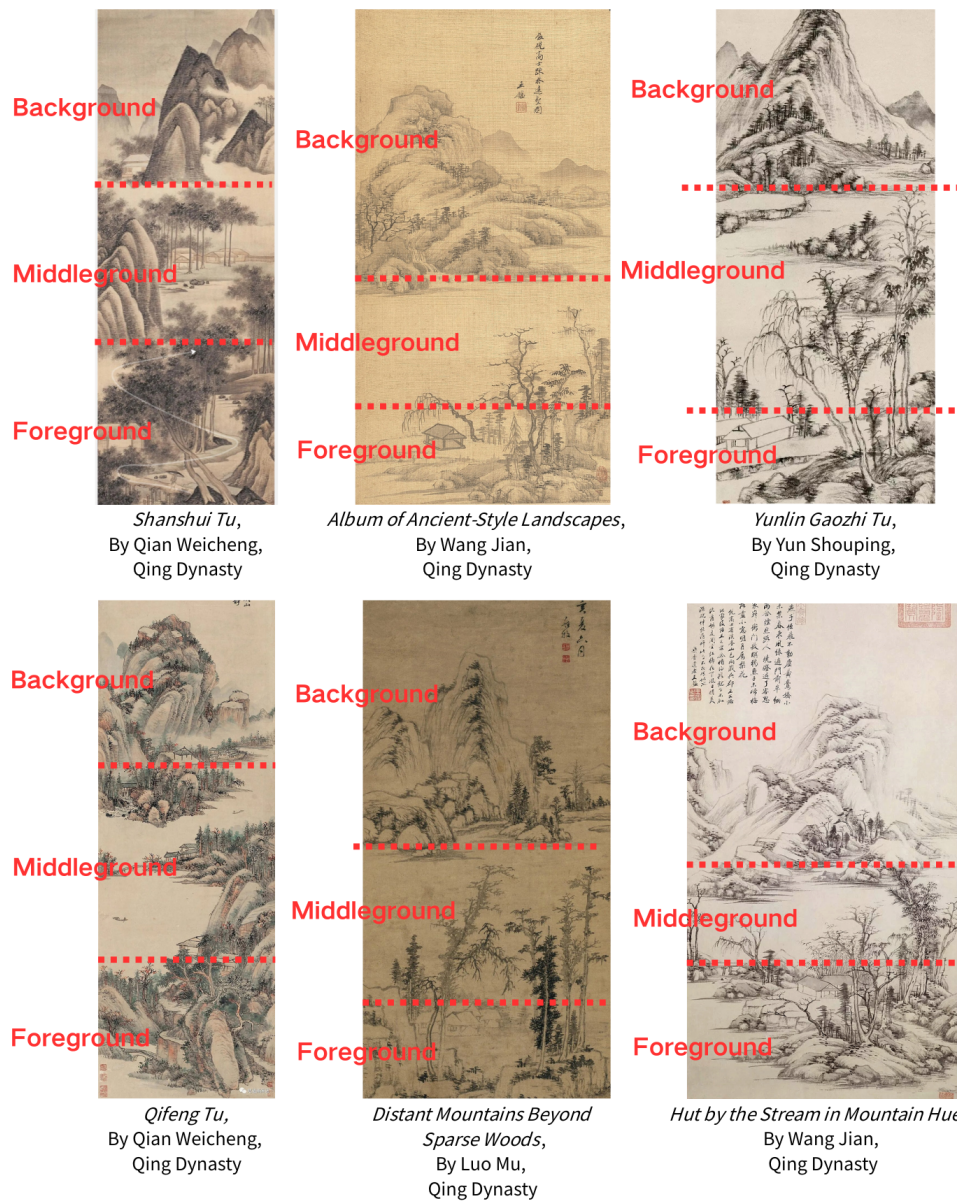


Figure 2 Spatial Characteristics of Six Sample Landscape Paintings from the Qing Dynasty

3. Analysis of Characteristics of Water

In the six landscape paintings, water bodies such as rivers and lakes play a crucial role in connecting spatial elements, with straight river courses being used sparingly. The shapes of water bodies are predominantly curved, naturally linking the foreground, middle ground, and background to form a cohesive visual space.

In *Shanshui Tu*, *Qifeng Tu*, *Album of Ancient-style Landscapes*, *Yunlin Gaozhi Tu*, and *Hut by the Stream in Mountain Hues*, rivers flow from distant mountains toward the foreground, integrating the foreground, middle ground, and background into a continuous spatial whole. This composition allows viewers to gradually move deeper into the painting along the direction of water flow, creating a typical viewing path characteristic of China's landscape paintings.

The river in *Shanshui Tu* follows a distinct S-shaped course, *Qifeng Tu* and *Hut by the Stream in Mountain Hues* employ continuously winding streams to organize the space. In contrast, the water surfaces in *Album of Ancient-style Landscapes* and *Distant Mountains Beyond Sparse Woods* are relatively flat and expansive yet retain natural, meandering shorelines. These curved forms extend the visual pathway and enhance spatial depth.

Water Surface Trend ————

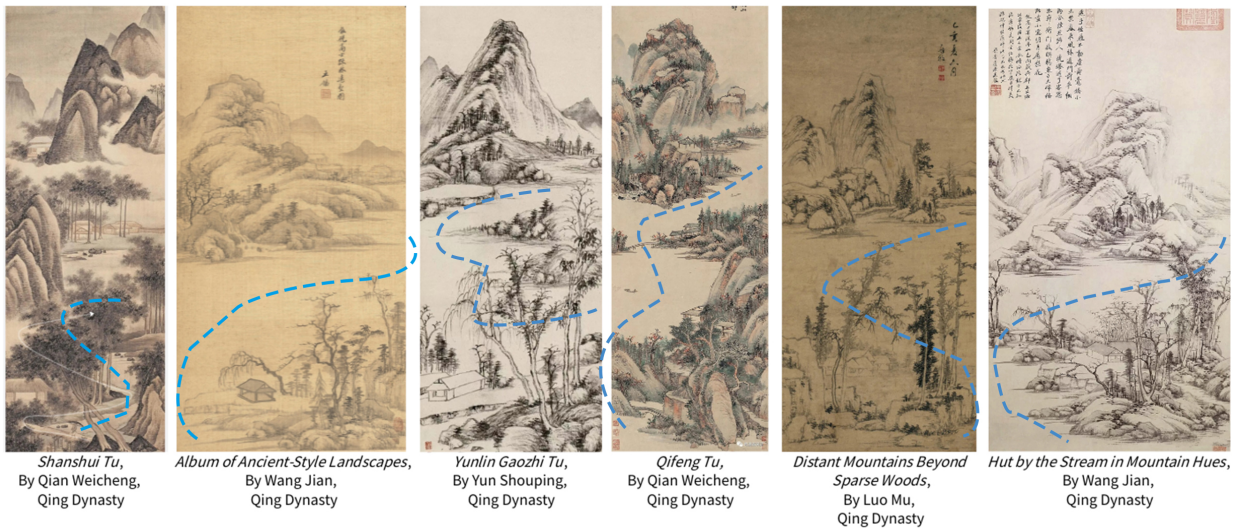


Figure 3 Characteristics of water flow patterns

In the foreground space, the arrangement of trees and other plants aligns with the flow of water, primarily concentrated at river bends. Water flow governs the spatial rhythm: trees become denser where the river turns and more sparse where the flow is gentle. While the distribution of trees appears natural, it actually responds to variations in water flow dynamics. For instance, in *Qifeng Tu*, *Shanshui Tu*, and *Distant Mountains Beyond Sparse Woods*, trees are mainly clustered at river bends to reinforce spatial obstruction and scenic rhythm, whereas open water areas maintain clear visibility, enabling viewers to naturally gaze toward distant mountains.

In the mid-ground space, villages and houses are built along the water but not directly adjacent to it; instead, a shallow open space is maintained between the structures and the water body as a buffer. This appropriate sense of distance enhances the natural harmony of the compositional layout. Ultimately, the water gradually disappears into the distant mountains, guiding the viewer's gaze naturally toward the far reaches of the scene. For instance, in works such as *Shanshui Tu*, *Album of Ancient-style Landscapes*, and *Hut by the Stream in Mountain Hues*, the houses are situated slightly higher than the riverbank, with open spaces or trees serving as transitional elements, fostering a harmonious relationship between architecture and the natural environment reflecting the Daoist philosophy of "unity of heaven and humanity. "

In terms of water representation, Chinese landscape paintings typically depict water through the simple use of blank space. Compared to the dense depiction of mountains and forests, the water surface constitutes the most expansive area within the composition. This technique echoes the Daoist concept of the interdependence between void and substance: only through void arises substance, and only through substance emerges void; neither can exist without the other. Thus, in China's landscape painting, water symbolizes "void," while dense landscape elements represent "substance. "

4. Analysis of Characteristics of Paths

The creative philosophy of China's landscape painting is profoundly influenced by the Taoist concept of "following nature," emphasizing adherence to natural laws and avoiding deliberate alteration of natural forms, just as absolutely straight lines are rare in nature. Consequently, paths and travel routes in Chinese landscape paintings typically adopt winding, curved forms rather than straight axes (Zhou, W. & Zhang, Y., 2025). In Qian Weicheng's *Qifeng Tu*, a meandering path extends from the lower right corner of the composition into the forest, continuously twisting with the undulations of the mountains; the viewer's gaze shifts accordingly, making it impossible to grasp the entire scene at once but allowing gradual discovery of new spatial layers during progression. In Wang Jian's *Hut by the Stream in Mountain Hues*, the stream and trail intertwine, following the contours of the mountains and waterways while incorporating trees and rocks to create multiple partial obstructions, enabling viewers to perceive distant pavilions and peaks only after turning around, thus creating a "changing scenery with every step" experience.

In *Shanshui Tu*, the path naturally follows the river's course, connecting the foreground woods, mid-ground village dwellings, and background mountains through continuous curves. The route eschews symmetrical layout, instead unfolding freely according to variations in rivers, mountains, and terrain, imparting a sense of continuous, rhythmic variation to the entire space. As viewers walk along the path, the scenery changes with each turn, creating a visual effect where "the landscape transforms with every step. " Only after

multiple detours does the full panorama gradually unfold, avoiding the limited panoramic view offered by a straight-line route.

5. Design Translation Principles

The transition from a painting-like space to a park-like space has led to the formulation of three design transformation principles:

Principle 1: Hierarchical spatial sequence. Based on the spatial logic of landscape painting, the park space is clearly divided into the foreground (dense with elements), midground (spacious), and background (elevated area), each possessing distinct spatial characteristics.

Principle 2: Water as the organizing element. Drawing inspiration from the use of water features in landscape painting, water bodies serve as the primary organizing element within the park space, linking different spatial zones.

Principle 3: Rhythmic path design. By incorporating vegetation and terrain at path turns, an S-shaped path system is created to regulate visual rhythm.

6. Validation Method

This study employed both subjective evaluation methods and objective analytical methods. The subjective evaluation methods invited five scholars and designers with professional expertise in landscape design to conduct a comparative evaluation of the proposed design scheme against the original 2003 design through a scoring system, thereby validating the effectiveness of this methodology. The overall score ranges from 1 to 5 points, encompassing five dimensions (each dimension has a total score of 1 point): cultural expressiveness, spatial coherence, functional performance, aesthetic quality, and user experience potential.

The evaluation process proceeded as follows: Five evaluators scored both the original proposal from 2003 and the proposed design proposal across five dimensions cultural expression, spatial coherence, functional performance, aesthetic quality, and user experience with scores ranging from 0 to 1 in increments of 0.1. The overall average score was calculated by summing all scores across the five dimensions and taking their mean. Five evaluators were invited, resulting in a small sample size, therefore, no statistical significance tests were conducted, and only descriptive analysis was performed.

The selection of evaluators emphasized diversity in backgrounds, including university faculty members and professional designers. One evaluator came from a design firm, enabling them to provide assessments from a practical business perspective, score may reflect industry-specific biases.

To address the limitations of subjective expert evaluation, this study further incorporates objective spatial indicators to conduct a comparative analysis of the existing park layout and the proposed renovation

scheme. Drawing on the spatial characteristics of traditional Chinese landscape paintings, six indicators are adopted to quantitatively measure the disparities between the two alternatives.

The evaluation indicators are specified as follows: 1) Length of primary walkways, which reflects the connectivity and accessibility of the pedestrian network; 2) Length of secondary walkways, representing the potential for exploratory walking experiences and alternative route options; 3) Number of landscape nodes, referring to spaces specially designed for sightseeing, gatherings, rest or visual transition; 4) Number of viewing platforms and pavilions, indicating the abundance of scenic stop-off points; 5) Waterfront length, measuring the extent of visitors' interaction with aquatic landscapes; 6) Number of independent functional zones, demonstrating the degree to which park functions are divided into separate districts.

All values of these indicators are extracted from the master landscape planning documents through direct measurement and manual counting. Linear metrics, including primary walkway length, secondary walkway length and waterfront length, are measured via CAD software. Quantitative count metrics, namely the number of landscape nodes, viewing platforms, pavilions and functional zones, are tallied manually based on the design drawings.

The integration of objective spatial analysis and expert assessment establishes a complementary evaluation framework and improves the reliability of the research findings.

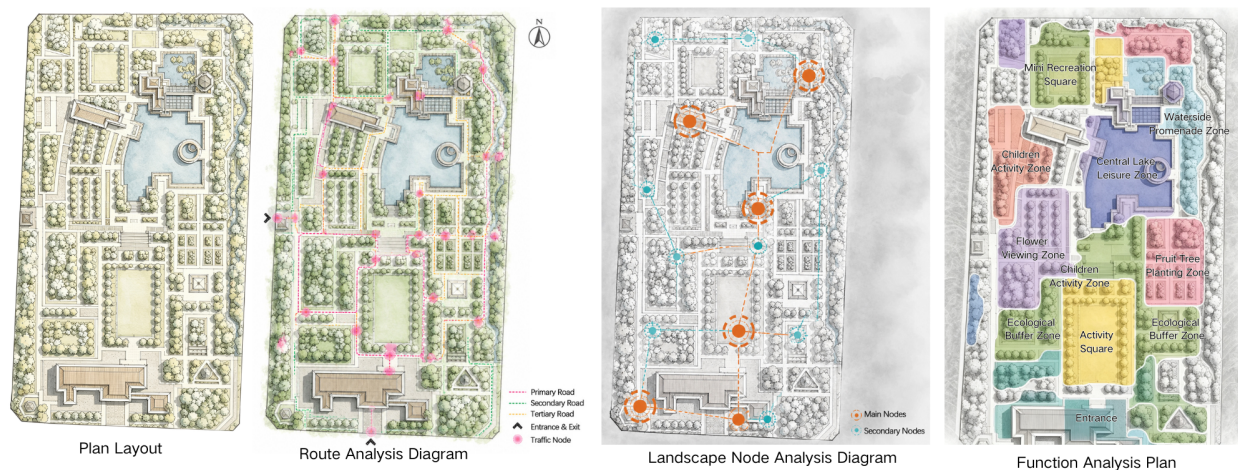


Figure 4 Original Scheme and Analysis Diagram

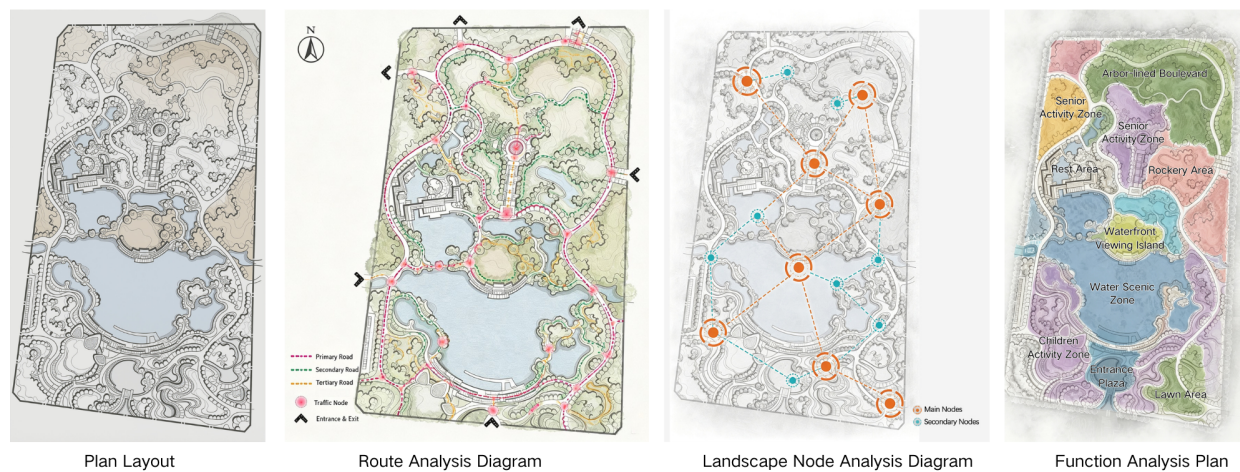


Figure 5 Proposed Design Proposal and Analysis Diagram

Results

1. Foreground Transformation

In terms of spatial composition, the foreground, middle ground, and background structures in China's landscape paintings are ingeniously referenced. The foreground elements at the entrance are densely arranged, creating a relatively narrow spatial area dominated by trees and rocks that are closely spaced and obstruct each other's views, forming continuous visual layers. The path follows the typical S-shaped route characteristic of landscape paintings, making multiple turns in the foreground and incorporating both plant and rock elements to slow the viewer's line of sight; with each turn, the scenery changes accordingly. The water bodies in the foreground are designed with winding coastlines, enhancing the sense of visual extension and creating a sense of vastness on either side of the water surface, while also contrasting with the dense, winding spatial layout of the foreground.

2. Middleground Transformation

In the landscape design of Sanqin Park, the middle ground features extensive water features, including artificial lakes, to create a sense of openness. Water surfaces dominate this zone while providing buffer space for the undulating terrain in the background. The expansive water area allows greater spacing between landscape elements and prevents visual obstruction by planting low shrubs instead of tall vegetation. With fewer elements and more open spaces, the middle ground exudes tranquility and comfort. Paths run along the riverbank with minimal turns, eliminating the need for visitors to seek directional guidance. The unobstructed view enables visitors to freely explore the surrounding scenery.

3. Background Transformation

The background space primarily features artificial hills and dense vegetation as landscape elements, extending progressively upward. The path does not run horizontally but winds around the hills, providing a clearer sense of direction. Water features are merely decorative elements positioned at the edges of the space. Numerous tall shrubs and mountain slopes create mutual obstruction, producing an illusion of infinite spatial extension in the background.

4. Overall Spatial Order Transformation

In landscape painting, space is not divided into independent fragments. Although the foreground, middle ground, and background are clearly layered, they remain continuous. The gaze flows within the picture. It is rarely abruptly interrupted. This continuous spatial order is introduced into the overall design of Sanqin Park. The park does not adopt a clear functional zoning method. Instead, terrain, water, and paths are used to naturally connect different spaces. Walking through the park, people do not feel obvious boundary changes. From the entrance, to the opening of the water surface, to the rising of space, it is more like a gradually deepening process. Rather than moving from one functional zone to another, it rejects the principles of Western functionalism, offering a stroll through a naturally formed landscape.

Paths play a role in controlling rhythm in the overall space. Where there are many turns, the space is compressed. Where the path is gentle, the space is expanded.

This variation does not emphasize axes. It does not pursue symmetry. It unfolds naturally according to site conditions.

Water plays a linking role in the overall space. It is not a single landscape node. Instead, it runs through different spatial layers. It appears at different locations. It appears at different scales. Sometimes it is prominent. Sometimes it retreats.

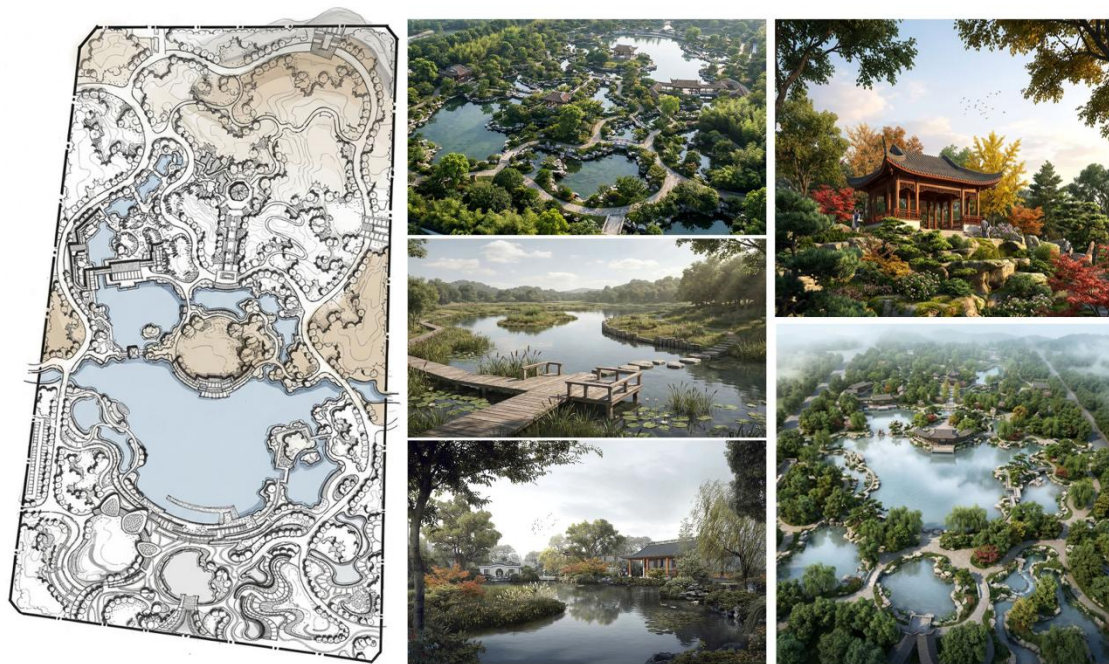


Figure 6 Sanqin Park Landscape Design Proposal

5. Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis demonstrates that the new design scheme offers a superior overall experience compared to the previous one. In the subjective evaluations conducted by five landscape architecture experts, the new park design received a score of 4.2 out of 5. All five experts unanimously agreed that the design embodies Taoist aesthetic principles and the spatial characteristics of China's landscape painting, noting that this serialized design provides a more engaging walking experience than traditional park designs. Zhang Qianting, an expert from Changzhou Tuyi Hand-painted Art & Design Co., Ltd., remarked: "The new design scheme emphasizes cultural expression without relying on superficial decorations, achieving it solely through the conceptual spatial sequence presented in the design."

Table 1 Expert Evaluation Scores for the Original Scheme and Proposed Design Proposal

Scheme	Evaluation Dimension	Expert 1: Zhang Qianting Changzhou Tuyi Hand-painted Art & Design Co., Ltd. 317297445@qq.com	Expert 2: Chen Xishan School of Fine Arts and Design, Changzhou University chenxishan@cczu.edu.cn	Expert 3 Su Wanqing School of Fine Arts and Design, Changzhou University suwanqing@cczu.edu.cn	Expert 4 Gu Mingyuan School of Architecture, Southeast University gumingyuan@seu.edu.cn	Expert 5 Zhao Qinghe College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University zhaoqinghe@tongji.edu.cn	Average Score
Sanqin Park Original Design Scheme	Cultural Expressiveness (Total 1 point)	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.42
	Spatial Coherence (Total 1 point)	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.50
	Functional Performance (Total 1 point)	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.60
	Aesthetic Quality (Total 1 point)	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.54
	User Experience Potential (Total 1 point)	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.54
	Overall Average Score (Total 5 points)	2.6					
Sanqin Park New Design Scheme	Cultural Expressiveness (Total 1 point)	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.84
	Spatial Coherence (Total 1 point)	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.90
	Functional Performance (Total 1 point)	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.84
	Aesthetic Quality (Total 1 point)	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.88
	User Experience Potential (Total 1 point)	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.74
	Overall Average Score (Total 5 points)	4.2					

In an objective evaluation, the proposed plan extends the primary walkways to 1,180 meters compared to the original Scheme. Secondary walkways are lengthened from 260 meters to 760 meters, offering a greater diversity of touring paths. This aligns perfectly with the spatial logic of traditional Chinese landscape paintings, namely "winding paths leading to secluded vistas" and "ever-changing scenery with every

step". The water interface is also extensively expanded and the waterfront shoreline is stretched from 390 meters to 870 meters, with a growth rate of 123.1% that creates abundant waterfront areas for visitors to get close to water. The number of viewing platforms and pavilions rose from 5 to 9. Visitors are provided with more spaces to pause and rest. The multi-dimensional arrangement of sightlines matches the multi-perspective viewing characteristics inherent to landscape paintings. Landscape nodes increase from 15 to 16. In the original layout, functional nodes are scattered separately within independent functional zones. By contrast, the proposed scheme connects all nodes via continuous sightseeing routes to deliver a more integrated spatial experience. The number of standalone functional zones is reduced from 12 to 9, forming a cohesive spatial structure.

Compared with the original layout, the proposed design shifts the overall spatial layout from function-oriented zoning to continuous experience-driven spatial organization, which better conforms to the spatial creation philosophy of traditional Chinese landscape paintings.

Table 2 *Objective indicators for both Original Scheme and Proposed Design Proposal*

Indicator	Original Design	Proposed Design	Change
Length of primary walkways (Meters)	820	1,180	43.90%
Length of secondary walkways (Meters)	260	760	192.30%
Number of landscape nodes (Number)	15	16	6.66%
Number of viewing platforms and pavilions (Number)	5	9	80.00%
Waterfront length (Meters)	390	870	123.10%
Number of independent functional zones (Number)	12	9	-25%

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Discussion

1.1 Influence on Spatial Experience in Urban Parks

The spatial design of modern urban parks can draw from the spatial aesthetic characteristics of traditional Chinese landscape painting. This allows space to form a unique experience. Spatial hierarchy borrows the foreground, middle ground, and background structure of landscape painting. The space gains layered changes in depth, width, and height. The space can no longer be taken in at a single glance.

At the park entrance, the space is narrow. Rocks and plants are used. The space becomes winding and varied. During walking, as the path changes, the scenery also changes. Walking itself becomes part of the experience. When entering the middle ground space, the view suddenly opens. When the water surface appears, the rhythm clearly slows. It contrasts with the compact feeling of the foreground space. Here, water not only creates a broad visual effect. It also gives the space a sense of calm. The gaze extends along the water surface. Attention is drawn away. The mood is calmed (Yang, B. & Volkman, N., 2010).

Continuing forward, the space begins to rise. Paths no longer spread in multiple directions. They wind along the terrain. People do not realize they are being guided.

They simply move upward naturally. When reaching a higher point, the entire spatial landscape can be overlooked. Overall, the park is no longer a collection of functions. Nor is it a stacking of scenic spots.

Instead, through walking, people gradually enter a spatial experience. This approach gives the park space a sense of wholeness. Even when standing in different locations, the perceived spatial relationships remain continuous. They are not fragmented and do not appear scattered (Zhou, Q. B., et al., 2013).

1.2 Response to Local Cultural Identity

Parks in cities are often used as public facilities. People enter them to walk, exercise, and rest. However, at a deeper level, they carry important functions of cultural transmission.

When the aesthetic principles of Taoist landscape painting are integrated into the park, the space ceases to be merely functional and transforms into a cultural space. This cultural space is neither symbolic nor merely decorative; rather, it stems from the inherent logic and rhythm of the space itself (Zhang, Q., 2024). visitors would experience without deliberate guidance. They follow the natural contraction, expansion, turning, and pausing of space. It is like walking into a landscape painting.

Therefore, when culture is integrated into park design, culture is not displayed. It is perceived through daily use. People who use this space every day unconsciously feel that the park resembles traditional Chinese landscape painting.

1.3 Implications for Contemporary Urban Park Design Methods

In contemporary cities, park design often faces limited scale and overlapping functions. Space is easily divided according to functional needs. Design easily becomes superficial. The spatial aesthetics of landscape painting provide a different approach for urban parks.

In design, functions are not divided first. Spatial relationships are organized first. Through the arrangement of front and back layers, multi-layered and varied spaces can still be created within limited areas. Therefore, in park design, small-scale areas can also form a complete spatial experience. This method reduces reliance on iconic landscapes. Space itself becomes the core of design. The relationships among

paths, water, and plants are more important than single scenic spots. At the level of use, this design approach is closer to everyday life. People can enter freely. Guidance is naturally completed by space itself. There is no need to understand design concepts.

For Chinese urban parks, this method has strong adaptability. It originates from the Taoist philosophy of following nature. It does not rely on specific forms. It responds to traditional aesthetics. It also adapts to modern lifestyles. It is a design method that can be transformed and used sustainably.

1.4 Comparison with Existing Research

The research conclusions of this article align with current academic trends that integrate China's traditional aesthetics and philosophical concepts into contemporary design, while also offering new extensions. Wu and Cao proposed the concept of a "landscape city," positioning it as a bridge between traditional landscape painting and modern urban planning, with a core emphasis on harmonious coexistence between humans and nature (Wu, Y. & Cao, N., 2022). This study proposes specific design methodologies and evaluates their practical effectiveness through concrete park renovation projects. Yao and Zhai noted that numerous interdisciplinary studies on spatial transformation inspired by landscape painting and landscape design remain at the theoretical level, lacking empirical validation (Yao, Z. & Zhai, Y., 2025). This article addresses this gap. Shu and Pei examined the renewal of humanistic spaces from the perspective of poetic spaces. Compared with their work, the analytical framework established in this study is more systematic (Shu, Y. & Pei, G. D., 2025). It not only translates artistic principles into actionable design guidelines but also enhances the robustness and reliability of the research methodology through a clear validation process.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

This evaluation is based on unbuilt design proposals rather than constructed parks. Since the assessment remains at the drawing stage prior to construction, feedback from real users is absent, making it difficult to verify the actual effectiveness of the schemes in real-world sites.

Furthermore, a blind evaluation mechanism was not adopted for the comparison between the original and revised designs. Judgments of assessors were subjectively influenced by their personal experience. The evaluation panel included members from the design firm, leading to discrepancies between commercial practical perspectives and impartial academic evaluation. The expert sample size was merely five participants; such a small sample fails to support statistical significance testing, which limits the generalizability of the conclusions.

In addition, the selection scope of painting samples is open to discussion. All selected traditional Chinese landscape paintings date back only to the Qing Dynasty. The limited range of dynasties and narrow pool of artists introduce bias regarding the stability of the three spatial principles identified in this study.

1.6 Recommendations for Future Research

The existing evaluation system is still plagued by subjectivity and other defects. Joint participation of actual users, sociologists and urban planners can verify the rigor of the methodology through the collision of diverse perspectives. The sampling scope of paintings also needs to be expanded. Focusing solely on Qing Dynasty landscape paintings results in an overly narrow sample base. Artworks dating back to the Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties, as well as compositions by more master painters, ought to be incorporated into the analytical framework. Only through the evolution of pictorial paradigms across historical styles can the generalizability of the three spatial principles withstand rigorous examination.

Further testing is required to confirm whether this set of design logic possesses universal applicability when applied to urban park sites of vastly different scales and complex contextual conditions.

2. Conclusion

Applying the aesthetic concepts of traditional China landscape painting to urban park design offers a novel perspective for urban park planning. The aesthetics of Chinese landscape painting does not emphasize formal imitation but focuses on exploring spatial organization and spatial experience. Analysis of spatial layers, water bodies, and pathways in landscape paintings reveals that this aesthetic system possesses distinct spatial logic (Feng, P., 2022) from foreground to background, there is an orderly structure with interwoven real and virtual spaces, where visitors are naturally guided by the space rather than relying on functional cues. In the design renovation of Sanqin Park, this spatial logic was reintegrated into the design scheme: the entrance features dense spatial elements and winding pathways, creating a visual effect of changing scenery with each step. The central water body appears expansive, forming a stark contrast with the foreground, while meandering paths run throughout the space, controlling the overall rhythm through their curvature. The park is no longer a single-function space but a medium for interaction between visitors and nature. This design philosophy transforms park space from a functional venue into a cultural space open to repeated experiences, where cultural significance no longer depends on specific symbols but becomes a perceptible spatial aesthetic experience.

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