

# From Traditional Gardens to Modern Parks: The Historical Evolution of Urban Green Space in China

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to explore the historical evolution of urban green space in China from traditional gardens to modern parks, and reveal the changes in the relationship between man and nature reflected in this process by analyzing the cultural foundation, social changes and design concept changes behind it. As the carrier of the spiritual life of ancient Chinese literati, the traditional garden was deeply influenced by the philosophy of Confucianism and Taoism, emphasizing the design principle of "although it is made by man, it is easier than nature", and pursuing the harmonious unity of artificial and natural. With the change of modern social structure and the introduction of western garden concepts, traditional private gardens have gradually transformed into public open Spaces. The development of civil society has spawned the demand for public green Spaces and prompted the birth of modern parks. In modern society, parks not only assume the function of recreation, but also become an important place for environmental protection, education and science popularization, and integrate modern concepts such as sustainable development and participatory design. At last, the paper summarizes the core value of the evolution from traditional garden to modern park, that is, the harmonious coexistence between man and nature. At the same time, it looks forward to how urban green space in China can inherit the traditional wisdom and meet the needs of the contemporary people under the background of globalization. This paper hopes to provide a new perspective for understanding the process of Chinese cultural inheritance and modernization through the study of the historical evolution of urban green space in China.

## 1. Introduction

The development process of China's urban green space is not only the epitome of the country's transformation from a traditional agricultural society to a modern industrial society, but also an important part of its cultural inheritance and modernization process. As one of the important elements of traditional Chinese culture, garden art has experienced a long historical evolution [1]. From the elaborate private gardens of ancient scholar-officials to the popularization and opening of modern urban parks, this change is not only a change in form, but also reflects people's understanding of nature, life and public space in different periods. It is of great academic value and social significance to study the historical evolution of urban green space in China [2,3]. First of all, it helps us to understand the cultural connotation of traditional Chinese gardens and their continuation and development in modern society. Secondly, through comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between traditional gardens and modern parks, it can provide historical experience reference for current urban planning. Finally, exploring this process plays an important role in deepening the understanding of the relationship between man and nature. Especially in today's increasingly prominent global environmental problems, how to build urban green space that meets both ecological requirements and human spiritual needs has become a topic worth thinking about.

The purpose of this paper is to sort out and explain the process of Chinese urban green space from traditional garden to modern park, and explore the changes of cultural value and social function contained in it. We will use the method of literature review, review the relevant research materials on

Chinese traditional gardens and modern parks, and analyze the main stages of urban green space development in China from the perspectives of philosophy, aesthetics, sociology and other disciplines, and try to reveal the socio-economic factors and ideological changes behind these changes. In addition, this paper will also focus on the evolution of green space design principles, as well as people's attitudes and ways of using nature in different historical periods, so as to present readers with a comprehensive picture of the development of urban green space in China.

## **2. The cultural foundation of traditional garden**

### **2.1 The concept of traditional garden and its philosophical foundation**

Traditional garden is an important part of the spiritual life of ancient Chinese literati. It is not only an artistic expression of material form, but also carries profound cultural connotation and philosophical thoughts [4]. In traditional Chinese culture, the garden is regarded as the embodiment of the ideal state of "harmony between heaven and man" and the place where people pursue peace of mind and harmony of nature. Influenced by traditional culture, Chinese traditional gardens mainly present three philosophical schools: First, Confucianism advocates "Leshan for the benevolent and water for the wise", emphasizing the affinity between man and nature [5,6]. Under the influence of this thought, the garden design pays attention to the imitation and reproduction of the natural landscape, and creates an environment that can be devoted to the landscape and cultivate one's self through artificial means. Garden is not only a space for living, but also a metaphorical place for self-cultivation, family harmony, state governance and world peace. Second, Taoism advocates conforming to nature and ruling without doing anything, and believes that the best art is to blend into nature without any trace [7]. Influenced by this, the traditional Chinese garden pursues the beauty of nature, emphasizing that "although it is made by man, it is easier than nature". Designers try to create infinite changes in the limited space of the natural scene, so that people can feel the universe in the grand and mysterious, to achieve physical and mental relaxation, forget the realm. 3. After Buddhism was introduced into China, especially the development of Zen, the cultural connotation of gardens was further enriched [8]. The quiet atmosphere and natural scenery in the garden make it an ideal choice for practitioners to meditate. The design of the garden also absorbs elements of Buddhist and Zen culture, such as winding paths, every stone and every wood has spirituality, etc., expressing a deep understanding of life and nature.

### **2.2 Principles of traditional garden designs**

The design of traditional garden is not only for visual beauty, but more importantly, to convey a way of life and aesthetic taste. The following are several key design principles: 1. Borrowing landscape and barrier landscape. "Borrowing landscape" refers to the use of the natural scenery or cultural landscape outside the garden as part of the garden to introduce the distant beauty into the garden; "Barrier scenery" refers to the intentional setting of obstacles to guide the line of sight and create a different effect [9]. These two techniques reflect the pursuit of spatial hierarchy in traditional Chinese gardens, so that small Spaces can also show the big world. 2. The combination of virtuality and reality is often adopted in garden design, such as the use of empty Windows, leaky Windows and other elements, which not only maintain a certain degree of privacy, but also allow light and scenery to penetrate, increasing the mobility and interest of the space [10]. In addition, the arrangement of water bodies and plants often follows this principle, forming a contrast between static and dynamic, and enhancing the artistic appeal of the garden. 3. With the integration of landscape poetry and painting, traditional Chinese gardens are deeply influenced by painting art, especially landscape painting [11]. The elements such as rocks, flowing water, flowers and trees in the garden are often arranged according to the painting theory, and strive to create a three-dimensional landscape painting. The garden is not only the object of viewing, but also the carrier for people to travel in it and experience the poetic landscape. 4. Symbolic meaning: Each garden element may contain specific cultural symbols or symbolic meanings. For example, pine, bamboo and plum are called "the three friends of the cold year", representing the spirit of perseverance; Pavilions are often endowed with a secluded and elegant life [12]. These symbolic expressions deepen the cultural heritage of the garden and make it an

important medium for inheriting Chinese civilization.

To sum up, Chinese traditional garden is not only a skill, but also a crystallization of culture. It reflects the ancient people's understanding and respect for nature, as well as their desire to pursue spiritual freedom and harmonious life. With the development of The Times and social changes, although the form of garden has changed, its core value - that is, the concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature - still has far-reaching significance and continues to influence the design and development of modern urban green space.

### **3. The change of urban green space in the modern transformation period**

#### **3.1 The impact of social change on gardenst**

With the profound changes of Chinese social structure from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, the functions and properties of traditional gardens also underwent significant changes. During this period, China was undergoing a transition from a feudal monarchy to a republican regime, and the influx of Western thought and culture brought new values and social systems. In this context, the garden was no longer just a spiritual paradise for a few scholar-officials, but began to gradually open to the society and become a part of the public space. The government of the late Qing Dynasty was corrupt and incompetent, and faced with internal troubles and foreign attacks, it was forced to carry out a series of reform attempts, such as the Westernization Movement and the Hundred Days' Reform. These efforts failed to save the Qing Dynasty, but they did promote the spread of new ideas and the loosening of social structures. The Revolution of 1911 overthrew the autocratic monarchy of more than two thousand years and established the Republic of China, which marked a new historical stage for China. In this process, the traditional hierarchy gradually disintegrates, the citizen class rises, and the demand for public leisure space grows.

Western powers obtained many privileges in China through unequal treaties, including the establishment of concessions. In these areas, Western-style parks became a way to showcase colonial culture. At the same time, some intellectuals who have studied overseas have brought back the ideas and techniques of modern urban planning, and they advocate the establishment of public green Spaces to improve the quality of the urban environment and the quality of life of residents. This concept fits in with the idea of "harmony between nature and man" in traditional Chinese culture, prompting people to rethink the relationship between man and nature and explore the way of harmonious coexistence between them.

#### **3.2 The awakening of public space consciousness**

Since modern times, with the development of social economy and the enhancement of individual rights awareness, the public's demand for open and shared urban green space has become more and more intense. This change is not only reflected in the increase in quantity, but also in the diversified development of nature and function.

Early public parks were mostly established by foreigners in areas under their control, with the aim of providing expats with a home-like living environment. Over time, however, similar attempts began to appear in China itself, such as Shanghai's Huangpu Park (formerly known as "Public Garden"), which was one of the first public green Spaces in China to be opened to ordinary people. The construction of such parks marks an important step in the transformation of traditional Chinese private gardens into modern public green Spaces.

The acceleration of modern urbanization and the increase of population density led to overcrowded living conditions. In order to relieve the pressure and improve the health level of citizens, the government and all sectors of society have attached importance to the construction and maintenance of urban green space. As a place of public activity, the park provides outdoor recreation space for citizens, but also becomes an ideal place to hold a variety of social, cultural and sports activities. In addition, the park also carries a certain social and educational function, passing on historical and cultural information through sculptures, monuments and other forms, enhancing the sense of national identity and cohesion. In modern society, the nature of gardens has undergone fundamental changes:

first, the service objects have changed. Traditional private gardens are mainly for aristocrats, officials and scholars, with strong closed and exclusive nature; On the other hand, public parks are open to all citizens, which reflects the principle of more democracy and equality. Private garden more reflects the owner's personal taste and life ideal, is a place of cultivation; In contrast, public parks assume more social responsibilities, such as promoting public health, enhancing social exchanges, and spreading civilized knowledge. The second is the change of design concept. Although both private gardens and public gardens emphasize natural beauty, the design of public parks often pays more attention to practicality, accessibility and inclusiveness, and strives to meet the needs of different age groups. At the same time, the planning also integrates modern landscape design theory, such as zoning layout, facilities, etc., in order to adapt to the fast-paced lifestyle of modern society.

#### **4. Formation and development of modern park**

##### **4.1 Functional expansion of the modern park**

As an important part of urban green space, the function of modern park has far exceeded the recreational role provided by traditional garden. With the development of social economy and the change of people's lifestyle, modern parks are playing an increasingly important role in environmental protection, education and science popularization. In the context of rapid urbanization, modern parks have become an indispensable part of the urban ecosystem. They not only provide fresh air and a pleasant environment for citizens, but also help mitigate the urban heat island effect and protect biodiversity. Through reasonable plant allocation and water management, the park can conserve water sources and purify water quality, thus improving the ecological environment quality of the whole city. Modern parks are not only the display window of natural landscape, but also the ideal place for environmental education and social and cultural exchanges. Many parks have a special exhibition hall or interpretation board, introducing the knowledge of local flora and fauna and the importance of ecological conservation; At the same time, various themed activities, such as tree Planting Day activities and bird watching Day, are held regularly to enhance public awareness of environmental protection. In addition, the park can also become a new carrier for the inheritance of traditional culture, showing local characteristics through architectural style, sculpture art and other forms to promote the spread and development of culture. In addition to providing recreation, modern parks also play a role in promoting community cohesion and social harmony. The open layout of the park makes it an inclusive and accessible public space where people from different backgrounds can interact freely and enhance mutual understanding and trust. The facilities in the park, such as sports venues and children's play areas, also provide convenient conditions for family gatherings and friends to meet, further enriching the life experience of the public.

##### **4.2 The renewal of the design concept**

The design of modern parks is no longer limited to the traditional aesthetic pursuit, but pays more attention to sustainable development, humanized design and the application of science and technology, and strives to create an urban green space that meets both ecological requirements and human spiritual needs. The concept of sustainable development runs through the whole process of modern park planning. From site selection to construction to post-maintenance, every link takes into account the effective use of resources and the minimization of environmental impact. For example, the use of native plants to reduce irrigation needs, the use of renewable materials to reduce carbon emissions, and the implementation of rainwater harvesting systems to improve water utilization will ensure the long-term stability of the park and continue to bring positive benefits to the city. Modern parks emphasize public participation and encourage residents to participate in the design, construction and management of parks. By organizing hearings and questionnaires to collect public opinions, the final plan is closer to the actual needs; At the same time, invite professional guidance to ensure scientific and professional. This "bottom-up" approach not only enhances the transparency and credibility of the project, but also helps foster a sense of responsibility and belonging among citizens. With the progress of information technology, modern parks begin to explore new ways of intelligent

management and personalized service. For example, the use of Internet of Things technology to achieve remote monitoring and fault warning of facilities and equipment in the park; With the help of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and other emerging technologies, create an immersive tour experience, so that visitors can better feel the beauty of nature; It can even predict the flow trend through big data analysis, optimize the traffic dredging plan, and improve the comfort level of the park.

## 5. Conclusion

Through the research of *From Traditional Garden to Modern Park: The Historical Evolution of Urban green Space in China*, we review the transformation process of urban green space from ancient private garden to modern public green space. This process is not only a change in form, but also a reflection of profound changes in social structure, cultural concepts and the relationship between man and nature. Although the form and function have changed dramatically, the core value that has always permeated China's urban green space development - the concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature - has never changed. Whether it is the pursuit of landscape poetry and painting in ancient gardens, or the emphasis on ecological protection and environmental education in modern parks, it reflects the Chinese people's appreciation of the beauty of nature and their sense of responsibility to maintain ecological balance. This core value is not only an important part of traditional Chinese culture, but also provides a valuable guiding principle for contemporary urban construction. Under the background of globalization, the development of urban green space in China is facing new opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, with the acceleration of the urbanization process, how to create more high-quality green space in the limited urban space is an urgent problem to be solved; On the other hand, in the face of environmental problems such as global climate change, parks, as part of the urban ecosystem, should play a greater role. In addition, technological progress has brought infinite possibilities for park management and visitor experience, such as the application of intelligent management systems and immersive Tours brought by virtual reality technology. In order to achieve the above goals, the future urban green space construction needs to do the following: 1. Inherit the traditional wisdom: continue to explore and carry forward the cultural essence of traditional Chinese gardens, combine classical aesthetics with modern design concepts, and create urban green space with Chinese characteristics. 2. Meet contemporary needs: Fully consider the lifestyle and social needs of modern people, create multi-functional, multi-level public green space, and make it an ideal place for people's recreation, learning and communication. 3. Promote sustainable development: adhere to the principle of ecological priority, adopt scientific and reasonable planning methods and technical means to ensure that the park can provide good recreation experience while protecting the environment. 4. Strengthen international cooperation: Learn from foreign advanced experience and technology, actively participate in international exchanges and cooperation, jointly cope with global environmental challenges, and promote the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. It is hoped that in the future development, China's urban green space can better inherit the traditional wisdom, adapt to the needs of The Times, and make greater contributions to the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature.

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