OPEN ACCESS
Global Journal of Research in Humanities & Cultural Studies
ISSN: 2583-2670 (Online)
Volume 06 | Issue 02 | March-April | 2026
Journal homepage: https://gjrpublication.com/gjrhcs/
Research Article

Modern Reconstruction of Traditional Garden Space Prototypes in Neo-Chinese Landscapes

*Yang Sheng

Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing, Guangdong, China.

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19052659 **Submission Date: 20 Jan. 2026 | Published Date: 16 March 2026**

Abstract

This paper explores the dialectical relationship between 'boundaries' and 'integration' within Neo-Chinese landscapes. Focusing on the four core spatial prototypes of traditional gardens—'corridors, pavilions, courtyards, and lanes'—it analyses their contemporary translation strategies within the context of high-density urban environments. The research reveals that while traditional spatial prototypes face multiple pressures, including spatial compression, shifting functional demands, and climate adaptability challenges, their cultural value and spatial functions can still be effectively reconstructed through innovative methodologies such as three-dimensional extension, fragmented reassembly, topological deformation, and scale translation. The boundary reconstruction of Neo-Chinese landscapes is manifested not only in physical transparency and functional compounding but also through psychological suggestion and dynamic temporal transitions. Furthermore, integration is achieved across multiple dimensions, including the contemporary translation of cultural memory, the amalgamation of ecological technologies with traditional wisdom, and the spatial empowerment of community governance. By examining the 'Yanlord Tangbei' project in Suzhou and the 'Sunac Guobin One' project in Chengdu as typical case studies, this paper verifies the efficacy and innovativeness of modern translation strategies, providing both a theoretical framework and a practical pathway for the critical reconstruction of Neo-Chinese landscapes.

Keywords: *Neo-Chinese landscape; spatial prototypes; boundary reconstruction; integration; contemporary translation; corridors, pavilions, courtyards, and lanes.*

1. Introduction: The Dialectic Between Tradition and Modernity

Through thousands of years of development, traditional Chinese gardens have cultivated a unique system of spatial wisdom and aesthetics, wherein 'corridors, pavilions, courtyards, and lanes' are not merely physical spatial elements but spatial prototypes that encapsulate cultural memory, life philosophy, and aesthetic experience. These prototypes embody the ecological concept of the 'unity of heaven and humanity', the spatial philosophy of the 'mutual generation of solid and void', and the landscape aesthetics of 'shifting perspectives with moving steps', constituting a crucial vessel for traditional Chinese culture. However, against the backdrop of accelerated urbanisation and continuously escalating residential densities, these traditional spatial prototypes are confronting unprecedented challenges.

The expansive and unhurried spatial foundations upon which traditional gardens relied no longer exist. The spatial prototypes that carry cultural memory and life philosophy can scarcely be applied directly in the face of extreme spatial compression and diversified functional demands. This necessitates that design practices transcend mere formal imitation and pivot towards a 'contemporary translation' of their inherent wisdom. This study focuses on the core tension within this translation process—'boundaries' and 'integration'—aiming to explore how traditional spatial prototypes can achieve a contemporary continuation of their cultural value through critical reconstruction while satisfying modern residential functions. Through the analysis of typical design strategies and case studies, this paper attempts to provide a theoretical and practical pathway for the innovation of Neo-Chinese landscapes, transitioning from the borrowing of 'physical form' to the reconstruction of 'imagery'.

A substantial genealogy of research has already been formed regarding the transmission of traditional culture in Neo-Chinese landscapes. The international academic community primarily explores its role as a vessel for local identity amidst globalisation from theoretical perspectives such as critical regionalism, cultural landscapes, and ecological wisdom; domestic research, conversely, concentrates more on the modern interpretation of traditional garden aesthetics and the categorisation of specific architectural styles and design techniques. For example, Xiao et al. (2025) used

Shuzhuang Garden as a case study to research the relationship between aesthetic communication and aesthetic perception. Wang et al. (2023) analysed the courtyard space design of the 'Taihe Chinese Courtyard' project. These achievements have laid a vital foundation, but the majority still remain confined to stylistic deductions or the application of traditional elements as detachable symbols. They fail to treat core elements such as 'corridors, pavilions, courtyards, and lanes' as a stable system of spatial prototypes, nor do they situate them within the specific contradiction of contemporary China's extreme high-density urban environments to deeply dissect the internal mechanisms of their structural translation through the dialectical relationship of 'boundaries' and 'integration'. Taking this as its point of departure, this paper strives to transcend symbol-level borrowing and explore reconstruction pathways for traditional spatial prototypes to achieve both cultural transmission and functional innovation in a contemporary context.

2. Deconstruction of the Connotations of Traditional Spatial Prototypes

2.1 The Corridor: Flowing Picture Frames and Mediating Boundaries

In traditional gardens, the 'corridor' is far from merely a roofed passageway; its core essence lies in being a productive mediating boundary. Through its morphology, which 'favours curves and length', it focuses on connection and guidance while dividing space, creating a 'transitional space' that is neither entirely public nor absolutely private. Its aesthetic essence lies in 'ideational transparency'—suggesting and penetrating the space on the other side through its own physical partitions and apertures (such as openwork windows), thereby transforming the process of walking into a flowing unrolled scroll painting, thus containing infinite depth of field and imagination within a finite corridor structure.

2.2 The Pavilion: The Viewing Eye and Spiritual Anchor

The 'pavilion', with its ultimate transparency of 'having a roof but no walls', defines the spiritual anchor within a garden. It is not a simple resting facility, but rather a carefully sited 'viewing eye' at visual hubs or the ends of pathways. The openness of the pavilion makes it a fixed framework for poetic dialogue between humanity and nature, gathering the surrounding wind, clouds, rain, snow, mountains, and streams into dynamic visual frames. It serves as both a visual focal point in physical space and a pause and locus of meaning within the rhythm of the tour, endowing the site with profound humanistic imagery.

2.3 The Courtyard: Enclosed but Not Isolated Living Containers

The 'courtyard' is a microcosm of traditional life and the natural universe, and its core wisdom lies in being 'enclosed but not isolated'. It establishes a distinct sense of inward-looking territory through buildings, connecting corridors, or walls, cultivating a tranquil atmosphere; simultaneously, it allows natural light, shadows, and scenery to permeate through moon gates, empty windows, and vegetation. The courtyard is a complete narrative space that follows a 'rhythmic spatial sequence', integrating daily routines, festive activities, and the four seasons into an introspective, self-sufficient unit, thereby reflecting the residential ideal of the 'unity of heaven and humanity'.

2.4 The Lane: Community Networks with an Intimate Scale

The 'lane', serving as a linear community network, functions as a gradual transitional space between public and private realms. It is far more than a thoroughfare; its intimate and agreeable scale (typically defined by architectural gable walls and courtyard enclosures) and its meandering, 'winding and long' pathways naturally foster serendipitous neighbourly encounters and brief pauses. Through variations in materials, openings, and details on both flanking interfaces, the lane curates a rich spatial rhythm and visual sequence. While organising circulation, it weaves together daily, informal community interactions and a sense of place.

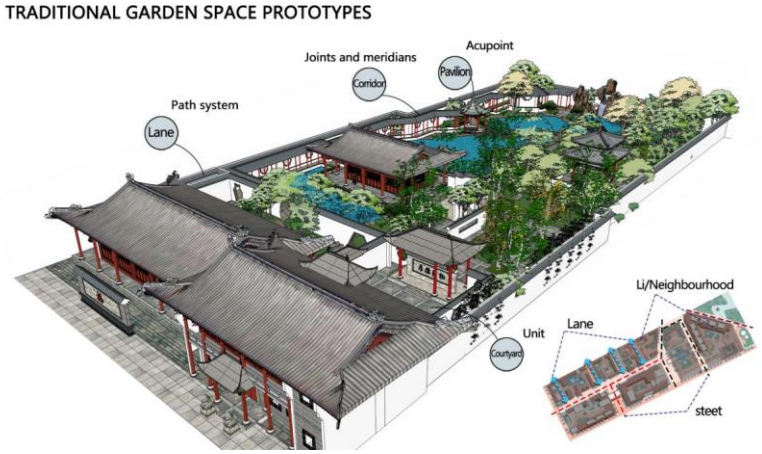

Figure 1: Traditional Garden Space Prototypes

3. Challenges Posed by Contemporary Urban Environments and Changing Residential Demands to Spatial Prototypes

3.1 Quantitative Basis of Spatial Compression

Contemporary cities are confronted with extreme spatial compression; the per capita construction land in megacities has fallen significantly below the lower limits of national standards (for example, Shenzhen and Guangzhou offer less than 60 square metres per person) (Shenzhen Municipal People's Government, 2025), whilst population density continues to climb. Spatial compression of this magnitude means that prototypes such as the 'courtyard', 'corridor', and 'lane', which are predicated on expansiveness in traditional gardens, have lost their foundational physical footprint. Consequently, they cannot be directly replicated and must undergo fundamental scale translation and structural reassembly.

3.2 Evolution of Functional Demands

The functional demands of contemporary residential areas differ markedly from those of the traditional garden era. Modern residential areas must not only satisfy basic dwelling functions but also incorporate diverse needs such as community services, leisure, entertainment, and social interaction. The high floor-area ratios and high-density environments of modern cities contrast sharply with the low-density, open nature of traditional gardens. This mandates that spatial prototypes must transition from being traditional vessels for private appreciation or introspective family life to modern functional carriers capable of efficiently accommodating diverse public activities and promoting community engagement. The central contradiction lies in how to integrate the spiritual ethos of traditional prototypes with the complex demands of modern life within limited land resources.

3.3 Climatic and Material Challenges

Different climatic zones present specific physical challenges to the reconstruction of spatial prototypes. For example, in the rainy regions of South China, it is necessary to address the durability and moisture-resistance of traditional timber and stone materials, whilst restructuring courtyard drainage systems to comply with 'sponge city' requirements; conversely, northern regions must balance shading and ventilation to avoid the urban heat island effect. Simultaneously, the application of modern materials (glass, metal, concrete) must complete a creative synthesis with the aesthetic realm of traditional spaces while satisfying structural and thermal performance standards.

3.4 Modern Contradictions of Cultural Identity

During contemporary translation, traditional prototypes are highly susceptible to falling into the trap of 'symbolisation' or 'decoration', whereby their forms are stripped of their original functional and cultural contexts, reducing them to visual labels. This results in the proliferation of moon gates that possess only morphology and pavilions that have lost their function as resting places. The genuine challenge lies in how to transcend the simplistic imitation of 'form' and reconstruct their 'spirit'—namely, the experiences, philosophies, and lifestyles embodied by the prototypes—through modern design languages and technologies, enabling them to regain vitality and cultural identity within a contemporary context.

4. Modern Reconstruction Strategies for Spatial Prototypes

4.1 Redefinition of Boundaries

Modern reconstruction is primarily manifested in the transcendence of traditional physical boundaries, pivoting towards a multi-layered, permeable boundary system. On a physical level, traditional solid walls are replaced by modern materials such as hollowed-out brick walls and glass curtain walls, creating a visual permeability that is 'visible but inaccessible'; for instance, the application of U-shaped glass curtain walls maintains the connection of light, shadow, and sightlines while segregating space. On a psychological level, non-physical elements such as paving materials, lighting colour temperatures, and sequences (e.g., linear light strips forming a 'virtual corridor' for guidance) are employed to suggest transitions between spatial domains, shaping a gradual experiential rhythm. In the temporal dimension, flexible designs such as movable partitions and multi-functional facilities enable the same space to accommodate varying functions at different times (e.g., transitioning between a children's playground and a community market), thereby achieving the dynamic and intensive utilisation of spatial resources.

4.2 Multidimensional Realisation of Integration

The core of reconstruction lies in achieving multidimensional integration rather than symbolic pastiche. The key to cultural integration is the translation of 'spirit': such as transforming the 'peeking' experience of a moon gate into a sequence of modern view-framing windows, or reconfiguring a traditional pavilion into a shared glass tea pavilion, thereby continuing its role as a spiritual anchor through functional innovation. Ecological integration is demonstrated through the combination of traditional wisdom and modern technology: such as integrating the 'sponge courtyard' concept with low-impact development techniques like rain gardens and permeable paving, rendering ecological processes visible and participatory. Social integration emphasises design as a medium for community governance: through participatory designs like resident co-built gardens and edible landscapes, the neighbourly interaction attributes of

traditional 'lanes and courtyards' are translated into modern public spaces that promote community identity and sustainable governance, realising spatial empowerment.

5. Translation Methods for the Four Spatial Prototypes

5.1 Mutation of the Corridor: From Linear Connection to Three-Dimensional Hub

The prototype of the contemporary 'corridor' has undergone a fundamental mutation from two-dimensional connection to three-dimensional verticality. To navigate high-density environments, its morphology extends vertically, often serving as a skywalk system connecting platforms at varying elevations; whilst resolving topographical constraints, it itself becomes a traversable aerial landscape. Its function has also shifted from a mere transit route to a compounded community interface, integrating multiple functions such as sheltering, leisure and socialising, art exhibition, and even children's activities, becoming a vibrant ribbon embedded within community life. Aesthetically, the ethos of the corridor is perpetuated through digital metaphors, namely utilising modern lighting sequences (such as linear light strips forming 'virtual corridors'), parametrised louvres, or rhythmic paving to abstractly reproduce the cadence and 'shifting perspectives' spatial experience of the traditional covered walkway.

5.2 Transformation of the Pavilion: From Independent Anchor to Penetrating Symbol

The reconstruction of the 'pavilion' is characterised by fragmentation, symbolisation, and functional compensation. Its complete morphology is deconstructed, and core elements (such as roof covers, colonnades, and framing effects) are isolated and reassembled, transforming into landscape pergolas, roof cantilevers, or art installations that integrate into various nodes of modern space. This shifts its identity from an independent viewing architecture to a penetrating spatial identifier. Concurrently, its traditional functions as a 'spiritual anchor' and 'recreational core' are compensated by community sharing boxes equipped with charging ports and Wi-Fi, smart resting pods, or neighbourhood tea pavilions, continuing its essence as a community cohesive point whilst meeting modern flexible working and socialising demands. The pavilion's function as a 'viewing eye' is often symbolised into framing structures on high-rise facades or city-overlooking observation decks, completing the transition from a ground-level node to a vertical visual focal point.

5.3 Topology of the Courtyard: From Closed Container to Permeable Unit

The reconstruction of the 'courtyard' involves a topological deformation from a closed, private enclave into a vertical, permeable, and shared modern courtyard unit. Confronted with land constraints, the courtyard system develops vertically, forming a vertical courtyard chain (piloti courtyards on the ground floor, sky gardens in the middle, and private garden plots on the top floor), reconstructing the territorial sense of the 'courtyard' in three dimensions. Its boundaries are blurred using glass curtain walls, hedges, and water features, transitioning from rigid enclosure walls to permeable 'soft boundaries', realising the visual and fluid integration between indoor and outdoor spaces. The most crucial transformation is the sharing of property rights and functions; the traditional single-family courtyard is converted into a community-shared courtyard, which, through functional zoning (public activity areas, semi-private leisure areas, and ecological planting areas), becomes the core public space for rebuilding modern neighbourhood relationships and community identity.

5.4 Translation of the Lane: From Transit Network to Vibrant Scene

The core of translating the 'lane' centres on reconstructing its scale and vitality as a community network. Firstly, a hierarchical alleyway network is established: primary lanes, secondary lanes, and micro-lanes. Through variations in path width, interface materials, and the sense of enclosure, the traditional gradual transition from public to private is reproduced, crafting rich spatial sequences. Secondly, through scenographic implantation, pocket gardens, shared facilities (reading corners, fitness equipment), or art installations are embedded at the turns or widened nodes of the alleys, activating pure transit spaces into 'scenes' that host serendipitous interactions and community life. Finally, temporal design is introduced. By planting species with distinct seasonal characteristics, the spatial experience of the lane alters with the changing seasons, re-establishing an emotional connection between modern dwelling and natural rhythms, thereby compensating for the loss of temporal perception in rapid urbanisation.

6. Case Studies: Reconstruction Paradigms in Two Contexts

6.1 Suzhou 'Yanlord Tangbei': Narrative Translation Under Low Density

Based on a foundation of low-density lakeside villas, the core contribution of this project lies in the narrative planar reorganisation and modern ideational translation of the traditional 'lane-courtyard' system. It does not simply replicate alleyway morphology, but rather reconstructs the gradual experience from the community entrance to the private courtyard through a meticulously orchestrated 'rhythmic spatial sequence'. Within this framework, the traditional 'corridor' is translated into the 'Three-Curve Corridor' and 'Moon-Embracing Bridge' that connect various nodes, becoming landscape axes guiding sightlines and pedestrian flow; the 'pavilion' evolves into a 'shared tea pavilion' made of glass, retaining its function as a spiritual anchor while implanting the social attributes of a community living room; the 'courtyard' maintains the territorial hierarchy from public to semi-public to private through a modern interpretation of the

'three-entry ceremonial' sequence. This case demonstrates that under relatively relaxed land conditions, Neo-Chinese landscapes can achieve a continuous transmission of traditional garden aesthetics and life philosophies through the contemporary choreography of spatial sequences and the lightweight translation of prototype elements.

Figure 2: Suzhou 'Yanlord Tangbei

6.2 Chengdu 'Sunac Guobin One': Structural Innovation Under High Density

Facing the severe constraints of a high-density mountainous residential area, this project exhibits a starkly different reconstruction logic: a structural vertical deconstruction and functional integration of the 'courtyard' prototype. The design translates the 'large courtyard encompassing small courtyards' model of the Western Sichuan *Linpan* settlements into a multi-layered, vertically nested system adapted to steep topography. Adopting a street-lane-courtyard layout akin to the 'Broad and Narrow Alleys' (*Kuanzhai Xiangzi*), in the creation of corridor-style landscapes and localised cluster landscapes, the Sunac Guobin Yaji project—while conforming to modern living circulation—emphasises the combination of Chinese charm and modern spatial experience. Through elevation changes and nested designs, it achieves the effect where every household can enjoy scenic views upon opening their windows. It pursues not only a physical sense of quality in the garden landscape but also seeks to elevate the ritual order values of traditional culture on a spiritual level. The entire garden space, referencing the garden structure of 'Du Fu's Thatched Cottage', is crafted according to the framework of 'four gardens', 'five environments', 'nine lanes', and 'nine realms', creating a residential morphology characteristic of the *Linpan* settlements. This cultivates a *Linpan* garden system that exemplifies the unity of heaven and humanity, appearing as a seamless, organically integrated whole that is naturally carved rather than artificially depicted. Here, the imagery of traditional prototypes such as 'pavilions' and 'courtyards' is seamlessly woven into corridor nodes and observation platforms. This case reveals that in the extremely compressed environments of contemporary cities, the key to reconstruction lies in transcending formal imitation, subjecting prototypes to topological deformation and systemic integration, in order to create complex spatial structures adapted to modern lifestyles and climates.

Figure 3: Chengdu 'Sunac Guobin One'

7. Conclusion: Towards a Critical Reconstruction of 'Neo-Chinese' Landscapes

The essence of Neo-Chinese landscapes is not the imitation or refinement of traditional forms, but rather a critical reconstruction targeting 'spatial prototypes'. This study reveals that the core mechanism of this reconstructive process lies in the reshaping of 'boundaries' and the achievement of 'integration'. Confronting the extreme compression of high-density cities, the traditional prototypes of 'corridors, pavilions, courtyards, and lanes' have achieved a fundamental transformation from static, fixed physical forms to dynamic, permeable, and compounded modern spatial systems through strategies such as three-dimensional extension, fragmentation, topological deformation, and scale translation.

The success of this reconstruction depends on achieving profound 'integration' across three dimensions: in the cultural dimension, transcending symbol extraction to translate the spiritual core of the prototypes (e.g., the anchor function of the 'pavilion', the container attribute of the 'courtyard'); in the ecological dimension, amalgamating traditional wisdom (e.g., the sponge courtyard) with modern low-impact development technologies; in the social dimension, enabling space to become an empowering medium that promotes community interaction and identity. The case studies of Suzhou and Chengdu demonstrate that there is no singular paradigm for this reconstruction, but rather a spectrum of strategies formed according to specific contexts, balancing between 'continuation of meaning and form' and 'structural innovation'.

Ultimately, critical reconstruction points towards a new design philosophy: it demands that during design operations, practitioners consistently adhere to the principle of 'valuing the spirit without being confined by the form' (Yang, 2024), establishing a creative and tension-filled dialogue between traditional spatial wisdom and contemporary urban realities. This provides a theoretical framework and practical pathway for Neo-Chinese landscapes to shed stylistic superficiality and evolve into a genuine modern spatial language that responds to contemporary issues and sustains cultural continuity.

Funding: This research was funded by the Scientific Research Fund of Zhaoqing University (Grant No. 20183).

References

1. Shenzhen Municipal People's Government. (2025). *Shenzhen territorial spatial master plan (2021–2035)*. https://pnr.sz.gov.cn/xxgk/ghjh/content/post_12013112.html
2. Wang, K., et al. (2023). The application of 'Neo-Chinese design' in courtyard landscapes: A case study of 'Taihe Chinese Courtyard'. *Urbanism and Architecture*, *20*(20), 193-196, 200.
3. Xiao, A., Hu, S., Liu, S., et al. (2025). Research on the communication of landscape imagery and aesthetic perception in overseas Chinese gardens based on text mining: A case study of Shuzhuang Garden in Xiamen. *Chinese Landscape Architecture*, *41*(6), 117-123.
4. Yang, S. (2024, December 20). Learning from nature, understanding from the heart: Analysis of humanistic characteristics in classical gardens. *EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD), 9*(12), 252-256. [ISSN: 2455-7838]

CITATION
Yang Sheng. (2026). Modern Reconstruction of Traditional Garden Space Prototypes in Neo-Chinese Landscapes. In Global Journal of Research in Humanities & Cultural Studies (Vol. 6, Number 2, pp. 32–37).
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19052659