

The Protection and Development Utilization of Architectural Paintings in Beijing's Imperial Gardens

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Abstract: The history of traditional architectural painting in ancient China is long and storied. Its existence not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of buildings but also serves to protect and extend the lifespan of wooden structures. The Ming and Qing dynasties represent the pinnacle of architectural painting development, during which the variety of paintings became more diverse, and the craftsmanship reached unprecedented heights. This paper primarily focuses on the major imperial gardens in the Beijing area during the Ming and Qing periods, analyzing the relationship between architectural paintings and garden structures, exploring their cultural significance and social value. Based on the achievements and issues revealed during their preservation, the paper offers insights and recommendations for the revitalization and utilization of related cultural heritage.

Keywords: Architectural Painting; Imperial Garden; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Cultural Heritage Preservation and Utilization.

1. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage is one of the most dynamic and vital components of human cultural diversity. It is the crystallization of human civilization and a precious shared asset, bearing not only the wisdom and the glorious history of humanity but also serving as a manifestation of the world's cultural diversity. Architectural painting, specifically Beijing architectural painting, was included in China's fifth batch of the National Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2021. As one of the traditional art forms within intangible cultural heritage, it holds multifaceted value in terms of history, art, science, culture, and society [1]. Architectural painting emerged alongside the development of wooden structures and has been passed down through a long history of evolution. Particularly during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the patterns and use of colors in painting became more institutionalized and detailed. The primary colors used were blue, green, and red, complemented by other hues such as yellow and white. Combined with a variety of patterns inherited from the Song Dynasty, these elements formed the resplendent beam and bracket paintings that visitors can admire today. These vibrant and intricately patterned decorations adorned palaces, gardens, and temples of the time, providing them with rich and colorful architectural embellishments.

As an intangible cultural heritage that is intrinsically linked to immovable cultural relics, its inheritance and preservation involve multiple fields and disciplines, including architecture, materials, history, and cultural relic restoration. It is evident that the protection and utilization of architectural painting require coordinated collaboration across various disciplines and departments to achieve effective outcomes.

2. The Connection Between Architectural Painting and Royal Gardens

In a general sense, a garden refers to a manmade recreational environment created by transforming the original natural landscape within a specific area through various techniques and methods. This includes altering terrain, planting trees and flowers, constructing buildings, and designing pathways. Gardens use elements such as water, mountains, plants, and structures to highlight human-centered spiritual culture, reflecting the harmonious unity between humans and nature. As the pinnacle of garden art and culture, royal gardens not only represent the aesthetic and horticultural craftsmanship of their time and region but also embody the cultural values and spiritual essence of society and the nation.

2.1. The Essence of Architectural Painting

The history of architectural painting can be traced back to the pre-Qin period. During this time, the form of painting involved applying corresponding colors or simple patterns to different components of buildings. However, even in this early stage, architectural painting began to reflect initial notions of hierarchy. With the influence of foreign cultures and religions in later periods, a greater variety of decorative patterns emerged, and the techniques and use of colors became more refined and standardized. By the Song and Yuan dynasties, the maturation of construction techniques and the elevation of artistic aesthetics led to more detailed standards for the patterns and color combinations used in architectural painting. By the Ming and Qing dynasties, with the mining and use of mineral pigments and the standardization of ancient Chinese architectural systems, the corresponding painting patterns and color applications became even more regulated and standardized (Table 1.) [2].

Table 1. The historical evolution and characteristics of architectural painting development.

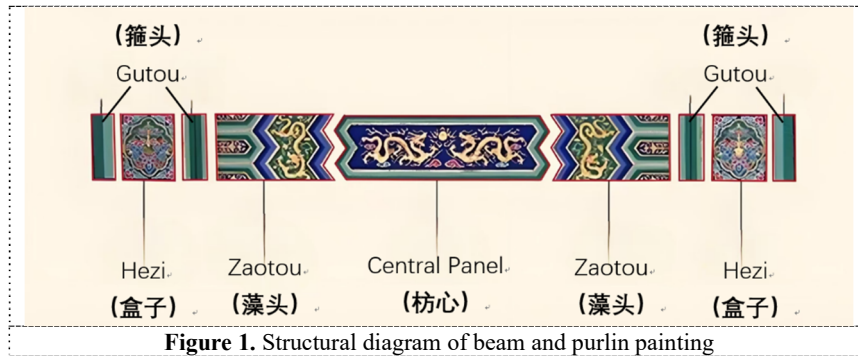
Dynastic Period	The Development Process of Architectural Painting	Characteristic
Pre-Qin period	Applying coatings to wooden structures for the purpose of anticorrosion and insect prevention.	The initial emergence of hierarchical concepts.
Qin and Han dynasties	Painting on brackets, beams, and ceilings.	The first appearance of decorative painting patterns (such as dragon patterns, cloud patterns, and brocade patterns) for ornamental purposes.
Northern and Southern dynasties	New architectural decorative patterns emerged under the influence of Buddhist art.	The variety of patterns became more diverse, and the concept of hierarchy was further elevated, continuing to develop in later periods.
Song dynasty	The layered shading technique was widely used in painting, creating soft transitions without harshness.	Architectural painting exhibited the unique, understated elegance characteristic of the Song Dynasty.
Yuan dynasty	The first appearance of Xuanzi (whorl) painting.	The Xuanzi (whorl) painting technique was still immature and not standardized.
Ming dynasty	The application of painting techniques expanded in architecture, with more diverse pattern themes.	The mining and use of mineral pigments led to more detailed classifications of painting, and Xuanzi painting further developed.
Qing dynasty	Architectural painting became more elaborate, and the painting on official buildings became more symbolic and abstract.	Xuanzi painting underwent further reform and development based on the Ming Dynasty, and the hierarchical system was finally solidified.

The standardization of architectural painting is primarily reflected in its structural composition—paintings are mainly displayed on the brackets, beams, and ceilings of buildings, while the paintings that directly represent the architectural attributes are mostly drawn on the beams and lintels. Beam and lintel paintings are generally divided into three parts, from the center to the sides: the central panel (Fangxin), the Zaotou (藻头), and the Gutou (箍头). These sections are clearly separated by zigzag lines, making the patterns on the beams and lintels compact and well-organized.

The central panel (Fangxin) is the core of the beam and lintel painting and the most significant part, showcasing the hierarchical status of the building. It typically occupies about

one-third of the total length. Between the central panel and the Gutou (箍头) lies the Zaotou (藻头). The combined length of the Gutou (箍头) and Zaotou (藻头) accounts for two-thirds of the total length of the beam and lintel, making their combined area larger than that of the central panel. Therefore, despite being located on the sides, the patterns and colors of the Gutou (箍头) and Zaotou (藻头) are equally important.

Additionally, if the beam or lintel is too long, a Hezi (盒子) can be added between the Gutou (箍头) sections. This helps balance the proportions between different parts of the painting, ensuring the patterns remain compact and the overall appearance harmonious. [3], this painting technique is mostly used in Hexi-style painting (Figure 1.).

**Figure 1.** Structural diagram of beam and purlin painting

2.2. The Representation of Architectural Painting in Defining Building Hierarchy

Table 2. Formatting sections, subsections and subsubsections.

Architectural Painting Names	Symbols and Characteristics	Subordinate Type Classifications	Representative Buildings
Hexi-style painting	Patterns primarily feature dragons and phoenixes, with different sections divided by "M"-shaped lines. The designs are more abstract, representing the highest grade of painting.	Golden Dragon Hexi, Golden Phoenix Hexi, Dragon and Phoenix Hexi, Dragon and Grass Hexi, etc.	The architectural complex along the central axis of the Forbidden City, the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests at the Temple of Heaven, etc.
Xuanzi-style painting	The Zaotou (藻头) section uses swirling whorl patterns, with different sections divided by "V"-shaped lines. The designs are more abstract, ranking below Hexi-style painting in hierarchy.	(Gold/Ink-grinding) Stone-polished Jade, (Gold/Ink-line) Large Gold Dots, (Gold/Ink-line) Small Gold Dots Xuanzi-style Painting, etc.	Zhihua Temple, Wanshou Temple, the Five Dragon Pavilions in Beihai Park, etc.
Suzhou-style painting	No fixed structural format, with rich and diverse themes and a more realistic painting style. It ranks below both Hexi-style and Xuanzi-style painting in hierarchy.	Bundle-style, Sea-spread-style, Central Panel-style, Gold-grinding Ink, Gold-line Suzhou-style Painting, etc.	The Painted Long Corridor in the Summer Palace, the Zhongwang Mansion (Loyal Prince's Residence), etc.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the centralized authority under autocratic monarchy reached its peak, and the strict hierarchical system was also reflected in architecture. In addition to assessing the scale of a building, the importance and rank of a structure could also be determined by its roof or exterior decorative paintings. Based on the building's rank, ancient architectural paintings were classified hierarchically into Hexi-style painting, Xuanzi-style painting, and Suzhou-style painting. (Table 2.).

Hexi-style painting, as the highest grade of architectural painting, is primarily used in large-scale buildings such as palaces and temples. Its patterns mainly feature dragons and phoenixes, symbolizing imperial authority. Xuanzi-style painting, which ranks below Hexi-style painting, has a broader range of applications and is commonly used in palaces, gate towers, temples, and gardens. Its distinctive feature lies in the use of whorl patterns in the Zaotou (藻头) section, and the patterns can be adjusted based on the length of the Zaotou (藻头), making the painting technique relatively more flexible. Compared to the other two styles, Suzhou-style painting emphasizes aesthetic appreciation over hierarchical representation. In terms of artistic style, Suzhou-style painting leans more toward realism than Hexi-style and Xuanzi-style painting, making it more commonly used in gardens. [4]. This type of painting often complements the scenery of gardens, reflecting more of the aesthetic and value orientations of the society at that time.

2.2.1. The Representation of Architectural Painting Hierarchy in Jingshan Park

Jingshan Park, a royal garden constructed since the Jin Dynasty, is located along Beijing's central axis and adjacent to the Palace Museum. It stands as one of China's most historically significant and best-preserved royal gardens, highlighting its immense importance.[5].

The core architectural complex of Jingshan Park—the Shouhuang Hall—is located in the rear section of the park. It served as the venue for displaying portraits of the Qing Dynasty's ancestral emperors and is one of the "Five Altars and Eight Temples." The entire complex was constructed following the design of the Imperial Ancestral Temple, with its main structures including the Baofang, the Brick City Gate, the Shouhuang Gate, and the Shouhuang Hall. Within this complex, the Baofang, the (South) Brick City Gate, the Shouhuang Gate, and the main hall of the Shouhuang Hall are all aligned along the central axis, forming the core of the complex. As such, these buildings feature yellow glazed tile hip roofs and Hexi-style paintings (with the main hall of the Shouhuang Hall having a double-eave hip roof). The side halls to the east and west of the Shouhuang Hall are the Yanqing Hall and the Mianxi Hall, which were once used to store the imperial genealogy. The stele pavilions on either side of the Shouhuang Hall's platform house inscriptions and imperial edicts written by Emperor Qianlong. These structures are also of great importance, and their beam and lintel paintings are likewise in the Hexi style, though their roofs differ to distinguish them from the main hall in terms of hierarchy. Other auxiliary buildings outside the central axis, such as the Divine Kitchen, Well Pavilion, and Duty Rooms, serve more utilitarian functions, primarily as management offices or storage spaces for ritual items. Consequently, their roofs are of lower grades, such as gable-and-hip roofs, overhanging gable roofs, or flat roofs, and their beam and lintel paintings predominantly use the Xuanzi style.

In addition to the core buildings, pavilions, as a long-standing type of standalone structure in Chinese history, are also an essential component of gardens, serving various types and functions. On the hill of Jingshan Park, there are five pavilions arranged in a row from east to west: Zhoushang Pavilion, Guanmiao Pavilion, Wanchun Pavilion, Jifang Pavilion, and Fulan Pavilion. These pavilions were originally places for enshrining the Five Wisdom Buddhas.[6]. The five pavilions are symmetrically arranged with Wanchun Pavilion at the center, and the corresponding pavilions on either side share the same roof style. The exterior eaves of all the pavilions are painted with the slightly lower-grade Xuanzi-style paintings (with the central Wanchun Pavilion featuring golden dragon patterns in its central panel, symbolizing imperial authority and power). From the use of these paintings, it is evident that the rulers placed great importance on Buddhism while steadfastly upholding and ensuring the principle of "imperial supremacy."

2.2.2. The Representation of Architectural Painting Hierarchy in Jingshan Park

Jingshan Park was officially designated as a public park in 1928 and has undergone multiple renovations over the years. It reopened to the public in 1955 and is managed under the Palace Museum administration. The management and preservation of the architectural paintings within the park fall under the broader scope of cultural relic protection. Key measures include routine inspection and maintenance by the Palace Museum management office, risk assessment for potential damage to the relics, timely identification of issues, and necessary repairs. For example, damaged components such as roof boards and flying rafters in ancient structures are replaced, and the paintings on these components are restored according to their original condition. The restoration adheres to fixed painting regulations, aiming to "repair the old as it was," preserving both its aesthetic significance and cultural value[7].

2.3. The Exterior Eave Paintings of the Pavilions in Beihai Park

As mentioned earlier, Suzhou-style painting, being of a lower hierarchical grade, generally lacks a fixed template in form. For example, the Sea-spread-style Suzhou painting does not distinguish between the central panel (Fangxin), Zaotou (藻头), or Gutou (箍头). Instead, it treats the entire beam and lintel as a single canvas for painting. Additionally, the scope of some Suzhou-style paintings is not entirely confined to the main beams. For instance, the Bundle-style Suzhou painting connects the central panels of the purlin, cushion board, and lintel into one large semicircular decorative surface, known as the "bundle." [8]. It is precisely because Suzhou-style painting offers greater freedom in its execution that it allows for a wider range of themes to be depicted, thereby achieving a more visually appealing and aesthetic effect.

2.3.1. The Exterior Eave Paintings of the Pavilions in Beihai Park

Beihai Park began construction in 1166 AD and served as a royal garden for the Jin Dynasty imperial family, where they enjoyed scenic views, handled court affairs, and conducted religious activities. During the Yuan and Ming dynasties, it underwent various expansions and renovations. It was during the Qing Dynasty that large-scale expansions took place,

establishing the overall layout and scale of Beihai Park as it is known today.

Beihai Park features numerous pavilions, which are flexibly and diversely positioned. Some are integrated into the architectural complexes of gardens within the park, while others stand alone as scenic highlights. Among the 23 historically preserved pavilions in Beihai Park (including those reconstructed in modern times but excluding newly built ones), approximately 18 have beam decorations adorned with Suzhou-style paintings. Analyzing the relationship between the park's pavilion architecture and its paintings, I believe there is no clear connection between the type of painting and the hierarchical status of the pavilions. This is because, during the Qing Dynasty, pyramidal roofs were categorized as miscellaneous-style architectural roofs and

generally did not carry strict hierarchical symbolism. Instead, the brackets (dougong) on the exterior eaves of the pavilions are what help identify their hierarchical status. [9]. The variation in the types of paintings on the exterior eaves of the pavilions is likely related to their architectural design and construction style.(Table 3.)—For example, in the case where the purlin, cushion board, and lintel are interconnected, the exterior eave paintings often adopt the Bundle-style Suzhou painting or the Double Central Panel-style Suzhou painting. In pavilions where the lintel features brackets (dougong) or intricately carved cushion boards or lintels, the Central Panel-style Suzhou painting is used. When the pavilion is small in size and located in an unimportant or inconspicuous area, the Sea-spread-style Suzhou painting is applied.

Table 3. Summary of Suzhou-Style Painted Pavilions in Beihai Park.

Serial Number	Pavilion Name	Suzhou-style Painting Type (Exterior Eaves)	Reason for Adopting This Architectural Style
1	Yinsheng Pavilion (引胜亭)	Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting	Brackets (dougong) on the lintel
2	Di'ai Pavilion (涤霁亭)	Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting	Brackets (dougong) on the lintel
3	Huiri Pavilion (慧日亭)	Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting	Brackets (dougong) on the lintel
4	Penghu Yisheng Pavilion (蓬壶挹胜亭)	Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting	Brackets (dougong) on the lintel
5	Miaoman Yunfeng Pavilion (妙鬘云峰亭)	Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting	Brackets (dougong) on the lintel
6	Xiao Kunqiu Pavilion (小崑邱亭)	Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin and lintel connected, Double Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting
7	Luanying Pavilion (峦影亭)	Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin and lintel connected, Double Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting
8	Jianchun Pavilion (见春亭)	Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin and lintel connected, Double Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting
9	Bixian Pavilion (碧鲜亭)	Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin and lintel connected, Double Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting
10	Yiyuan Pavilion (意远亭)	Bundle-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin, cushion board, and lintel interconnected
11	Yunyi Pavilion (云依亭)	Bundle-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin, cushion board, and lintel interconnected
12	Shuanghong Xie Pavilion (双虹榭亭)	Bundle-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin, cushion board, and lintel interconnected
13	Yishan Pavilion (揖山亭)	Bundle-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin, cushion board, and lintel interconnected
14	Xiexiu Pavilion (撷秀亭)	Bundle-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin, cushion board, and lintel interconnected
15	Yihu Tiandi Pavilion (一壶天地亭)	Bundle-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin, cushion board, and lintel interconnected
16	Jinglan Pavilion (镜澜亭)	Bundle-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin, cushion board, and lintel interconnected
17	Zhenluan Pavilion (枕峦亭)	Bundle-style Suzhou Painting	Purlin, cushion board, and lintel interconnected
18	Duoyun Pavilion (朵云亭)	Sea-spread-style Suzhou Painting	Small pavilion area (6.85 square meters)

Additionally, the spatial location of the pavilion within the garden also influences the type of exterior eave painting to some extent. For example, when the structural framework of the buildings is similar, pavilions located around the core structures of gardens within the park, given their status as auxiliary buildings, are designed to complement the main structures[10]. Therefore, most of these pavilions use the Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting (e.g., Luanying Pavilion, Bixian Pavilion, etc.). Alternatively, pavilions located on mountainsides or near rockeries, primarily serving to accentuate and highlight the surrounding garden environment, also mostly use the Central Panel-style Suzhou Painting (e.g., Jianchun Pavilion, Xiao Kunqiu Pavilion, etc.). On the other hand, pavilions that use the Bundle-style Suzhou Painting are typically situated at scenic viewpoints within the garden or occupy important positions in the landscape.

As a comprehensive and representative royal garden, Beihai Park embodies the concepts and core themes of Chinese garden design, from its overall layout to the planning of its architectural complexes and the application of painted decorations. Architectural painting—especially the Bundle-style Suzhou Painting, as a key element of garden decoration—often features realistic landscapes, trees, rocks, flowers, birds, and animals. With vibrant and varied colors, the painted scenes showcase diverse forms and hold significant aesthetic value. Using striking base colors like blue and red, the Gutou (箍头) and Hezi (盒子) around the central painting are adorned with traditional auspicious patterns, enhancing the painted content and the building itself.

It is evident that the garden designers aimed to integrate these painted scenes with the architecture and natural surroundings, reflecting the philosophical concept of

harmony between humans and nature. At the same time, the use of bright, vivid colors and intricate patterns adds an ideal layer of humanistic charm to the natural garden, creating a poetic and picturesque atmosphere. By combining painting with garden design, the landscapes and structures are transformed into spaces rich in artistic ambiance, making ancient Chinese gardens uniquely distinctive through this integrated artistic expression.

2.3.2. Current Status of the Preservation and Utilization of Paintings in Beihai Park

In addition to routine inspection and maintenance of cultural relics, Beihai Park also promotes the preservation of intangible cultural heritage by organizing various activities that leverage festivals and the park's natural features. For example, around October each year, the park hosts a chrysanthemum exhibition. While showcasing new varieties of chrysanthemums cultivated in recent years, the exhibition also displays numerous Suzhou-style paintings alongside the flowers. This allows visitors to not only enjoy the beauty of autumn chrysanthemums in full bloom but also gain insight into the creative inspiration behind Suzhou-style paintings. Through this, visitors can better appreciate the aesthetic and cultural value of this traditional art form, subtly experiencing the charm of traditional culture.

2.3.3. The Painted Long Corridor of the Summer Palace

As one of the "Three Hills and Five Gardens" in the western suburbs of Beijing, the Summer Palace is a vital component of royal gardens. The Painted Long Corridor, located between Longevity Hill and Kunming Lake, is regarded as a representative and culmination of Suzhou-style painting in northern official architecture. It holds significant value and status in the fields of ancient Chinese traditional architecture, culture, and art.

The Painted Gallery has undergone three major restorations since its construction, with the last significant restoration taking place around the 1990s. Most of the paintings we see on the gallery today date back to this period of restoration. The gallery features over 14,000 paintings of various types. In addition to the commonly seen landscapes, birds, animals, and floral scenes mentioned earlier, there are also numerous figure paintings, most of which are derived from Chinese classical literature or mythological tales. From historical records, it appears that the damage to the corridor paintings was quite severe during certain "the Great Cultural Revolution" periods. By the time of the last restoration, the original content of the paintings was no longer discernible. As a result, most of the paintings are likely not their original versions but rather new subjects chosen by the restorers and craftsmen of that time. Consequently, the content of these paintings largely involves themes from famous literary works. Judging from the style of the paintings, they resemble the illustrations found in popular novels and storybooks of the folk tradition, which is probably the source of the paintings we see today[11].

Based on the narrative origins of architectural paintings, they can be primarily categorized into the following types: Firstly, there are depictions of key characters from famous Chinese literary works, such as "Passing Five Gates and Slaying Six Generals," "Liu Xuande Crossing the River with the People," and "Burning of Bowang Slope." These scenes are intended to highlight certain characteristics and virtues of the characters, such as martial prowess, benevolence, and strategic genius. Secondly, there are paintings that involve significant plot points from the stories, like "Yuanchun's

Home Visit," "Daiyu Burns Her Manuscript," and "The Temple in the Snowy Mountain." These plot points, which serve to advance or pivot the storyline in the original novels, have been widely appreciated and pondered over by scholars both ancient and modern, leaving a lasting impression on many readers, and thus have been chosen as subjects for character paintings. Thirdly, there are paintings derived from well-known novels created during the Ming and Qing dynasties that have been passed down to the present day, such as "The Investiture of the Gods," "Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio," and "The Romance of the Western Chamber." [12] On one hand, the fact that these works have survived to the present day is a testament to their popularity among readers and their widespread circulation. On the other hand, it is also due to the humanistic ideas and values embodied in these novels being accepted by society. As a result, certain episodes or scenes from these stories have been adapted into architectural paintings and incorporated into garden designs.

In addition to themes from classical Chinese literature, architectural paintings featuring human subjects also draw from mythological tales and anecdotes of famous figures. Mythological stories, encompassing both folk and religious myths, originally a form of folk literature, constitute an important part of national culture, possessing the ability to convey moral values and cultural heritage. Using these as subjects for architectural paintings highlights the affection and recognition of the contemporary social group for these cultural vessels, expressing the characteristics and connotations of the society's ethical teachings. Apart from mythological stories, anecdotes of celebrities also serve an educative role for society. Since ancient times, with the continuous development of society, certain famous individuals, by virtue of their abilities and the achievements they demonstrated, have had a profound impact on society. In the corridor paintings, there are depictions related to historical celebrities such as "Su Wu Tending Sheep," "The Four Elders of Shangshan," and "The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove." [13] To a certain extent, these paintings also convey positive ideologies such as loyalty to the sovereign, patriotism, benevolence, and love for the people. The remarkable deeds and accomplishments of some celebrities, to a certain degree, become role models and exemplars for society, thereby enhancing the cultural and moral standards of the community.

2.3.4. The Current State of Protection and Utilization of the Painted Gallery in the Summer Palace

As a large-scale imperial garden, the Summer Palace has adopted a more comprehensive approach to the protection and utilization of its cultural heritage. For instance, the growing emphasis on humanities education and the public's demand for spiritual and cultural enrichment have made museum education related industries increasingly popular. In response, the garden's management has developed recommended tour routes tailored to the garden's environment and features, ensuring that visitors not only have a complete touring experience but also enjoy an enhanced cultural education.

Given that the official guided tours in the garden are relatively more comprehensive, they also include explanations of architectural paintings, particularly those in the Painted Gallery of the Summer Palace. This allows visitors to fully understand the content and background stories of the relevant paintings while they tour the landscape. In promoting the related cultural heritage, it also broadens the visitors' knowledge, thereby improving their cultural literacy.

In addition to the official guided tours, the Summer Palace has also opened up to third-party organizations for providing guided explanations. These organizations offer a more personalized and entertaining approach compared to the formal official tours. This allows visitors who already have an interest in traditional culture to gain deeper insights, while also sparking curiosity among those who may not have been previously acquainted with it. As a result, it helps to uncover potential enthusiasts of traditional art, promoting cultural dissemination and the development of cultural tourism economy.

3. Issues and Suggestions for the Development of Architectural Paintings in Gardens as Cultural Heritage

Architectural paintings, as a form of traditional artistic cultural heritage, serve various social functions and represent one of the finest expressions of humanistic art and aesthetic pursuits. While Chinese traditional art forms are rich and diverse, and within the realm of traditional arts, cultural heritages such as paper-cutting, brick carving, and stone engraving also possess these social functions, the advantage of architectural paintings lies in their vibrant colors, diverse patterns, and the variety of images depicted in the paintings[14]. Moreover, architectural paintings combine both abstract and concrete expressions, making them adaptable to groups with different aesthetic sensibilities to a certain extent, and thus more readily accepted by the general public. Most of the surviving royal gardens today are essentially material and cultural spaces that serve as carriers of both architectural heritage and natural landscapes. At their core, they represent spiritual wealth with aesthetic artistry and historical culture as their essence, requiring human mediation to carry forward this spiritual civilization. Therefore, for contemporary scholars and related professionals, while ensuring their own professional competence and abilities, the core issue concerning the protection and utilization of such cultural heritage is how to imbue the public with a certain level of cultural literacy. Effective practices aimed at addressing this issue, to achieve the goals of preservation and development, will enable us to better ground ourselves in the present and look forward to the future[15].

3.1. Issues in Protection, Utilization, and Inheritance

As previously mentioned, both professional scholars and industry practitioners have made considerable efforts and achieved notable successes in the protection and utilization of cultural heritage over the years. However, it is also important to acknowledge that certain issues have arisen in practice. Only by correctly identifying and addressing these problems can we effectively ensure the steady and long-term preservation and value exploration of cultural heritage in the future.

3.1.1. The Oversights that Occurred during the Restoration Process

Taking the Summer Palace as an example, it was previously mentioned that the last major restoration of the painted long corridor took place around the 1990s. Most of the restoration work was based on illustrations from the Ming and Qing dynasties and carried out using traditional techniques. From

the perspective of restoration philosophy, there were no significant issues, as considerations were given to the painting style and restoration practices during the process. However, later on, some scholars discovered that certain painted patterns and their narrative themes were repeated on the corridor, with some even appearing three to four times, indicating a high rate of repetition [16]. I believe that, in addition to the imperfections in the restoration plan at the time, this issue also stems from historical legacies. Following the "the Great Cultural Revolution," there was a prolonged gap in education, which made it difficult for the seasoned professionals of the past to undertake such a massive project. Meanwhile, the new generation of scholars lacked sufficient professional expertise and practical experience, leading to significant errors in the restoration of the painted long corridor.

In addition, some architectural paintings may exhibit inconsistencies in artistic style. For instance, certain landscape paintings might display overly natural color transitions or excessively realistic depictions of vegetation. These discrepancies could arise from the restorers' own artistic concepts, which they may have inadvertently introduced into the restoration of ancient structures. I believe that art and aesthetics are constantly evolving and progressing. From a purely artistic perspective, innovation and fusion in painting can be beneficial.

3.1.2. The Homogenization and Uneven Quality within the Cultural Tourism Industry

As previously mentioned, garden management departments plan and organize activities based on the scenic elements within their gardens and the changing seasons. While these initiatives attract other parks and gardens to emulate, they also contribute to a certain degree of homogenization in cultural tourism offerings. For instance, in various Beijing gardens, wherever there is a large pond, lotus flowers are planted, and related events such as Lotus Festivals are held. Most of these activities revolve around boating on the lake, flower viewing, and surrounding stalls at temple fairs. This trend of following suit can easily lead to public aesthetic fatigue and diminishes the unique characteristics that each garden originally possesses.

Moreover, the popularity of museum education has spurred the transformation and addition of many other research and cultural tourism institutions. However, not all guides and docents are professionals, leading to varying interpretations of the same cultural heritage site. Additionally, due to the vast expanse of royal gardens and limited visiting time, some cultural tourism teams are tasked with ensuring that the tour of the site is completed within the allotted time while also hoping that visitors can experience the garden in its entirety. This often results in a superficial style of commentary and sightseeing, where tourists grasp the cultural and spiritual essence of the attractions only superficially, without understanding the underlying reasons. Consequently, this not only fails to effectively utilize the educational and aesthetic functions of the heritage sites but also diminishes the enjoyment of exploring the gardens, making it difficult to achieve widespread public engagement and advocacy.

3.1.3. The Emphasis on Theory over Practice in the Transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Moreover, independent of the buildings themselves, the art of architectural painting is also considered an intangible cultural heritage, whose transmission inherently relies on human practice. Therefore, in the context of passing down

this craft, the cultivation of its "reserve force" is a critical issue that requires attention. From what I have observed in terms of talent cultivation methods, a common and reasonable approach is to invite professional practitioners or scholars from museums or research institutes to serve as external lecturers at universities. They impart relevant knowledge to students and allow them to engage in hands on practice of this traditional craft. This serves a dual purpose: it helps to unearth potential future professionals in cultural heritage conservation and restoration, and it also enables students to gain a thorough understanding of such manual skills. To some extent, this enriches the university curriculum, fosters student interest, and assists them in determining their future career paths.

However, some professional scholars have pointed out that while most of the new generation of practitioners possess a strong ability to summarize and generalize the theories of traditional crafts and fine arts, they often lack practical experience. In the transmission of skills, what is most needed are talents who can apply these skills in practice, which requires summarizing experiences and honing abilities through long-term practice and application. This primarily involves the cultivation of vocational and technical higher education talents. Yet, there is a certain societal bias towards the recruitment and training models for such skilled personnel, which may lead to uneven quality in the talent pool. Therefore, I believe this is a goal that requires a long-term commitment and the development of a sustained plan to provide targeted training for these technically applied talents[17].

3.1.4. The Survival Challenges faced by Inheritors of Intangible Cultural Heritage

At the same time, due to the vast number and variety of intangible cultural heritages in China, it is somewhat challenging to achieve comprehensive protection and transmission. In many regions, museums of intangible cultural heritage and heritage parks have been established, but numerous inheritors face issues such as financial constraints, declining skills, and a lack of successors. Therefore, I believe that rather than focusing on superficial "vanity projects," it would be more beneficial to concentrate on improving the living and employment conditions of these inheritors, enhancing their deserved treatment and social status, and enabling them to focus on the transmission and development of their crafts. This approach would serve as the best form of promotion and protection for intangible cultural heritage.

3.2. Related Suggestions

In summary, the protection, utilization, and transmission of architectural paintings should be fundamentally premised on respecting history and acknowledging the role of individuals in cultural heritage. It is also essential to ensure the professionalism of scholars and inheritors to correctly and appropriately safeguard the corresponding cultural heritage. As for how to effectively protect and utilize such cultural heritage in the future, here are several suggestions:

According to the Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China, issued by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) China National Committee, the protection of architectural paintings should strictly adhere to the two fundamental principles of "minimal intervention" and "not altering the original state of the cultural relics." Subsequently, based on the current condition of the paintings, appropriate protection or restoration plans should

be formulated[18]. For instance, when the original architectural paintings are intact and firmly attached to the structure, the focus should be on routine maintenance, and the images of the paintings should be preserved through photography or other means for future restoration in case of damage. If there are areas of the painting that are partially damaged or have fallen off, these sections should be retouched and restored, with minimal alterations or adjustments to the original painting to preserve its inherent characteristics. In cases where the paintings are severely damaged or even unrecognizable, extensive repairs or repainting may be carried out based on the historical materials available, but the restoration should still be conducted in accordance with the historical context.

Enhancing the professional competence of relevant practitioners. This applies not only to the professional capabilities of official personnel but also to the vocational standards of third-party institutions. I believe it would be appropriate to introduce corresponding policies and regulations that specify in detail who or which institutions are qualified to provide explanations and instruction. Additionally, implementing certain assessment methods and strengthening review and supervision will ensure that the spiritual and cultural essence of cultural heritage is accurately communicated to the public.

Simultaneously, it would be beneficial to establish certain intangible cultural heritage art experience centers, allowing the public to genuinely experience the charm of intangible cultural heritage while also making full use of the garden spaces to enrich the recreational and educational aspects of the gardens. For example, in recent years, there has been debate over whether the Yuanmingyuan should undergo further restoration. Some argue that as a heritage park and a patriotic education base, a major restoration of its various areas would obscure its educational value. Others believe that it is a pity that the Yuanmingyuan, once hailed as the "Garden of Gardens," no longer displays its past splendor. However, I believe these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive. For instance, the reconstruction of the Hall of Embodied Treasures in the Changchun Garden has already been implemented, and the area has been designated as a base for integrity culture education. Similarly, a portion of the area could be restored and transformed into an intangible cultural heritage experience center, where visitors can engage in hands on activities. By experiencing the creative process of traditional arts, visitors can better connect with intangible cultural heritage, thereby enhancing their garden experience, boosting employment and development in the cultural tourism industry, and not affecting the educational function of the Yuanmingyuan.

4. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the architectural paintings of several major royal gardens in Beijing, with the main theme being the protection and utilization of cultural heritage. Firstly, it analyzes the cultural connotations of architectural paintings, encompassing representative imagery from culture, art, politics, and other aspects. Secondly, it examines the expressive forms and functions of the paintings in Jingshan Park, Beihai Park, and the Summer Palace. Furthermore, it investigates and assesses the current state of development and utilization of garden paintings, identifies existing issues, and proposes corresponding recommendations.

In summary, the protection and utilization of cultural

heritage are two interrelated aspects. Protection aims to better utilize cultural resources materially and economically, while utilization serves to maintain the vitality of regional and ethnic cultures. The common goal of both is to safeguard cultural heritage in various ways. Therefore, continuous exploration and practice are essential in the transmission and protection of culture. Throughout the process of practice, it is crucial to consistently summarize experiences and address issues, refining and enhancing existing achievements. Only then can the cultural heritage industry be effectively utilized, transforming it into economic benefits and providing healthy, sustainable development for the region's socio-economic landscape.

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