

Article

The Aesthetic Imagery of Traditional Garden Door and Window Forms: A Case Study of the Four Major Traditional Gardens of Lingnan

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Abstract: Traditional Lingnan gardens, one of the three major types of Chinese garden design, have evolved over nearly a millennium, embodying the distinctive craftsmanship and aesthetic sensibilities of the Lingnan region. The architectural elements of doors and windows in these gardens serve as key expressions of regional cultural identity. This study focuses on four renowned Lingnan gardens (e.g., Yuyin Garden in Guangzhou, Liang Garden in Foshan, Qinghui Garden in Shunde, and Ke Garden in Dongguan) as primary case studies to examine the typologies, decorative characteristics, and aesthetic qualities of their doors and windows. Based on aesthetic imagery, the research elucidates both the functional and structural principles governing these designs, while also exploring their aesthetic resonance with traditional Chinese arts, such as calligraphy, painting, and poetry. By deepening the theoretical understanding of the formal and artistic features of Lingnan garden doors and windows, this study contributes to advancing the scholarly discourse on traditional garden architecture and supports the ongoing cultural preservation of this important heritage.



Academic Editors: Vaidas Petrulis, Raimondas Bliudzius and Huriye Armagan Dogan-Stewart

Received: 24 November 2024

Revised: 29 January 2025

Accepted: 4 February 2025

Published: 7 February 2025

Citation: Wang, Z.; Zheng, R.; Tang, J.; Wang, S.; He, X. The Aesthetic Imagery of Traditional Garden Door and Window Forms: A Case Study of the Four Major Traditional Gardens of Lingnan. *Buildings* **2025**, *15*, 513. <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings15040513>

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Keywords: Lingnan classical gardens; architectural heritage; door and window aesthetics; decorative elements; regional cultural heritage; traditional Chinese art; garden architecture

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Traditional Lingnan gardens are one of the three major types of classical Chinese gardens, along with northern and southern gardens. Lingnan gardens are affected by their geographical environment and the considerable influences of culture and economy, resulting in unique regional style characteristics. The types and styles of the doors and windows, important parts of the building facades in Lingnan gardens, profoundly affect the overall atmosphere of the gardens.

The four existing gardens that exemplify the grandeur of Lingnan are Yuyin Garden in Guangzhou's Panyu, Qinghui Garden in Shunde, Liang Garden in Foshan, and Ke Garden in Dongguan [1]. The variety of door and window styles within these gardens exceeds several dozen, and are functionally designed to provide good ventilation, keep out moisture, and protect from the sun. Moreover, the diverse themes and exquisitely crafted designs of the doors and windows, which incorporate various artistic forms such as painting, calligraphy, and poetry, have rendered them a significant medium for reflecting the cultural

life and social aesthetics of the Lingnan region. This study methodically investigates the typologies, decorative traits, and aesthetic features of doors and windows in Lingnan gardens. Its objectives are to delineate common features with traditional arts and to expound on their cultural and aesthetic significance.

1.2. Literature Review

Windows and doors represent fundamental components of traditional Chinese garden architecture. As early as the Song dynasty, Li Jie's *Yingzao Fashi* [2] meticulously documented the manufacturing processes and dimensional specifications of these architectural elements, serving as a vital resource for the study of window and door craftsmanship. During the Ming dynasty, Ji Cheng's *The Craft of Gardens* [3] categorized various styles of window and door openings, thereby establishing foundational craft norms for these features within garden design. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Liang Sicheng's *Qing Structural Regulations* [4] delineated the historical development of ancient windows and doors in its "Decoration" chapter, providing insights into their historical provenance. Yao [5] advanced the classification of window and door nomenclature based on their forms and functions, thereby clarifying the typology of these architectural elements. Collectively, these scholarly contributions offer a rich repository of historical data and research opportunities for subsequent researchers to engage in the specialized study of garden windows and doors.

The study of Lingnan gardens, a unique classification within Chinese gardens, has gained scholarly attention more recently, particularly in contrast to the more established focus on northern and Jiangnan gardens [6]. Lingnan gardens have had a significant surge in scholarly attention over the last two decades, as seen by an increase in the breadth and depth of research. Furthermore, the design of windows and doors within these gardens has increasingly attracted scholarly scrutiny.

Mo and Xia wrote *Lingnan Garden*, an early systematic work on Lingnan gardens, providing an overview of the distinctive forms and construction techniques of windows and doors within this architectural context [7]. The authors emphasized the variations in craftsmanship that arise from differing geographical locations. Building upon this foundational work, Yang [8] explored the production processes associated with windows and doors, as well as the integration of Western technology into the mechanisms of these architectural elements in Lingnan gardens. Huang [9] analyzed the natural adaptability of windows and doors in Lingnan architecture from a physical perspective, while also comparing their stylistic characteristics with those of windows found in other regional gardens. Collectively, these studies have significantly enhanced our understanding of the forms, construction processes, and technological dimensions of windows and doors in Lingnan gardens. However, research focusing on the artistic aspects of craftsmanship in this context remains relatively underdeveloped.

The architectural styles of doors and windows in Lingnan gardens exemplify both humanistic values and social adaptability, with their decorative elements particularly highlighting these characteristics. Xue [10] classified Lingnan doors and windows according to their primary structural components, thereby organizing the evolutionary factors influencing the decorative arts associated with traditional Lingnan architecture. This classification provides a temporal framework for understanding the transformation of the underlying cultural phenomena. Zhu [11] examined the decorative craftsmanship within Lingnan garden architecture, focusing on the physical attributes of door and window decorations and their intrinsic semantic meanings. Liang [12] identified that Lingnan garden decorations reflect the essence of materials and expressionism, shaped by the dual influences of indigenous and Western cultures. By examining the decorative themes present in doors and

windows, Yang [13] highlighted the emphasis on practical utility in the local culture. Concurrently, research from an artistic perspective has advanced, with Zhang [14] investigating the color schemes of window decorations from a chromatic standpoint, concluding that the predominant color palette in Lingnan gardens is characterized by “dark colors as primary, with bright colors as complementary”. Chen [15] analyzed the spatial construction logic of Lingnan gardens through the lens of landscape painting, primarily addressing the relationship between garden space and theoretical techniques in painting, while also indirectly affirming the connection between garden doors and windows and traditional painting arts. Feng [16] summarized the laws of decorative patterns for windows and doors on an aesthetic level, contributing to the exploration of compositional forms. While the aforementioned studies have examined the art of garden doors and windows from various perspectives, including historical evolution, linguistic symbolism, and thematic color analysis, there remains a notable deficiency in the exploration of their aesthetic connotations.

In addition to macro-level discussions concerning the numerous doors and windows found in Lingnan gardens, numerous scholars have undertaken focused research that examines specific components or individual cases. Liang [17] utilized the colored windows of Qinghui Garden as a case study to investigate the modern decorative implications of colored windows within Lingnan gardens. Ouyang [18] conducted an analysis of the artistic connotations associated with the shapes and craftsmanship of various types of glassless windows in these gardens, revealing the cultural motivations that inform their design. Manchu-style windows are particularly distinctive within the context of Lingnan gardens, prompting scholars such as Zeng [19] to perform an in-depth analysis of the methods of window opening, the materials used for light transmission, and the stylistic composition of these windows. Zhu [20] contributed to the understanding of the multicultural influences reflected in the design of Manchu windows.

In summary, the recent literature on Lingnan gardens highlights the technological craftsmanship of doors and windows, the various forms of decorative patterns, and the exploration of their cultural implications and social customs. However, there exists a relative paucity of research that examines these elements only from an aesthetic perspective and a lack of systematic inquiry. This paper, grounded in a rational understanding of form and decorative principles, as well as an emotional appreciation of folk culture and artistic conception, employs four renowned gardens as case studies to further elucidate the aesthetic characteristics and landscape design methodologies of doors and windows in Lingnan gardens. Therefore, this study aimed to achieve two primary objectives:

- (1) To systematically categorize and analyze the typologies, decorative patterns, and structural principles of doors and windows across the four major traditional Lingnan gardens, elucidating their exterior forms and decorative attributes.
- (2) To elucidate the interrelationships between the designs of garden doors and windows and the traditional arts of painting, calligraphy, and poetry, providing a comprehensive explanation of their landscape crafting techniques and aesthetic philosophies.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Ideas

This study presents a systematic artistic analysis of traditional Lingnan garden doors and windows, primarily examining their formal characteristics and aesthetic qualities from three distinct perspectives.

Firstly, based on on-site investigations and a review of historical materials, the research categorizes the formal features and decorative material types of these doors and windows, while also interpreting their cultural connotations. Secondly, the study translates the survey-cartography results of decorative patterns into digital images, elucidating the

compositional logic of their elements. Thirdly, it conducts a comparative analysis of door and window art with traditional Chinese calligraphy, painting, and poetry, demonstrating the shared artistic principles and humanistic character across these forms (Figure 1).

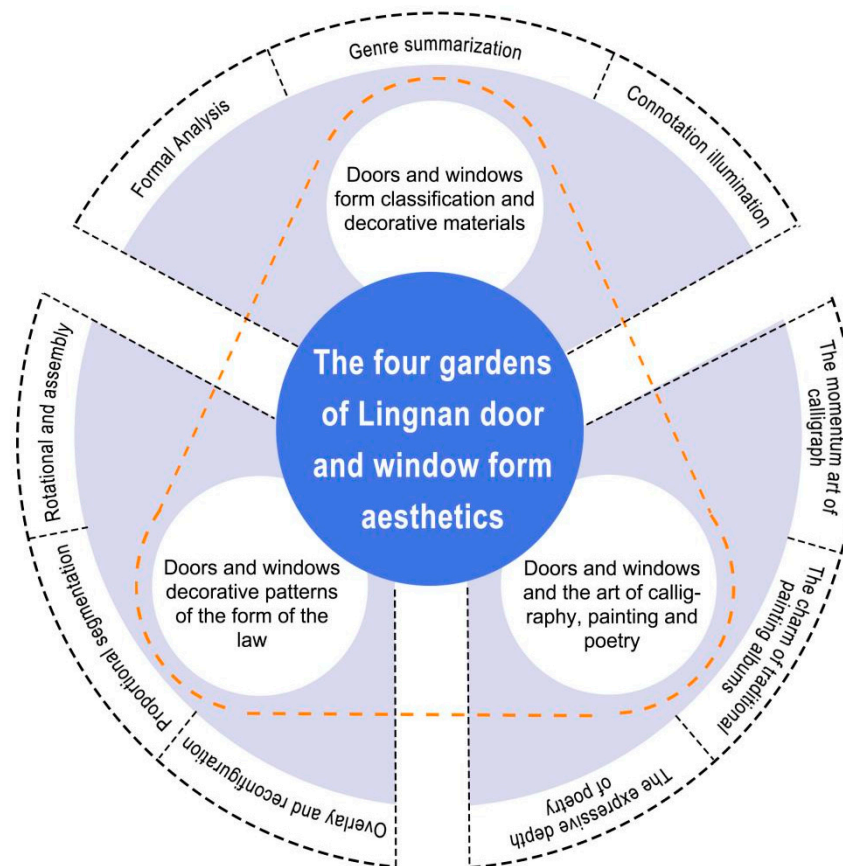


Figure 1. Framework of the article (source: authors).

2.2. Research Subjects

2.2.1. The Development Background of Windows and Doors in Lingnan Gardens

The Lingnan region, characterized by a hot and rainy climate, historically referred to as “Yan Zhou” [21], exhibits architectural doors and windows primarily designed around the functional requirements of illumination and ventilation. The history of Lingnan gardens can be traced back to the Southern Han dynasty. Due to the limitations of technological capabilities at that time, simple straight-latticed windows were the most prevalent style of fenestration. By the Tang and Song dynasties, continuous advancements in productivity and construction techniques facilitated the widespread adoption of threshold windows, removable windows, and partition doors to better accommodate the local climatic conditions. Decorative motifs with distinct Buddhist cultural characteristics were also incorporated into door and window designs, exemplified by the application of Bodhi leaf patterns and Ruyi patterns on the window grilles. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the region’s extensive coastline facilitated the growth of overseas trade [22]. This economic growth facilitated greater sophistication in garden door and window craftsmanship, as decorative patterns progressed from basic geometric forms to incorporate diverse subjects such as human figures, natural elements, poetic verses, and calligraphic works. Moreover, long-term overseas trade experiences fostered a relatively tolerant view of foreign cultures among Lingnan people, contributing to an inclusive and open disposition [23]. Lingnan garden doors and windows incorporated newly introduced Western materials and construction methods, such as the utilization of colored glass in the creation of Manchu-style windows,

and the adoption of Roman archways and Baroque column capitals in the door apertures, thereby reinforcing the multi-faceted and syncretic character of Lingnan gardens.

2.2.2. Subject Choice

The Pearl River Delta region, situated in central Guangdong Province, serves as the political, economic, and cultural nucleus of the Lingnan area (Figure 2), and experienced a flourishing of garden construction during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The rationale behind choosing the four classic Lingnan gardens of Yuyin Garden, Qing Hui Garden, Liang Garden, and Ke Garden, our case studies, is as follows. Firstly, the four traditional gardens were built in the Ming and Qing dynasties, have a history of more than a hundred years, and are listed as national key cultural relic protection units. The diverse formal types and the rich array of decorative themes exhibited in the doors and windows within these gardens demonstrate a high level of artistic achievement, thereby lending them a typicality suitable for scholarly investigation. Secondly, the components and carvings of doors and windows within these four gardens are exceptionally well preserved, accurately reflecting the intended design characteristics. This provides our research with invaluable primary data, enabling a more precise understanding of the stylistic features of Lingnan garden doors and windows. Thirdly, a wealth of historical documentation concerning these four gardens exists, along with a foundational body of research into their door and window craftsmanship. This prior scholarship allows us to build upon established knowledge and delve more deeply into the artistic and cultural significance of their formal designs.

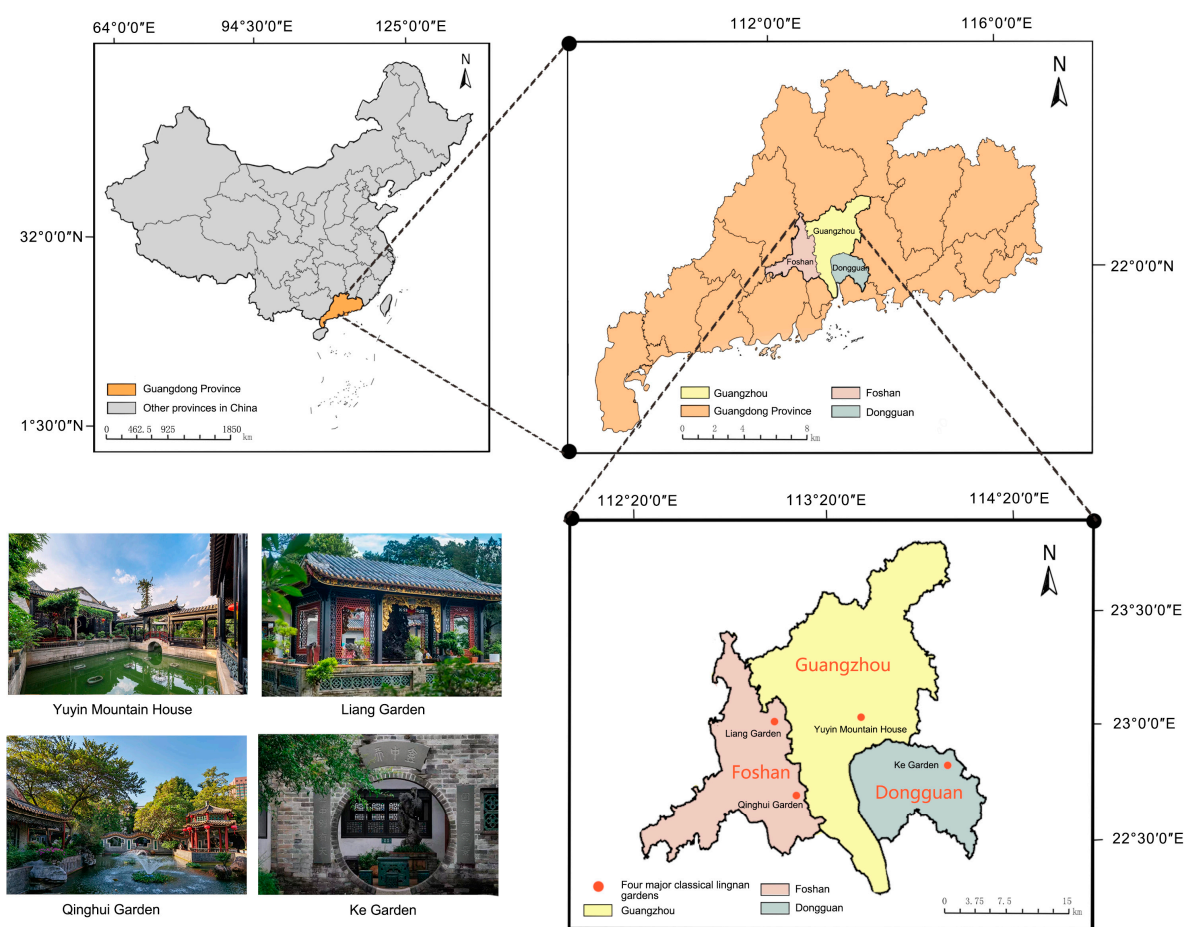


Figure 2. Geographical distribution of the four major Lingnan gardens (source: authors).

2.3. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, encompassing a literature review, field observations, and graphical analysis to refine and summarize the rules and aesthetic qualities of the styling of Lingnan garden doors and windows.

(1) Data Collection

This study primarily employed literature review and on-site observation techniques to gather the necessary primary source materials. The literature review specifically involved collecting relevant scholarly works and historical records pertaining to gardens. The research commenced with the procurement of historical and cultural background information on Lingnan gardens, along with hand-drawn drafts of their doors and windows, through a review of relevant publications and scholarly periodicals. This was followed by the collection of local chronicles, such as the *Panyu County Gazetteer* and the *Shunde County Gazetteer*, to chronicle the geographical, economic, and cultural milieu of the Lingnan area. Furthermore, the poems and calligraphic and painted works left behind by the garden owners were interpreted to explore the potential relationships between garden design and traditional art forms.

(2) Data Analysis

This research utilized image analysis and digital technology software for data analysis. Image analysis as a methodology focuses on visual elements and symbols. By thoroughly examining visual aspects such as form, theme, and composition, as well as their conveyed symbolic significance and cultural implications, this approach reveals underlying information within images [24]. In this study, a total of 230 usable photographs were compiled. These images were then subjected to observation and description, and a selection of representative samples, characterized by clear indicative qualities, complete expressions, and latent cultural symbolism, were chosen for analysis and processing. This process facilitated the identification of patterns and motifs within the images and an exploration of their meanings and symbolic significance within their regional cultural context. Following the collection of fundamental data, this research primarily employed AutoCAD to process the layout characteristics of doors and windows, and Procreate software to analyze their artistic features. By integrating findings from on-site investigations, AutoCAD was first utilized to generate plan drawings of the gardens, with annotations indicating the positional distribution of doors and windows, thus facilitating a direct visualization of their spatial density and analysis of their functional roles. Subsequently, selected representative image materials were processed using Procreate. Algorithms such as color threshold adjustments and edge detection were used to isolate decorative patterns within the images, enabling subsequent interpretation of formal regularities and cultural symbolism.

3. Results

3.1. Permeable Doors and Windows

The form, scale, and opening method of doors and windows directly affect the visual and psychological experience of viewers and users [25]. Lingnan garden doors and windows can be categorized into two groups based on how they open and close: permeable doors and windows and operable doors and windows (Table 1).

Table 1. Statistics on the numbers of the four major types of garden window and door forms (source: authors).

Classification Basis	Type	Yuyin Garden	Liang Garden	Ke Garden	Qinghui Garden	Grand Total
Permeable type	Door apertures	18	11	23	17	69
	Window apertures	2	0	11	8	21
	Openwork windows	15	44	20	58	137
Operable doors and windows	Threshold windows	21	24	13	25	79
	Horizontal sliding windows	4	2	1	2	11
	Removable windows	5	4	23	2	49
	Partition doors	20	22	16	27	75
	Traditional Chinese sliding lattice door	0	3	1	0	4
Grand Total		85	110	108	139	442

3.1.1. Permeable-Type Doors and Windows

Permeable-type doors and windows are built into the wall of the building and cannot be opened or closed. They are characterized by the air passing through the hole. There are two types of permeate: fully permeable and semi-permeable. This allows for ventilation and creates a beautiful setting (Table 2).

Table 2. Information pertaining to the formal properties of permeable-type doors and windows (source: authors).

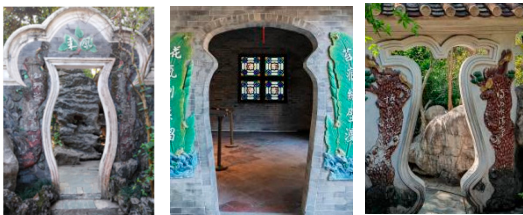
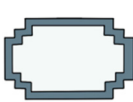
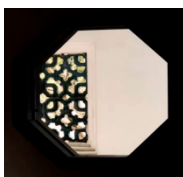
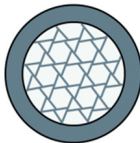
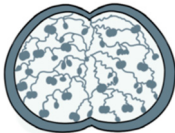
Category	Format	Basic Styling		
Door apertures	Fully permeable			
				
		Geometric Forms		
				
				
		Artifact Forms		

Table 2. Cont.

Category	Format	Basic Styling			
Window apertures	Fully permeable				
		Geometric Forms			
					
		Natural Forms			
					
		Artifact Forms			
		Openwork windows	Semi-permeable		
Geometric Forms					
					
Natural Forms					

Regarding their spatial distribution, permeable-type doors and windows are predominantly located near significant landscape features, such as Shenliu Hall in Yuyin Garden and the Stone Court in Liang Garden (Figures 3–6). These locations feature relatively large-scale open spaces, and the use of permeable-type doors and windows helps to further expand visual space and enrich the viewing experience.

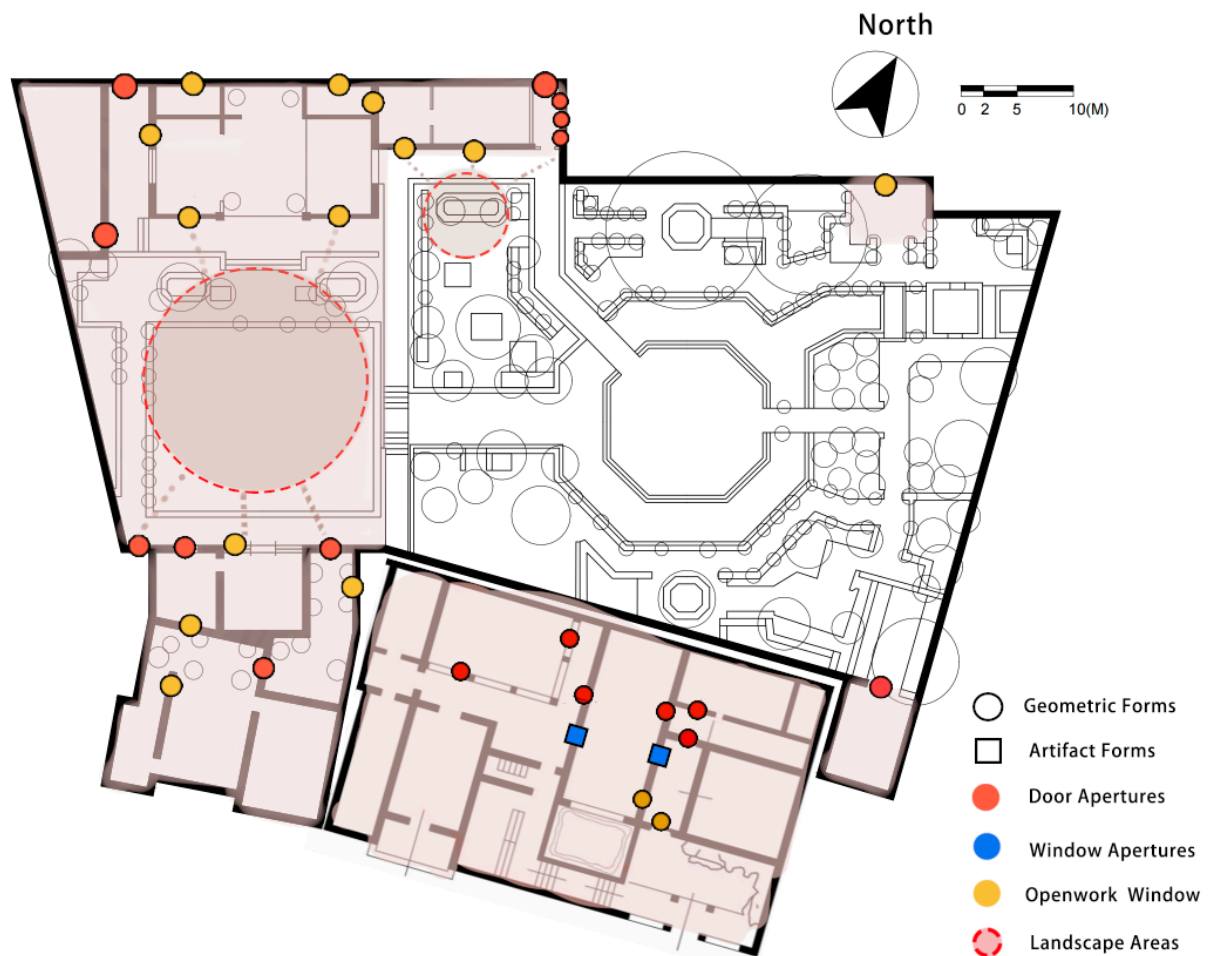


Figure 3. Location and distribution of permeable-type doors and windows in Yuyin Garden (source: authors).

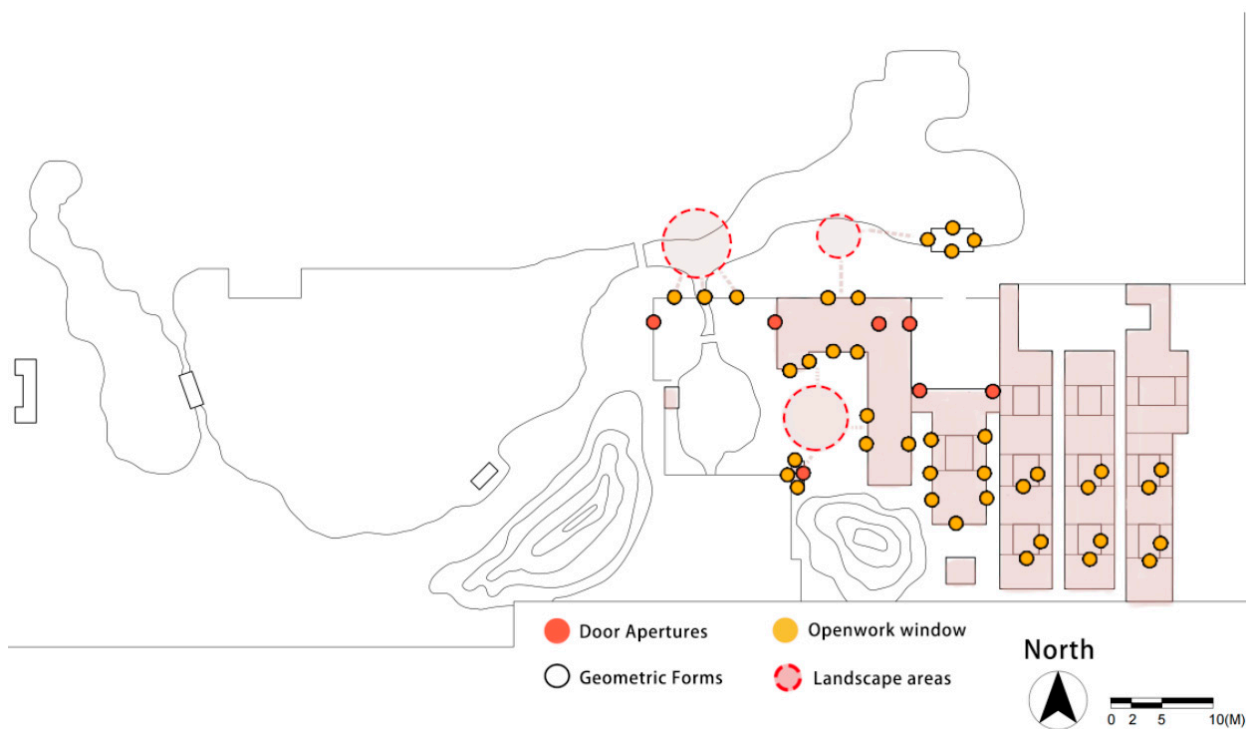


Figure 4. Location and distribution of permeable-type doors and windows in Liang Garden (source: authors).

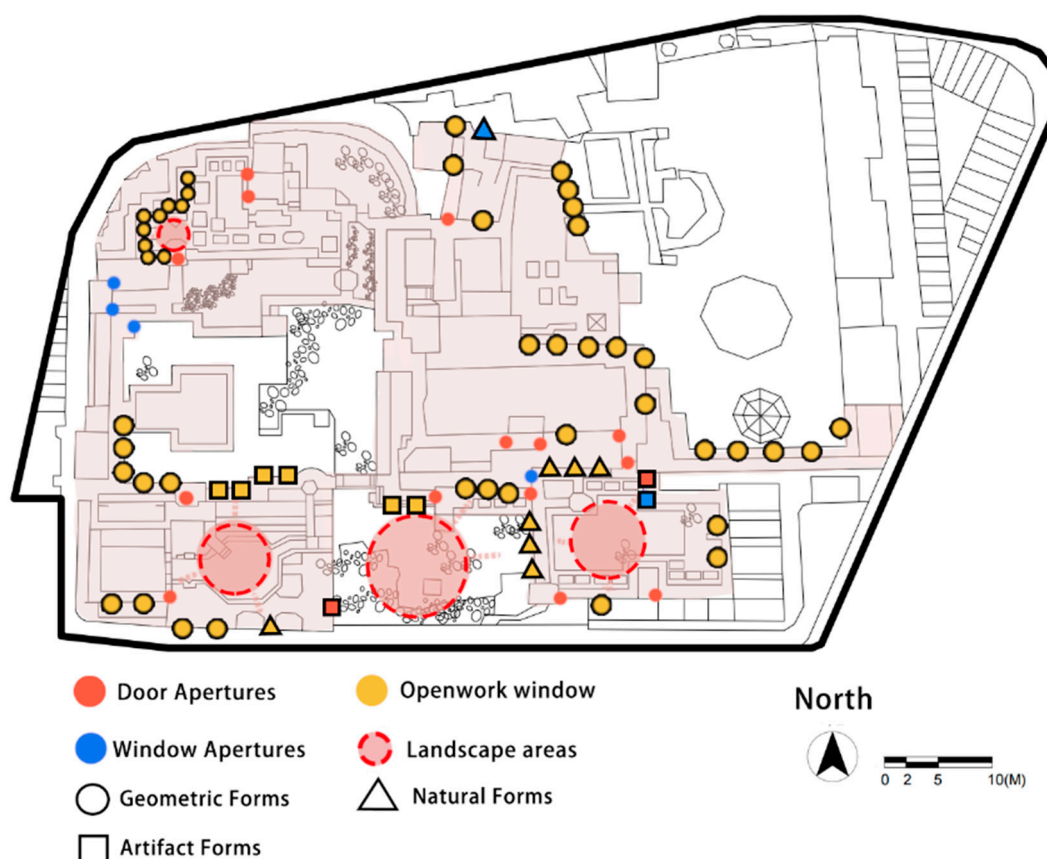


Figure 5. Location and distribution of permeable-type doors and windows in Qinghui Garden (source: authors).

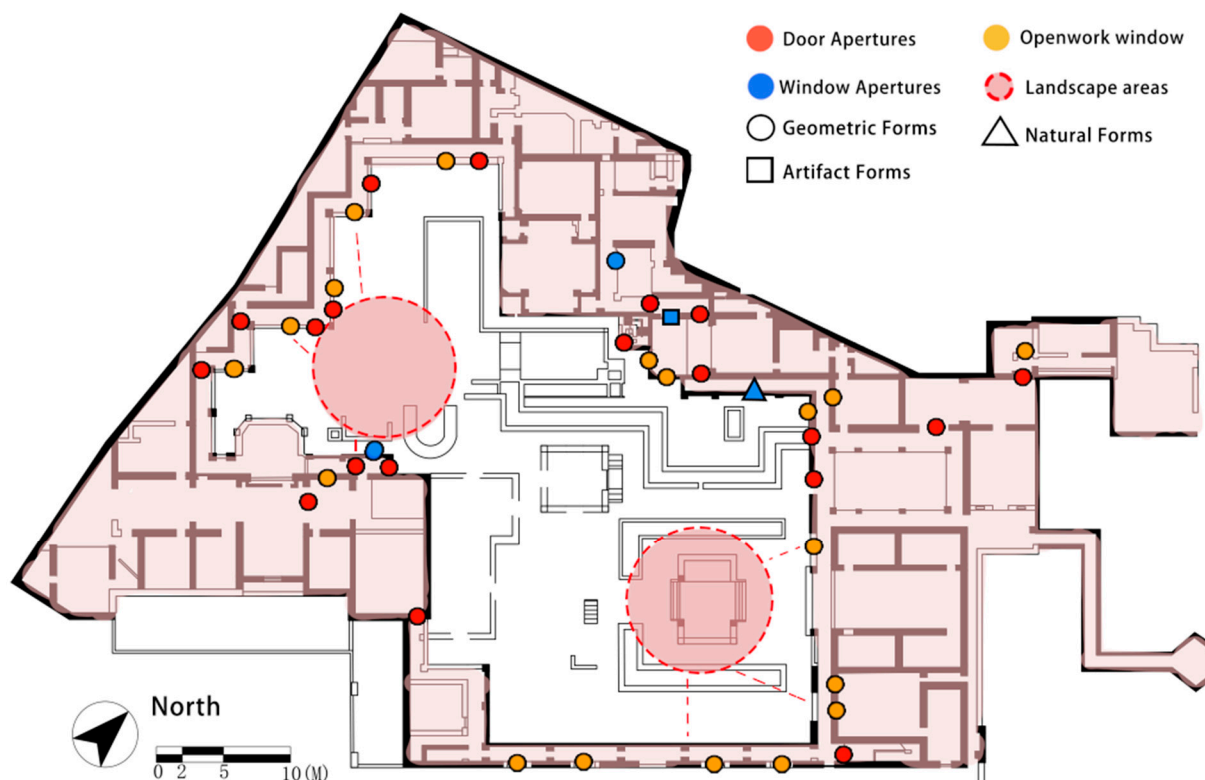


Figure 6. Location and distribution of permeable-type doors and windows in Ke Garden (source: authors).

In terms of their design and spatial arrangement, door apertures are predominantly situated in areas facilitating passage between interior and exterior spaces. This placement serves to direct the visitor’s path and to strengthen the perceived boundaries of the landscaped areas. A primary scenic element is commonly placed to act as a visual focus within the field of vision. Window apertures are frequently located on the sides of courtyard walls and at the turning points of corridors. The views framed by these windows are generally limited in scope and type, often presenting a simplified scene composed of rock and plant elements; however, the form and treatment of the window frames are also considered a significant design element. In Lingnan gardens, openwork windows are notably numerous and exhibit a wide range of positional flexibility. They are commonly found alongside corridors, at the termini of corridors, or on the lateral sides and corners of courtyard walls. When located within corridors, openwork windows frequently appear in rows, predominantly utilizing geometric forms. Their dimensions and spacing are often uniform or very similar, thus creating a sense of rhythm and visual harmony. Furthermore, distinct forms such as the fan, vase, and peach shapes, owing to their graceful shape, are typically positioned in locations that readily draw attention, thus serving as both visual and aesthetic focal points. For example, the fan-shaped openwork windows on the walls flanking the Half Moon Pavilion in Qinghui Garden provide glimpses of rock and trees behind, forming a unique visual focal space (Figure 5).

3.1.2. Operable Doors and Windows

Operable doors and windows provide significant convenience for ventilation, protection against rain, and prevention of theft, and contribute to the establishment of a private space. Operable doors and windows can be classified into four categories based on their opening mechanisms, and the categories are as follows (Table 3).

Table 3. Schematic of opening and closing mechanisms for operable doors and windows (source: authors).

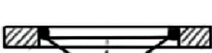
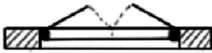
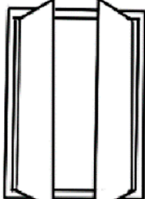
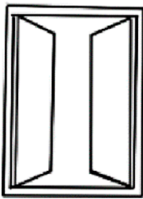
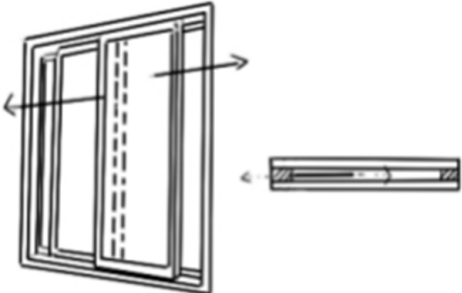
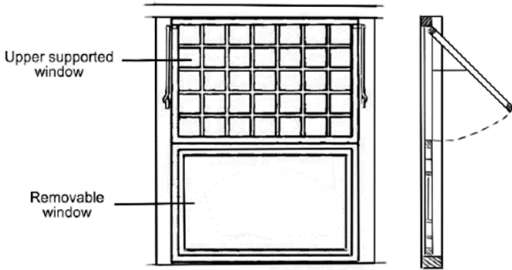
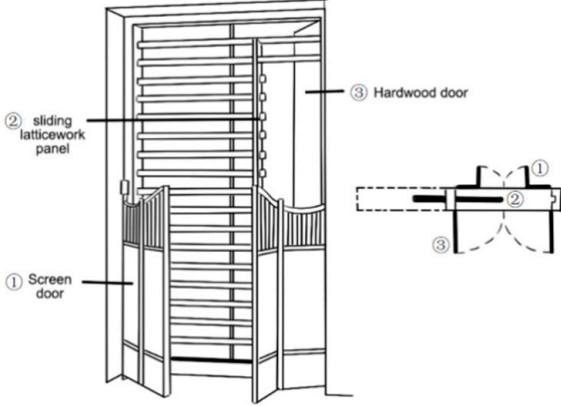
Category	Opening and Closing Methods	Entity Examples
Threshold windows and partition doors	 Push to open Pull to open	
Threshold windows and partition doors have similar designs and are commonly found in structures such as halls, pavilions, towers, and verandas. They typically come in even-numbered configurations of four, six, or eight panels, with fixed panels at both ends and movable panels in the center. (Yu Yin Shan Fang threshold windows)		

Table 3. Cont.

Category	Opening and Closing Methods	Entity Examples
Horizontal sliding windows		
Horizontal sliding windows, which push and draw a single sash in a horizontal motion, are seen in halls and hall-like structures. They can be combined with a supported and removable window or a ventilated window to establish a dual-layered structure, both internally and externally. (Yuyin Garden horizontal sliding window)		
Removable windows		
Removable windows are frequently found in cabin-like and pavilion structures, characterized by their division into upper and lower sections. While the lower sash is fixed, the upper sash can be forced open with an iron rod to improve sun shade and offer rain protection. (Ke Garden removable windows)		
Traditional Chinese sliding lattice door		
The traditional Chinese sliding lattice door is comprised of three components: the screen door, the sliding lattice, and the solid hardwood door. The screen door and the solid hardwood door can both open inwards and outwards, while the sliding lattice is capable of moving side to side. This configuration offers both ventilation and security features. (Liang Garden sliding latticework door)		

In Lingnan gardens, operable doors and windows are primarily threshold win-
dows and partition doors, often located on the front or back sides of garden buildings
(Figures 7–10). Different opening methods for these doors and windows affect both their
actual opening area and the rate of natural ventilation. Threshold windows and partition
doors can be opened freely both inward and outward. When the wind’s angle of incidence

is relatively large, increasing the inward opening angle of the window promotes convective heat dissipation. Horizontal sliding windows, due to their sliding mechanism, have a maximum ventilation area of half the total window area, limiting their heat dissipation capacity, and thus their numbers are relatively small. Moreover, the Lingnan region is subject to the effects of seasonal monsoons, with southeast winds predominating coupled with direct solar radiation from the northeast during the summer months. Hence, it becomes necessary for doors and windows to effectively integrate functions of ventilation, heat dissipation, and solar shading. As a result, removable windows are frequently positioned on the eastern side of buildings, with the upper sash, when propped open, providing both shade and an expanded air intake area, thus contributing to reduced building energy consumption.

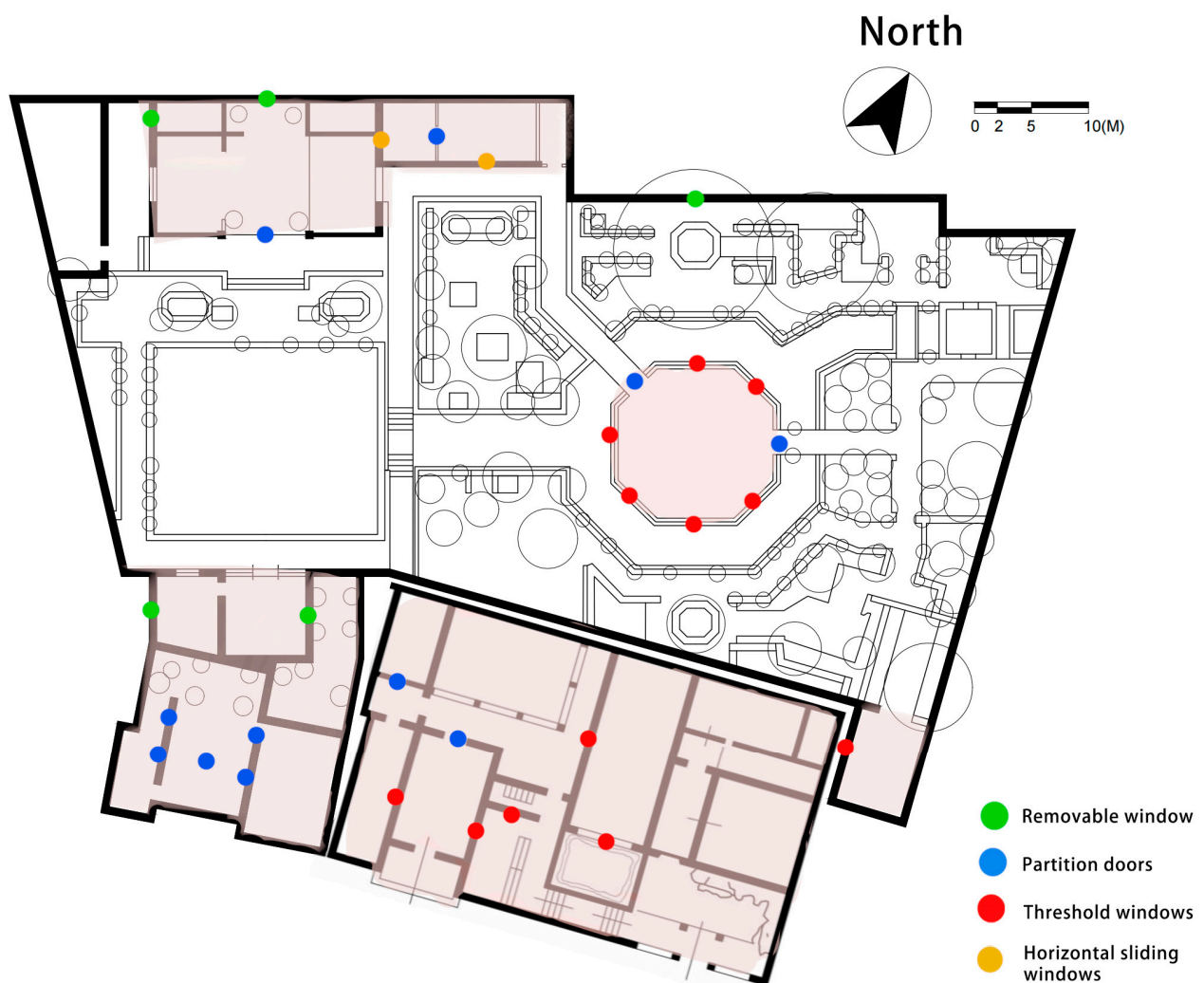


Figure 7. Location and distribution of operable doors and windows in Yuyin Garden (source: authors).



Figure 8. Location and distribution of operable doors and windows in Liang Garden (source: authors).

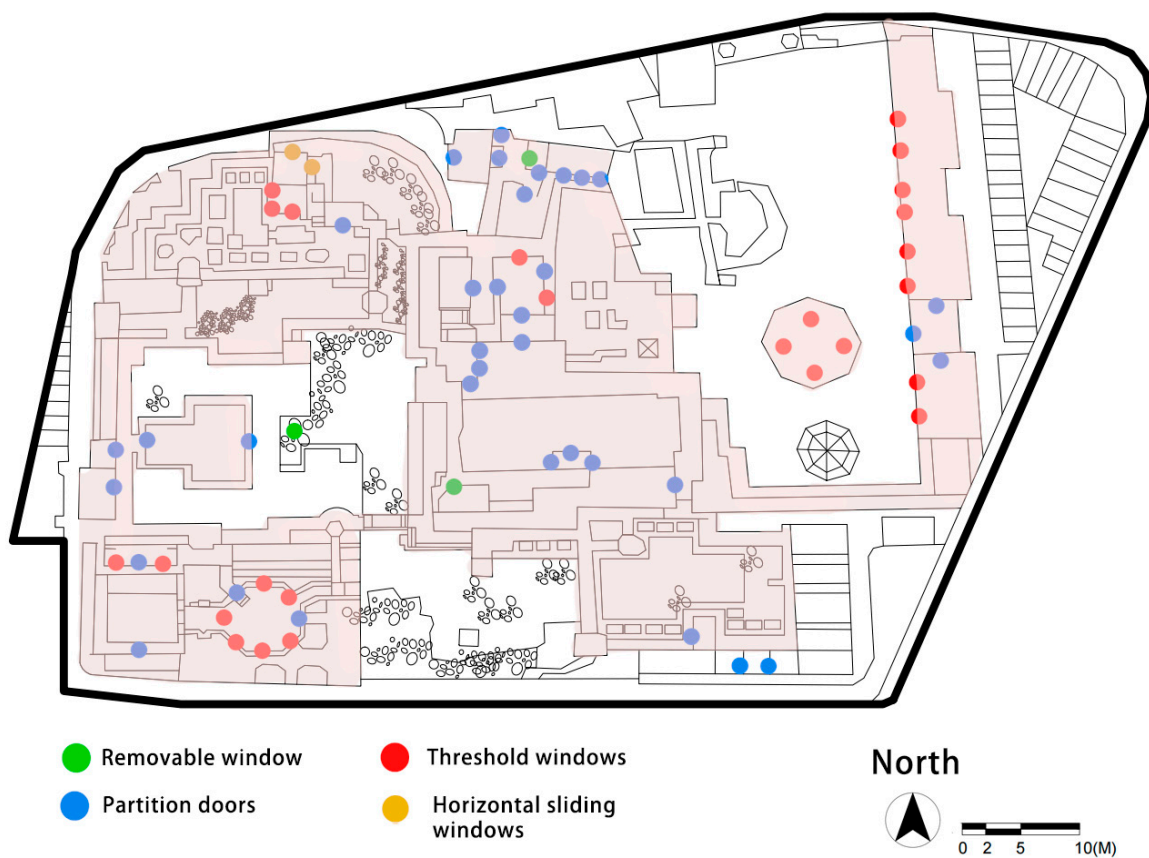


Figure 9. Location and distribution of operable doors and windows in Qinghui Garden (source: authors).

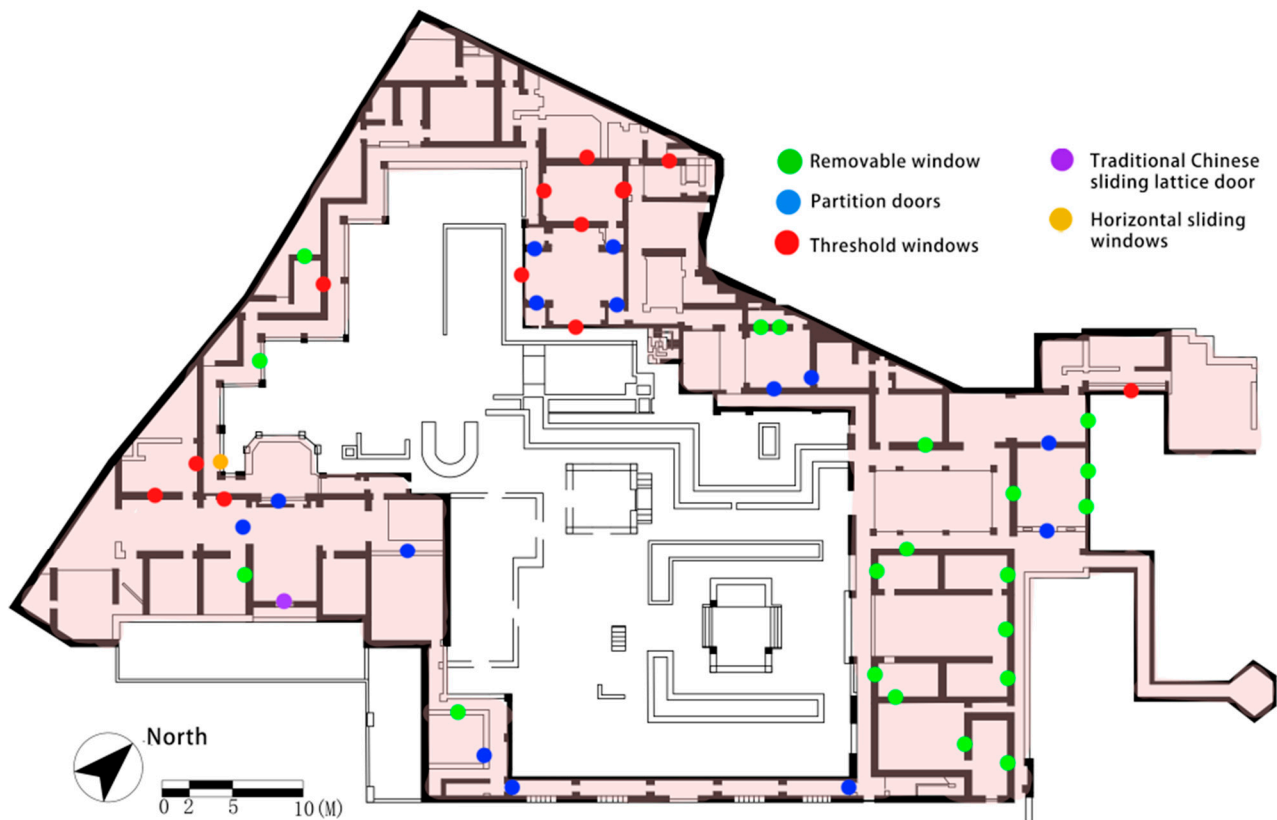


Figure 10. Location and distribution of operable doors and windows in Ke Garden (source: authors).

In essence, operable doors and windows in Lingnan gardens are designed with the primary consideration of functional effectiveness. These doors and windows often frame views of landscapes that are smaller in scale, but exquisitely detailed, while at the same time serving to provide both sun protection and ventilation. This approach also contributes to a more engaging garden experience.

3.2. Characteristics of Door and Window Decorations in Lingnan Gardens

Doors and windows are not only the pivot of organizing the spatial relationship of an architectural plan but also the main body of showing architectural decorative forms. The decorative themes and composition on the doors and windows of Lingnan gardens show the aesthetic imagery of regional culture. This subsection will be analyzed from the two aspects of decorative motifs and compositional strategies.

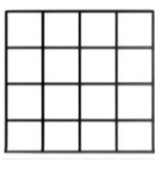
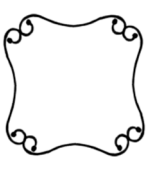
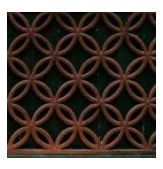
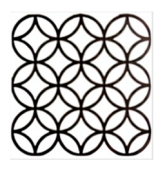
3.2.1. Theme of Decoration for Doors and Windows

(1) Unique and Rhythmic Geometric Patterns

The geometric patterns, such as square, cracked ice, and coin motifs, are the fundamental design elements in Lingnan gardens. These patterns can be classified into linear, curvilinear, and mixed types. Their forms are generated by the repetition of basic geometric shapes, with a sense of regularity and rhythm [26]. These geometric patterns are characterized by their simplicity and clarity, reflecting the initial perceptual understanding that individuals possess regarding their environment. Due to their relatively straightforward manufacturing process, these patterns are particularly favored by the inhabitants of the Lingnan region. The ornamentation of garden doors and windows similarly draws from diverse artistic inspirations. As evidenced in Guangzhou Han tombs, Nanyue pottery features 124 distinct geometric patterns [27], an aesthetic inclination that is carried over into garden ornamentation. Furthermore, influenced by materials used in Lingnan

embroidery—specifically silk velvet embroidery and *xiangyunsha*—garden door and window decoration incorporates the relatively uncommon sleeping silkworm pattern, which expresses the cultural symbolism of sericulture and the aspiration for abundance (Table 4).

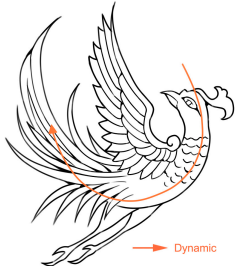
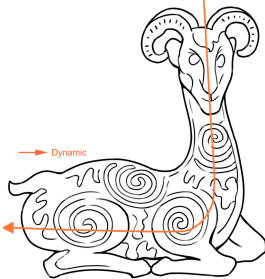
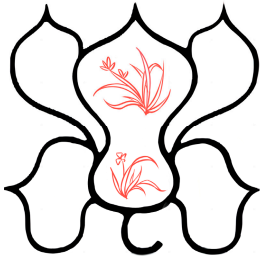
Table 4. Geometric pattern types and cultural allegory (source: authors).

Type	Legend	Pattern Extraction	Legend	Pattern Extraction
Line type				
	Tortoiseshell pattern: Consists of interconnected hexagonal units, emulating the structure of a tortoiseshell, which symbolizes longevity and good fortune in traditional Chinese culture.		Square pattern: Shaped like a fishing net, an important tool for coastal residents to make a living, and thus signifies a wealthy family.	
Curved patterns				
	Sleeping silkworm: Imitates the form of a resting silkworm. In Chinese culture, silkworms are symbolic of the divine gift of colorful garments, signifying an abundance of clothing and a continuous flow of wealth.		Coin pattern: Composed of overlapping concentric circles, evoking the appearance of ancient coins and symbolizing wealth and financial prosperity.	
Mixed patterns				
	Cross Ruyi pattern: The central cross, resembling Earth's meridians and parallels, symbolizes the vastness of the universe. The four sides are adorned with Ruyi patterns, representing the fulfillment of desires.		Ruyi tortoiseshell pattern: The design features a central Ruyi pattern surrounded by a cross-shaped tortoiseshell motif, symbolizing a life of enduring happiness and the fulfillment of all aspirations.	

(2) Auspicious Animal and Plant Motifs

The inhabitants of Lingnan draw inspiration from the natural environment, integrating a diverse array of animal and plant motifs into the design of windows and doors, thereby endowing these elements with significant cultural meaning. For instance, plant patterns frequently incorporate plum, orchid, and bamboo to symbolize the virtues associated with a gentleman. Additionally, the region's abundant agricultural products, including lychee, Buddha's hand citron, persimmon, and banana, are utilized to convey aspirations and blessings for a prosperous life. Animal motifs often depict auspicious creatures such as dragons, phoenixes, kylin, and bats, each carrying connotations of good fortune (Table 5).

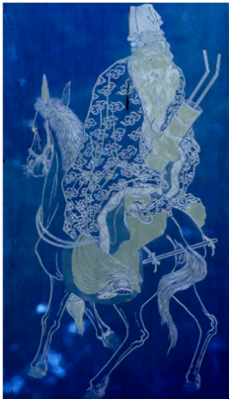
Table 5. Diagrammatic representations and cultural symbolism of extracted animal and plant motifs (source: authors).

Type	Legend	Pattern Extraction	Analysis
Animal			The phoenix is regarded as an auspicious creature, symbolizing good fortune and happiness. Its form embodies vitality, while its elegant posture conveys grace and nobility.
	Phoenix		
			The word “goat” is phonetically similar to the Chinese characters for “yang” and <i>xiang</i> , both of which are associated with luck and prosperity.
	Goat		
Plant			The peony symbolizes wealth and prosperity. When arranged in a vase, it represents affluence and tranquility.
	Peony		
			The red cotton tree flower symbolizes vibrant energy, while its adornment with orchids represents a noble and virtuous character.
	Cotton tree		

(3) A Wide Variety of Diagrams on Artifacts

In the architectural design of Lingnan gardens, a diverse array of antiques and utensils are often utilized as decorative motifs, including swords, vases, and musical instruments. These items are selected for their homophonic meanings, which symbolize auspiciousness [28]. Additionally, characters are also significant pattern decorations in doors and windows. Famous historical characters, literary items, and divine figures are typically selected as decorative subjects and paired with the number of doors and windows to produce a narrative series (Table 6).

Table 6. Diagrammatic representations and cultural symbolism of extracted utensil and figure motifs (source: authors).

Type	Legend	Pattern Extraction	Analysis
Artifact			Chinese character 炉 in 香炉 (incense burner) is homophonic with 禄, symbolizing fortune and advancement. Many incense burner designs draw inspiration from traditional bronze vessels.
			The vase symbolizes peace, and when paired with a Ruyi, it represents both tranquility and fulfillment.
Character			Zhang Guolao symbolizes longevity and fortune, while the fish drum he carries represents alignment with the heavens and the will of the people.
			The diagram in the maidservant painting is poised and refined, embodying grace and reflecting a relaxed, sophisticated way of life.
	Cotton tree		

(4) Elegant and Expressive Literary Themes

Chinese characters are hieroglyphs, and their structure and line combinations are highly aesthetic. In the doors and windows of Lingnan gardens, certain characters are directly adorned with auspicious symbols, while others are artistically modified to create more exaggerated forms that harmoniously integrate with their surroundings. Additionally, poems and proverbs are often selected as decorative motifs for doors and windows, thereby enhancing the cultural ambiance of the environment (Table 7).

Table 7. Artistic variations in calligraphic designs and corresponding calligraphy styles (source: authors).

Type	Illustration		
Transformation			
	<i>Fugui character transformation</i>	<i>Fugui character transformation</i>	<i>Fu character transformation</i>
Calligraphy			
	Seal script: “auspicious wishes”	Regular script	Running hand script

The above discussion has summarized four decorative patterns found in Lingnan garden doors and windows. These patterns are rendered using diverse materials such as etched glass, carved wood, wrought iron, and glazed ceramics, each bearing distinct crafting methods. While striving for overall aesthetic unity, the door and window decorations also incorporate subtle variations in detail, effectively showcasing the distinctive craftsmanship of the Lingnan region.

3.2.2. Rules Governing Composition of Door and Window Decorative Patterns

(1) Overlay and Reconfiguration

Overlay and reconfiguration pertain to the arrangement in which two or more different elements are concentrically overlaid to produce a novel design. An illustrative example can be observed in the pattern on the window sill of Qinghui Garden, where the central feature is a coin motif, which is surrounded by a layer of sun patterns and further embellished with begonia designs. This combination of various elements results in an innovative pattern that also conveys multiple layers of auspicious meanings (Figure 11).

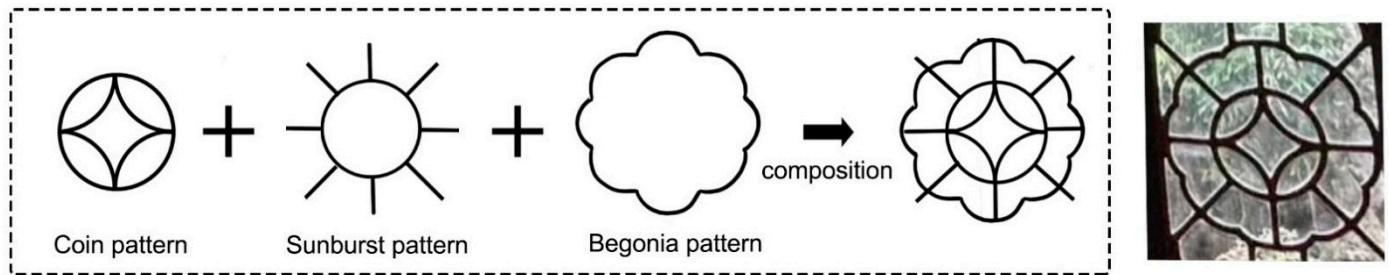


Figure 11. A schematic representation of the process of overlay and reconfiguration of diverse patterns (source: authors).

(2) Proportional Segmentation

Proportional segmentation refers to the process of dividing unit patterns into new units of varying dimensions according to specific proportions, followed by the recombination of these units to form divisions of differing sizes within the overall composition. An illustrative example of this concept can be observed in the Manchu windows of Yuyin Garden, which are constructed from squares of various proportions. These squares create innovative patterns that exhibit a harmonious rhythm within the two-dimensional space (Figure 12).

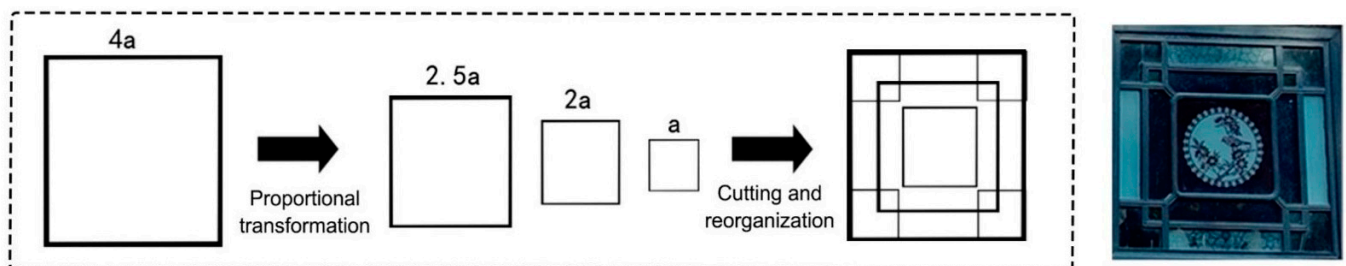


Figure 12. Illustration of the formation process of lattice patterns in Manchurian windows (source: authors).

(3) Axial Symmetry

Axial symmetry is attained by reflecting a fundamental element across a central axis to produce a mirrored design. In Figure 13, the pattern on the partition door is formed by vertically and horizontally flipping the fish motif, thereby generating a novel design. This symmetrical configuration conveys a sense of stability and harmony to the observer. Due to Lingnan's geographical position, nestled between mountains and the sea, a strong maritime culture has led the people of Lingnan to frequently incorporate fish motifs into their designs, symbolizing bountiful harvests and a peaceful, prosperous life.

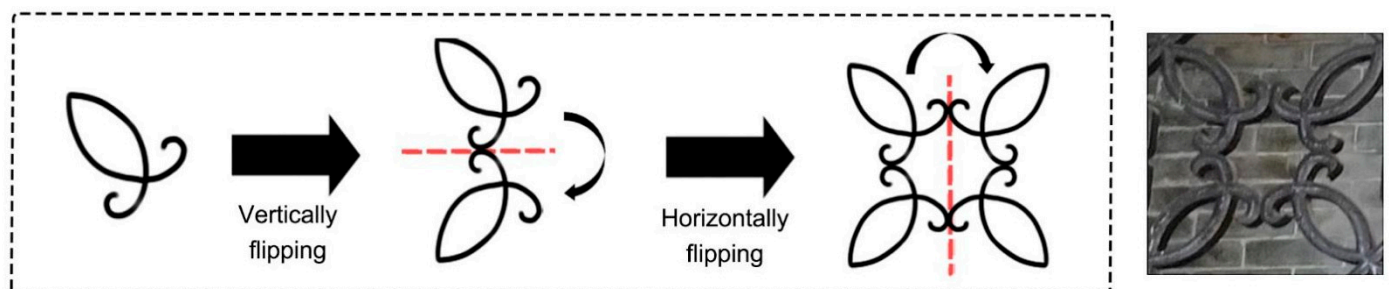


Figure 13. Diagram illustrating the generation of new designs through symmetrical manipulations of fish motifs (source: authors).

(4) Rotation and Assembly

The concepts of rotation and assembly refer to the creation of a continuous pattern by rotating a basic element around a central point at a preset angle and repeating the action. For example, the designs on the doors and windows of Eight Directions' Fragrant Pavilion in Qinghui Garden are generated through the rotation, assembly, and replication of rectangular elements, thereby creating wave pattern motifs. Lingnan's inhabitants, whose fortunes have been shaped by their connection to water, used rivers, lakes, and seas, serve as a medium for cultural exchange and trade. This motif, as a result, is most often found in pavilions that are situated by bodies of water like ponds (Figure 14).

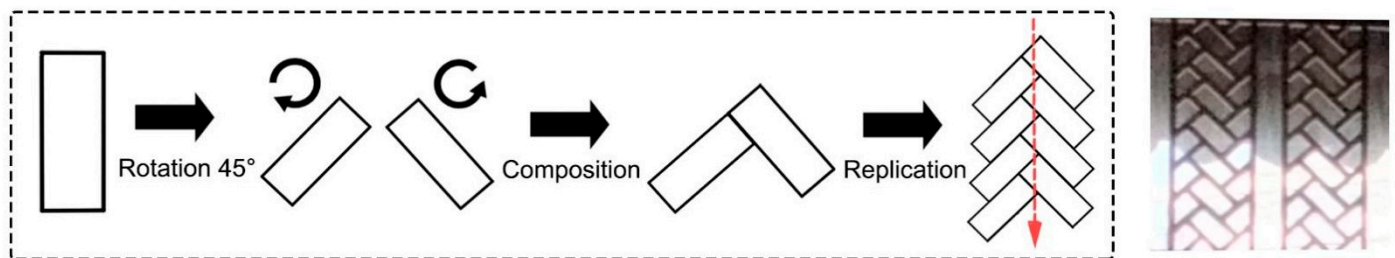


Figure 14. Formation process of wave patterns using single elements (source: authors).

The decorative patterns found in Lingnan gardens are created through the use of various geometric unit shapes, which are manipulated via overlay and reconfiguration, proportional segmentation, axial symmetry, and rotation and assembly. These unit shapes serve as the fundamental elements for subsequent replication and arrangement, resulting in larger graphical patterns that enhance the visual coherence of the overall scene.

3.3. Door and Window Landscaping and Traditional Art Aesthetics in Lingnan Gardens

Doors and windows in Lingnan gardens are important elements in creating landscape mood, and their landscape-making methods are interpenetrated with calligraphy, painting, and poetic art. This section explores the beauty of form and aesthetic orientation through elaborating the common relationship between doors and windows and traditional art.

3.3.1. Interface of Windows and Doors and “Trend” in Calligraphy

The traditional landscape gardening approach emphasizes the dynamic appreciation of nature, and the Chinese art of calligraphy also takes movement and rhythm as its basic characteristic. As a result, the two approaches to structure are similar. In order to create changes in the landscape, garden designers intentionally organize the visual elements of windows and doors, thereby creating rhythmic variations and inner charm.

The character “trend” is a description of the rigidity and flexibility of the brushstrokes, the movement and static patterns in the art of calligraphy, and serves to encapsulate the expression of rhythm and aesthetic appeal. Ouyang Xun articulated the importance of spacing in character arrangement, stating, “Characters should be arrayed with spacing neither too sparse nor too dense. Arrangement signifies spacing to enhance the trend, while stacking signifies tightening the space... Furthermore, “evenly adjusting strokes” refers to modifying the size, length, and spacing of strokes in accordance with the character’s shape [29]”. For character arrangement, it is essential to maintain well-proportioned and natural spacing to establish a coherent trend. This principle is similarly applicable in garden design, where windows and doors are often aligned side by side or spaced continuously to create a harmonious trend. For instance, the cloud-veil-shaped openwork windows in Qinghui

Garden are uniformly spaced along the courtyard wall, with their tops connected in a wave-like arc, thereby generating a sense of continuous momentum (Figure 15).

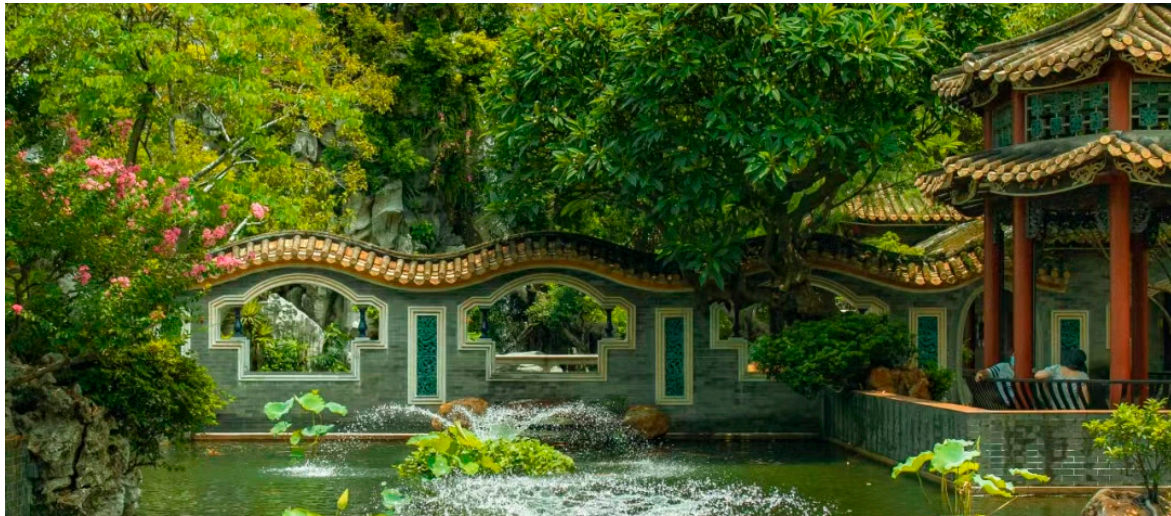


Figure 15. Cloud-veil-shaped lattice windows in Qinghui Garden (source: photographed by authors).

Calligraphic composition is characterized by an emphasis on the spatial intervals between phrases and characters, specifically incorporating pauses, known as “emptiness”. However, these interruptions do not disrupt the continuity of the strokes, but maintain a coherent sense of movement (Figure 16). Judicious pauses contribute to a balanced composition, where both density and openness are achieved while sustaining the overall vital rhythm. As noted, “The connection does not lie in the meeting of lines, but in the connection of qi (similar to air). Qi connection refers to the connection where the lines do not meet [30]”.

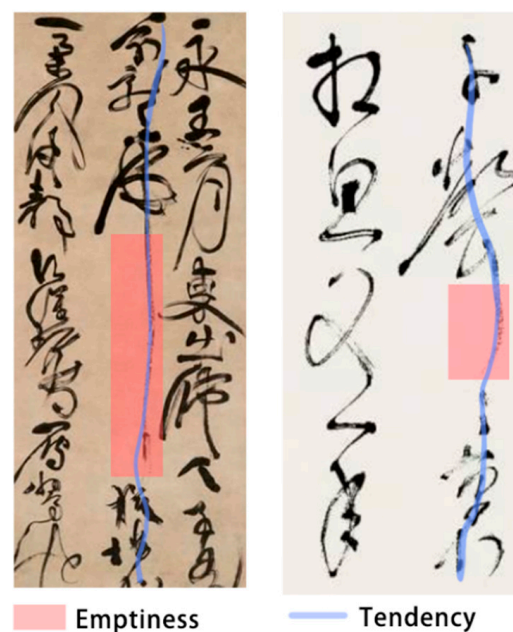


Figure 16. Calligraphy layout analysis diagram (source: authors).

An illustrative example can be found in the facade of Ketable Wall in Dongguan Ke Garden, which features a systematic arrangement of multiple windows and doors that creates an orderly sequence. However, the unequal spacing between windows on the right-side facade generates “emptiness”, thus creating a rhythmic pause; The varying lengths and sizes of the doors and windows produce a coherent rhythm, similar to calligraphy, where unity and variation are achieved through a carefully balanced, staggered arrangement (Figure 17).

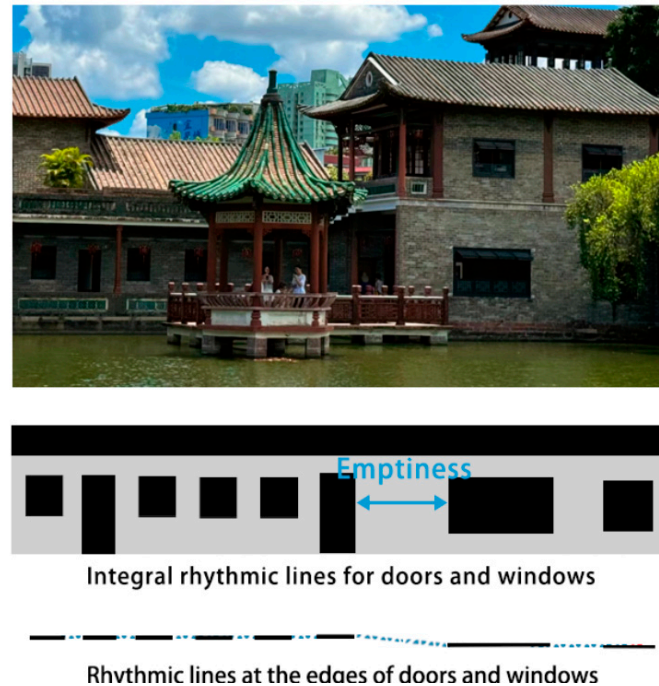


Figure 17. Schematic diagram of pauses and continuous rhythms for windows and doors (source: authors).

3.3.2. Window and Door Views in Relation to Pictorial Forms

As visual and spatial arts, respectively, traditional Chinese paintings and classical gardens share some aesthetic characteristics. Traditional Chinese paintings emphasize transparency, charm, and elegance [31]. The art of doors and windows of Lingnan gardens absorbed the formal language of traditional paintings, constituting the landscape mode of “opening windows like hanging paintings” and the far-reaching artistic style.

Albums represent a distinctive mode of presentation in Chinese painting, characterized by the segmentation of subject matter into discrete scenes, with each page illustrating a singular vista. The act of sequentially flipping through these pages engenders a scroll-like effect, enabling the viewer to mentally reconstruct the individual scenes into a cohesive image. Linglong Water Pavilion, located within Yuyin Garden in Guangzhou, is an octagonal structure that features a full-length lattice window on its facade. When observing the view through this window, the lattice grilles fragment the external scenery into a series of paneled images [32], reminiscent of the small scenic units typically found in Chinese landscape album pages. As viewers engage dynamically with the environment, the segmented scenery is synthesized into a unified image within their cognitive framework. This artistic approach parallels the creative process involved in the production of landscape album pages, thereby enriching the viewing experience with additional layers of interest (Figure 18). A poem reads, “A zither rests upon the table, idly; outside the window, a few bamboos show their green. No one is present behind the quiet curtains and blinds, as the spring breeze blows in by itself” [33], depicting the scenery and the functional roles

of doors and windows. The inherent beauty of the garden, framed by these architectural elements, undergoes a process of transformation and reconstruction within the viewer's mind through visual engagement, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive experience of the garden's landscape.

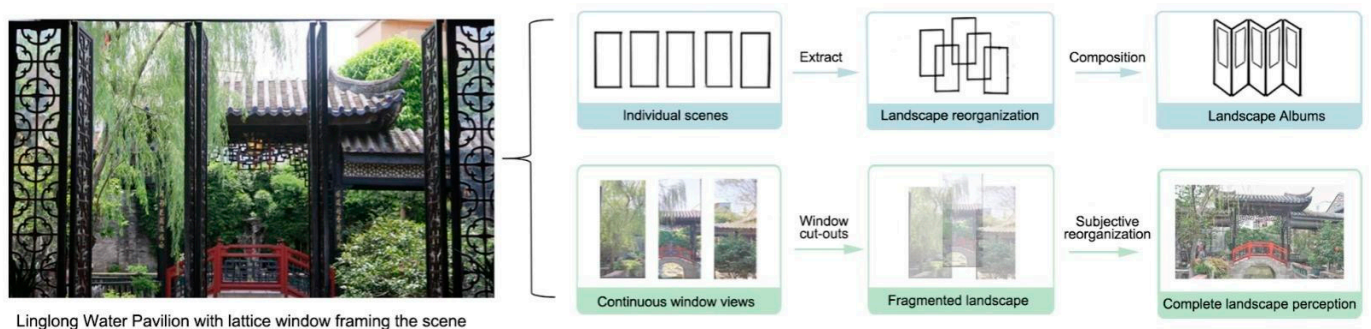


Figure 18. The cognitive process of scene cropping in door and window views (source: authors).

The use of the double screen as a painting method in traditional Chinese painting exhibits parallels with the framing of views found in garden door and window designs. In traditional Chinese painting, the use of double screens as a painting technique shares commonalities with the scenic arrangements found in garden doors and windows. As the American art historian Wu Hung has noted in his analysis of a double-screen painting of a gathering and chess playing, the artwork employs double screens or a similar overlapping composition. By adding “internal frames” parallel to the picture plane, the artist achieves a trompe-l’œil effect and a feeling of depth in space [34]. The painting employs two screens, arranged from larger to smaller and from outer to inner, to depict a spatial recession with layered depth (Figure 19).

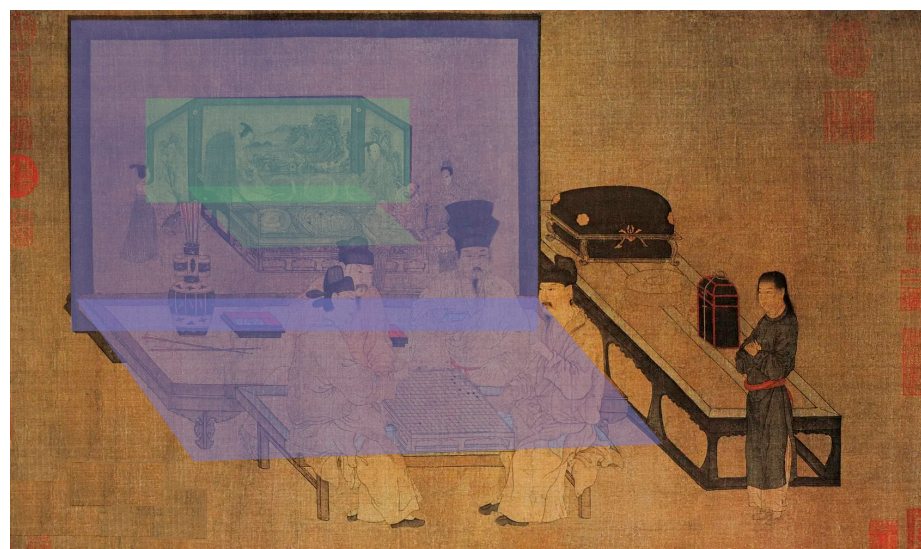


Figure 19. Analysis of the multiple spatial layers in a double-screen painting of a gathering and chess playing (source: authors).

The practice of layering permeable-type doors and windows to construct an illusion of spatial distance is a common feature in Lingnan gardens. For instance, in the passageways of Yuyin Garden (Figure 20), six door apertures are horizontally overlapped, disrupting the perception of true distance. The consecutive doorframes rapidly constrict the view, thus enhancing the sense of depth. The effect is similar to overlapping screens, which

blur the boundaries between real and illusory space, thereby creating a trompe-l'œil visual experience.



Figure 20. The series of six layered permeable-type doors at Yuyin Garden (source: authors).

From a practical standpoint, given Lingnan's hot and humid climate, gardens require effective ventilation and heat dissipation. The continuous arrangement of door openings facilitates airflow throughout various interior spaces, while the large scale of architectural doors and windows enhances interior lighting, as well as facilitates the flow of air between inside and outside for cooling.

3.3.3. Naming by Scenery and Poetic Shaping

Some of the Lingnan gardens are embellished with couplets and plaques around the windows and doors. These items contain summaries and interpretations of the scenery's meanings, which enhance the viewer's comprehension of the attractions' meanings while also serving as a distinctive kind of art with the landscape's doors and windows and the interface's structure. In *"Dream of the Red Chamber"*, it is articulated, "Such grandeur of scenery, so many pavilions, all flowers, willows, mountains, and waters, without inscriptions, would fail to add to their charm" [35]. This statement underscores the essential function of couplets and plaques in augmenting the aesthetic appeal of garden landscapes.

Lingnan gardens often utilize subtle and refined language in their couplets and plaques to convey landscape imagery. A notable example is the Bamboo Garden plaque located in Qinghui Garden, which is embellished with stucco at the apex of the door archway, thereby serving as a focal point. The couplets flanking the archway, designed in the shape of bamboo leaves, exhibit vibrant colors that create a striking contrast with the gray walls of the courtyard. The couplet states, "Where the wind passes, the sound lingers with the bamboo's rhythm; under the bright moon, the fragrance of flowers is ubiquitous", effectively encapsulating the scenery within the garden. As visitors traverse the archway and walk along the stone path, they observe green bamboo leaning against the wall, casting shifting shadows in the sunlight. The Bamboo Garden harmoniously integrates sound, color, and shadow, thereby cultivating a serene and tranquil atmosphere (Figure 21a).



Figure 21. Couplet and plaque forms and their landscape-related meanings (source: authors).

The doorways flanking Yuyin Garden are inscribed with the couplet, “Three bow’s space of red rain is ample, a corner of shade where green clouds are deep”. The character for “bow” in Chinese refers to an ancient unit of measurement for land, while “red rain” denotes the vibrant *Pyrostegia venusta* situated in front of Shenliu Hall. These flowers mingle with the lush greenery of the park to form a vibrant and colorful landscape. The characters for “shaded” and “deep” capture the richness of the greenery (Figure 21b). This couplet succinctly encapsulates the scenery of Shenliu Hall, reflecting the creator’s design intent and emotional expression. Within Qinghui Garden, the hall named Xiao Peng Ying features a horizontal board adorned with calligraphy above its entrance. The terms *peng* and *ying* symbolize the legendary islands of Penglai and Yingzhou, conveying the original owner’s aspiration for a transcendental spirit. Although the space lacks actual clouds, water, or islands, the artistic expression of the language on the board evokes an emotional resonance, conjuring the ambiance of “Peng Ying” in the observer’s mind (Figure 21c).

4. Discussion

This study takes the four famous gardens in Lingnan as the research object and centers on the shape type and decorative themes of garden doors and windows, revealing in depth the laws and artistic characteristics of door and window modeling, which helps to elucidate the aesthetic value of the cultural heritage of the Lingnan gardens, and also provides references for the modern garden design.

The results of the study mainly reveal two points. First, the study reveals the formal aesthetic laws that characterize the types of windows and doors in Lingnan and their decorative features. Second, the study reveals the influence of traditional Chinese calligraphy, painting, and poetry on the landscaping of doors and windows in Lingnan gardens, as well as the similarity between the landscaping techniques of doors and windows and those of traditional Chinese art. Calligraphy inscriptions on doors and windows complement the contextual atmosphere of the gardens, and the use of painting art in door and window decoration enriches the unique visual experience. The poems and inscriptions on the doors and windows add literary flavor and cultural connotation to the garden.

Compared to prior work [14,18], which concentrated on delineating the formal features of doors and windows, in contrast, this study adds the aspect of positional distribution of door and window forms. It demonstrates the relationship between door and window morphology and their scenic effects, while also highlighting how their opening methods respond to the local climatic conditions. Compared with the existing research results [11,12,15], the insights presented in this paper are different in the same way. From the common point of view, the shape and design of Lingnan garden doors and windows are deeply influenced by the regional culture of Lingnan: their structure is based on the pragmatic point of view of commercial culture, and adds artistic effect on the basis of meet-

ing the actual function. In terms of the differences, the existing research mostly interprets the gardening theory and method in artistic terms from the macro perspective and explain the compatibility of its artistic language, while this study focuses on the microscopic level to explore the compatibility between the door and window settings of Lingnan gardens and the creations of the art of calligraphy, painting, and poetry, and to deepen the analysis of its poetic, pictorial, and chiaroscuro characteristics in the presentation path of the garden details.

As one of the three major schools of Chinese garden design, Lingnan gardens, in comparison to their Northern and Jiangnan counterparts, exhibit a distinct regional character in their door and window designs. Located on the periphery, Lingnan was less influenced by the political ideologies of the Northern imperial court, resulting in a decorative style that demonstrates a “transgression” of hierarchical norms. This is evident in the use of “phoenix motifs”, traditionally symbols of power, in vibrant colors for door and window ornamentation, where the symbolic intent leans towards popular wishes for good fortune and prosperity, thus showcasing a shift from ritualistic to secular values. Moreover, due to the influence of maritime commercial culture, Lingnan exhibited a high receptivity to Western aesthetics, actively integrating Western decorative elements, creating a marked differentiation from the traditional literati gardens of Jiangnan.

5. Conclusions

- (1) Traditional Chinese art and traditional gardens constitute mutually influential sister arts. As the creators of Lingnan gardens often belonged to the cultural and artistic elite, the design and adornment of garden doors and windows reflect the creative principles and aesthetic aspirations of traditional art. These art forms share both commonalities in their scenic construction, exhibiting a design orientation informed by poetry, calligraphy, and painting, and similarities in their choice of materials, frequently incorporating elements such as plum blossoms, bamboo, pine trees, and banana trees to evoke landscape settings imbued with personal cultural ideals.
- (2) Lingnan gardens’ doors and windows, typically large and symmetrically arranged, prioritize practical functions such as ventilation and cooling, reflecting a natural adaptation to the subtropical climate. Materials used in door and window construction range from glass and wood to ceramic and wrought iron, complemented by ornamentation incorporating traditional motifs, everyday objects, and Western stylistic elements. A palette of warm colors, including red, yellow, and pink, often complements cool colors like purple, blue, and green, creating visually rich and vibrant designs. These design choices, reflecting a pragmatic aesthetic of Lingnan’s urban life, also demonstrate the integration of modern Western influences. This blend demonstrates the region’s open-minded, integrative, and selective approach to cultural exchange, along with a refreshing, vibrant, and nature-oriented aesthetic sensibility.
- (3) The rich variety of forms, vibrant ornamentation, and poetic sensibility of Lingnan garden doors and windows constitute valuable design inspiration for contemporary landscape architecture. Their enduring value can be preserved and extended through three key strategies: first, by extracting original formal language and symbolic characteristics to reconstruct traditional artistic expressions; second, redefining design prototypes by integrating these with modern materials and construction techniques; and third, a nuanced exploration of Lingnan’s historical and cultural context to inform contemporary design approaches, thereby effectively communicating the distinctive aesthetic ideals of Lingnan gardens and deepening their relevance in the modern era.

Finally, this study also has certain limitations. For example, while exploring the commonalities between the aesthetic qualities of doors and windows and traditional Chinese

art forms, it primarily focused on the visual interface and the resulting effects. There is still much to explore regarding the deeper aesthetic ideas behind viewing and scene construction. Furthermore, due to the wide distribution of Lingnan gardens, this paper only selected the four most representative gardens as research objects, which may not fully represent the entire spectrum of door and window designs in Lingnan gardens. Future research can expand the scope of case studies to more comprehensively elucidate the cultural and aesthetic features of Lingnan gardens.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Z.W. and R.Z.; data collection, R.Z.; data analysis, J.T.; writing—original draft, Z.W. and R.Z.; writing—review and editing, X.H., S.W. and J.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by Guangdong Province Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project, grant number GD22CYS03.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to restrictions on privacy.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments and feedback for improving this manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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