

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Visual heritage in urban spaces: Traditional Chinese patterns as agents of cultural identity in modern landscape architecture

Bowen Sun^{1,2}  and Intan Khasumarlina Binti Mohd Khalid^{1*} ¹Department of Art, Faculty of Art, Sustainability and Creative Industry, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia²Department of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Architectural Engineering, Shanghai Zhongqiao Vocational and Technical University, Shanghai, China(This article belongs to the *Special Issue: The Immediate Historicity of Sinophone Architecture: Tracing Cultural Influence in a Postcolonial Landscape*)

Abstract

Rapid urbanization has often led to the erosion of cultural identity in cities, making the integration of traditional Chinese patterns into contemporary landscape architecture an important means of sustaining heritage and symbolism within modern urban spaces. This article investigates the integration of traditional Chinese patterns into contemporary landscape design, emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural traces within urban environments. A convergent parallel mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (case studies, interviews, and visual analysis) data collection. Survey results highlighted how people perceive cultural identity and esthetic value, while case studies and interviews provided insights into the symbolic and design purposes of traditional patterns in urban contexts. Evidence shows that traditional forms, such as geometric motifs, lotus flowers, and feng shui principles, play a major role in reinforcing cultural identity and strengthening the sense of place amid contemporary urbanization. These practices have been widely embraced by society, fostering stronger connections to cultural heritage and contributing to the creation of esthetically pleasing and functional urban spaces.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese patterns; Urbanization; Feng shui; Geometric motifs; Nature-inspired designs; Urban planning; Cultural heritage

***Corresponding author:**Intan Khasumarlina Binti Mohd Khalid
(intan@fskik.upsi.edu.my)

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1. Introduction

The rapid growth of cities over the last several decades has led to the dominance of concrete buildings, glass façades, and industrial-style architecture. While such urban development is often associated with modernization and development, it has also resulted in the erosion of cultural identities in many cities. This tendency is especially evident in landscape architecture, where projects in urban quarters frequently lose their connection to local culture, history, and collective experiences. The drive toward modernization often overshadows the historical, cultural, and social values that have shaped architectural and urban environments over centuries (Cheng *et al.*, 2017).

Landscape architecture—through the creation of parks, gardens, streetscapes, and open spaces—plays a significant role in sustaining the cultural character of cities. These spaces act as symbolic connectors to the past, preserving values, traditions, and histories of societies that once flourished there. Nevertheless, as cities evolve and expand to accommodate modern demands, they face the recurring challenge of integrating these demands with the culture or cultural heritage that gives urban centers their unique identity (Berg, 2018).

This dilemma has been particularly evident in China, where efforts to harmonize rapid urban expansion and technological development with cultural values remain ongoing. In the past years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of incorporating traditional design elements into modern cities. Landscape architecture in China has increasingly sought to ensure that cultural heritage remains embedded within contemporary urban design. With a history of more than 2500 years, Chinese landscape architecture has long embodied beliefs in harmony, balance, and cosmic order (Duan *et al.*, 2022), reflected in symbolic landscape designs that became integral to cultural expression (Ertan & Eğercioğlu, 2016).

Modern landscape architects are therefore tasked with bridging traditional designs and contemporary urban needs, preserving esthetic and symbolic values while addressing the pressures of urbanization. This article examines how traditional Chinese design patterns, such as geometrical figures, nature-oriented styles, and feng shui principles, are being reinterpreted in modern urban contexts, where they serve both esthetic and practical functions in maintaining cultural identity amid globalization (Cresswell, 2015).

In landscape architecture, patterns appear as both geometric and natural motifs, each carrying significant symbolic meaning in Chinese culture. Angular forms such as squares and circles symbolize order and unity, reflecting the relationship between earth and heaven. Likewise, poetic designs drawn from lotus flowers, bamboo, and peonies symbolize purity, resilience, and prosperity (Sheng & Buchanan, 2022). These themes deeply rooted in Chinese architecture and traditionally expressed in gardens, temples, and houses, are now adapted to contemporary urban settings.

Beyond geometric and natural-inspired designs, feng shui concepts—which guide the spatial arrangement of elements to harmonize nature and human life—have also long shaped traditional Chinese design practice (Viki & Al-Harithy, 2019). Today, designers are reconfiguring these elements to create spaces that are not only visually pleasing but also culturally resonant and functionally relevant, thereby reaffirming the role of landscape architecture in connecting tradition with modernity.

Although the use of conventional patterns in modern urban designs has often been associated with esthetics, their functional and connotative aspects should also be recognized. Traditional motifs such as the lotus flower and bamboo are not merely decorative; instead, they carry significant cultural connotations. The lotus symbolizes purity, whereas bamboo represents strength and impregnability. Incorporating these designs further fosters a sense of belonging and cultural pride among urban residents, reinforcing their connection to the historical identity of the city (Shang & Yao, 2024).

Integrating traditional patterns into urban design also serves important functional roles. As an illustration, the layout of the elements in feng shui can be applied to create harmony between humans and nature, thereby contributing to societal well-being. In today's context of increasing urban densification and mechanization, reintroducing traditional patterns can provide a “dose” of meaning, spirituality, and cultural continuity within the urban fabric, bridging the gap between past and future.

In summary, while rapid urbanization has often led to the erosion of cultural identity in many cities, landscape architecture offers a powerful means of preserving and appreciating cultural heritage. By incorporating traditional Chinese designs into modern urban landscapes, landscape architects can maintain a living connection between historical traditions and modern lifestyles. Although it remains challenging to reinterpret traditional elements in ways that are both esthetically appealing and practically applicable, doing so is essential for transmitting cultural identity to future generations.

1.1. Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to explore how traditional Chinese patterns can be incorporated into modern landscape architecture as a means of preserving cultural heritage. It examines the application of historic design principles in contemporary urban environments, focusing on their esthetic, symbolic, and functional roles. In particular, the study considers a revised perception of traditional motifs, including geometric patterns and nature symbols, as integral elements of the urban environment that contribute to shaping the cultural identity of a new generation of Chinese cities.

One of the central features of this research is the analysis of how landscape architects attempt to integrate traditional Chinese designs into modern cities. This entails an evaluation of whether traditional elements serve only as ornamental features or whether they can play a significant role in enriching urban spaces, creating environments that are not only visually appealing but also socially and

culturally meaningful. The discussion further addresses the compatibility of cultural patterns with the practical demands of contemporary urban planning, including functionality, accessibility, and sustainability.

Through these questions, this study highlights the ongoing relevance of traditional design in the rapidly evolving urban landscape of contemporary China and offers insight into how cultural heritage can be maintained in the face of globalization and urbanization.

1.2. Study significance

This study holds particular significance for cultural heritage and modern urban design, as it underscores the necessity of incorporating traditional backgrounds into the planning of modern cities. It highlights the role of landscape design in preserving local identity, especially at a time when cities are emerging and urbanizing at an unprecedented pace.

The preservation of visual heritage within urban environments contributes to bridging the present and the past while fostering pride and a sense of belonging pertinent among city residents (Viki & Al-Harithy, 2019). The integration of traditional Chinese designs not only strengthens visual identity but also enriches the social and cultural texture of the city. It also ensures that contemporary cities are not reduced to compartmentalized, uniform spaces but instead reflect distinctive historical, cultural, and philosophical values that resonate with their communities.

Moreover, this study contributes to the broader discussion on the effects of globalization on cultural diversity. In an era when architectural design is becoming increasingly universalized, it is essential to explore ways of safeguarding cultural uniqueness through thoughtful design integration. This study, along with similar studies, may serve as a blueprint for nations facing similar challenges, offering strategies for effectively incorporating traditional cultural elements into contemporary urban development.

1.3. Research problem

The research problem concerns how traditional Chinese patterns can be incorporated into the landscape architecture of modern building designs to sustain cultural identity in the face of rapid urbanization and globalization. The central challenge lies in achieving a balance between preserving traditional design elements and meeting the functional and esthetic demands of contemporary urban environments.

1.4. Research questions

The two research questions in this study are as follows:

- How do the traditional Chinese patterns in modern landscape architecture contribute to the preservation

of cultural identity in the context of globalization and urbanization?

- How do these patterns reflect Sinitic identity, hybridity, and postcolonial contestations within contemporary urban landscapes?

2. Literature review

This section examines several areas of incorporating traditional Chinese patterns into contemporary landscape architecture and their role in protecting cultural identity. The review is organized into major thematic areas: The role of traditional patterns in architectural design, the significance of cultural identity in current urban planning, emerging trends in Chinese landscape architecture, and the key challenges encountered in integrating such patterns into modern urban design.

2.1. Role of traditional patterns in architecture

Traditional patterns in China have typically included geometric motifs, nature-inspired designs, and symbolic patterns that hold significant cultural meaning. Today, these patterns serve not only as decorative elements but also as representations of ancient philosophies. Influences from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism have long been embedded in both architectural and landscape design for centuries.

2.1.1. Geometry motifs

Chinese architecture has long incorporated fundamental geometric forms, such as square, circle, and diamond, each carrying deep symbolic meaning. The square traditionally symbolizes the earth, whereas the circle signifies the heavens and the unity of all beings (Viki & Al-Harithy, 2019). These symbolic designs are evident in historic imperial palaces, temples, and gardens, and they continue to influence feng shui-inspired designs of modern cities.

2.1.2. Nature-inspired patterns

Traditional Chinese design has long drawn inspiration from natural and symbolic elements such as lotus flowers, peonies, dragons, and bamboo. Such designs were valued not only for their esthetic beauty but also for their cultural symbolism: Dragons denote strength and power, bamboo represents resilience, and the lotus embodies purity and harmony (Sheng & Buchanan, 2022). These designs were widely applied in gardens and temples, with each motif carrying meanings that reflect core Chinese values.

2.1.3. Cultural significance in traditional architecture

As demonstrated, traditional Chinese patterns play a vital role in conveying cultural identity. Researchers have noted that these patterns represent a form of visual heritage

that communicates Chinese cultural values and serves as visual landmarks within cities. By embedding such motifs, architecture is linked to ancient philosophical and cultural traditions, thereby reinforcing the connection between the built architecture and cultural history.

2.2. Traditional patterns in urban spaces

With rapid urbanization, there has been a growing interest in revitalizing traditional Chinese design concepts within contemporary urban environments. This development reflects an effort to preserve the cultural identity of cities and provides a sense of stability in urban design, countering the prevailing trend toward globalization (Jiang *et al.*, 2022).

2.2.1. Restoring cultural landscapes in city parks and gardens

A major example is the assimilation of traditional Chinese garden landscapes into contemporary parks and recreational spaces. A classical Chinese garden, characterized by meandering walkways, rockeries, and water features, continues to influence modern urban park designs. Even in cities such as Shanghai, these classical elements have been incorporated into large public spaces, such as Century Park and Jinshan City Park, where they help foster a sense of place rooted in cultural heritage (Berg, 2018). These spaces provide not only esthetic satisfaction but also spiritual rejuvenation, reflecting the Daoist philosophy of harmony between nature and humanity.

2.2.2. Architectural symbols in modern urban design

Chinese architectural patterns are increasingly being incorporated into modern city façades and infrastructure designs. A prominent example is the Beijing National Stadium, better known as the Bird's Nest, which demonstrates how cultural factors in China can be translated into contemporary designs. The use of traditional motifs, such as the hexagonal patterns integrated into the façade, reflects ancient Chinese philosophical concepts of cosmic order, which have long played a crucial role in both architecture and landscape design (Sun, 2010).

2.2.3. Public response to traditional patterns

The use of traditional patterns in urban settings can foster public acceptance of these patterns as part of the modern cityscape. Incorporating traditional Chinese elements into urban design has been shown to promote a sense of belonging and cultural pride among urban residents. Conversely, when such elements are integrated superficially or without appreciation of their cultural significance, they risk diminishing local identity and weakening the city's connection to its past (Zhou & Zhang, 2015).

2.3. Cultural identity in modern landscape architecture

In urban spaces, cultural identity plays a crucial role in the design process, particularly in societies with long and rich histories, such as China. The incorporation of traditional cultural elements into contemporary landscape architecture offers a method to preserve local identities while also accommodating the functional demands of modern urban living.

2.3.1. Sustaining cultural identity amidst globalization

In the era of globalization (Zhou & Zhang, 2015), where cities increasingly resemble one another, cultural identity has emerged as one of the most significant features in urban planning and architecture. A new pattern of modern city development in China emphasizes the integration of traditional design elements, providing a means to distinguish urban spaces from the stagnant and repetitive designs seen in cities across the world. Through this approach, Chinese cities are able to embrace and preserve their cultural identities while simultaneously participating in the global cultural discourse (T. Zhang & Lian, 2021).

2.3.2. Urbanization and cultural loss

Urbanization may be economically competent, but it often deprives people of cultural elements. In this context, landscape architecture has become an important means of maintaining cultural identity within the urban environment. Previous studies have outlined the potential of incorporating traditional design elements into urban parks, streetscapes, and public spaces to preserve local heritage and promote cultural sustainability in rapidly developing cities such as Shenzhen and Guangzhou (Li, 2016).

2.3.3. Cultural resonance in the urban spatial pattern

Traditional designs and styles have long been applied in public parks, temples, and heritage zones to evoke a sense of shared history. Nowadays, the experience of being in these public spaces is not merely esthetic; it also signifies cultural continuity. Through the strategic incorporation of Chinese patterns, these spaces can serve as sites of shared memory and expression of diverse Chinese cultural traditions (Miao, 2005).

2.4. Contemporary trends in Chinese landscape architecture

The use of traditional Chinese patterns in modern landscape design is an emerging trend, largely driven by nostalgia and a desire to preserve cultural traditions. However, this integration is not without challenges,

as landscape architects must find ways to adapt these traditional features to meet modern demands.

2.4.1. Spirit of tradition and invention

Contemporary landscape designers strive to integrate traditional Chinese elements in ways that are both modern and contextually relevant. They experiment with materials (UNESCO, 2011), spatial arrangements, and technology to reinterpret traditional Chinese elements. For example, in many Chinese urban gardens today, smart technologies are increasingly used to enhance visitor experiences, where interactive digital amenities are combined with traditional landscape features (Q. Liu & Shmelova-Nesterenko, 2023).

2.4.2. Sustainability and functionality

Another key trend is the adoption of eco-friendly materials and sustainable design in urban landscapes while maintaining traditional Chinese patterns. This trend indicates the growing emphasis on creating spaces that are not only esthetically appealing but also ecologically sustainable. Landscape architects are increasingly exploring ways to adapt traditional Chinese garden principles, such as water conservation, ecological balance, and natural beauty, into modern design practices aimed at advancing sustainability (Gao, 2016).

2.5. Research gaps

Despite the extensive literature on the use of traditional patterns in Chinese architecture, there is little research that offers a comprehensible and systematic juxtaposition of these patterns with contemporary landscape architecture in China. Studies that examine the interaction between these visual elements and contemporary design principles, particularly their role in shaping cultural identity within urban environments, remain scarce. Moreover, limited research has explored how citizens perceive the incorporation of these elements and whether such practices enhance cultural identity beyond serving as ornamental nostalgia (Wang, 2020).

To address this gap, this study employed cultural identity theories and place-making theories. Cultural identity theory guided the analysis of how traditional patterns uphold and communicate a collective sense of belonging in urban settings, while place-making theory provided a framework for examining how the integration of traditional Chinese landscape designs contributes to the construction of significant urban spaces.

2.6. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study draws upon the cultural identity theory of nationhood, place-making theory, and the concept of Sinitic identity. These theories

provide the analytical lens through which the assimilation of traditional Chinese patterns in urban landscapes is examined. By grounding the study in these theories, it deepens the understanding of how cultural signifiers, such as traditional design patterns, can preserve cultural heritage amid the contemporary influences of modernization and globalization. Specifically, cultural identity theory of nationhood and place-making theory serve as the foundational bases for analyzing the role of traditional Chinese patterns in 21st-century architecture. Together, these theories guide the interpretation of how traditional patterns contribute to the formation of a sense of place and belonging in contemporary Chinese urban contexts.

2.6.1. Cultural identity theory

The cultural identity theory helps explain how traditional Chinese patterns reaffirm cultural coherence and foster a sense of attachment to place. The embedding of such patterns in urban design serves as cultural markers through which people develop a sense of identity and pride in their surroundings (Hall, 1990). This theory emphasizes the importance of cultural symbols and practices in shaping collective identities. In this study, Chinese design patterns, including geometric motifs and nature-inspired symbols, were interpreted as visual identifiers of culture. These elements signify enduring values, such as harmony and resilience, and they play a crucial role in sustaining a sense of place amid the rapid modernization of cities.

2.6.2. Place-making theory

Place-making theory emphasizes the design of physical spaces that foster a sense of belonging and community (W. Zhang & Han, 2017). In this study, it was applied to examine how traditional Chinese design elements in landscape architecture contribute to the creation of meaningful public spaces. By integrating Chinese patterns into urban environments, place-making not only supports functional uses but also establishes spaces of historical, communal, and cultural belonging that allude to cultural continuity.

2.6.3. Visual perception theory

The visual perception theory guides the analysis of how visual codes, such as geometric motifs and nature-inspired patterns, evoke cultural emotions and embed heritage within the urban environment (Arnheim, 1974).

In summary, the conceptual apparatus of Sinitic identity emphasizes flexibility, hybridity, and postcolonial struggles in Chinese spatial cultures. This theoretical framework was applied to analyze how traditional Chinese patterns in contemporary urban spaces reflect forms of cultural bargaining. In rapidly globalizing cities, these design elements serve both as a defense against the

Westernization of culture and as a means of harmonizing with global architectural esthetics. The confrontation between tradition and modernity is thus inscribed in the hybridization of Chinese cities. Incorporating traditional Chinese patterns into urban spaces signifies a deliberate reference to historicity and cultural heritage in modern architecture. Hence, this study situated traditional Chinese patterns as sites of cultural resilience and postcolonial negotiation, thereby offering insight into how urbanization in China produces both continuities and ruptures in spatial culture. Ultimately, these patterns invite critical reflection on Sinitic identity, hybridity, and postcolonial contestations in the contemporary urban landscape.

3. Methodology

This study examined the dynamics of integrating traditional Chinese patterns into modern landscape architecture and their contribution to shaping urban cultural identity. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed to capture both the breadth and depth of the research topic through the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Z. Zhang *et al.*, 2020). The quantitative component involved assessing public perceptions through surveys, whereas the qualitative component included case studies, interviews with landscape architects, and visual analyses. Together, these methods provided a comprehensive and contextually rich understanding of the research problem.

3.1. Research method

This study adopted a descriptive mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies. This design allowed for an in-depth exploration of how traditional Chinese patterns are integrated into urban environments and how they influence cultural identity. A convergent parallel design was employed, whereby quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously to address the research objectives, but analyzed separately (Breitung & Lu, 2016). The findings from both strands were then compared and integrated, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

3.1.1. Quantitative component

Respondents from the general population were surveyed to evaluate how traditional Chinese patterns influence their perceptions of cultural identity and the esthetic value of urban spaces. The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

3.1.2. Qualitative components

Case studies, semi-structured interviews with landscape architects, and visual analyses were conducted to examine

the design practices and symbolic use of traditional Chinese patterns in urban contexts. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify key trends and generate deeper insights.

3.2. Selection criteria of case study

The urban settings in China where designers integrate traditional design patterns to complement modern urban landscapes were used as the primary case studies. These locations must represent leading urban planning projects that successfully combine traditional elements with the functional demands of modern urban life. The selection criteria comprise:

- Integration of traditional Chinese patterns: Projects that incorporate recognizable Chinese patterns, including geometric drawing (e.g., square and circle), motifs (e.g., lotus flower and bamboo), and feng shui, in their design.
- Location: Projects from three major Chinese cities that are nationally recognized for their landscape architecture, particularly in the design of parks, streets, and public places.
- Diversity of scale: Selected projects should represent a range of scales, including large urban parks and smaller-scale gardens, to capture the varied expressions and cultural impact of traditional Chinese patterns across different urban contexts.

Selected case studies included the Summer Palace in Beijing, a combination of historic garden construction patterns with modern renovation processes; Century Park in Shanghai, a modern urban park that incorporates traditional landscape elements, including water features and green roofs; and Xi'an City Wall Park, a contemporary urban park that draws directly on traditional cultural motifs, including dragons and peonies, in its design.

3.3. Data collection methods

3.3.1 Case study analysis

The case studies provided a detailed illustration of how traditional Chinese patterns are applied in the design of urban landscapes. Data were collected through field visits, photography, and the examination of architectural drawings. The analysis focused on how traditional patterns are integrated into modern urban design and how the cultural connotations they embody contribute to the identity and meaning of the city.

3.3.2. Semi-structured interviews of landscape architects

Landscape architects, urban planners, and designers who met the following criteria were interviewed: Landscapers/planners/designers who have worked on projects involving

traditional Chinese patterns. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing for open-ended responses while maintaining focus on key thematic areas (Su, 2018). These areas include:

- (i) Motivations behind introducing traditional patterns into contemporary urban projects.
- (ii) Challenges and advantages of integrating traditional design elements with contemporary urban needs.
- (iii) Public perception of these designs and their relevance to cultural identity and heritage.

3.3.3. Visual and symbolic analyses

Visual and symbolic analyses focused on the esthetic and cultural meanings embedded in traditional Chinese patterns. These analyses were guided by Y. Liu (2014) and included the following dimensions:

- (i) Geometric motifs: Forms such as squares, circles, and diamonds were examined for their symbolic meaning, including connections to harmony and the order of the universe.
- (ii) Nature-inspired patterns: Patterns including lotus flowers and bamboo were investigated in relation to their cultural significance, representing values such as purity, resilience, and harmony.
- (iii) Principles of feng shui: Feng shui was assessed as a guiding principle for spatial organization, particularly its role in shaping spatial layouts and cultivating a sense of place.

The visual interpretation adopted a qualitative approach, drawing on traditions of design analysis to investigate how these patterns communicate cultural identity. The study also considered how such symbolic renderings, when embedded in urban landscapes, become accessible to the public and reinforce cultural resonance in everyday city life.

3.3.4. Perception survey

An opinion poll was conducted with a sample of 500 participants who visit the selected urban spaces included in the case studies. The survey evaluated three key aspects (Shang & Yao, 2024):

- (i) Cultural identity and belonging: How the presence of traditional Chinese patterns influences people's sense of cultural connection and identity.
- (ii) Esthetic appreciation: Public perceptions of beauty and emotional responses to traditional design components.
- (iii) Perceived authenticity and relevance: The extent to which these traditional elements are viewed as authentic and significant within the context of contemporary urban life.

The research employed a stratified random sampling approach to ensure a broad demographic representation across variables such as age, sex, and cultural background. Survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

3.4. Data analysis

3.4.1. Qualitative analysis

For case studies, the selected projects were thematically analyzed to examine how traditional Chinese patterns are integrated into contemporary urban design. The analysis focused on the symbolic and cultural meanings of these patterns, as well as their role in shaping urban identity.

For interviews, transcripts from the interviews were coded and analyzed to identify recurring patterns related to: (i) The motivation for incorporating traditional patterns, (ii) the challenges encountered by designers, and (iii) perceptions of the general population regarding the relevance of these designs.

For visual analysis, the data were organized into themes of esthetic, symbolic, and functional elements. The analysis emphasized how these traditional patterns embody cultural connotations and contribute to the performance of public spaces.

3.4.2. Quantitative analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze survey data to identify trends in public perception. The responses were categorized into three dimensions: cultural attachment, esthetic appreciation, and perceived authenticity of traditional patterns in urban contexts. The results were presented in graphs and tables to illustrate correlations between the integration of traditional Chinese patterns and cultural identity in urban settings.

3.5. Ethics consideration

The research adhered to the established ethical standards throughout its implementation. All interview participants and survey respondents provided written informed consent. Data collected through interviews and surveys were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and protect the privacy of participants (Sun, 2010). Furthermore, the study remained sensitive to the cultural significance of the traditional design elements under discussion.

3.6. The methodological rationale

3.6.1. Case study

The practice provides contextual and comprehensive insights into the incorporation of traditional Chinese designs within contemporary urban environments. It enables the researcher to examine how these patterns

are applied in real-life settings, thereby ensuring that the findings are not only theoretically relevant but also of practical value for urban planners and designers.

3.6.2. Interviews

This type of research allows for interviews with professionals, providing first-hand insights into the design process and the obstacles encountered when incorporating cultural elements into urban environments. Such insights are valuable in bridging the gap between theory and practice.

3.6.3. Visual and symbolic analysis

The analysis of the visual form of urban spaces enables the research to identify how traditional patterns contribute to cultural continuity and placemaking within the city. This is vital for appreciating the symbolic and esthetic significance of these traditional patterns.

3.6.4. Survey

The survey of public opinions may provide insights into how residents interact with their living environments and perceive the integration of traditional elements into landscape architecture. This, in turn, sheds light on the broader social influence of landscape architecture.

4. Results

The success of this research relied on a combination of case studies, interviews with landscape architects, visual analysis of traditional Chinese patterns in urban areas, and surveys conducted among the general population. This multi-method approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how traditional Chinese patterns are integrated into modern landscape architecture, with particular attention to their role in preserving cultural identity and shaping contemporary urban design.

4.1. Case study

The case study focused on selected urban spaces in China where traditional Chinese patterns have been applied in landscape architecture. The aim was to determine the extent to which these traditional features contribute to strengthening cultural identity and to assess whether they can be effectively integrated with the requirements of contemporary urban design.

4.1.1. Case study 1: The Summer Palace in Beijing

One of the most prominent examples of integrating traditional Chinese patterns into modern urban design is the Summer Palace in Beijing. Strongly influenced by Daoist philosophy, the garden emphasizes harmonious interactions between humans and nature. The landscape

is enriched with traditional Chinese elements, including lotus ponds and geometrically shaped water bodies, each carrying symbolic meanings of spirituality, prosperity, and longevity (Table 1).

Another important way in which traditional Chinese designs have been preserved at the Summer Palace is through their incorporation into the modern restoration of the gardens. The use of circular ponds and labyrinthine pathways arranged in geometric patterns reflects symbolic meaning tied to cosmic harmony (Figure 1). These motifs remain fundamental markers of Chinese cultural identity, fostering a strong connection to the past.

A visitor survey revealed that most respondents expressed a strong sense of nostalgia and cultural pride when engaging with traditional design elements. Notably, 85% of participants suggested that the visual esthetic quality of these designs significantly shaped their perception of Chinese cultural heritage.

4.1.2. Case study 2: Century Park, Shanghai

Century Park in Shanghai is a contemporary example of Chinese public space that embodies the characteristics of traditional Chinese landscape gardens while integrating a modern style. The park is designed according to feng shui principles and incorporates traditional geometrical motifs with contemporary eco-friendly water features,

Table 1. Traditional motifs in the Summer Palace

Motif	Symbolism	Application in design
Lotus flower	Purity and harmony	Used in water features and symbolic garden design
Bamboo	Resilience and growth	Incorporated into garden pathways and fences
Geometric patterns	Cosmic harmony	Found on pond layouts, paths, and rock formations



Figure 1. Geometric pond patterns and rock formations in the Summer Palace

Source: Photo by english.beijing.gov.cn (https://english.beijing.gov.cn/travellinginbeijing/citytours/202507/t20250708_4144375.html).

such as sustainable water elements and green roofs (Figure 2 and Table 2).

The park incorporates natural pattern concepts through the use of flowering plants, bamboo groves, and rock formations that blend seamlessly with the environment and promote sustainability. By embedding traditional Chinese design principles into its urban landscape, the park becomes more than a visually pleasing space—it also serves as a spiritual retreat for visitors.

The Century Park survey revealed a high level of appreciation for the integration of traditional and modern design among visitors. Seventy-eight percent of respondents reported experiencing a sense of tranquility and continuity with traditions, even within the fast-paced urban environment, through the use of traditional thematic motifs. However, approximately one-quarter of respondents believed that these traditional elements carried an element of superficiality, as they were not fully connected to the realities of contemporary urban life.

4.1.3. Case study 3: Xi'an City Wall Park

Xi'an, a city renowned for its historic city walls, features the Xi'an City Wall Park, which seeks to harmonize traditional Chinese landscape components with contemporary design

concepts. The park incorporates symbolic elements, including dragons and peonies (Figure 3), representing power, wealth, and beauty.

The sculptural representations of dragons and the peony gardens, along with other traditional cultural motifs, are used in the park to emphasize the historic importance of Xi'an as the capital city of several Chinese dynasties. The integration of these age-old symbols with modern park features creates a balance between honoring historical heritage and meeting modern urban requirements.

Survey findings revealed that 90% of visitors to the Xi'an City Wall Park expressed positive attitudes toward the use of traditional patterns. Many respondents emphasized that such patterns fostered a sense of cultural pride and strengthened their connection to the past, particularly among those with family ties to the historic city.

4.2. Thematic findings from interviews with architects

The interviews with landscape architects and urban designers were particularly valuable, as they provided detailed insights into the design process and the challenges encountered in incorporating traditional Chinese patterns into modern urban landscapes.

4.2.1. Motivations of designers in applying traditional Chinese patterns

Most architects emphasized that their primary motivation for introducing traditional Chinese patterns into modern urban environments was to respect cultural heritage while simultaneously meeting contemporary functional needs. According to landscape architects, the incorporation of symbols such as bamboo, lotus flowers, and dragon motifs provides urban landscapes with a distinct cultural identity, preventing them from appearing detached from local history. Examples of the responses are:

Table 2. Symbolic traditional elements in Century Park, Shanghai

Element	Symbolism	Purpose in the modern landscape
Bamboo	Resilience and flexibility	Used to frame walkways, creating a serene atmosphere
Lotus flowers	Purity and beauty	Integrated in ponds, symbolizing cultural depth
Water features	Prosperity and renewal	Represents the flow of energy, influenced by feng shui principles



Figure 2. Traditional Chinese design in Century Park, Shanghai. (A) Interactive water features. (B) Traditional motifs.

Source: Photos (A) obtained from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Century_Park_%28Shanghai%29#/media/File:Century_Park_Shanghai_fishing.jpg. (B) By julianne.hide/Shutterstock.com (https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/late-evening-one-streets-yokohama-chinatown-698446498?irclid=VPySmMzURxycWef13bwMbwNmUkpzu2wMq2i1VA0&irgwc=1&pl=77643-108110&utm_medium=Affiliate&utm_campaign=TinEye&utm_source=77643&utm_term=&utm_content=108110).



Figure 3. A tulip garden in Xi'an City Wall Park

Source: Photo obtained from https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g298557-d1801468-Reviews-Xi_an_Botanical_Garden-Xi_an_Shaanxi.html.

The designs are not ornamental only; they are the ideology and belong to it. These allow us to make sure that contemporary cities still have the Chinese soul. (Landscape architect, Beijing).

The fact that traditional designs, such as feng shui, are regarded as a bridge between the past and the future can be considered to be one of the reasons why it is highly regarded. They provide an urban environment with continuity and harmony. (Urban designer, Shanghai).

4.2.2. Obstacles to the designers

Despite enthusiasm for fusing traditional Chinese designs into modern urban landscapes, designers encountered several challenges. The common barrier was striking a balance between the esthetic requirements of contemporary urban environments and the spiritual or symbolic meanings embedded in traditional patterns. The identified challenges include:

- (i) Modernization: The integration of traditional patterns into contemporary applications often presents a major challenge, as it risks distorting or diluting the original meaning of the motifs. Many traditional motifs are sensitive to interpretation, and adapting them to meet functional needs can degrade their cultural or spiritual significance.
- (ii) Urban context: In highly urbanized settings, designers frequently struggle to preserve the authenticity of traditional designs while simultaneously addressing the demands of efficiency and space limitations.

4.2.3. Intentions of the design and public consultation

According to the architects, the proper integration of traditional elements requires substantial knowledge of cultural values and how these values resonate with community members. They noted that the most effective use of traditional patterns can revitalize people's connection to their heritage. This perspective is further supported by the survey findings from the visitors to the Xi'an City Wall Park, as discussed earlier.

4.3. Visual analysis of traditional Chinese patterns in urban spaces

The image interpretation focused on how traditional Chinese patterns are incorporated into urban landscapes. The analysis examined elements such as geometric shapes, water features, and symbolic representations to understand how they contribute to the cultural identity of urban spaces.

4.3.1. Geometric and nature-inspired motifs

Geometric motifs, such as squares, circles, and diamonds, appeared in various public spaces as symbols of balance and cosmic order. Such patterns were commonly

integrated into paved roads, gardens, and building façades, strengthening the symbolic connection between nature and human settlement.

Nature-inspired patterns, such as lotus flowers and bamboo motifs (Figure 4), were incorporated into fountains, sculptures, and gardens, representing purity, strength, and growth. These features not only evoke traditional esthetics but also address the spatial demands of contemporary urban environments.

4.3.2. Integration with modern urban elements

Traditional Chinese elements, including dragon sculptures and peony motifs, were often incorporated into contemporary urban features, such as LED-based lighting systems, interactive fountains, and intelligent landscaping technologies (Table 3 and Figure 5). This balance between the new and the old preserved cultural authenticity while adapting to modern functional needs.

4.3.3. Visual impact on cultural identity

Traditional Chinese elements, such as dragon sculptures and peony patterns, were often combined with contemporary urban features, such as LED lighting, interactive water fountains, and smart irrigation systems. This integration allowed for the preservation of cultural identity while simultaneously meeting the functional demands of modern urban environments.



Figure 4. Image showing lotus flowers and bamboo motifs integrated into urban spaces

Source: Photo obtained from <https://www.tripstoshanghai.com/attractions/show/shanghai-century-park.htm>.

Table 3. Examples of the integration of traditional Chinese design elements into modern urban features

Traditional design element	Modern urban feature	Purpose/impact
Lotus flower motif	Digital water displays	Enhances cultural symbolism with interactive engagement
Dragon sculpture	Smart lighting	Combines symbolic meaning with modern technology
Bamboo groves	Eco-friendly green roofs	Merges traditional elements with sustainability



Figure 5. Traditional Chinese patterns in urban spaces
Source: Image by Sinan Ozen (<https://illustrarch.com/articles/architectural-sustainability/45656-bamboo-the-green-guardian-of-architecture.html>).

4.4. Survey results: Public perception of traditional Chinese patterns in urban spaces

A survey was conducted with 500 visitors to the urban spaces featured in the case studies. The survey focused on public perceptions of the incorporation of traditional Chinese patterns into modern landscapes.

4.4.1. General findings

The general findings of the survey are as follows (Table 4 and Figure 6):

- Cultural identity: 88% of respondents reported feeling a stronger connection to Chinese heritage when engaging with spaces that incorporated traditional motifs.
- Esthetic appeal: 76% of respondents agreed that traditional patterns enhanced the visual appeal and uniqueness of the spaces.
- Nostalgia: 65% of respondents associated these designs with nostalgia and an emotional connection to their cultural roots.

4.4.2. Challenges in public perception

For superficiality, 22% of respondents believed that the integration of traditional patterns was somewhat superficial and did not fully convey the deeper meanings of the patterns. This highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing esthetic appeal and the depth of cultural symbolism.

Overall, the findings of this research indicate that traditional Chinese patterns in modern urban areas play a significant role in preserving cultural identity and fostering a connection to cultural heritage. The case

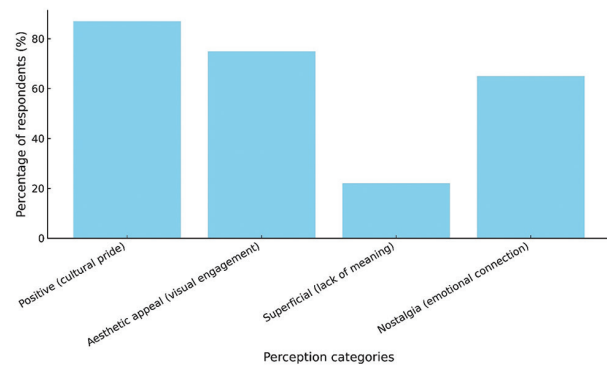


Figure 6. Public perceptions of traditional Chinese patterns in urban spaces
Source: Graph by the authors.

Table 4. Survey results

Perception	Percentage of respondents (%)
Positive (cultural pride)	88
Esthetic appeal (visual engagement)	76
Superficial (lack of meaning)	22
Nostalgia (emotional connection)	65

studies, interviews, and visual analyses demonstrate that these patterns play a role in place-making, imbuing spaces with historical and symbolic significance. Despite obstacles, including ensuring authenticity and shaping public perception, the incorporation of traditional Chinese patterns remains an invaluable strategy for maintaining cultural continuity within contemporary urban landscapes.

5. Discussion

The results from the case studies, interviews, visual analysis, and public surveys provide a clear understanding of how traditional Chinese patterns are incorporated into modern landscape architecture and how this integration helps preserve cultural identity in urban environments. In this discussion, the implications of these findings are explored, focusing on the benefits, challenges, and cultural values of incorporating traditional Chinese patterns into modern urban designs.

5.1. The role of Chinese traditional patterns in cultural identity

Among the most notable results of this research is the strong connection between traditional patterns and the cultural identity of urban spaces. The results from surveys and case studies clearly demonstrate that the incorporation of traditional Chinese patterns into contemporary landscape design helps maintain cultural continuity and fosters a sense of belonging among urban residents (Q. Liu & Shmelova-Nesterenko, 2023).

The incorporation of geometric designs, such as circles and squares, and nature-inspired symbols, such as lotus flowers and bamboo, in parks, avenues, and other urban areas strengthens the historical and cultural narrative of the city. These traditional components not only enhance esthetic appeal, as observed in the Summer Palace and Xi'an City Wall Park, but also convey deeper psychological and philosophical cultural values.

The consistent use of symbolic motifs—such as the lotus flower for purity, the dragon for strength, and bamboo for resilience—demonstrates that these motifs retain the core values of Chinese culture. By preserving these features in urban settings, cities maintain a visual link to their past, fostering a shared cultural identity among residents, even amidst rapid urbanization.

The survey findings further indicate that these patterns evoke a sense of pride and cultural belonging. Specifically, 88% of respondents reported feeling more connected to their cultural heritage when engaging with spaces incorporating traditional patterns. This confirms that traditional elements in contemporary cities can be powerful, emotive markers of cultural identity.

However, not all responses were entirely positive. While many appreciated the esthetic and cultural impact of such patterns, 22% of participants believed that the incorporation of traditional elements was superficial and disconnected from the broader urban landscape (Jie *et al.*, 2024). This suggests that visual heritage alone may not fully convey cultural authenticity and richness. It underscores the importance of ensuring that the symbolism and significance of traditional patterns are clearly understood and valued not only by designers but also by the general public.

5.2. Integration of traditional patterns with modern design needs

Both the case studies and interviews with architects revealed that introducing traditional Chinese patterns into contemporary urban landscapes presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, such traditional patterns contribute distinctive esthetic value, enriching the cultural and visual diversity of urban design. On the other hand, architects and designers must carefully harmonize such designs with the practical requirements of contemporary cities.

The visual assessment of urban environments, such as Century Park in Shanghai and the Summer Palace in Beijing, reveals the role of traditional patterns—whether geometric or nature-inspired—in enhancing the esthetic value of urban spaces. These patterns are not mere ornaments but are deeply connected to the history and

philosophical principles of Chinese culture. Incorporating these traditional designs into contemporary architecture ensures that cities reflect local cultural identity rather than conforming to the uniformity observed in numerous cities worldwide (Zuo *et al.*, 2022).

Traditional patterns remain a bridge to the past, yet they must also meet the practical demands of contemporary urban settings. Architects often face the challenge of adapting these traditional elements to contemporary functionality. For example, in Century Park, classical garden design concepts were transformed to accommodate modern functions, such as smart water systems and green roofs. This integration of sustainability and cultural heritage demonstrates how modern urban necessities can be adopted alongside existing traditional patterns when designers apply creativity and innovation.

Another challenge identified by architects and urban designers is the simplification of traditional patterns. Many traditional patterns are highly detailed and symbolic, and adapting them to modern environments can risk diluting their cultural meaning. For example, feng shui arrangements or dragon designs may be modified due to spatial or financial constraints. Interviews with designers highlighted the importance of maintaining the integrity of these cultural symbols while adapting them to contemporary urban use (Cheng *et al.*, 2017).

5.3. Public perception and cultural sensitivity

The survey indicated a strong public interest in urban places incorporating traditional Chinese patterns, with most respondents associating these patterns with regional cultural heritage. However, about one-fifth of respondents perceived such elements as somewhat superficial, highlighting a gap between the visual appeal of the designs and their deeper cultural meaning.

This divergence in perception is a critical factor for urban designers. While esthetic appeal is important, the emotional and cultural connections evoked by traditional patterns cannot be overlooked. The success of traditional patterns in urban environments depends not only on their visual appearance but also on their ability to effectively communicate cultural values to the community.

5.3.1. Cultural sensitivity in urban design

The results also underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity in landscape design. Designers must not only preserve traditional patterns but also integrate them thoughtfully into contemporary urban life. Achieving a balance between appealing to modern sensibilities and retaining the symbolic and cultural significance of these patterns is essential (Hu *et al.*, 2021).

5.3.2. Inclusive urban design

Another important factor is the inclusivity of urban areas. The integration of traditional Chinese designs should ensure that the diverse demographics of contemporary cities are considered. In cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, where people from various regional and cultural backgrounds converge, it is essential to create spaces that are open and accessible to all, without privileging any particular group. This inclusiveness is central to this generation of urban environments, reflecting the cultural diversity of contemporary cities.

5.4. Future directions for integrating traditional patterns into modern urban design

There are several future implications from the findings in this study. As cities continue to grow, the need for more delicate and balanced urban design becomes increasingly critical. The study established that while traditional patterns provide a strong basis for preserving cultural heritage, the current trend is to integrate them with contemporary requirements such as sustainability, accessibility, and digital technology.

One promising avenue for future research and design is the use of digital tools to enhance traditional landscape architecture. As cities adopt smart technologies, traditional patterns can be integrated into interactive installations, augmented reality experiences, or even smart gardens. This approach could enrich user experiences while keeping traditional Chinese motifs alive in innovative ways.

In the context of growing environmental challenges, traditional Chinese design principles offer valuable lessons for sustainable urban planning. Techniques from classical Chinese gardens, such as feng shui principles and sustainable water management, demonstrate the balance between humans and nature and can inform the development of environmentally conscious cities in the future.

5.5. Limitations of the study

Although this research provides valuable insights into how traditional Chinese patterns have been integrated into contemporary urban design, it has some limitations. The case studies and interviews were conducted with a relatively small sample, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand to a wider range of case studies across different regions in China and other countries where Chinese cultural influence is prominent.

In addition, future studies could examine the lasting impact of traditional patterns on the cultural identity of urban residents. Research could also explore the effectiveness of digital technologies in reinforcing traditional design features within urban landscapes.

In summary, the adoption of traditional Chinese patterns in modern urban areas is significant for preserving cultural heritage while accommodating contemporary urban planning requirements. The study highlights the symbolic and esthetic values of these patterns and their capacity to foster a sense of belonging and cultural pride among city dwellers. However, challenges remain regarding authenticity, functionality, and public perception. Future urban planning should emphasize innovation, sustainability, and cultural sensitivity to achieve a balanced integration of tradition, modernity, and livable city environments.

6. Conclusion

The research highlights the significant role of traditional Chinese patterns in modern landscape architecture, particularly in preserving cultural identity and fostering a renewed sense of place within urban settings. The findings indicate that incorporating traditional features, such as geometric shapes, nature-inspired patterns, and feng shui principles, can strengthen the connection between contemporary urban spaces and their cultural heritage. Such components not only enhance the esthetic quality of the spaces but also serve as enduring symbols of cultural continuity amid rapid urbanization.

Survey findings further show that people highly value these traditional patterns, with most respondents reporting a sense of pride and belonging when engaging with urban spaces that feature them. Nevertheless, challenges remain in preserving the authenticity of cultural motifs while meeting the functional requirements of contemporary urban settings. The study highlights the need for further research on effective strategies for incorporating traditional elements into urban planning, particularly in consideration of sustainability and global architectural trends.

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Author contributions

Conceptualization: Bowen Sun

Investigation: Bowen Sun

Methodology: Bowen Sun

Writing – original draft: Bowen Sun

Writing – review & editing: Intan Khasumarlina Binti Mohd Khalid

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Ethics approval was not required for this study.

Consent for publication

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Availability of data

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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