

THE LITERARY AND ARTISTIC FIELD OF XIYUAN YAJI: A FIELD AND SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. This study focuses on the Xiyuan Yaji (Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden) of the Northern Song Dynasty, examining its generation mechanisms and symbolic evolution as a literary and artistic field. It reveals that the literati in Yuanyou period (元祐) accumulated cultural capital through their literati gatherings, thereby constructing the cultural identity of the scholar community and gradually establishing the “Xiyuan Yaji” as a symbol of an ideal life. The Yuanyou literati concretized the Xiyuan Yaji as a manifestation of the ideal life of intellectuals by creating an autonomous cultural domain. This symbol further reinforced its cultural value during the Ming and Qing dynasties. In the modern era, the Xiyuan Yaji has been revived as a spiritual symbol among specific cultural groups. This study provides a fresh perspective for understanding the formation, evolution, and modern significance of cultural symbols of Chinese intellectual culture in the historical context. Additionally, it broadens the application of Bourdieu's field theory and semiotics in the study of Chinese intellectual culture.

Keywords: *Xiyuan Yaji, literary and artistic field, cultural symbolization, cultural capital*

Introduction

Yaji (literati gatherings) served as a significant form for scholars to articulate their aesthetic ideals and construct a shared cultural identity in the cultural context of ancient Chinese scholars. As a particularly renowned gathering initiated by Su Shi and other prominent literati during the Yuanyou (元祐) period of the Northern Song Dynasty, Xiyuan Yaji was not only a platform for artistic exchange but also a symbol embodying the aesthetic values, lifestyle ideals, and spiritual aspirations of the scholar class (Shih, 2017). During these gatherings, the literati accumulated cultural capital through poetry, calligraphy, paintings, and writing essays and reinforced the identity of the scholar community. As a result, Xiyuan Yaji gradually transcended its initial purpose as an event and evolved into a vital cultural symbol, reflecting the scholars' pursuit of an idealized lifestyle. With the development of history, the imagery of Xiyuan Yaji has repeatedly appeared. Scholars continuously endowed it with cultural connotations that transcended their specific historical contexts. As a result of this process, Xiyuan Yaji has become a timeless emblem of the ideal academic life. In modern times, Xiyuan Yaji has been revitalized as a symbol of traditional culture in specific cultural communities, meeting people's needs for spiritual belonging and lofty culture. This study explores the generation mechanism and symbolic evolution of Xiyuan Yaji as a literary and artistic field based on Bourdieu's field theory and semiotic theory. It analyzes how the literati during the Yuanyou period constructed a dependent cultural space through Xiyuan Yaji and reviews its symbolization process in later generations of scholars. By doing so, this study seeks to illuminate the historical inheritance and contemporary relevance of Xiyuan Yaji within the broader context of scholar culture.

Research objectives

There are two objectives in this study. Firstly, it aims to investigate the generation mechanisms of “Xiyuan Yaji” as a literary and artistic field and focus on how collective gatherings build literati identity. Secondly, it is designed to review the symbolization process of “Xiyuan Yaji” and demonstrate how it developed into a cultural symbol representing the ideal life of scholars.

Literature review

Historical background

The Xiyuan Yaji, a gathering of literati initiated by Wang Shen, who was an imperial son-in-law and high-ranking official of the Northern Song Dynasty, was held at his residence, Xiyuan. Some of the most influential literati of the time, like Su Shi (苏轼), Huang Tingjian (黄庭坚), Chao Buzhi (晁补之), Qin Guan (秦观), Zhang Lei (张耒), Mi Fu (米芾), and Li Gonglin (李公麟), were present at this gathering. They attempted to cultivate an idealised, transcendent lifestyle through poetry composing, calligraphy exchange, paintings, and engaging in leisurely tea-fueled discussions—a form of intellectual and artistic communion (Sun, 2012). Xiyuan Yaji was more than a literary and artistic meeting and embodied the literati's pursuit of spiritual independence and aesthetic refinement. It reflected their shared values, preferences, and attitudes towards life (Huang and Xiao, 2021; 2020). As a cultural paradigm, Xiyuan Yaji developed into a model for scholarly gatherings during the Song Dynasty and influenced subsequent generations, thereby becoming a cornerstone of Chinese scholar culture. With the evolution of history, the Xiyuan Yaji transcended its original field, developing into a spiritual symbol across time and space. In the party struggle of the Yuanyou period, scholars sought to assert their identity and stayed away from political disputes. Subsequent scholars did not directly experience the original Xiyuan Yaji, but they expressed reverence for its ethos through the reappearance of the Xiyuan Yaji Painting, treating it as a spiritual sanctuary and an idealised emblem of intellectual camaraderie and cultural refinement (Liu and Wu, 2024).

The generation mechanism of the literary and artistic field

The independence of the literary and artistic fields relies on the accumulation of both cultural and symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu's field theory, the distinctiveness and independence of such fields are upheld by internal logic and operating principles that distinguish them from external political and economic pressures. Within this field, the literati reinforced their cultural capital and strengthened their identity by participating in a range of activities such as writing poetry, creating calligraphy, painting, and exploring Zen Buddhist philosophy (Li, 2022). During the Yuanyou period, Su Shi accumulated a large amount of cultural capital and became an exemplar of literati identity. Xiyuan Yaji was not only a venue for artistic exchange but also a platform for expressing political views and expanding social networks. The literati consolidated their cultural identity through these multifaceted interactions. They also constructed an autonomous space independent of external power structures and affirmed their intellectual and artistic autonomy at that time.

The symbolic path of Xiyuan Yaji

According to semiotic theory, cultural symbols become widely recognised through social reappearance. Previous study argued that symbols gain meaning through processes of social reproduction and reinterpretation over time. Xiyuan Yaji frequently appeared in culture and became a potent symbol that epitomised the ideal life of the literati. Since the Song Dynasty, both literati and artists have continually used the motif of Xiyuan Yaji in their creative works. Therefore, it was invested with cultural significance that transcended its historical and geographical origins and became a spiritual symbol of the scholar class (Huang and Xiao, 2021). This symbolisation process was significant during the Ming and Qing dynasties. At that time, Xiyuan Yaji has become a recurring motif in paintings and literary creations. The literati's reinterpretation of art reinforced the gatherings symbolism as a source of spiritual solace and intellectual independence. Tang (2001) notes that Xiyuan became a historical reference and represented the scholars aspiration for detachment from worldly concerns and their pursuit of an ideal life. Over time, it evolved into a cultural symbol of profound significance, remaining a recurrent motif in artistic and cultural works even into the Republic of China era (Qi, 2023). The literature available underscores the dual significance of Xiyuan Yaji. One lies in an autonomous literary and artistic field; another lies in a cultural symbol that contains the ideals of the literati. Scholars built up cultural capital and created a space that was ideologically and practically independent of power through Yaji activities. This space served as both a spiritual sanctuary and generated the collective identity. Over centuries, Xiyuan Yaji transcended its historical origins and became a symbol of the literati's ideal life and a lasting emblem of their intellectual and cultural aspirations.

Theoretical framework

Based on Bourdieu's field theory and semiotic theory, this study makes a comprehensive analysis of the cultural and symbolic dimensions of Xiyuan Yaji. It examines how Xiyuan Yaji was formed as a literary and artistic field within the scholar-official community and traces the pathways of its symbolic evolution. Specifically, it investigates how the Yuanyou literati accumulate cultural capital and construct an independent cultural space through Yaji activities. Ultimately, it explores how these literati attain self-identification while contributing to the evolving symbolic meanings associated with Xiyuan Yaji.

Field theory: The generation mechanism of a literary and artistic field

According to Bourdieu's field theory, a field is a distinctive social space characterized by its own set of rules, internal structures, and independent operational logic. In this space, participants obtain recognition and legitimacy by accumulating and exchanging cultural capital—a critical metric of influence (Bourdieu, 1984). Taking Xiyuan Yaji as an example, the Yuanyou literati engaged in various cultural and artistic activities, including poetry composing, calligraphy, and painting. These initiatives not only demonstrated their artistic talents and cultural acumen but also significantly contributed to the establishment of Xiyuan Yaji as an independent literary and artistic field. This field is significant for scholars to showcase their cultural capital and reinforce both their prestige and their collective identity as members of the literati class. What's more,

Xiyuan Yaji became a cultural space ideologically independent of political authority. It made literati freely express their intellectual and artistic pursuits without external interference. In this space, they accumulated symbolic capital and further solidified their cultural identity and status. Xiyuan Yaji became a crucial site for the affirmation of the literati's cultural aspirations and self-identification by cultivating an atmosphere characterized by creativity and self-expression.

Semiotic theory: The evolution of the symbolic path

Semiotic theory focuses on the role of signs and symbols in culture, particularly how they evolve and acquire new meanings over time through reproduction and reinterpretation. These cultural transmission mechanisms enable symbols to transcend their original context and place themselves in collective memory and social consciousness. This symbolic evolution is compellingly illustrated by the Xiyuan Yaji. The gathering accumulated layers of meaning through repeated cultural reproductions and reinterpretations, ultimately surpassing its historical specificity. It evolved from a simple gathering into an enduring symbol that contains the literati's aesthetic values, intellectual pursuits, and spiritual ideals. This process highlights how Xiyuan Yaji transcended its tangible origins, achieving a symbolic resonance that reflected and reinforced the literati's shared identity and aspirations.

The comprehensive application of the theoretical framework

This study offers a detailed perspective on the mechanisms and processes underlying the cultural and symbolic significance of Xiyuan Yaji by integrating field theory and semiotic theory. Field theory illustrates the process by which the literati accumulate cultural capital and establish independent cultural spaces, thereby fostering their collective identity. However, semiotics explains how Xiyuan Yaji underwent a dynamic transformation, becoming a well-known cultural symbol with enduring relevance. These two theories enable a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural trajectory of Xiyuan Yaji. It clarifies the interaction between the structural mechanisms of cultural production and the symbolic processes that imbued Xiyuan Yaji with its lasting significance. When taken as a whole, these theories provide a thorough perspective for examining how Xiyuan Yaji developed into a pivotal literary and artistic field and a potent cultural symbol in Chinese scholar culture.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts historical document analysis to thoroughly examine the generation mechanism and symbolic path of Xiyuan Yaji as a literary and artistic field. By tracing its cultural roles and symbolic significance across various historical periods, this research thoroughly understands how Xiyuan Yaji evolved into a prominent cultural symbol and its enduring impact on the scholar community throughout history.

Research design

The research design of this study focuses on tracing the historical inheritance of Xiyuan Yaji and analysing its symbolisation process. In particular, it investigates how Xiyuan Yaji developed into a symbolic construct and helps spread the cultural values among the scholar-official community. This study involved the following two steps: (1)

Historical Analysis: The study systematically traces the historical development of Xiyuan Yaji from the Northern Song Dynasty, through the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, and into modern times. This longitudinal analysis based on time aims to identify the critical cultural meanings and transformations related to Xiyuan Yaji. It also situates these in the broader context of Chinese literati culture and reveals how it evolved alongside shifts in political, social, and intellectual environments. (2) **Close Reading of Texts and Visual Imagery:** The study meticulously examined a large number of texts (including poetry, prose, and inscriptions) and artistic imagery such as paintings and calligraphy. It explores how Xiyuan Yaji was conceptualised and represented as a cultural symbol through close reading and visual analysis. These analyses illuminate Xiyuan Yaji's profound role in embodying the ideals, values, and aesthetic pursuits of the scholar class, ultimately revealing how it transforms into a symbol of their identity and aspirations.

Collection of literature

This study carefully collects literature and categorises it into four key groups to reconstruct the historical and cultural trajectory of Xiyuan Yaji. Each group provides unique and critical insights into the evolution and significance of Xiyuan Yaji as a cultural phenomenon. (1) **Poems and Proses:** This category encompasses literary compositions from the Northern Song Dynasty to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, especially the works of renowned people such as Su Shi, Zhang Lei, and their contemporaries. These works offer valuable perspectives on the spiritual aspirations and aesthetic ideals of the literati. The following are some representative works:

Five Quatrains in Response to Kong Mizhou (和孔密州五绝)

The Visit to Xiyuan in Teng County (滕县时同年西园)

A Reply in the Same Style as Tian Guobu's Two Poems, One of Which (再次韵答田国博部夫还二首其一)

Water Dragon Chant: In the Next Rhyme Zhang Zhi's Yanghua Ci (水龙吟·次韵章质夫杨花词)

Seven Poems Written While Walking in the Western Garden on a Leisurely Day and Feeling Things (暇日步西园感物辄为诗得七篇·秋圃)

Looking Out to Sea: Reminiscing about Ancient Luoyang (望海潮·洛阳怀古)

These works provide crucial insights into the cultural and symbolic framework of Xiyuan Yaji, emphasizing its role as a representation of transcendence and the quest for an idealized, scholarly life. (2) **Inscriptions and Commentaries of Paintings:** The inscriptions and commentaries associated with paintings of Xiyuan Yaji, such as:

Record of the Xiyuan Yaji Painting (西园雅集图记)

Inscription on the Painting of Xiyuan Yaji (题西园雅集图)

An Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden for the Princes of Yechung (西园雅集为邺中诸王作)

It serve as valuable primary sources These writings demonstrate how successive generations of literati interpreted, reimagined, and imbued Xiyuan Yaji with evolving symbolic meanings, reflecting its enduring emotional and cultural resonance. (3) Paintings and Reproductions of the Past Ages : The artistic depictions of Xiyuan Yaji serve as vital visual representations of its symbolic evolution. This study examines various versions of Xiyuan Yaji Painting and focuses on works by influential artists such as Zhao Mengfu, Qian Xuan, Wen Zhengming, and Qiu Ying. This research explores how these visual artworks make Xiyuan Yaji become an emblem of the ideal literati lifestyle and a recurring theme by analysing the artistic elements such as the composition, depiction of landscapes, and accompanying inscriptions. (4) Imagery in Daily Objects : The imagery of Xiyuan Yaji was not only in paintings and calligraphy but also in daily objects such as writing brush pots and cups in the Qing Dynasty. Examples are Zhu Songzhu's Xiyuan Yaji Writing Brush Pot and You Tong's *Xiyuan Yaji Rhinoceros Horn Cup* (犀角杯). These items were not only practical but also symbolised the literati's admiration for Xiyuan Yaji. This further enhanced Xiyuan Yaji's status as a pervasive cultural symbol in daily life. The study analyzes these diverse materials to reconstruct the historical trajectory of Xiyuan Yaji and highlight its transformation from a specific gathering into a cultural emblem across time and space.

Historical document analysis

This study mainly applied the historical document analysis method to systematically explore materials related to Xiyuan Yaji. This method helps people understand how Xiyuan Yaji transitioned from a concrete cultural gathering into a widely recognised cultural symbol. The following areas are the focus of the study: (1) Poetry and Prose: The article profoundly studies literary works composed by Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, Qin Guan, and other Yuanyou literati, exploring the symbolic meanings associated with the imagery of Xiyuan (Wang, 2020). These works show how Xiyuan Yaji became a focus for the cultural identity of the literati by frequently expressing desires for the transcendence of the secular realm, aesthetic ideals, and a life of intellectual refinement. (2) Inscriptions and Commentaries: This study reveals how successive generations of scholars interpreted and redefined the symbolism of Xiyuan Yaji by analyzing the inscriptions on *Xiyuan Yaji paintings* and related works. These writings reveal their role in preserving collective memory and fostering continuity and emotional connection across different historical contexts. (3) Visual Depictions in Paintings: The study examines paintings of Xiyuan Yaji to reveal how it was visually conceptualized as a cultural symbol. It highlights how Xiyuan Yaji became a recurring artistic motif representing the literati's ideal life and values by analysing the depiction of figures, landscapes, and inscriptions. (4) Practical Objects with Symbolic Imagery: The Xiyuan Yaji imagery was integrated into daily objects such as brush pots and cups. This shows Xiyuan Yaji has the pervasive influence. These objects had the cultural ideals and aesthetic values associated with Xiyuan Yaji, reinforcing its role as an enduring symbol within the literati group.

This study reconstructs the historical trajectory of Xiyuan Yaji through the systematic analysis of these diverse materials. It also illustrates Xiyuan Yaji's

transformation from a specific gathering into a cultural symbol with lasting significance. The findings demonstrate that Xiyuan Yaji can transcend its original context through successive reinterpretations and reproductions by the literati. Ultimately, Xiyuan Yaji embodies the ideals of the literati and serves as a cornerstone in the construction of their cultural identity.

Results and Discussion

This study indicates the generation mechanisms and symbolic trajectory of *Xiyuan Yaji* as a literary and artistic field through historical document analysis and close textual reading. The results highlight how *Xiyuan Yaji* became an autonomous cultural space and a significant symbol in scholar culture.

Autonomy and identity in the literary and artistic field

As an independent literary and artistic field, *Xiyuan Yaji* provided scholars with a special space to distance themselves from worldly pursuits such as fame and fortune. This place demonstrated cultural autonomy and spiritual independence, allowing the literati to concentrate on intellectual and artistic endeavors. Scholars collectively constructed a sense of community through their creative works inspired by *Xiyuan Yaji*, reinforcing their cultural and social identity. In this context, they established *Xiyuan Yaji* as a symbol of their class identity through poetry writing, calligraphy creation, and painting. This shows their ideals of intellectual detachment and artistic freedom. The autonomy of this field served as a refuge from external pressures and a platform for the affirmation of the shared values and aspirations of the scholar community.

Symbolisation of an ideal life

Xiyuan Yaji has gradually become a powerful symbol and represented the literati's ideal lifestyle over time. It was characterised by leisure, elegance, and a harmonious relationship with nature and embodied the cultural ideals of the scholar group. The transformation of *Xiyuan Yaji* into a cultural symbol reflects the literati's pursuit of a life beyond material. The motifs were associated with *Xiyuan Yaji*-tranquility, refinement, and intellectual engagement-and made *Xiyuan Yaji* a representative of their disengagement from worldly ambitions and their deep connection to aesthetic and spiritual values. Consequently, *Xiyuan Yaji* came to symbolise the literati's vision of an ideal existence and served as a cultural representation of their aspirations and ethos.

Continuation of symbolisation and contemporary value

As *Xiyuan Yaji*'s imagery and cultural meanings were repeatedly revisited and reinterpreted by successive generations of literati, its symbolic significance was further strengthened during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Its status as a representation of the ideal life of the literati was cemented by this sustained engagement with *Xiyuan Yaji*, which guaranteed its significance as a recurrent topic in artistic and literary expressions. As a cultural symbol, *Xiyuan Yaji* in modern times bridges the values of traditional scholar culture with the spiritual needs of contemporary society and has been revitalised. Its reemergence in various cultural practices and intellectual activities reflects the enduring relevance of its symbolic meaning. *Xiyuan Yaji* is recognized as a representation of the literati's refined life and continues to embody the connection

between historical cultural ideals and modern aspirations, acquiring new cultural significance in the process. This part examines how Xiyuan Yaji became an essential cultural symbol for the scholar and explores the formation and evolution of its symbolic path with Bourdieus field theory and semiotic framework.

The autonomy of the literary and artistic field and the construction of scholar identity

As an independent literary and artistic field, Xiyuan Yaji provided scholars with a space to stay away from fame and fortune and indicate cultural self-discipline. According to Bourdieus field theory, the autonomy of a literary and artistic field is supported by independent cultural and symbolic capital and lies in its detachment from the influence of power. Mi Fu, in *Record of Xiyuan Yaji Painting*, remarked: “汹涌于名利之域而不知退者，岂易得此耶！”。He expressed the sentiments of scholars to be away from authority and pursue inner interests while emphasizing the importance of elegant gatherings in their spiritual lives. Scholars distanced themselves from the realm of fame and fortune, pursued spiritual self-identification, and gradually established Xiyuan Yaji as a symbol of scholar identity. Su Shi and his contemporaries grew closer to Xiyuan emotionally. For instance, Su Shi composed works such as Five Quatrains in Response to Kong Mizhou (和孔密州五绝·春步西园见寄), The Visit to Xiyuan in Teng County (滕县时同年西园), and in A Reply in the Same Style as Tian Guobu's Two Poems, One of Which (再次韵答田国博部夫还二首其一), he wrote: “风流别乘多才思，归趁西园秉烛游”。His attachment to elegant gatherings and his idealized pursuit of a leisurely life are both evident in this line. Xiyuan serves as a place for meetings and a spiritual sanctuary that is far away from worldly concerns. In addition, in Water Dragon Chant: In the Next Rhyme Zhang Zhi's Yanghua Ci (水龙吟·次韵章质夫杨花词), Xiyuan embodied Su Shi's melancholy about the ups and downs of his career.

Zhang Lei, in Seven Poems Written While Walking in the Western Garden on a Leisurely Day and Feeling Things (暇日步西园感物辄为诗得七篇·秋圃), wrote in almost the same way: “秋圃寂无有，萧条残菊枝。”，expressing nostalgia for the past and memories of previous gatherings. Huang Tingjian, in With Liu Jingwen (和刘景文), stated: “追随城西园，残暑欲退席”，hinting at his rough career and longing to reunite with friends at Xiyuan. But by the time this poem was written, some of these friends had already passed away, so Xiyuan became a symbol of the Yuanyou literati. Similarly, Chao Buzhi, in Yujiexing · Jinei (御街行·寄内), mentioned: “西园红艳绿盘龙，辜负一年春好”，using Xiyuan to bring back memories of better times and lament the past years. In Looking Out to Sea: Reminiscing about Ancient Luoyang (望海潮·洛阳怀古), Qin Guan wrote: “西园夜饮悲笳，有华灯碍月，飞盖妨花”，conveying nostalgia for the glorious scenes of Xiyuan Yaji and the sadness of time's passing.

Scholars in the Yuanyou period were full of vigor and created an independent space at Xiyuan, which was free from fame and fortune. It served as a poetic space for leisure and a cultural venue for discussions transcending worldly concerns. With the political

turmoil and career setbacks, this realm became their emotional attachment. The scholars, in adversity, integrated their longing for friends and peaceful years into their poetry. This made Xiyuan become an identity marker for the Yuanyou literati, centered around Su Shi.

Symbolic expression of the literati ideal life

Xiyuan (namely Western Garden) was a gathering place and a symbol of the ideal life. Scholars placed their aspirations for separation from fame and a closer relationship with nature through the natural scenery and cultural symbols displayed in the gatherings. For example, Mi Fu, in *Record of Xiyuan Yaji Painting*, described: 水石潺缓, 风竹相吞, 炉烟方袅, 草木自馨”. It vividly portrayed a serene and idyllic inner world and endowed the gatherings with transcendent spiritual connotations. In *Xiyuan Yaji Painting*, Li Gonglin created a poetic and elegant scene with images such as “bamboo path” (竹径), “a solitary pine tree” (孤松), and “ancient jade zither” (古器瑶琴). Mi Fu considered this as “the joy of tranquility” (清旷之乐), representing the scholars’ pursuit of a peaceful and refined life, thereby giving the gathering unique philosophical symbolism as an epitome of their ideal. In addition to recreating the scenes of the gatherings, *Xiyuan Yaji Painting* expressed the scholars’ quest for an ideal life through symbolic imagery. In the painting, Li Gonglin was painting Tao Yuanming’s *Returning Home* (归去来图), intending to use Tao Yuanming to symbolize the aspiration for reclusion and a detachment from worldly affairs, due to Tao Yuanming’s recognition as the pioneer of Chinese pastoral poetry and his veneration by posterity as the “Foremost Poet of Reclusion”. Xiyuan Yaji was more than specific gatherings. It evolved into a culture symbol of the ideal life and scholar identity.

Continuation of the symbolic process: From historical inheritance to contemporary values

Xiyuan Yaji has gradually sublimated through the continuous inheritance of scholars throughout history, becoming a cultural symbol that transcends time and space. The poet Yao Wenhuan (姚文奂) in Yuan Dynasty wrote in his *Inscription on the Painting of Xiyuan Yaji* (题西园雅集图): “四海才华萃, 西园爽气浓。” (Gu, 1983, pp. 364–365), demonstrating respect for the spirit of the Song literati and elevating Xiyuan to a spiritual realm beyond time. The scholar Wang Shizhen (王世贞) in Ming Dynasty further praised the ideals the Yuanyou literati upheld in *An Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden for the Princes of Yechung* (西园雅集为邺中诸王作) and *Inscription on Qiu Shifu’s Copy of the Painting of Xiyuan Yaji* (题仇实父临〈西园雅集图〉后), consolidating Xiyuan Yaji as a symbol of their spiritual pursuits.

The Xiyuan Yaji Painting became a recurrent pattern in painting, with variants occurring throughout history. From the painters Zhao Boju (赵伯驹) and Liu Songnian (刘松年) in the Northern Song Dynasty to Zhao Mengfu (赵孟頫) and Qian Xuan (钱选) in the Yuan Dynasty, the depiction evolved. Zhao Mengfu’s

version included the inscription of Yu Ji (a poet in the Yuan Dynasty): “即图而观，云林泉石，倏然胜处也。” (Kong, 1985, p. 853). Many of the original versions of the picture made by artists such as Wen Zhengming (文徵明), Tang Yin (唐寅), and Qiu Ying (仇英) during the Ming Dynasty are currently preserved in Taipei's National Palace Museum.

The admiration for Xiyuan Yaji during the Qing Dynasty extended to daily supplies such as brush pots and cups. The Xiyuan Yaji brush pot by Zhu Songzhu and the rhinoceros horn cup by You Tong illustrate how Xiyuan imagery was integrated into material culture and turned into a symbol of aesthetic ideals. Xiyuan Yaji continues to serve as a cultural bridge. Its elegant atmosphere is recreated through activities such as the Scholarly China salons in Beijing and Shanghai or the Today's Memory of Xiyuan Yaji project in Nanjing, which links traditional culture with modern life. These endeavors continue to represent tranquility and spiritual comfort and resonate with the enduring pursuit of lofty culture.

Conclusion

This study investigates the generation mechanism and symbolic evolution of Xiyuan Yaji as a literary and artistic field during the Northern Song Dynasty. It indicates the significant role that Xiyuan Yaji played in shaping scholar culture by employing historical document analysis and close textual reading. The findings show that the Yuanyou literati accumulated cultural capital through Yaji activities and built an autonomous cultural space distinct from political influence. This space consolidated the literati groups identity and transformed Xiyuan Yaji from a simple gathering into a powerful symbol of the literati's ideal life. The study also demonstrates how the literati applied calligraphy, painting, inscriptions, and literary creations to express their aspirations for simplicity and refinement. Xiyuan Yaji gained great cultural significance because of these activities. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, its symbolic value was further reinforced, becoming a pivotal emblem for successive generations of scholars in pursuing spiritual fulfillment and cultural ideals. The revival of Xiyuan Yaji as a symbol of traditional culture in modern society reflects a growing appreciation for past intellectual and cultural traditions. As a symbol of tranquility, cultural refinement, and spiritual belonging, Xiyuan Yaji inspired modern cultural activities to bridge historical traditions with contemporary life. However, there are certain limitations to this study. It has proven difficult to reconstruct the original context of Xiyuan Yaji because of the fragmentary nature of ancient documents. Additionally, the absence of quantitative data constrains this study in assessing its cultural adaptability in contemporary society.

Future research could integrate unpublished documents and visual materials to reconstruct the historical conditions around Xiyuan Yaji in great detail. Its acceptance and symbolic resonance in modern society can also be assessed by quantitative methods, offering deeper insights into its contemporary cultural adaptability. Such approaches would enhance our comprehension of Xiyuan Yaji's enduring relevance and evolving meanings. This study offers a fresh viewpoint on how Xiyuan Yaji was created and developed as a cultural symbol within its historical context. It extends the theoretical framework for understanding Chinese scholar culture by applying Bourdieu's field theory and semiotics theory. The acknowledgment of limitations and proposed directions for future research provide valuable references for further exploration. It aims

to provide a deep comprehension of Xiyuan Yajis historical and modern significance within broader cultural and temporal frameworks.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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