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Research on the Visual Identity Design and Application of Suzhou Embroidery from the Perspective of Living Heritage: A Case Study of Suzhou Gardens

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ABSTRACT

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The Suzhou gardens are the core attraction of Suzhou's tourism industry. As a carrier of the integration of Suzhou's culture and economy, they play a crucial role in the development of the city, the inheritance of culture, and the promotion of industries. The Suzhou garden culture is deeply embedded in the texture of the city. However, the current Suzhou gardens still have practical flaws in visual communication and cultural activities. Some tourists are in a predicament of "seeing the scenery but not understanding the scenery". The deep cultural narrative of the gardens has not been effectively conveyed through effective visual carriers. At the same time, the integration of Suzhou intangible cultural heritage is superficial. Although there have been cross-border attempts between gardens and intangible cultural heritage, they are mostly simple element superimpositions, failing to present an effective closed loop of "Suzhou garden culture - intangible cultural heritage project - visual communication".

From the perspective of development trends and integration value, the value of Suzhou garden culture is developing towards a cross-border new stage. National and local policies, such as the "Suzhou Gardens Protection

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Regulations", provide clear value orientations for the protection, activation, and dissemination of Suzhou gardens. Meanwhile, the "14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development" emphasizes the requirement of integrating intangible cultural heritage with tourism. Suzhou embroidery, as a precious treasure of Chinese culture over thousands of years, also plays a crucial role in the interweaving of cultural traditions and innovation. As both Wu culture, Suzhou embroidery's artistic characteristics of "being meticulous in details and pursuing the artistic conception" are highly consistent with the garden-making philosophy of "although not created by humans, it is naturally formed" of Suzhou gardens.

This research will take "promoting the visual image of Suzhou gardens and activating the intangible cultural heritage of Suzhou embroidery" as the core goal, focusing on the unique artistic styles of the four classic Suzhou gardens (Canglang Pavilion, Lion Forest, Qipao Garden, and Liu Garden), analyzing the core of Suzhou embroidery intangible cultural heritage, using the symbolic language of graphic design and visual reconstruction methods to extract and reconfigure the core visual symbols of the four gardens, and finally matching corresponding Suzhou embroidery needlework and fabrics with different visual characteristics for the design of visual images and physical objects.

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Keywords: The four famous gardens of Suzhou; Visual image design; Suzhou embroidery; Revitalization of intangible cultural heritage

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INTRODUCTION

Research background: In the context of the deep integration of culture and tourism and the activation of traditional culture, the dissemination, development and value transformation of historical cultural heritage have all become the core issues of urban cultural construction. The classical gardens of Suzhou, as a World Cultural Heritage site, are the core symbol of Suzhou's urban culture and the spatial carrier of the aesthetic spirit of the Jiangnan region. Among them, the Four Famous Gardens - Canglang Pavilion, Lion Forest, Zhoupu Garden and Liuyuan Garden - respectively represent the peak of garden-making art in the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, carrying the most abundant historical and aesthetic values.

From the perspective of current development, there are still obvious shortcomings in the cultural tourism dissemination of Suzhou gardens: On the one hand, the existing visual promotion mostly presents the overall concept of "Suzhou Gardens", and the differentiated characteristics of the four famous gardens have not been fully highlighted. Tourists often encounter the cognitive dilemma of "not recognizing the scenery while viewing it, and not being able to distinguish the garden while visiting it" during their tours. On the other hand, the deep cultural narrative and artistic features of the gardens are difficult to be effectively conveyed through visual carriers.

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At the same time, the policy orientation of integrating intangible cultural heritage with cultural tourism provides a new path for the dissemination of garden culture. Based on this, this study takes the differentiated artistic characteristics of the four famous gardens as the core, explores the feasible path for the innovative design of garden visual images and the integration of Suzhou embroidery craftsmanship, and responds to the dual practical needs of upgrading Suzhou garden culture and the activation of intangible cultural heritage.

Research Significance:

Theoretical Significance: In current research, the visual image dissemination of Suzhou gardens mainly focuses on the architectural language characteristics or image design of the gardens themselves, lacking a deep and continuous connection with other cultural techniques of Suzhou gardens. The inheritance of Suzhou embroidery craftsmanship skills and the systematic theory of Suzhou garden IP have not been fully developed. Therefore, in terms of integration and renewal, this research has certain theoretical significance.

This study constructs the core language symbols of Suzhou gardens, matches the needlework techniques and fabric characteristics in Suzhou embroidery, and reconfigures the visual perception through graphic design to form the components of the logical framework. At the same time, it integrates the garden artistic conception culture of the

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Wuyi region and the intangible cultural heritage of Suzhou embroidery, filling the theoretical gap of interdisciplinary integration and enriching the theoretical dimension of visual dissemination.

Practical Significance: From the perspective of the practical application of Suzhou gardens, this research directly addresses the cognitive dilemma of most tourists who "fail to recognize the scenery they are viewing" and the reality problem of the superficial integration of intangible cultural heritage. It promotes the publicity of the garden culture characteristics through the visual image design of the four gardens and the visual representation of Suzhou embroidery intangible cultural heritage through the craftsmanship techniques. To a certain extent, this solves the deficiency of lacking systematic resource integration in the Wu region culture. The practice of activating intangible cultural heritage through the new path of Suzhou garden IP design is also different from the traditional themes of landscape, birds, and flowers. It transforms the garden symbols into new and innovative expression themes.

Therefore, to a certain extent, this research not only creates a differentiated visual image brand for Suzhou garden culture, but also expands the application scenarios of Suzhou embroidery, attracts the attention of young groups, alleviates the deficiency of insufficient regional radiation power, and provides a feasible design solution for the

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integration of Suzhou embroidery intangible cultural heritage into modern life. Finally, this research result also to a certain extent corresponds to the requirements of the cultural inheritance of the "Suzhou Gardens Protection Regulations" and the intangible cultural heritage tourism and culture integration policy of the "14th Five-Year Plan for Culture Development". It is in line with the policy orientation of the "14th Five-Year Plan for Culture Development" on the integration of intangible cultural heritage and tourism.

Historical Contextual Significance: The Suzhou gardens and Suzhou embroidery culture are both core carriers of the Wu culture. The former is the epitome of spatial aesthetics, while the latter is the ultimate expression of needlework aesthetics. Together, they carry the cultural spirit of refined elegance and nature worship of the Wu literati.

This research, through in-depth exploration and visual translation of the historical and cultural characteristics of the four famous gardens, enables traditional garden aesthetics to go beyond historical remnants and physical spaces, and is transformed into cultural carriers integrated into contemporary life through graphic design and intangible cultural heritage craftsmanship. This realizes the contemporary continuation and dynamic inheritance of the Wugushi cultural genes, and holds significant cultural value for inheriting the Jiangnan cultural lineage and promoting traditional aesthetics.

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Research Contents and Methods: This research mainly consists of three core components: Firstly, a systematic review of the artistic characteristics and visual elements of the four famous gardens in Suzhou; Secondly, the construction of the logic and differentiation rules for the compatibility between Suzhou embroidery and the four famous gardens; Thirdly, the creation of visual image designs for the four famous gardens and the implementation of Suzhou embroidery techniques.

The research adopts the method of literature review to sort out the relevant theoretical achievements of gardens and Suzhou embroidery; it uses the method of field investigation to conduct on-site research on the current status of the four famous gardens and Suzhou embroidery techniques, obtaining first-hand materials; it employs the method of semiotic analysis to disassemble and extract the core visual symbols of the gardens; and it uses the method of design practice to complete the visual design and the implementation of the craftsmanship, verifying the feasibility of the research conclusions.

CHAPTER 1

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ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS AND CULTURAL CORE OF THE FOUR FAMOUS GARDENS IN SUZHOU

1.1 The Gardening Philosophy and Aesthetic Characteristics of Suzhou Gardens

1. Garden Design Philosophy within the Wu Culture

The historical and cultural essence of Suzhou gardens is embodied in their visual symbolic language. The core of its culture is rooted in the cultural genes of the Wuyi region and the sentiments of scholars. The Wuyi region has a dense network of waterways and abundant resources, and the landscaping concept of Suzhou gardens is inseparably linked to these material foundations.

Suzhou is located in the Jiangnan water town area, with dense river networks and abundant water sources, providing a natural material foundation for garden landscaping. This has formed the characteristic of "no garden without water". At the same time, since ancient times, the Wuyi region has had a flourishing literary scene, and the scholar class became the core subject of garden construction. They integrated the aesthetic interests of poetry, calligraphy, and painting into the practice of garden creation, using gardens as a space carrier to express their yearning for

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seclusion and achieve spiritual habitation. After the mid-Ming Dynasty, scholar garden construction reached its peak, and gardens no longer merely served as living spaces but became comprehensive artistic carriers integrating literature, painting, calligraphy, and architecture. Scholar aesthetics became the core kernel of Suzhou garden aesthetics.

2. The Core Aesthetic Essence of Suzhou Gardens

Although created by humans, it seems as if it was naturally formed" is the core design concept of Suzhou classical gardens. Its essence is to simulate the form and atmosphere of natural landscapes within the limited urban space by artificially stacking mountains, arranging water features, planting trees, and building pavilions, achieving the spatial effect of "a forest within a small area".

This design concept encompasses three aesthetic connotations: Firstly, it is natural expressionism. The landscaping of Suzhou gardens does not aim to replicate nature precisely; instead, it extracts the essence of natural landscapes and creates a mountain and forest atmosphere through an expressive approach. Secondly, it is space creation. Through techniques such as borrowing scenery and framing views, the garden design breaks through spatial limitations to create rich spatial layers. Finally, it is the harmony between heaven and humanity. The garden space embodies the

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spiritual pursuit of scholars to adapt to nature and express their sentiments in the mountains and waters.

1.2 Historical Context and Diverse Characteristics of the Four Famous Gardens in Suzhou

The four famous gardens in Suzhou belong to the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties respectively. Each of them embodies the gardening concepts and artistic styles of different eras, presenting distinct and unique characteristics.

1. The Humble Administrator's Garden

The Humble Administrator's Garden was built during the reign of Emperor Zhengde of the Ming Dynasty. It was constructed by Wang Xianchen, who resigned from his official position and returned to the countryside. Wen Zhengming participated in the design and planning. It is the largest classical garden in Suzhou and the pinnacle of the literati landscape gardens of the Ming Dynasty.

Its name is derived from the phrase "Planting a garden and selling vegetables to provide food for daily consumption... This is also the

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governance of the foolish ones." It embodies the political ideals and life pursuits of the Ming Dynasty literati who retired to the countryside and sought pleasure in nature. The entire garden is centered around water features, with expansive water surfaces and buildings built along the water. The overall layout is spacious and grand, presenting an expressive landscape style of distant mountains and flowing waters.

The architectural style is simple and elegant, seamlessly integrating with the landscape and vegetation. There is no sense of excessive decoration or overcomplication. The garden has different scenes throughout the four seasons, featuring spring willows, summer lotuses, autumn chrysanthemums, and winter plums, each with its own charm. It is a model of the literati's gardening concept of "planting a garden as a painting, and generating emotions based on the scenery."

2. Lion Grove Garden

The Lion Grove was first built during the Taizheng period of the Yuan Dynasty by the eminent monk Tianru. Initially, it was a garden of a Zen temple, representing the unique Zen style gardens of Suzhou.

The core of the Lion Forest is a large the Taihu Lake Lake rock group, with countless peaks and winding canyons. It is named after the similarity

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between a stone peak and a lion, which is consistent with the Buddhist concept of "lion roar" in Zen Buddhism. The stones of the Taihu Lake Lake and the artificial mountains are arranged in harmony, known as the "Kingdom of Artificial Mountains". The path of the constructed cave winds and intertwines, creating a sense of depth and the interaction between reality and illusion, which can create a maze like spatial experience.

Finally, the entire stone landscape of Lion Grove is complemented by ancient cypress trees and ponds. The overall layout is centered around the principles of Zen Buddhism, conveying the peaceful and ethereal atmosphere of the Zen forest in the Yuan Dynasty, reflecting the deep integration of Buddhist Zen philosophy and literati landscape.

3. Canglang Pavilion

The Canglang Pavilion was built during the Qingli era of the Northern Song Dynasty by the scholar Su Shunqing. It is the oldest existing classical garden in Suzhou and represents the elegant style of garden design in the Song Dynasty.

The garden takes the literary allusion of "Canglang Washing the Gown" as its cultural core. The overall layout centers around the

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mountains and forests, using the river outside the garden as a backdrop to create a unique layout where "water scenery is integrated within the garden".

The garden's design characteristics can be summarized as "wildness, tranquility, and elegance": the earthy hills and lush trees in the garden retain the simple charm of a forest. The winding corridors and the scattered lattice windows throughout the garden create a sense of a winding path leading to a secluded place. The architectural form of the Canglang Pavilion is simple and plain, and the inscriptions on the plaques are all filled with the artistic taste of scholars. As a whole, it conveys the scholarly demeanor of the Song Dynasty scholars, who were peaceful and detached from the superficialities, embodying a refined and secluded spirit. The Canglang Pavilion is regarded as "elegant" for these reasons.

These three characteristics complement each other and form the spiritual essence of the Canglang Pavilion.

4. Lingering Garden

The Lingering Garden was built in the Ming Dynasty. During the Qing Dynasty, it was expanded by Sheng Kang, reaching its peak. It represents the exquisite and elaborate style of gardens in the Qing Dynasty.

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Attention was paid to the details of the buildings, such as doors, windows, railings, and carvings, which fully demonstrated the exquisite and delicate craftsmanship of the Qing Dynasty. At the same time, in terms of the layout of the space, it has the characteristic of being well-proportioned and flexible. For example, through the separation of corridors, walls, and buildings, multiple spaces of different sizes, brightness, darkness, and emptiness and fullness are formed. It can create a rich and diverse landscape sequence within a limited space, and is praised as "reaching the charm of the mountains and forests without leaving the city."

The landscape sequence within the garden progresses layer by layer, from the narrow and winding corridor at the entrance to the main scenic area in the middle, and then to the courtyard stone forest in the east. The rhythm changes are very rich, fully demonstrating the characteristics of the Qing Dynasty garden design that emphasizes spatial experience and detail creation.

1.3 Core Visual Elements of the Four Famous Gardens

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The visual elements of the four famous gardens in Suzhou can be summarized into three systems: architecture, landscape, and culture. Each garden exhibits distinct characteristics in these three elements.

1. Architectural Visual Symbols

Architectural language is the most distinctive visual symbol of Suzhou gardens. The architectural styles of the four famous gardens are each unique.

In terms of pavilions and terraces, the pavilions and terraces in the Humble Administrator's Garden are mostly in the form of hexagons and octagons, with a light and flowing shape that can blend well with the water features, and they are very harmonious. While the main pavilion of the Canglang Pavilion has a square hip roof style, which is simple and profound. The pavilions and terraces in Lion Grove Garden are mostly built along the mountains, with lively shapes. In contrast, the pavilions and terraces in the Lingering Garden are more complex in shape and have more exquisite decorations.

In terms of the shape of louvres, the louvres in the Humble Administrator's Garden mostly feature landscapes and plant patterns, while those in Lion Grove Garden mainly consist of floral and mythical beast

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patterns. The louvres of Canglang Pavilion are mainly geometric patterns, which are simple and elegant. The louvres of the Lingering Garden, on the other hand, are more delicate and exquisite.

Taking the corridors of the four famous gardens as examples, the corridors in The Humble Administrator's Garden mostly run along the water, being natural and expansive; the Canglang Pavilion is characterized by its double corridors to separate the water scenes inside and outside the garden; while the corridors in the Lingering Garden are winding and variable, serving as a transitional function for space, and different spaces have formed different visual language symbols.

2. Landscapes and Water Features Symbols

The landscape elements constitute the framework and soul of Suzhou gardens, and they reveal the differences in the landscape layout of the four famous Suzhou gardens.

The mountain and rock construction of the Suzhou Garden is gentle and spacious, usually scattered along the water edge. The Lion Grove Garden has its overall construction centered around the Taihu stone rockery, with a strangely magnificent and imposing shape, and quite imposing in its style. The Canglang Pavilion mainly uses earth mountains

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and stones, and the mountain and stone elements usually give a rustic texture. Finally, the Lingering Garden centers around the Guanyun Peak and other placed stones, with a straight and exquisite shape.

In terms of the construction of the water bodies in the gardens, the Suzhou Garden has an expansive water surface, which is the core of the entire garden landscape. The water body of the Lion Grove Garden is mostly surrounded by rockeries, and the mountains and water blend harmoniously. The Canglang Pavilion uses earth mountains and stones as the main feature, and the mountain and stone elements usually give a simple and elegant feel. The water body of the Lingering Garden is winding and narrow, intertwined with the buildings, with you and I within each other.

Compared with the layout of the landscape, in terms of the use of vegetation, each garden has its own unique features: The Humble Administrator's Garden is represented by lotus and willows, with a strong water-town atmosphere. Lion Grove Garden has ancient cypresses with a very rustic feature. The Canglang Pavilion is characterized by bamboo, with a serene and elegant feel. The Lingering Garden has ginkgo trees and peonies, which are more delicate and magnificent.

3.Humanistic symbols

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The plaques and inscriptions in the garden not only enable people to imagine that they are visual representations of the humanistic spirit of the garden, but also serve as the finishing touches to the garden's artistic conception.

The naming of places such as "Yuanxiang Hall" in the Humble Administrator's Garden is derived from the works of literati, carrying poetic and artistic connotations. The inscriptions like "Zen Hut" and "Bow the Peak and Point the Cypress" in the Lion Grove Garden convey the essence of Zen Buddhism everywhere. Finally, the couplet "Clear Wind and Bright Moon Have No Price, Close Water and Far Mountains All Have Sentiment" in the Canglang Pavilion clarifies the secluded core of the garden.

These humanistic symbols are not just textual signs, but also visual expressions of the core spirit of the garden.

CHAPTER 2

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RESEARCH ON THE COMPATIBILITY OF THE FOUR FAMOUS GARDENS OF SUZHOU WITH SUZHOU EMBROIDERY ELEMENTS

2.1 Overview of the Artistic Characteristics and Craftsmanship of Suzhou Embroidery

1.The aesthetic characteristics of Suzhou embroidery

Suzhou embroidery, as the first of the four famous embroideries, originated in the Suzhou area and is deeply rooted in the cultural soil of the Wuxi region. It is renowned for its "fine and elegant" characteristics.

Its aesthetic traits are highly compatible with the Suzhou gardens: Firstly, it is exquisite and delicate. Su embroidery uses needles instead of brushes and threads instead of ink. Its needlework is rich and diverse, capable of presenting extremely fine layers and textures. Secondly, Su embroidery has the characteristic of being elegant and graceful. The colors are emphasized as soft and delicate, often using intermediate and transitional colors, which align with the aesthetic temperament of the Jiangnan water towns.

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At the same time, Su embroidery does not pursue rigid realism but conveys the spirit of the objects through the needlework， carrying the aesthetic pursuit of the literati in the Wuxi region.

2.Suzhou embroidery techniques and fabric characteristics

The embroidery techniques of Suzhou embroidery are the core carrier of its visual effect in Suzhou embroidery culture. These techniques are diverse, including stitch grouping, random stitch embroidery, etc., each with distinct styles. Stitch grouping is soft and smooth, random stitch is three-dimensional, and seed stitch has a dynamic feel.

Take plain stitch as an example. Its lines are smooth and flowing, suitable for depicting architectural outlines and hard structures. While stitch grouping has a natural and soft color transition, suitable for representing water surfaces, vegetation, and other gradations. Finally, random stitch texture can enrich the three-dimensionality, suitable for depicting natural textures such as rocks and trees, etc.

In terms of the selection of Suzhou embroidery fabrics, different fabrics can also present different lusters, light transmittance, and texture qualities, which all constitute the attribute database of Suzhou embroidery craftsmanship. Plain silk satin has a soft luster and fine texture, suitable for

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depicting the refined and elegant garden style, while Hangzhou textile has a matte texture and strong texture sense, suitable for depicting the simple and serene garden temperament.

2.2 Research on the Compatibility of Suzhou Embroidery and Suzhou Gardens

The Suzhou gardens and Suzhou embroidery both belong to the core carriers of the Wugushi cultural system. The former represents the three-dimensional poetry and painting of the Wugushi region, while the latter is the ink painting on the tip of a needle. Over the course of thousands of years of development in the Wugushi area, they have mutually influenced and nourished each other, playing a crucial role and forming a cultural connection characterized by the same spiritual origin, compatible forms, and similar values.

1. Morphological adaptation

At the level of form expression, the artistic language of Suzhou embroidery has a highly corresponding relationship with the spatial language of gardens: the density and contrast of stitches in Suzhou

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embroidery correspond to the opening and closing, as well as the creation of emptiness and reality in garden spaces. At the same time, the gradual color change and layered stacking in Suzhou embroidery correspond to the distance and depth levels of garden landscapes.

Through the texture and luster differences of different fabrics in Suzhou embroidery, it corresponds to the temperament and texture of different gardens. This corresponding nature of the form language enables the Suzhou embroidery technique to accurately translate the spatial atmosphere of gardens, achieving the transformation from three-dimensional space to two-dimensional threads.

2. Value matching

Both belong to the cultural system of the Wu region and are deeply influenced by the aesthetic tastes of scholars. They both follow the aesthetic principles of "adhering to nature, pursuing the artistic conception, and being refined and elegant".

The Suzhou gardens are the natural artistic conception created by scholars in the space, while the Suzhou embroidery is the natural charm reproduced by artisans through their needles. Both are based on nature as the aesthetic source, and both have the scholar's sentiments as their spiritual core, carrying the cultural genes of the Wu region, which are

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"refined, reserved, and elegant". This cultural homogeneity is the core foundation for the deep integration of the two.

At the contemporary value level, the integration of the two can achieve mutual empowerment. The Suzhou gardens, through the Suzhou embroidery technique, break through the limitations of physical space, transform the garden culture into touchable cultural products, expand the dissemination scenarios, and achieve dynamic inheritance. Conversely, the Suzhou embroidery, by drawing on the themes of the gardens, breaks through the limitations of traditional themes, integrates into the contemporary tourism and cultural consumption market, and rejuvenates new vitality.

CHAPTER 3

VISUAL DESIGN CREATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOUR FAMOUS GARDENS IN SUZHOU

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3. 1 Early Design Phase: Visual symbol extraction and conception

1. Principles and Methods for Extracting Symbolic Language

The extraction of visual symbols usually requires the following principles to be followed. Firstly, the principle of authenticity: the extracted symbols must originate from the real elements of the garden, and these elements often carry the core of the garden culture. There should be no arbitrary imagination. On-site exploration and evidence collection can be conducted to obtain the real language symbol materials.

Secondly, the principle of visual recognizability: these symbols must have distinct characteristics, be able to clearly distinguish the style differences of the four famous gardens, and also be operable. Through simplification and reconstruction techniques, they can meet the implementation requirements of graphic design and Suzhou embroidery craftsmanship. During the extraction process, redundant details should be removed, the most recognizable visual outline should be retained, and a series of translation techniques such as abstraction and stylization should be carried out to form standardized design symbols.

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2. Extraction of Core Visual Symbols of the Four Famous Gardens in Suzhou

Based on the visual element system described in the previous text, the design concept is developed through the most representative visual symbols of each garden.

For instance,the Humble Administrator's Garden extracts "hexagonal pavilions + lotus pond water surface + willow lines" as the core symbol group to present the expansive layout of the Humble Administrator's Garden. While "Taihu stones + cave contours + ancient cypress silhouettes" form the core symbol group, which can better express the rich and extraordinary stone scenery of the Lion Grove Garden. The Canglang Pavilion uses "geometric blind windows + bamboo shadow lines" as the core symbol group, conveying a serene atmosphere through simple lines. Finally, the Lingering Garden extracts "form of Guan Yun Peak + curved corridor contours + flower window patterns" as the core symbol group, presenting a delicate space with progressive layers. Each symbol group includes both core identification elements and auxiliary atmosphere elements, ensuring recognition while also carrying the garden's artistic conception.

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3. Modernization of Visual Symbols

After clarifying the extraction method of symbolic language and the visual characteristics of each garden, the modern artistic reconstruction of the symbolic language can be carried out.

In terms of form, geometric simplification and line refinement are carried out, converting the complex garden buildings and landscapes into simple planar forms, while retaining the core identification features of the gardens. In terms of color usage, based on the adaptive color system of each garden, 2-3 main colors and auxiliary colors can be extracted to construct a standardized color system.

And composition is the key logic of blank space and layout in graphic design. While preserving the artistic conception of the gardens, it is adapted to contemporary visual aesthetics and application scenarios, ultimately forming a reusable visual symbol library specific to the four famous gardens.

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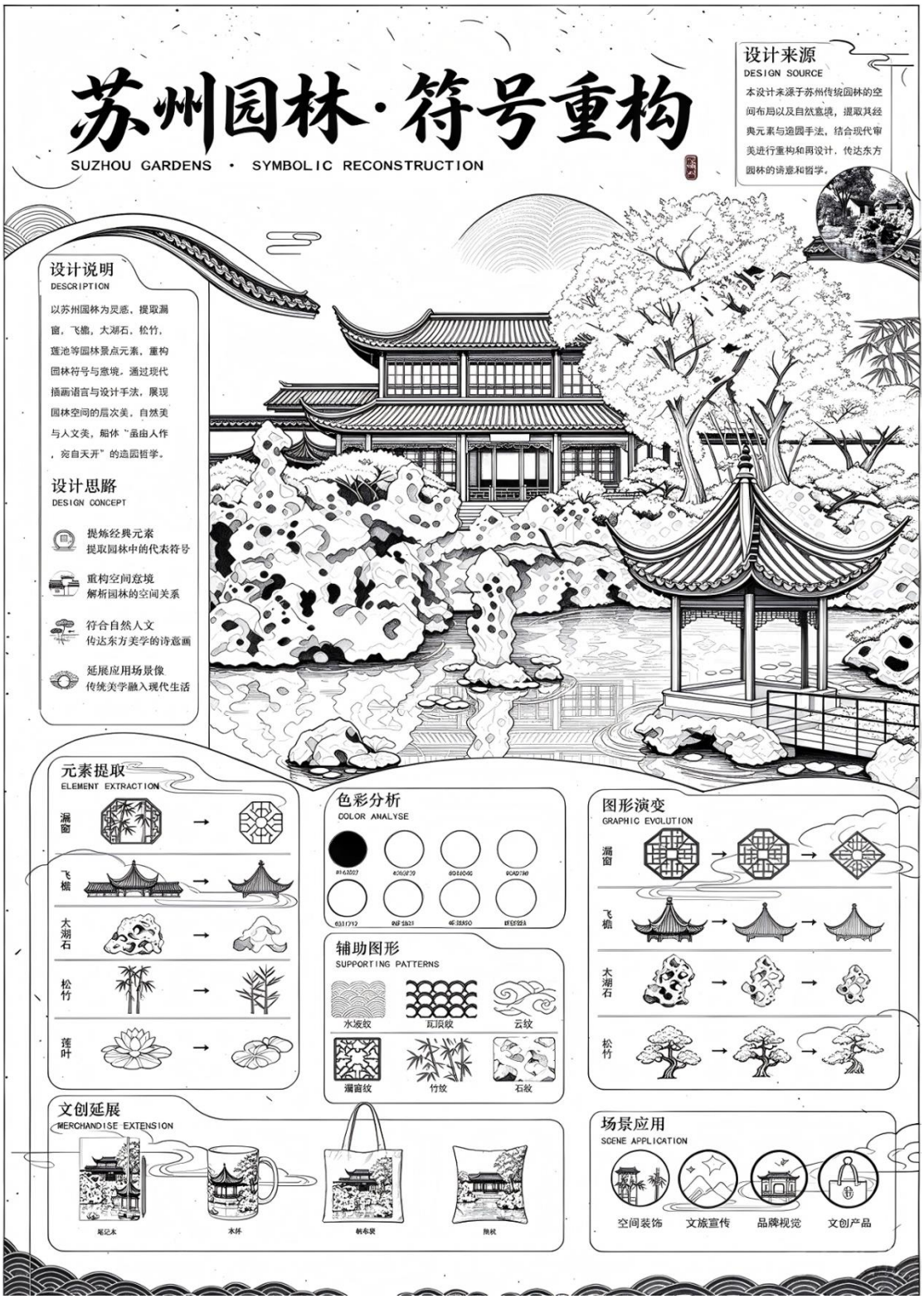

Reconstruction of Visual Symbolic Language (Sketch)

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Reconstruction of Visual Symbolic Language in Suzhou Gardens

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3.2 Visual Image Design for the Four Famous Gardens

1. Design Positioning and Core Concept

This series of designs is specifically targeted at the cultural visual IP of the four famous gardens in Suzhou. The core purpose is to serve the dissemination of garden culture and the development of cultural products. The design is based on the core concept of "each garden has its own unique charm, embodying both form and spirit", and focuses on the artistic characteristics of each garden. On the main body, it uses visual symbols as the carrier, and at the same time, adds texture with Suzhou embroidery craftsmanship. This ensures the accuracy of cultural connotations while also possessing the visual appeal and practicality of modern design, thereby creating a differentiated visual image of gardens.

2. The Humble Administrator's Garden

The poster of the Humble Administrator's Garden is based on the core principles of "spaciousness, elegance, and intention" in garden design. It follows the panoramic landscape painting composition style of Wen Zhengming's map of The Humble Administrator's Garden, and selects

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hexagonal pavilions, willow trees, lotus leaves, and expansive water surfaces as the core visual symbols of the poster.

The picture uses a large area of water as the base, by gradually spreading the shoreline and the outline of the willow trees in the background, placing the simplified outline of the Yuanxiang Hall in the middle scene, and decorating the lotus leaves and lotus flowers in the near point. At the same time, the buildings and vegetation of The Humble Administrator's Garden are arranged along the water surface in a relaxed and spacious manner, restoring the open and spacious water scenery layout of the The Humble Administrator's Garden, and interpreting the garden design concept of "entering the garden through paintings" in the Ming Dynasty.

In terms of color, water blue and light green are used as the main tones, with light pink used to highlight the lotus flowers. The overall color is soft and transparent. In terms of shape, a large number of gentle and smooth curves are used, weakening the harsh and sharp outlines, simulating the gentle shape of the water ripples, willow trees, and lotus leaves of the Jiangnan water town, and using color gradation to expand the space of the picture in distance.

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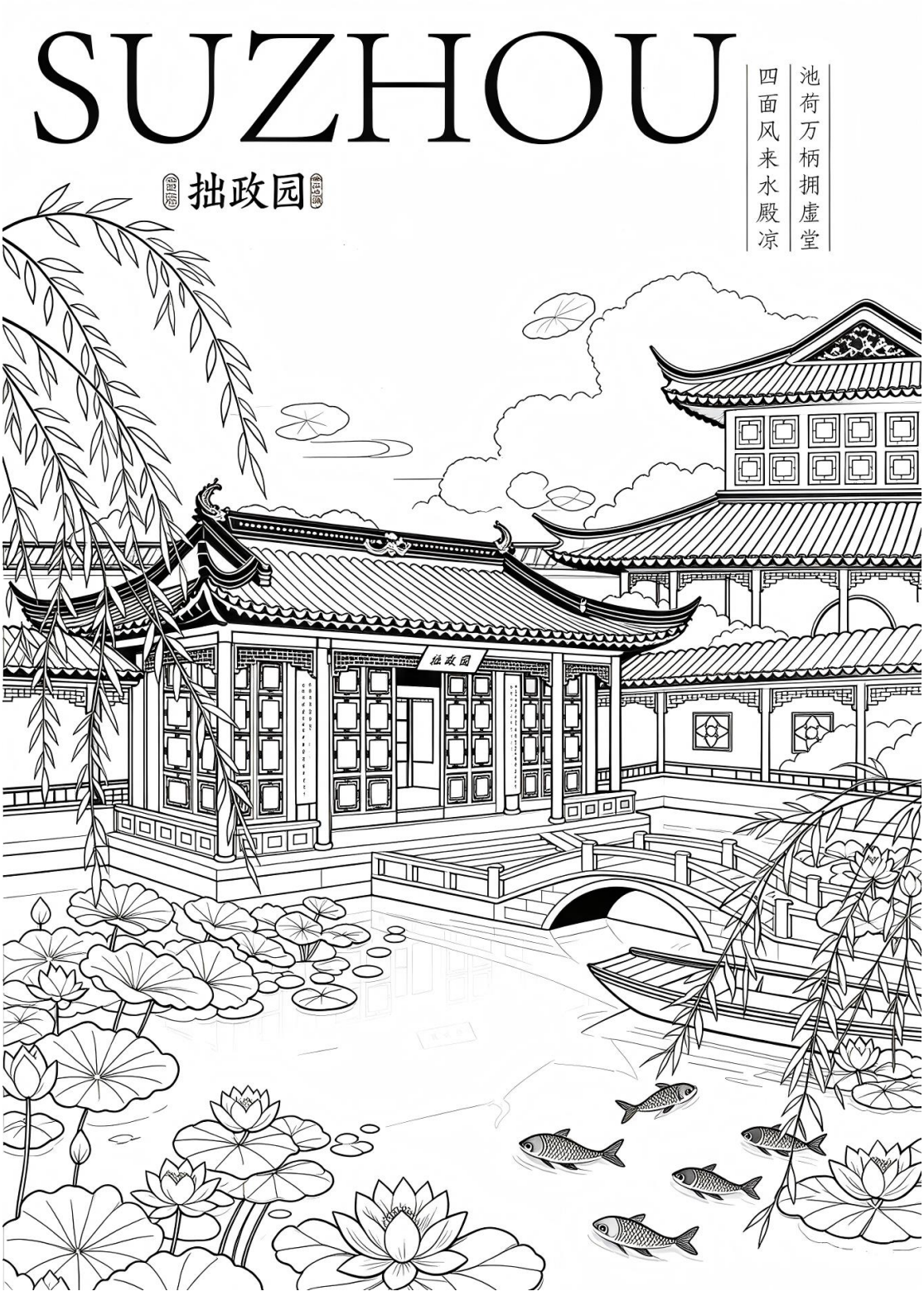

The Humble Administrator's Garden Poster (Draft)

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The Humble Administrator's Garden Poster

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3. Lion Grove Garden

The Lion Grove Garden uses the group of Taihu stone terraces as the main narrative element of the picture. It selects the rugged Taihu stone peaks, the outlines of the artificial terraces, the shadows of ancient cypresses, and the reflections on the pool surface to construct the visual symbol system of the poster.

The composition adopts a scattered layout of staggered stacking to simulate the layered and winding artificial mountain spaces of the "Woolly Lion Forest Kingdom". The large and small stone peaks are arranged in a staggered and uneven manner, using the interlacing and superimposition of blocks to restore the characteristics of the spiral and interplay of emptiness and reality of the artificial terraces. At the bottom of the picture, the water reflection and the shadow of the ancient cypress are combined, with the rocks and water reflecting each other, conveying the serene and ethereal environment of the Yuan Dynasty Zen forest.

The colors of the entire picture are mainly in gray-brown and stone blue, with dark brown used to represent the ancient cypresses. The overall tone is stable and heavy, matching the stone texture of Taihu stones. In terms of shape, the "slender, cracked, transparent and wrinkled" external features of Taihu stones are emphasized, using the

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contrast of light and shade of blocks to represent the concave and convex holes of the rocks, without doing photo-level realistic depiction, focusing on expressing the extraordinary charm of the entire artificial mountain group.

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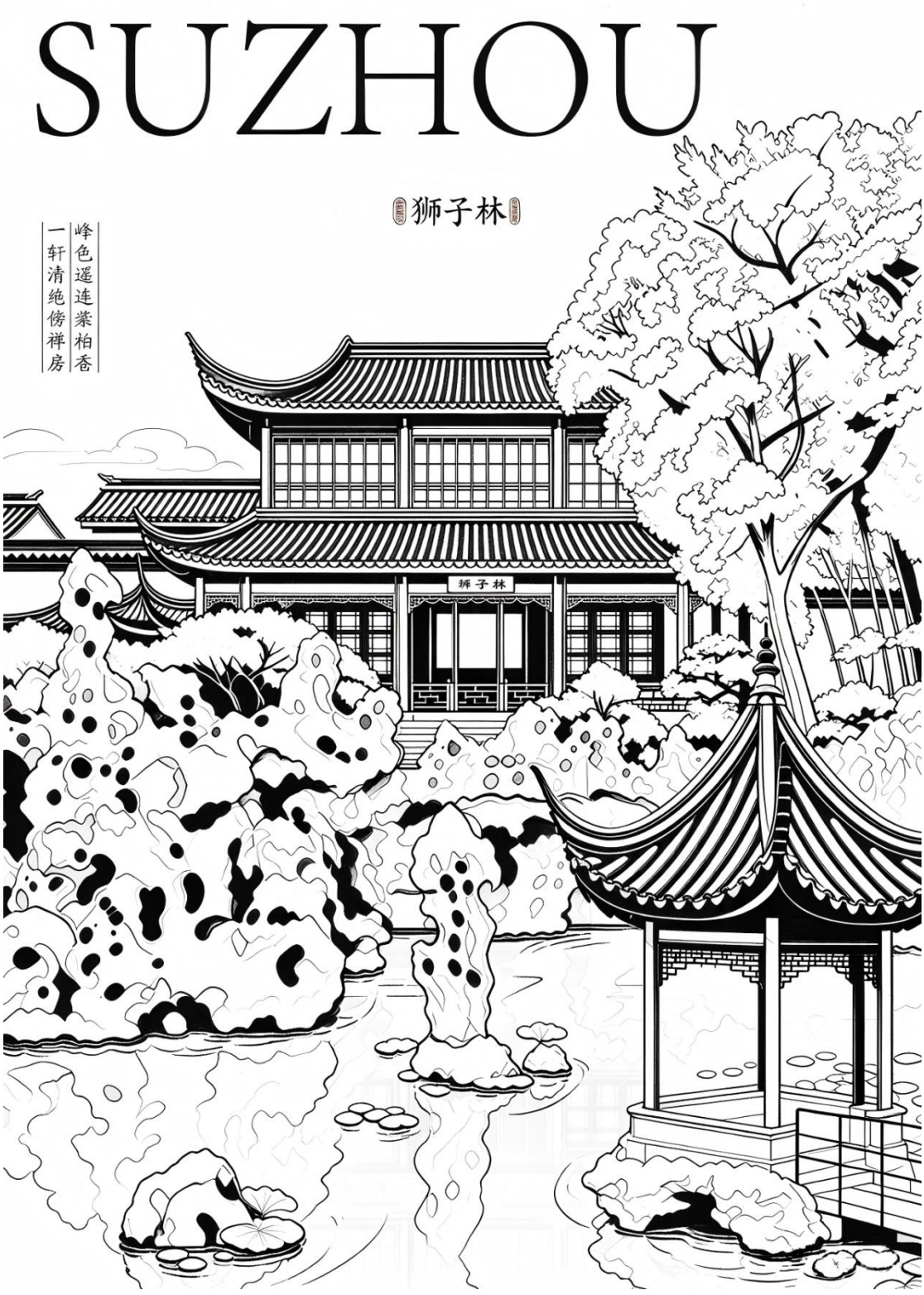

Lion Grove Garden Poster (Draft)

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Lion Grove Garden Poster

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4. Canglang Pavilion

The poster of Canglang Pavilion is created based on the garden-making characteristics of the Song Dynasty, namely "wildness, tranquility and elegance". In terms of symbolic language, the square main pavilion, geometric pattern lattice windows, bamboo shadows, and external borrowing of river water are selected as the core symbols of the poster.

The composition of Canglang Pavilion draws on the blank and freehand painting techniques of Song Dynasty landscape paintings. The simplified and refined main pavilion outline is placed at the visual center on the left side of the picture, while the Canglang Pavilion characteristic geometric lattice windows that have undergone geometric abstraction are arranged on the right side. At the same time, the bamboo shadows are outlined with blurred lines. The bottom of the picture uses simple lines to represent the river water borrowed by the Canglang Pavilion's double corridor, and the large area of blank space replicates the quiet and ethereal atmosphere of the garden, echoing the core spirit of the literati, "The clear wind and bright moon have no price, while the nearby water and distant mountains all have feelings."

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In terms of the color system of the poster, dark gray and light beige are chosen as the main colors, and the low-saturation dark green is used as the accent color for the bamboo shadows. The overall color tone is calm and elegant, which is in line with the simple and unpretentious aesthetic orientation of the Song Dynasty literati.

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Changlang Pavilion Poster (Draft)

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Changlang Pavilion Poster

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5. Lingering Garden

The poster of Lingering Garden focuses on the exquisite and complex architectural features of the Qing Dynasty gardens. The design revolves around the spatial sequence of the garden, which is characterized by "moderate opening and closing, and progressive layers". The landmark symbols of the poster are the stone formation of Guanyun Peak, the winding corridors, and the exquisite patterns of the decorative windows.

The composition adopts a progressive layout, placing Guanyun Peak at the visual center of the picture. The contours of the curving corridors and the intricate decorative window patterns extend towards the edges of the picture on both sides. Low stone formations and vegetation are scattered at the bottom to simulate the spatial experience of gradually entering the courtyard and the unfolding of the landscape while walking through the winding corridors in the Lingering Garden. This is done to replicate the rich and delicate spatial rhythm of the Qing Dynasty garden design.

The color scheme of the entire poster uses warm wood color and stone gray as the main tones, complemented by dark green vegetation. The overall color is warm and elegant, in line with the architectural characteristics of Lingering Garden. The architectural details of the Qing Dynasty are retained in the design, with a focus on depicting the decorative window patterns and the lines of the corridors. The rich layers of lines are

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used to reflect the exquisite and delicate craftsmanship of the Qing Dynasty.

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Lingering Garden Poster(Draft)

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4.5.1 Liuyuan Poster(Draft)



Lingering Garden Poster

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3.3 The practical craftsmanship implementation and application of the design works of Suzhou gardens

1. The matching of needlework and fabric has been implemented

According to the compatibility rules of Suzhou gardens and Suzhou embroidery techniques mentioned earlier, four pieces of embroidered works were completed using Suzhou embroidery techniques:

The work for The Humble Administrator's Garden was made with Jacquard silk fabric, using blue, light pink, and willow green threads as the main colors. The water surface and lotus leaves were transitioned layer by layer using loose stitch patterns, resulting in soft and natural colors. This semi-transparent fabric enhanced the ethereal and freehand artistic atmosphere.

The work for The Lion Grove Garden used plain crepe silk fabric, with grayish-brown, ochre, and black silk threads as the main colors. The main rock peaks were embroidered using seed stitch to create texture, and the light and dark transitions were connected using haphazard stitches. The three-dimensional effect was strong.

The work for the Canglang Pavilion used Hangzhou silk fabric, with black, dark gray, and dark green silk threads as the main colors. The main pavilion outline was embroidered using loop stitch, with straight and

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smooth lines. The bamboo shadows were layered and diffused using plain stitch, giving a simple and natural texture.

The work for the Lingering Garden used plain crepe silk fabric, with wood color, stone blue, and warm brown silk threads as the main colors. The details of the buildings and the window grilles were embroidered using fine plain stitch, with clear and exquisite textures, highlighting the delicate texture of the garden. Through different stitch techniques and fabrics, the characteristics of each garden were differentiated and adapted, and the design was implemented.

2. Restoration of Garden Ambience and Expression of Texture in Process Implementation

During the embroidery process, the density and depth of the stitches can be varied to simulate the relationship between the virtual and real aspects of the garden space.

For example, by using sparse stitches and light colors in the background and dense stitches and rich colors in the foreground, the layering of the stitches can recreate the depth of the garden space. At the same time, the material characteristics of the fabric are fully utilized. Through the differences in matte, glossy, and semi-transparent textures, the distinct qualities of each garden can be emphasized, allowing viewers

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to not only perceive the garden's atmosphere through vision, but also feel the different material textures through touch, achieving an upgrade from "seeing the scenery" to "touching the scenery", and transforming the garden culture from a static landscape into a tangible physical work.

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Exhibition of Suzhou embroidery in Humble Administrator's Garden

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Exhibition of Suzhou embroidery in Lion Grove Garden

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Exhibition of Suzhou embroidery in Canglang Pavilion

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Exhibition of Suzhou embroidery in Lingering Garden

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3.4 Design and Application of Suzhou Gardens' Derivative Products

1. Suzhou Gardens Series of Cultural Products and Visual Extension Design

Based on the core visual symbols and visual works of Suzhou gardens, a series of application outcomes have been developed: Cultural and creative products include but are not limited to postcards, bookmarks, scarves, decorative paintings, canvas bags, etc., covering various consumption scenarios. Visual communication types include posters, cover designs of guidebooks, and materials for the scenic area's navigation system, all tailored to the needs of garden tourism communication.

All derivative designs follow a unified symbol system and color standards, maintaining the distinct styles of the four famous gardens, forming a complete visual application matrix.

1.A series of cultural and creative products based on the illustrations of Suzhou gardens: including but not limited to bookmarks, notebooks, etc.

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Bookmarks

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Notebooks

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2.Packaging design for the series of illustrations of Suzhou gardens: including paper boxes and small iron commemorative gift boxes, etc.



Paper gift box



Iron gift box

3.Suzhou Gardens Series Illustration Campus Art Exhibition: Featuring displays of posters, cultural and creative products, physical installation products, and more.

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Exhibition Design

4.Post the theme posters of Suzhou gardens beside the escalators in the subway station and on the bulletin boards in the residential areas. Use the flat posters as visual carriers and integrate them into the real public space environment to achieve the function of cultural dissemination.

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Outdoor display (community)



Indoor Display (Subway)

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CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

Research Findings

This research systematically explored the historical context and distinctive artistic characteristics of the four famous gardens in Suzhou, constructed a core visual element system covering three dimensions: architecture, landscape, and culture, and simultaneously clarified the respective aesthetic cores and visual identification features of the four gardens from the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, as well as providing more detailed theoretical basis.

At the same time, it demonstrated the research on the cultural homology and form compatibility of Suzhou embroidery and the four famous gardens, established the form compatibility of each garden's needlework, fabric, and color, breaking through the limitations of the traditional layering of integrated elements in intangible cultural heritage.

Therefore, this research completed the series of visual image design for the four famous gardens and the practical implementation of Suzhou embroidery techniques, forming a complete design path from symbol extraction, visual reconstruction to the implementation of the entire project's techniques and actual derivative applications. It can effectively

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convey the cultural connotations of the gardens and fully leverage the unique advantages of intangible cultural heritage techniques, providing a reusable practical model for the dissemination of Suzhou garden culture and the activation of intangible cultural heritage.

Insufficient Research

Due to the limitations of the research time and process conditions, this study still has certain shortcomings: Firstly, the scale and subject range of the ground-based Suzhou embroidery works are limited. Only four main visual works have been embroidered, and the process transformation of other visual symbols of famous gardens has not been fully carried out. Secondly, the expansion of the application scenarios of the visual symbols of the four famous gardens is still limited. Other emerging communication forms such as digitalization and immersion have not yet been included in the practical scope.

Future Research and Practice Prospects

By systematically reviewing this research, further in-depth studies can be conducted in the following aspects in the future:

First, expand the application scenarios of garden visual symbols, combining digital media, immersive experiences and other technological means to create more diverse forms of garden visual communication; second, deepen the integration of Suzhou embroidery with other garden

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cultures, explore more possible combinations of stitches, fabrics and garden elements, develop more rich Suzhou embroidery garden series works, thereby forming a large-scale cultural product system, allowing Suzhou garden culture to achieve wider and deeper dissemination and inheritance in the contemporary era.

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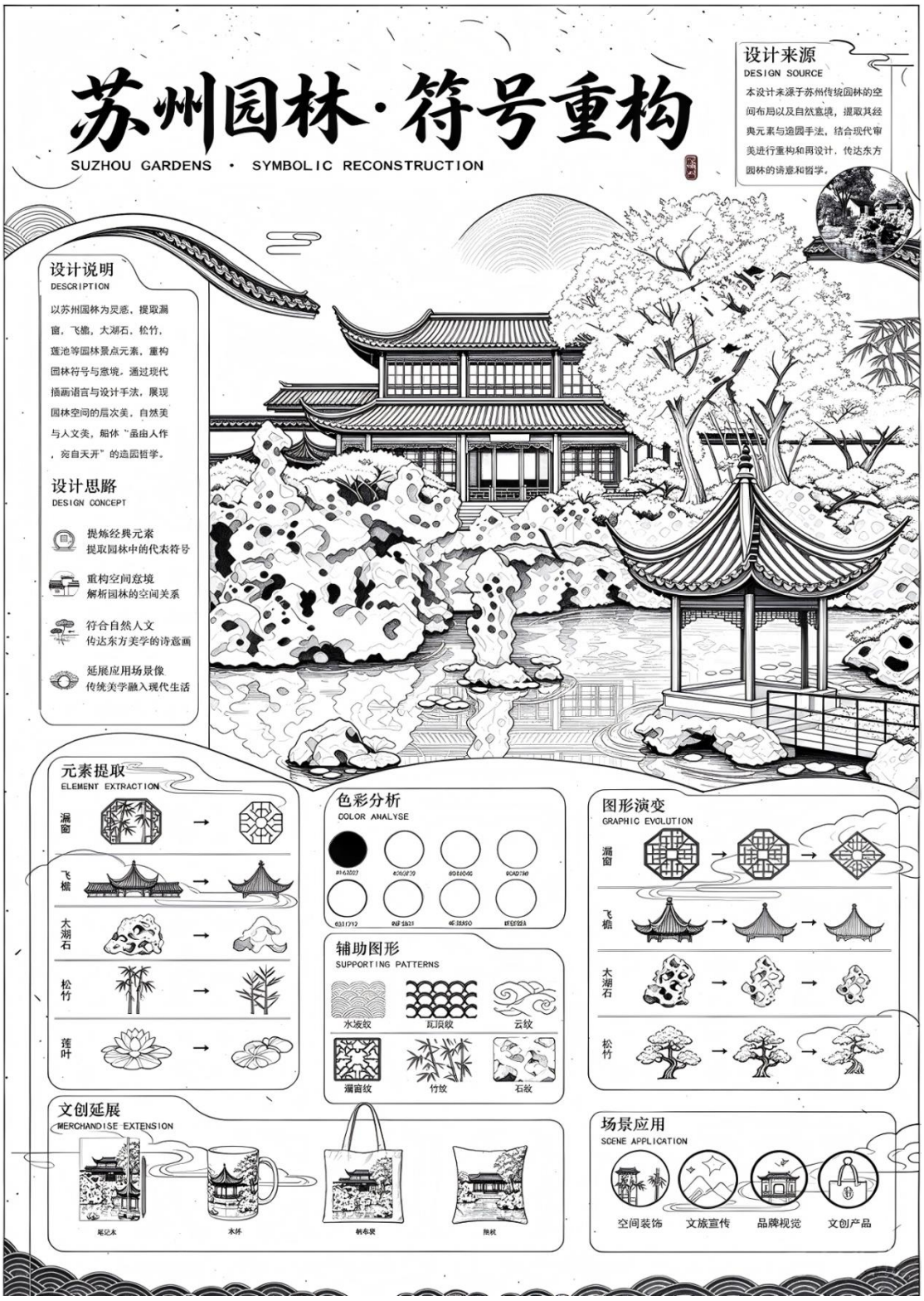
APPENDIX Б(sketch and project proposal)

Чорно-біла інфографіка / Information infographic black-and-white draft



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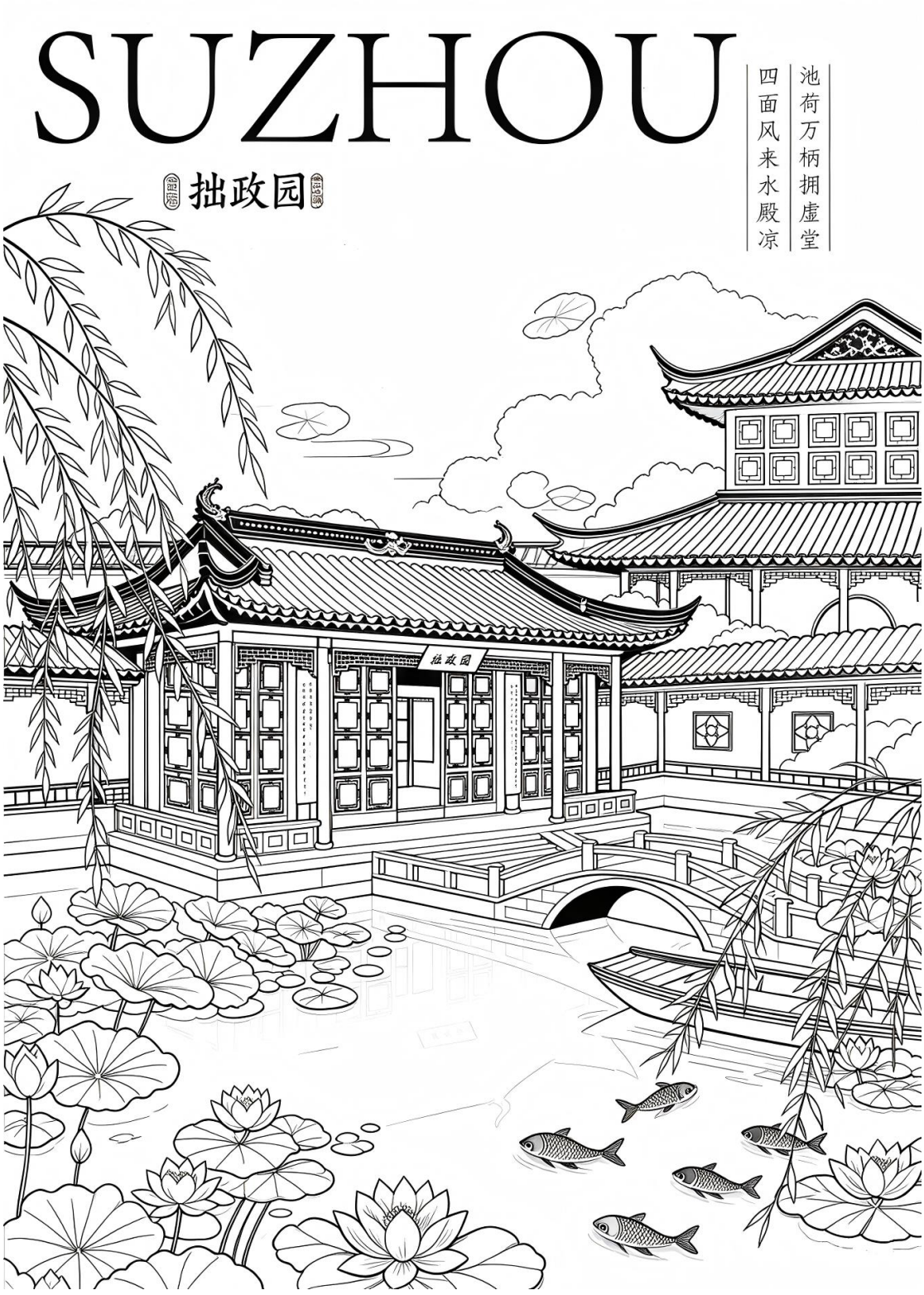

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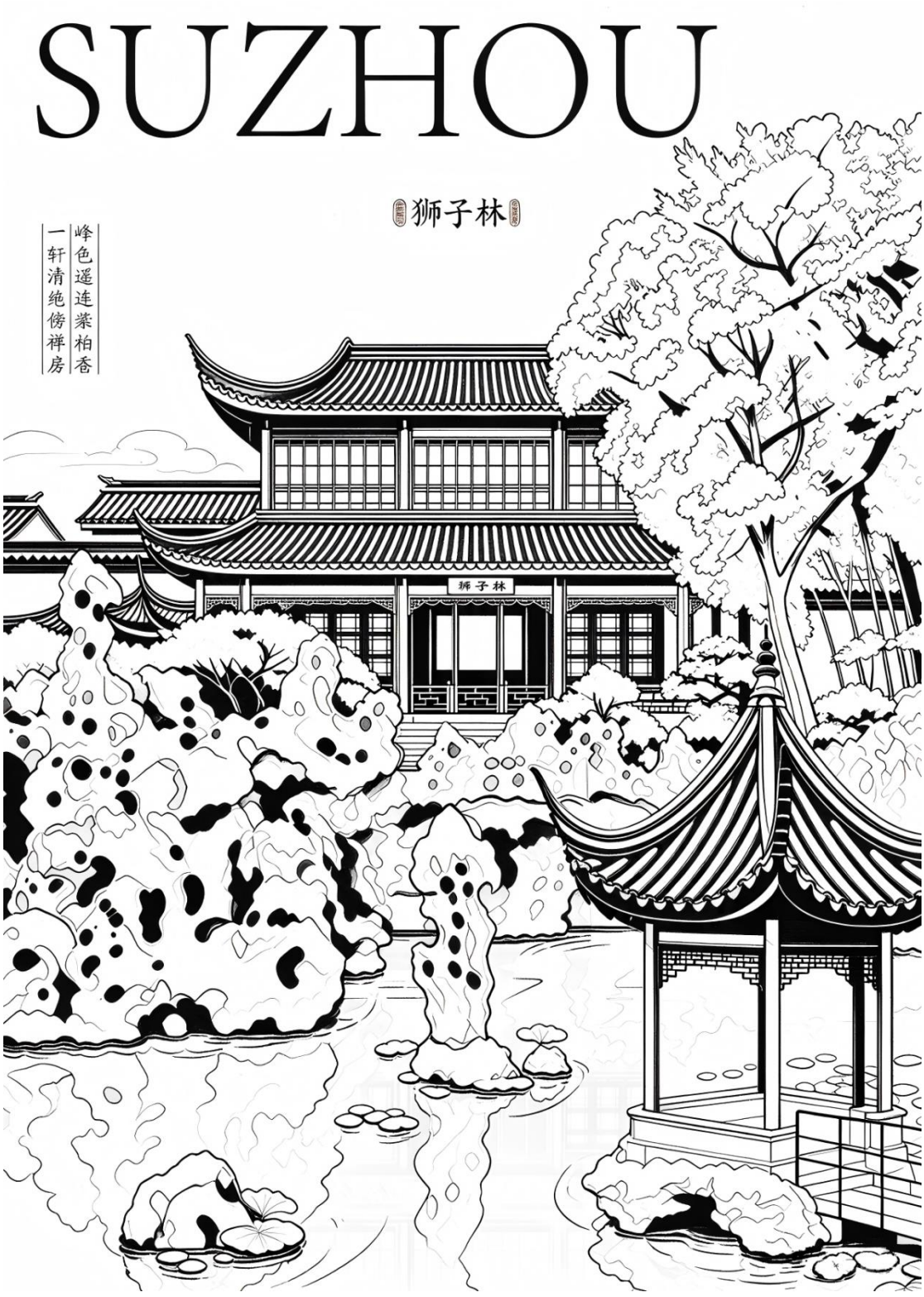
SUZHOU



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