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STUDY ON THE PROTECTION STATUS, PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES OF RELIGIOUS GARDENS IN YANGZHOU - A CASE STUDY OF DAMING TEMPLE, QIONGHUA GUAN AND PUHADING GARDEN

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Abstract

Yangzhou religious gardens represent an important heritage where multi-religious culture integrates with classical gardens. However, they are confronted with conservation dilemmas due to urbanization and tourism development. To improve relevant conservation theories and provide practical references, this paper conducts a horizontal comparison by adopting methods of literature research, field investigation and case analysis, with Daming Temple, Qionghua Guan and Puhaddin Garden as case studies. The results indicate significant differences in the conservation levels among the three gardens. The study reveals that the gardens share common problems such as single funding sources, shortage of professionals, and imbalance between conservation and development, together with respective distinctive dilemmas. Accordingly, a hierarchical strategy is proposed, including classified conservation, diversified funding and talent channels, and promotion of living inheritance, so as to support the sustainable conservation of Yangzhou religious gardens and the protection of multi-religious heritage.

Keywords: Yangzhou Religious Gardens, Diverse Religions, Cultural heritage Protection, Daming Temple, Qionghua Guan, Puhading Garden

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INTRODUCTION

As one of the first batch of national historical and cultural cities announced by the State Council, Yangzhou is located at the intersection of the Grand Canal and the Yangtze River. Historically, it thrived due to canal transportation (Zhao, 2018, p. 2), becoming a hub where diverse cultures converge. Religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam have coexisted here for a long time, (Chu Weilin, 2015, p. 80) thus fostering distinctive religious gardens represented by Daming Temple, Qionghua Guan and Puhading Garden. These gardens integrate religious doctrines with the art of garden-making, embody Yangzhou's cultural context and memories of faith, and also form an integral part of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt.

Religious doctrines have exerted a profound influence on the distinctive characteristics of gardens. The Buddhist concept of "Zen", the Taoist notion of "following the laws of nature", (Yi, 2011, p. 190) and the Islamic idea of the "paradise" or "Heavenly Garden" have each shaped their unique design logics respectively. (Putra, Caisarina, & Fuady, 2025, p. 651) Furthermore, these gardens have served as important venues for literati gatherings and cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. For instance, Daming Temple embodies the cultural legacy of Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi, while Puhading Garden preserves the historical memories of China-foreign friendship.

A "religious garden" takes garden landscapes as the material carrier (Fu Jin, 1996, p. 60) and is a special type of garden that integrates religious culture with secular aesthetics (Zhao Guanghui, 1987, p. 7). Its core lies in the layout of mountains, waterwork, landscapes, architecture, and plants, combined with the construction of religious ornaments such as pagodas, stone pillars engraved with Buddhist scriptures, and stone inscriptions (Zhao Guanghui, 1987, p. 8), forming a unique landscape with both garden charm and religious atmosphere. The essential criterion for judging it lies in whether its fundamental purpose is to "serve religion".



Figure 1: Qiling Pagoda Plaza of Daming Temple, Yangzhou

Source: Photo by the author (2025)

The three typical religious gardens in Yangzhou each have their own characteristics. Daming Temple (Figure 1), a Buddhist garden, is located on the middle peak of Shugang in Yangzhou, adjacent to Slender West Lake. Founded during the Daming period of Emperor Xiaowu of the Southern Song Dynasty (Southern Dynasties, 457–464 CE), it combines natural and courtyard-style architectural layouts and is regarded as the top ancient temple in Yangzhou (Guijie, 2018, pp. 57,63). Qiong hua Guan, a Taoist garden, is situated on Wenchang Middle Road in Yangzhou, formerly known as Fanli Guan. Founded in 11 BC, it preserves relics such as the Qionghua Platform, the Memorial Archway of "Fanli Guan"(Figure 2), and the "Wushuang Pavilion" (Xiaofei, 2001, p. 58) and retains the traditional layout of "temple in the front and garden at the back". Puhading Garden, an Islamic garden, is built on a high hill beside the ancient Grand Canal, divided into the tomb on the hill and the temple at the foot of the hill. It creates a pattern of "mountains standing in front of water" by artificially piling up hills and digging ponds, integrating Arabic architectural styles into the Chinese courtyard style, and fully demonstrating the characteristics of "being surrounded by mountains and water with vigorous ancient trees" (Leyun, 1985, p. 36).



Figure 2: Memorial Archway of Qionghua Guan, Yangzhou, Yangzhou
Source: Photo by the author (2025)

At present, the interweaving of issues such as accelerated urbanization, intensified tourism development and backward conservation technologies has left some of Yangzhou's religious gardens facing predicaments including architectural aging, weakened cultural connotations, and an unclear division of responsibilities and powers among conservation entities. However, scholarly research has not kept pace with these realities, resulting in notable research gaps: firstly, there is a paucity of in-depth specialized studies on the diverse types of religious gardens in Yangzhou—Buddhist, Taoist, Islamic and others—and a lack of cross-religious horizontal comparisons; secondly, existing research on religious garden conservation lacks sufficient depth and systematic discussions integrated with the social, cultural and technological context of the new era; thirdly, most existing studies focus on the isolated analysis of individual gardens, failing to form a systematic and holistic understanding of the conservation of Yangzhou's religious gardens as a whole.

Against this backdrop, this study focuses on typical cases of diverse religious gardens, breaks free from the constraints of the vertical management mindset, and conducts targeted research through horizontal comparative analysis. Academically, it can enrich the research on Yangzhou's religious gardens and improve the protection system for diverse religious heritage; in practice, it can address the conservation dilemmas with pinpoint accuracy, provide a reference for administrative departments, and facilitate the continuation of cultural context and the development of this renowned historical city.

RESEARCH METHODS

As a branch of classical gardens, religious gardens exhibit a particularly prominent interdisciplinary characteristic. (Jiahua, 1999, p. 127) Research on Yangzhou's religious gardens involves multiple disciplines including religious studies, history, garden studies, architecture, fine arts, horticulture and botany, constituting a research field that demands the integration of knowledge from a wide array of disciplines.

According to the views of Y. Lincoln and N. Denzin, qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counter-traditional research field, spanning the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 1994, p. 576) Yangzhou's religious gardens, as complex cultural landscapes bearing diverse cultures and embodying prominent multidisciplinary characteristics, have their core conservation issue in balancing the restoration of material relics and the inheritance of religious connotations, as well as reconciling the integrity of historical context with adaptability to practical scenarios—this also serves as the core research question orientation of this study. Therefore, under the paradigm framework of the discipline of Chinese garden studies and cultural heritage conservation, this study adopts the methods of literature review, field investigation and case analysis that are commonly applied in qualitative research, to systematically analyze the conservation problems of Yangzhou's religious gardens and propose targeted strategies.

In the subsequent research, based on the aforementioned research methods, the study will be carried out in a progressive manner. This ensures that the analysis of the conservation issues of Yangzhou's religious gardens is both in-depth and practical, thus providing a solid theoretical foundation for relevant conservation practice.

Literature Research Method

Literature research is the core method of history. It explores historical facts and evidence by using existing secondary data, lays a foundation for subsequent field investigations, and is an indispensable part of this study (Fang, 1997, p. 143). Given the time-honored nature of Yangzhou's religious gardens, literature research shall be carried out from a multi-dimensional perspective: to excavate local chronicles such as Yangzhou Fu Zhi (Records of Yangzhou Prefecture) (Yang, 1991) and Jiangdu Xian Zhi (Records of Jiangdu County), (Xie & Liu, 1991) as well as scriptural classics including the Buddhist Tripitaka and the Taoist Daozang, so as to sort out the evolution of religious gardens and the influence of religious thoughts on their construction; to integrate archives of cultural relic conservation and restoration, existing academic achievements and relevant domestic and international research, thus clarifying the evolution and

conservation foundation of the research objects and drawing on advanced experience; to sort out the evolution of China's cultural relic conservation policies, and combine this with the practice of Yangzhou's ancient city conservation over the past few decades to define the guiding role of such policies.

Existing research has notable limitations: the number of published outcomes is limited, and systematic achievements are mostly concentrated in the fields of Buddhism and Taoism, with studies related to Islam being extremely scarce. (Qian, 2022, p. 70) the published achievements are insufficient in exploring the construction characteristics and religious atmosphere (Zou Linhai, 2017, pp. 3-4); the research on tourism development planning is not in - depth (Zou Linhai, 2017, pp. 93-95); and most of them are attached to projects such as the Grand Canal heritage, making it difficult to highlight their own religious and cultural characteristics (Huhua, 2016, pp. 283-292) .

Field Investigation Method

The field investigation method is a comprehensive means in cultural heritage research (Wang Chen & Wang, 2016, pp. 15-16), which can study social changes across time dimensions (Earl & Qiu, 2005, p. 276). It needs to carry out field investigations from the interdisciplinary perspectives of architecture (building restoration technology), cultural heritage protection (classified protection theory), religious studies (analysis of religious space functions), and sociology:

From the perspective of architecture, analyze the style characteristics, structural forms, and construction techniques of religious garden buildings, compare the differences with ordinary civil buildings, and check the safety of building structures, such as wall cracks and decay of wooden structures. (Figure 3)



Figure 3: Reclining Buddha Hall of Daming Temple, Yangzhou
Source: Photo by the author (2025)

From the perspective of garden science, study the garden spatial layout, garden - making techniques (such as borrowing scenery, opposite scenery, and screened scenery), and plant configuration, analyze the construction logic of religious atmosphere and aesthetic artistic conception, and evaluate the integrity of garden landscapes, such as water pollution and plant decay.

From the perspectives of sociology and religious studies, the protection of cultural landscape heritage should attach importance to historical context and cultural connotations (Jixiang, 2015, pp. 98-99).

Explore the composite value of religious gardens as "carriers of religious culture, media for dialogue between humans and nature, and containers of historical memory". Through informal interviews, first-hand feedback on conservation challenges was collected from garden managers and religious representative Mr. Ma. This approach avoids the limitations of single-dimensional conservation thinking and ensures the systematicity and scientific rigor of the research. (Table 1)

Table 1: Field-investigation dates for each case in this study are presented below

Case	Religious Category	Field-investigation Date
Daming Temple	Buddhism	13 October 2025, 27 October 2025
Qionghua Guan	Taoism	25 October 2025
Puhading Garden	Islam	14 October 2025, 17 October 2025, 27 October 2025

Source: Author's own field survey, October 2025.

Case Study Method

The case study method is a dynamic, multi - object, and multi - level research strategy that requires the use of various data collection methods (Li & Cao, 2012, pp. 3-4) and has become a common tool for multi - disciplinary research on complex social phenomena (Yin, 2014, p. 4).

Table 2: Case-selection Criteria of This Study

Case	Religious Category	Conservation Grade	Current Condition
Daming Temple	Buddhism	National-level	Intact religious buildings and affiliated gardens
Qionghua Guan	Taoism	Municipal-level	Intact religious buildings and affiliated gardens
Puhading Garden	Islam	National-level	Intact religious buildings and affiliated gardens
Tianning Temple	Buddhism	National-level	Only major religious buildings remain; the garden area no longer exists

Case	Religious Category	Conservation Grade	Current Condition
Wudang Palace	Taoism	Municipal-level	Only major religious buildings remain; the garden area no longer exists
Xianhe Mosque	Islam	National-level	Only major religious buildings remain; the garden area no longer exists

Source: Author's own field survey, October 2025.

This study selects three typical types of religious gardens in Yangzhou—Daming Temple (Buddhist), Qionghua Guan (Taoist), and Puhading Garden (Islamic)—as its case studies (Table 2), with the specific research approaches outlined as follows:

Field survey and data collection: Conduct on - site visits to the three gardens, record the existing status of the building itself (wooden structures, walls) and garden landscapes (water bodies, vegetation, ornaments); use tools such as total stations and drones to measure the location, size, and scale of buildings, terrain, and plant communities, and draw current situation maps.

Analysis of problems and measures: Sort out the specific problems faced by the case gardens in the protection process (such as fund shortage, tourist carrying pressure), the protection measures adopted (such as building renovation technology, landscape improvement methods), as well as the protection effects and shortcomings.

Theoretical Verification and Experience Summary: Combine the findings of literature analysis and field investigations, verify the effectiveness of conservation theories, and reveal the local particularities of religious garden conservation in Yangzhou; integrate the disciplinary knowledge of sociology and public administration to summarize the conservation experiences and models adapted to local conditions in Yangzhou.

ANALYSIS: SORTING OUT THE PROTECTION STATUS OF TYPICAL RELIGIOUS GARDENS IN YANGZHOU

Daming Temple - A Representative of Buddhist Gardens: Protection Practice of a "Key Cultural Relics Protection Unit"

Daming Temple was first constructed in the Daming reign period of the Liu Song Dynasty of the Southern Dynasties. Renowned for Jianzhen's eastward voyage to Japan, it was designated as a Major Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the National Level in 2006, and stands as the case with the most well-established conservation foundation among Yangzhou's religious gardens. (Association, 2021, p. 74). Its conservation practice has advanced centering on "cultural relic restoration, mechanism improvement and cultural activation", and is carried out in adherence to the principles of "restoring the old as it was, advancing in phases and functional adaptation". (Figure 4)

In the protection of material relics, Daming Temple underwent renovations in 1963, 1973 and 1988 to commemorate Master Jianzhen. (Editorial Committee of Daming Temple Chronicle, 2004, pp. 11-12,20). It has since carried out successive renovations across the entire temple complex in 2013, (qianzhi, 2013, p. B1), 2014 (zhiquan, 2014, p. T1), 2015 (kongsheng, Qiling Pagoda Square Debuted, 2015, p. A2) and 2024 (Tao, 2024, p. 5).

In terms of the conservation and management mechanism, as introduced by Venerable Renbai, the administrative person in charge, Daming Temple has established a mechanism of "dedicated personnel responsibility, dynamic supervision and control, and zoned management", set up a Cultural and Historical Hall, and compiled archives for cultural relics. In terms of collaborative cultural conservation, Daming Temple takes *Jianzhen Culture* as its core and relies on the Jianzhen Institute to promote the integration of religious culture and garden conservation.



Figure 4: Layout plan of Daming Temple, Yangzhou

Source: Photo by the author (2026)

Qionghua Guan - A Representative of Taoist Gardens: Protection Dilemma of a "Minor Relic"

Qionghua Guan, the oldest existing Taoist garden in Yangzhou, is characterized by a small relic scale and limited funding, leading to fragmented conservation. In terms of material relics, basic restoration has been the primary focus since the 1990s. (Yunguan, 2003, p. 104). In the early 21st century, there was insufficient follow-up maintenance, with efforts merely confined to maintaining the existing

condition. (Zhang, Tile - Lifting Maintenance of Qionghua Guan, 2022). As found by the author through on-site investigations, there exist an ambiguous management subject, unclear allocation of powers and responsibilities, and absent participation of the Taoist community; collaborative cultural conservation has weakened, the Sanqing Hall has been converted into an art gallery, resulting in the loss of Taoist statues and their original functions, and obvious deviations in cultural display. (Figure 5)



Figure 5: Mountain-Gate Hall of Qionghua Guan, Yangzhou
Source: Photo by the author (2025)

Puhading Garden - A Representative of Islamic Gardens: Protection Exploration of "Integration of Chinese and Foreign Styles"

Puhading Garden, an Islamic Sino-foreign integrated architectural complex first constructed in the Southern Song Dynasty, is a Major Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the National Level. (Figure 6) Its conservation efforts focus on restoring the main structure in adherence to the principle of "restoring the old as it was", (Committee, 2004, p. 12) and carrying out environmental improvement. (Zhang, New Scenery on the East Bank of the Ancient Canal, 2023, p. A5) It has established a management mechanism of "Religion-led, Multi-level Supervision" and upgraded the security system. Meanwhile, it has separated religious and

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tourism activities through "Zoned Supervision and Control", and set up institutions including the Islamic Culture Exhibition Hall, Puhading Memorial Hall and Cultural and Historical Hall. While safeguarding the solemnity of religion, it displays Islamic garden culture, thus achieving a balance between heritage conservation and living inheritance.



Figure 6: Layout plan of Puha Ding Garden, Yangzhou, Yangzhou
Source: Photo by the author (2025)

DISCUSSION: COMMON AND INDIVIDUAL PROBLEMS IN THE PROTECTION OF TYPICAL Religious Gardens in Yangzhou

Common Problems: Common Challenges for Diverse Religious Gardens

The protection of typical religious gardens in Yangzhou is confronted with three major common challenges: funding shortages, talent gaps, and the imbalance between protection and development. Their funding is highly reliant on government fiscal allocation, (Editorial Committee of Daming Temple Chronicle, 2004, pp. 11-12) resulting in a single financing channel constrained by the gardens' own development capacity. While Daming Temple can partially supplement its funds with tourism revenue, Qionghua Guan and Puhading Garden face more acute funding shortfalls due to their small scale and low popularity. All three types of gardens lack interdisciplinary talents with both religious knowledge and garden conservation expertise, which hinders the authentic inheritance and value interpretation of cultural heritage. For instance, the wood and stone carvings embodying the integration of Chinese and Arab cultures in Puhading Garden are in urgent need of inheritance by professional talents. A long-standing imbalance exists between protection and development across the gardens: Daming Temple has continuously advanced renovation and supporting construction to cope with a large tourist flow, yet it still faces the pressure of

carrying capacity oversaturation and disrupted religious atmosphere. In contrast, Qionghua Guan and Puhading Garden have fallen into the vicious circle of "protection-idleness", merely maintaining the physical existence of their architectures while losing their religious and cultural functions. If this vicious circle remains unbroken, these gardens will gradually become relics with physical existence but no cultural connotation, endangering their long-term heritage value.

Individual Problems

Beyond the common challenges, the three gardens face unique individual predicaments due to their distinct cultural traits and location conditions. Daming Temple (Buddhist) suffers from the separation of tourism development and religious functions. The massive tourist flow and commercial facilities have damaged its Zen ambiance, and its cultural display remains superficial, failing to fully explore the profound historical connotations associated with historical figures such as Jianzhen, Ouyang Xiu, Su Shi and Emperor Qianlong, which restricts the exertion of its core cultural value. Qionghua Guan (Taoist) is constrained by limited physical space and weakened Taoist attributes. Surrounding constructions have left no room for its expansion; moreover, the lack of management by Taoist practitioners has led to the loss of its cultural essence, and fragmented relics have made systematic protection difficult to implement. Puhading Garden (Islamic) is plagued by the disconnection between its garden style and the inheritance of traditional craftsmanship. (Figure 7) The style of commercial buildings outside the garden is incompatible with the garden's core feature of the integration of Chinese and Arab styles, and the unique stone carving craftsmanship is on the verge of extinction, threatening the authentic preservation of its historical style and features.

By sorting out the conservation issues of the three types of religious gardens and comparing them with existing literature, this study finds that previous research has mostly focused on the discussion of issues concerning a single garden or a single religious type, with relatively general analyses of common problems and insufficient attention to the individualized differences among different religious gardens. While verifying such common problems as funding shortage, talent scarcity, and imbalance between conservation and development, this study further reveals the differentiated characteristics, namely tourism overloading in Buddhist gardens, cultural hollowing in Taoist gardens, and stylistic alienation in Islamic gardens. This research improves the systematic understanding of conservation issues regarding Yangzhou religious gardens and addresses the weaknesses in existing studies.(Table 3)

Table 3 : Common and Individual Conservation Problems of the Cases

Case	Common Problem: Funding	Common Problem: Professional Talents	Common Problem: Unbalanced Development	Individual Problem
Daming Temple	Reliant on government finance	Shortage of interdisciplinary professionals	Unbalanced development	Tourism activities disturb the religious atmosphere
Qionghua Guan	Reliant on government finance	Shortage of interdisciplinary professionals	Unbalanced development	Lack of specialized management
Puhading Garden	Reliant on government finance	Shortage of talents skilled in Chinese Arab stone carving techniques	Unbalanced development	Changes in garden style and risk of loss of traditional craftsmanship

Source: Author's own field survey, October 2025



Figure 7: Puhading Garden, Yangzhou

Source: Photo by the author (2025)

HIERARCHICAL PROTECTION COUNTERMEASURES FOR DIVERSE RELIGIOUS GARDENS IN YANGZHOU

After years of development, Yangzhou has gradually formed a system of laws, governmental regulations and planning policies serving diverse objectives and dimensions. Laws and regulations enacted by the National People's Congress as well as provincial-municipal authorities, such as the *Cultural Relics Protection Law of the People's Republic of China* and its Implementing Regulations,

constitute the fundamental legal basis for heritage conservation. At the administrative implementation level, the *Regulations on the Protection of Famous Historical and Cultural Cities, Towns and Villages*, issued by the State Council, provides practical instruments for cultural relic conservation.

Meanwhile, China's conservation system for historic and cultural cities has moved beyond the protection of individual buildings or heritage sites. It places greater emphasis on large-scale conservation of historic building clusters. This system protects not only officially-designated cultural-relic protection units but also their surrounding environments, representing an advanced form of heritage conservation.

The *Outline of the Plan for the Protection, Inheritance and Utilization of the Grand Canal Culture* is a national-level development plan that charts future conservation and development pathways. Though not statutory legislation, its forward-looking, open, proactive and flexible features help attract more personnel and resources for heritage conservation. It enables full-scale discussions prior to conservation actions, maximises public attention, and facilitates access to adequate resources.

Establishing a Protection System of Classified and Targeted Measures

Centering on the respective pain points of Daming Temple, Qionghua Guan and Puhading Garden, a classified and targeted protection system is established to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. For Daming Temple, the measures include strict tourist flow control with zonal and hierarchical guidance, standardizing commercial operations, further exploring Buddhist culture, and building a digital dissemination platform. Documentation of heritage data is the foundation of the essential procedures that facilitate and advance the conservation of cultural heritage buildings in the contemporary era. (Baharuddin, Bahardin, Nawawi, Harun, & Hussain, 2024, p. 32) For Qionghua Guan, protection is promoted in phases: consolidating historical research foundations in the short term, and expanding spatial scope, restoring Taoist management and maintenance, and revitalizing its Taoist attributes in the medium and long term. For Puhading Garden, the strategies involve regulating the surrounding environment through interdepartmental collaboration, inheriting its distinctive craftsmanship, and fostering a positive cycle of protection and activation. These efforts collectively form a scientific and systematic protection system for Yangzhou's diversified religious gardens.

Expanding the "Diversified Collaboration" Channels for Funds and Talents

To address the development bottlenecks of the three religious gardens, diverse and collaborative channels for funding and talent cultivation are expanded. In terms of funding, a special fund for the protection of Yangzhou's religious

gardens is established, and a social donation platform is built to break the over-reliance on fiscal allocation. Tailored to the characteristics of Qionghua Guan and Puhading Garden, efforts are made to upgrade their cultural relic protection grades and secure funding support from home and abroad respectively, with strengthened efficiency in fund supervision. In terms of talent development, it has deepened university-local cooperation with Southeast University and other institutions, offered special courses and jointly built internship bases, invited religious community members to participate in conservation work to uphold authenticity, organized special training sessions and public lectures on a regular basis, and laid a solid foundation for a team of interdisciplinary talents.

Exploring a "Living Inheritance" Path for Cultural Protection

Based on the religious characteristics of the three gardens and targeting the pain points in cultural inheritance, differentiated paths of living inheritance are explored to transform the religious gardens from static relics into dynamic cultural carriers. For Daming Temple (Buddhist), in collaboration with intangible cultural heritage inheritors, it restores Tang-dynasty Buddhist rituals, sets up a Zen meditation experience area, and develops research and study routes to form a closed loop of cultural inheritance. For Qionghua Guan (Taoist), it holds cultural exhibitions on traditional festivals such as the Lantern Festival, organizes Taoist ritual performances and interpretations, and explores Taoist health culture to launch experience classes. For Puhading Garden (Islamic), it hosts Islamic Food Festivals on traditional holidays and builds cultural and creative spaces to expand its influence and bridge cultural gaps. Art and cultural activities can help people foster local cultural awareness in the context of cultural heritage and social interaction. (Isa & Shan, 2024 VOLUME 22, p. 496) The ultimate goal of living inheritance is to activate the cultural and religious functions of the gardens and realize the effective inheritance of their core cultures.

CONCLUSION

The core contribution of this study is to address the limitations of existing research on Yangzhou's religious gardens by breaking the research perspective of focusing on a single garden or a single religious type. Through a horizontal comparison of Buddhist, Taoist and Islamic gardens, this study systematically analyzes the current protection status and existing problems, thus enriching the breadth and depth of research on Yangzhou's religious gardens. At the practical level, the proposed hierarchical protection strategies are closely aligned with the actual predicaments of the three gardens and feature strong operability. They can provide direct references for the local government of Yangzhou and relevant administrative institutions in their religious garden protection work, helping Yangzhou's religious gardens break through protection dilemmas and achieve

sustainable development, while continuing the cultural context of the harmonious coexistence of diverse religions along the Grand Canal cultural belt.

Based on the findings and unresolved issues of this study, future research can be further advanced from four aspects: First, focus on the refined conservation of Yangzhou's religious gardens, conduct an in-depth exploration of the specialized restoration techniques for material relics of different types of religious gardens (including timber structures, stone carvings, water systems, etc.), and enhance the professionalism and pertinence of conservation efforts. Second, expand the research scope, integrate Yangzhou's religious gardens with the surrounding historic blocks and cultural tourism resources, explore the synergistic development model of "Garden + Block + Cultural Tourism", and address the imbalance between conservation and development. Third, strengthen cross-regional comparative research, compare the conservation experiences and challenges of other diverse religious gardens in China, and extract replicable and promotable conservation models. Fourth, combine the policy directions and technological advancements of cultural heritage conservation in the new era, explore the in-depth application of digital technologies in the conservation and cultural communication of religious gardens, promote the in-depth integration of religious garden conservation with the digital age, and conduct an in-depth study on the synergistic pathways between cultural heritage conservation, local economic development and social and cultural construction, so as to maximize the value of cultural heritage.

ETHICS STATEMENT

All on-site investigations, interviews and data collection in this study were conducted in accordance with the relevant ethical guidelines for academic research. All research participants provided informed and voluntary consent, which was obtained through verbal confirmation or written informed consent forms.

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