TRADITIONAL LANDSCAPE AND CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE IN CHINA

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Through the processes of globalization and industrialization, contemporary China is facing big problems of placelessness and pollution. As part of that, and for deep historical reasons, China is losing cultural confidence and identity. In the design of new landscapes, China has been superficially imitating western models, so that many cities in China now resemble each other and have no clear local, regional, or national identity. Given these large problems, it has become necessary to rethink contemporary culture in China in general and landscape architecture there specifically. To that end, the goal of this thesis is to discern and articulate a new approach to landscape architecture in China, one specific and meaningful to contemporary Chinese culture and that eschews superficial imitation of western examples. With that in mind, a broader goal of this thesis is to help rebuild culture confidence in China by reinterpreting its legacy of thousands of years of history and traditional culture. The method used in this thesis is to reinterpret the landscape tradition in literature and art in order to show the relevance of traditional practices to contemporary problems and concerns. Because landscape, poetry, and painting were complementary in traditional Chinese culture, and because all of those disciplines engaged with ideas of nature and philosophy, studying the traditional way of seeing nature in ancient literature and arts could help inform more meaningful approaches to contemporary landscape design. To that end, this thesis explores two fundamental philosophical systems in ancient China, Taoism and Confucianism, as well as historic, landscape-themed poems and paintings, in order to extract concepts pertinent to contemporary theory and practice of landscape architecture, such as
ecology, sustainability, seclusion and boundary, and the experience of sequential viewing.

Similarly, contemporary design projects are analyzed to show how traditional design principles are sometimes used by architects and landscape architects. Framing traditional and contemporary situations in those ways models continuity in the landscape culture of China. To reinforce that continuity, the thesis suggests several methods for translating traditional garden techniques into the contemporary theory and practice of landscape architecture in China.

Key words: tradition, culture, China, landscape, poem, painting, nature, philosophy,
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CHAPTER 1

CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE IN CHINA

1.1. Superficial imitating of West and loss of cultural identity

There has been tremendous social change in China in this information age (Ng, 2009). With high-speed development due to globalization, cities have become more connected. China is one of the world’s most rapidly urbanizing countries. Over the past thirty years, following the Open-Door Policy (announced 1978) and the subsequent embrace of globalization, distinct approaches to urban revitalization have been pursued by different cities (Shu Wang, 2002). The influence of western power and culture on those changes has been so significant that many cities in China have lost their traditional distinctiveness. Said differently, those cities have taken on a generic character associated with western models. Admittedly, the process of transformation reflects well the contemporary approaches to economy and society. However, it has damaged or destroyed the historic built environment in many places, with consequences for urban, regional, and even national image and identity. Landscapes in most cities of China today look similar to each other. They have lost their traditional, cultural character and communicate, instead, a send of placelessness.
Comparing images of cities in China, such as Chongqing and Shanghai, with those of the west, such as Chicago is hard to tell differences among them (Figure 1.1). They all have high skyscrapers, with glittering lights from those building. They lack both human scale and culturally-specific markers and therefore fail to convey a sense of place. Looking at images of contemporary cities, we can hardly tell which are in China without looking at the names labeling them. Why does China look more and more like the United States? Why do cities in China looks more and more alike? One reason is the process of globalization, which has brought a prosperous economy to China along with more enlightened politics; however, that process has diffused cultural identity by undercutting traditional culture, which in China developed over thousands of years. During the past two decades, Chinese architects and landscape architects have superficially imitated western models without reflection or understanding. As a consequence, traditional urban patterns have changed a lot, and many urban residents have lost a sense of “hometown” identity (Z. Yang, 2012). Take Hangzhou for example; the urban pattern there has changed from a city of canals to a hardscape metropolis. The contemporary city has a totally western face. Also, traditional communities and their way of life have been disrupted or isolated.
by the new developments.

1.2. Pollution problem

Along with globalization, the process of industrialization has had a huge influence on contemporary China. Despite its deep history of innovation in the sciences and technology, China fell behind the west during the early industrial period. Beginning in the 1960s, Chinese leaders made a conscious decision to catch up with the developed countries. From then on, China has invested heavily in technology and industrial development, and it has achieved success in science and economy. However, this success has come at a high cultural price. Today, when China is mentioned, many will picture the heavy smog in Beijing. Air and water pollution, and many other environmental concerns, have become one of the most important problems in China now. For example, in November 2013, China has experienced smog, and thirty provinces were impacted. In that month, there were only five days in Beijing without smog. Of the 500 biggest cities in China, less than 1% air quality standards recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Analects China, 2013).

Both the loss of cultural identity brought about through globalization and the pollution problems brought about through industrialization are due to an anxious desire for success in China during recent decades. That China has made amazing progress during the past sixty years, fulfilling the goals of politics and economy, is clear, and it is still making progress. While rapid development has caused the aforementioned problems, globalization and industrialization have been necessary, for deep, historical reasons.
1.3. “Rootless” culture and lack of cultural self-confidence

For thousands of years, traditional culture in China was shaped by a unique system of thought based in Confucianism and with “benevolence” as its core concept. Adherents of Confucianism regarded benevolence-based hierarchy as its highest social value, and they developed a highly refined morality and ethics system (Ouyang, 2014). With that rational culture concept, China resisted the “darkness and ignorance” associated with superstition. Confucianism emphasized the value of harmony among the human spirit, society, and nature. Shaped by that ethical doctrine, ancient China became a unique civilization.

However, since the invasions of China by foreign powers during the Opium Wars, beginning in 1840, China experienced a specific sort of significant change which had not occurred in three thousand years before. To salvage China from subjugation became an urgent mission for Chinese nationalists. Modern Chinese history is a story of both the struggle of the nation for survival and of the modernization of national culture under western impact. During the modern period, many intellectuals have thought that the relative weakness of China was because of its pedantic traditional culture, including Confucianism. They criticized and repudiated that culture. After the Second Opium War (1856-60), the Westernization movement in China began to study methods and techniques of western countries; along with Wu Xu Reform movement, study of concepts and cultural practices, such as democracy, also started. Traditional culture continued to be marginalized or ignored into the twentieth century. For example, Confucianism was seen as backwards, as a custom-based and non-scientific approach, and it was renounced in the May 4th Movement of 1919 (S. Cao, 2013). In fact, that kind of comprehensive criticism of traditional
culture became the theme and tone of the entire twentieth century, resulting in today’s sense that contemporary Chinese culture is “rootless.” Awakening from the dream of “Celestial Empire,” the Chinese became self-abased and lost confidence in their own traditional culture (S. Cao, 2013). In the period of the Cultural Revolution (1960s-1970s), even during the 1980s, many scholars were anxious to criticize Confucianism even though they failed to understand it comprehensively.

Unfortunately, repudiation of tradition and embrace of foreign culture cannot solve problems in contemporary China, such as the lack of integrity in today’s utilitarian Socialist Marketing economy. After the establishment of new China in 1949, the government devoted three decades to political development followed by three decades of focus on economic development. However, ignorance of cultural developments, especially as manifest in the Cultural Revolution, which attacked traditional culture and its adherents, shows the contradiction between the requirements of spiritual culture and those of regressive cultural production (Xiao, 2013). Building on past attention to political and economic development, the government of China might now devote attention to cultural development.

1.4. Goal of thesis

In China today, the practice of landscape architecture fails to engage Chinese cultural identity and sense of place, and it must therefore be rethought. The goal of this thesis is to describe a new approach to landscape architecture in contemporary China, one that helps to construct cultural identity through design, rather than promoting superficial imitating of western
examples. With that in mind, a broader goal of the thesis is to help rebuild cultural confidence in China by reinterpreting its legacy of thousands of years of history and traditional culture.

1.5. Connection between landscape, poetry, and painting

Landscape is an important topic in traditional Chinese poetry and painting. Poetry and painting are distinct art forms, one employing visual media, the other employing words (Z. Wang, 2010). But in Chinese culture, many connections exist between these two different practices. In the development of traditional Chinese arts, the relationship between painting and poetry became fluid. Traditional Chinese poems are mostly short and express emotion by describing spatial relationships in imagined scenes, rather than through sequences in time (Lu, 2004). Similarly, traditional Chinese paintings skillfully blend an awareness of time into the static spatial image. Whereas Western painting came to prioritize consistent use of perspective within the visual field, shifting perspective was valued in traditional Chinese painting. Scenes with different perspectives could appear together in one painting and communicate a sense of temporal sequence. In describing the artwork of Wang Wei, a painter and poet during the Tang Dynasty, a famous scholar of the Song Dynasty, Su Shi, remarked, “we can see the image from Wei’s poem and we can read the poem from Wei’s painting” (Lu, 2004). Su Shi also argued that poetry is invisible painting and painting is visual poetry. In many examples, work in one medium inspired work in the other. For example, Ma Yuan’s famous painting *Fishing alone in the Cold River*, made during the Ming Dynasty, called was inspired by Liu Zongyuan’s poem, “Snow River”:
From hill to hill no bird in flight

From path to path no man in sight

A lonely fisherman afloat

Is fishing snow in lonely boat.

Figure 1.2 Fishing Alone in the Cold River by Ma Yuan. (Source: http://tc.wangchao.net.cn/baike/detail_1123221.html)

The painting (Figure 1.2) shows a skiff in the center with several waves around it, representing a sense of freedom on a vast river. Yuan used a large proportion of blank space to illustrate the sense of loneliness described in the poem. In traditional Chinese gardens, many motifs were sigillary derived from traditional paintings and poems. Such gardens were artworks of the literati and painters, reflecting their temperament, sentiment, and aesthetic sensibility. The gardens reflected the spirit of many literary works and were conditioned by aesthetic expectations derived from paintings and poems. Many gardens were named after poets and referenced their artistic conceptions. The poets also benefited from gardens in their efforts to reach a high level of the artistic achievement. Poetry and garden design were complementary and evolved together.
That relationship with poetry distinguishes traditional Chinese garden design within the world history of landscape. For example, the construction of gardens was conceived as a practice like writing poetry, and components of each garden were meant to correspond to each other like elements in literary works—that is, where meanings were produced through mutual reference among words in the given context. Using too many words or decorative motifs was a major taboo in both literature and garden design. These principles show the close relationship between literature, visual art, and landscapes (S. Li, 2006).

In this thesis, I use literature and painting as a tool through which to reinterpret the traditional Chinese understanding of space, nature, and the human being. Understanding traditional design principles forms the basis for a new, more culturally meaningful approach to landscape architecture in contemporary China.
CHAPTER 2
VIEW OF NATURE IN LITERATURE AND ART

2.1. Ecology in Taoism

Taoism is one of the two major philosophical systems in China, originating there around 1,800 years ago. Taoism integrated deeply with Chinese vernacular culture and had a profound impact on many aspects of cultural life, including ethics, religion, and social intercourse in traditional Chinese society. Taoism structures a unique view of nature, in which the human being is an integral part; it teaches that humans should respect nature and coexist with it in a harmonious way. It sees life as part of the universe and advocated that lifestyles should follow the laws of nature, as well as of the whole universe (G. Wang, 2002). In general, the essences of Taoism are respecting nature, caring about life, and being harmonious. Those ancient, core conceptions are echoed in the contemporary idea of ecology.

The ecological aspect of Taoism suggests useful methods for addressing the relationship between nature and human beings. To a certain extent, it views this relationship as a system, within which human beings should make an effort to maintain the relationship and keep the whole system harmonious (X. Zhang, 2012).

Traditional Chinese arts have very close relationship with Taoism. Many poets, such as Meng Haoran and Li Bai, and painters, such as Zhao Mengfu and Wen Zhengming, have been influenced by Taoism. For example, the latter portrayed people as very small in their painted landscapes. They aspired not to close resemblances in form or appearance but to focusing on the
artistic conception, which acts in cooperation with the spirit of Taoism. The conceptual priority of literati paintings is the integration of “spirit and environment,” of “emotion and scene.” That resembles a core concept of Taoism, “syncretism between heaven and man,”—in other words, human beings and nature constitute a whole ecological system (X. Zhang, 2012). The artistic conception is based on the spatial environment. In order to focus on space and time, specific techniques became conventional in traditional Chinese painting, such as shifting perspective and leaving blank space. On the one hand, those techniques challenge association of the subject with a certain time and space; on the other hand, they invoke a vast artistic imagination of the world, so that the limited space of the material image is able to express the infinite thoughts of the universe. In that way, formal composition of the artistic conception invokes nature and human beings in combination (F. Wang, 2007). Many famous paintings show these techniques, such as the Xiaoxiang Image of Dong Yuan in the Song Dynasty, Early Spring of Guox, and Tourism in Xishan of Fan Kuan.

Taoism has also had deep influence on the traditional built environment in China. To maximize benefits, the construction of traditional Chinese residential settlements responded to local environmental conditions, including natural, economic, and social factors. Constructed of local materials, traditional houses are a kind of low cost, low energy consumption, and low pollution vernacular architecture (F. Wang, 2007). In keeping with Taoism, the traditional Chinese vernacular architects did well in regard to saving energy and protecting the natural environment while reflecting local culture.

Another exemplary poem is Li Bai’s Sitting alone in the Jinting Mountain:
Flocks of birds fly high and vanish;
A single cloud, alone, calmly drifts on.
Never tired of looking at each other---
Only the Jingting Mountain and me.

The poet here situates himself in relation to nature; he and Jingting Mountain gaze at each other as if in love. In the poem, the person and the mountain together make an integral system, so that the human being is not governing nature, but collaborating with it, being friendly with nature. The example suggests that all humans should respect nature like a friend.

2.2. Sustainability in Confucianism

Besides harmony with nature, with a basis in Taoism, harmony in society is another important aspect of traditional Chinese culture, with a basis Confucianism. The main principle of Confucianism is moderation, and we can also see the influence of that on literature and painting. For example, when the aforementioned poet and painter Wang Wei described vividly a twisted creek and quiet atmosphere amid a beautiful scenery, his emphasis on the creek reflected Confucian moderation (Zheng, 2007), along with benevolence and harmony.

The painting *Stomping* (Figure 2.1), created around 1200 by Ma Yuan, shows this kind of moderation and benevolence. A poem is inscribed on the painting:

Rain clears the outskirts of town

The empire city is shining by morning sun

Farmers live in peace and contentment in harvest year
They walk on the ridge and sing with song

Figure 2.1 Painting of Stomping by Ma Yuan Time:1200AD (source: http://jsl641124.blog.163.com/blog/static/177025143201181743630806/)

The upper part of the painting symbolizes the emperor; the upward reach of the mountain to the heavens suggests that imperial power can connect to the sacred realm of the sky. The lower part of the painting symbolizes the reality of the mortal world. The blank part between the upper and lower parts stands for different possible relationships between the emperor and the people. In the lower part of the painting, farmers celebrate the harvest in great happiness, reflecting the harmonious relationship between the government and ordinary people (X. Chen, 2007). The implication is that, because of harmony in the social hierarchy, as well as between people and
nature, people obtained a rich harvest.

2.3. Seclusion, separation, and boundary

The traditional Chinese garden is surrounded by enclosure walls and is therefore of limited area. As an important feature of garden design, the boundary wall is also an important device in traditional literature and art. For example, a branch passing over the wall suggests the beauty of what cannot be seen from outside.

A very famous prose work, Peach-Blossom Spring, written by Tao Yuanming in 421, described an isolated, ideal state. The story tells of a fisherman who happened to pass through a cave and found himself in an isolated village within a wide, level valley, with many houses, fields, and farms. There were bamboos and mulberries; farmers were working, and dogs and chickens were running about. The clothing of the people was like that in the outside world, and they all appeared very happy and contented. They did not know about the outside world. When the fisherman left the village, and passed back through the cave, he told others about the place he discovered. However, no one could find the way back to it again.

Through this legend, the image of Peach-Blossom Spring has represented an ideal state among Chinese people for 1,600 years. Not surprisingly, there was a big gap between the poet’s real life and the ideal of Peach-Blossom Spring. While the real world has war, poverty, disease, hunger, and inevitable disasters, Peach-Blossom Spring was a distant wonderland, but also an ideally simple rural community. Therefore, when poet described the place, he set hills, creeks, and caves as a barrier around it, to isolate it from the outside real world, and it became
mysterious, ambiguous, and elusive (Z. Zhang, 2010). Peach-Blossom Spring became an utopian society in Chinese literature and a sustaining spiritual ideal, like the garden of Eden in the west. The source of Peach-Blossom Spring was the outcome of the peaches' various traditional associations, becoming the spiritual home that intellectuals eulogized and longed for.

The secluded place and the bounded area are also important concepts in traditional Chinese garden design. Architectural and landscape elements turn their backs to the outside and create an enclosed, seemingly autonomous space. That kind of introversion is very meaningful in times of inaccessible communications, lack of information, and poor communication (W. Chen, 2004). In the past, when scholars were frustrated with politics and wanted to distance themselves from such concerns, but they did not want to abandon their wealth to live in seclusion in the mountains, they found consolation in gardens. Those relatively closed environments met their desires and became places for negotiation between the bonds of society and the pleasures of freedom.

From overall general perspective, the classical Chinese garden is conceived and organized according to components, references, and features, such as walls, buildings, mountains, water, plants, and other landscape elements (W. Chen, 2004). The garden is divided into many isolated units, as are the residential, urban, and other traditional environments. Unlike western gardens, the classical Chinese garden does not display all of its the sceneries at first glance.

In traditional Chinese poetry, the courtyard is invoked in many scenes. The world of the courtyard is often compared to that outside the walls. When spring comes, the poet wonders in which courtyard it will appear. The boundary is related to nostalgia through the idea of the mountain range as a barrier between the subject and his hometown (W. Chen, 2004). Chinese
poems use the word “Xiang Guan” to represent hometown; “Xiang” means homeland while “Guan” means separation. In the conception of Chinese poets, nostalgia is always accompanied by sadness and loneliness; the hometown is far away and hard to go back to, since it is beyond countless mountains and water bodies (W. Chen, 2004). This concept of separation is very common in the Chinese way of seeing. In traditional Chinese natural scenic landscapes, the most valued point at which to pause is located either beside water or on the top of a mountain; it is never on a vast, open, flat surface, such as a lawn, a flower garden, or a valley between peaks.

Although natural landscape is imitated in gardens by constructing artificial mountains and small-sized lake area, viewers stay outside the simulations to view them as scenes. In their eyes, nature is beautiful but must be far away in the agricultural society, where people are quite weak and feeble in the face of nature (W. Chen, 2004). However, even as they fear nature, their longing for it never diminishes. In the relationship of landscape and residential building, the technique of penetration balances this separation. The garden introduces nature to viewers by way of doors, windows, patios, and galleries.

2.4. Experience of sequential viewing in painting

Unlike the west’s fixed position of observation and analysis, landscape is perceived from many aspects in Chinese culture, from inside to outside and through long-term contact, then creatively transferred to the paper using painting techniques. The artistic realm of Chinese painters and poets is a universe full of musical interest that unifies space and time. Because of the flatness of painting, representing multiple dimensions requires the use of a special technique.
In Chinese landscape painting, this method is called shifting perspective (Qi, 1996). All of the objects in the painting are same in distance and size, the scenes follow the movement of the viewer, with each part as a separate view. Therefore, many Chinese landscape paintings are on long scrolls, like Figure 2.2 shows.

![Figure 2.2 Painting of Fuchun Dwelling Mountains by Huang Gongwang](Source:http://www.huaxia.com/zhwh/whrd/2010/07/2012875.html)

When visiting traditional Chinese gardens, visitors can have both a dynamic view and a static view. Through movement, visitors can see wonderful scenes from different directions; static views give visitors picturesque scenes to contemplate. Chinese gardens are famous for their complex configurations, especially the design of visiting routes. Walking in the garden gives visitors a sense of dynamic experience through constantly changing landscape. In other words,
landscape is apprehended through an accumulation of shifting perspectives (Feng, 1997), which in time convey the abundant beauty of the garden.

Classical Chinese garden art is called four-dimensional space (Feng, 1997). The fourth dimension is the temporal duration of the visit. The integral significance of time signals that the beauty of the Chinese garden cannot be seen at a glance; the scenes in front of the visitor’s eyes appear in different layers at different distances and sizes. The view of space-in-time in Chinese garden design reflects the traditional aesthetic that focuses on the perceiver as subject.
3.1. Traditional culture in contemporary Chinese architecture and landscape architecture

In architecture and landscape architecture, the broadest aim of design is to foster place attachment. Rather than imitating foreign styles, being inspired by vernacular precedents is a good way to achieve that aim. In recent years, some important architects and landscape architects in China have begun to find this way of the vernacular. Two prominent examples are Shu Wang in architecture and Kongjian Yu in landscape architecture. Yu is more practical in his approach whereas Wang attempts to capture and embody something essential.

Yu thinks there are two tiers in Chinese culture: living low and high-class. The living low-culture refers to the vernacular, which is the active energy essential to the survival and development of the Chinese people. This kind of culture helps a big population survive on limited land and resources. It includes the close relationship between humans and the landscape, such as how to tend land, how to manage water, how to choose sites for development. The other tier of culture, high-class culture, refers to the literati and aristocracy. It relates to leisure rather than survival. Chinese literature, art, and yuan-lin (classical garden design) belong to this tier (X. Wu, 2012). In Yu’s opinion, Chinese culture is wrongly equated with the high-class tier. So he focuses, instead, on the lives of common people, criticizing the so-called Chinese traditional culture as an exclusive, “dead culture.” Yu criticizes the yuan-lin for not achieving the high standards expected of designed landscapes today: truthfulness--classic gardens are distinguished
by artificial rockeries and water bodies, plus ornamental plants; goodness--numerous emperors wastefully brought disaster to ordinary people; and beauty--a concern still open to discussion. In short, traditional works have value as cultural heritage, but with significant limitations, and they do not fit contemporary society. Yu has noted that the yuan-lin reflects the lifestyle of the literati; it does not address the environmental and social problems we are facing today, and it does not conform with contemporary values. There should be higher standards in measuring beauty and ugliness. Contemporary society needs a new aesthetic through which to assess landscape (X. Wu, 2012).

Through his practice, Yu promotes an idea of landscape called Turen, which means the love of the ground. His office, Turenscape, promotes a down-to-earth culture and the beauty of wild plants, which is a new aesthetic based on contemporary environmental issues and ecological ethics. Also, Yu has been articulating and testing a new aesthetic standard, which he calls “big foot.” Among Chinese elites, foot-binding was practiced for about one thousand years. This intentional deformation, which rendered elite women incapable of walking, was considered beautiful, while the natural foot was deemed vulgar. In contemporary China, this “foot-binding” culture is reflected in design through de-humanizing buildings, high-cost landscapes, and environmental pollution. In contrast to such distorted culture, Yu promotes the “big foot” idea: recovering landscape architecture as an art of survival. To that end, Yu focuses on ecology and works from the perspective of scientific information, such as data analysis (Turenscape.com). He applies ecological principles to landscape design by using native plants to maintain the local ecosystems. In many projects, he retains the original texture of farmland and cultivates
ornamental plants that can also be picked by citizens, thereby creating a cultural and ecological space.

Unlike that of Kongjian Yu, Shu Wang’s attitude towards the elite tier of traditional culture is more respectful. Being both a scholar and an architect, Wang pays attention to history and calls for a spiritual reconnection with tradition. He is much more “high class,” as defined by Yu. He is talented at playing the bamboo flute, calligraphy, and traditional landscape painting. As an architect interested in the vernacular, Wang has deep understanding of Chinese ancient books and domestic architecture, and he has earned a reputation as “the most humane architect in China.” In Wang’s opinion, the rootless quality of contemporary Chinese architecture stems from a loss of cultural confidence (Nystyle.com). Traditional Chinese culture is based upon harmony with nature, as represented in landscape painting. Traditional urban forms in China also emphasize the unfolding of horizontal relationships, like that between architecture and landscape, between architecture and ground, and among buildings. The traditional architect is a guardian of the ground, human life, and nature. Architecture is a kind of construction, a practical labor with thinking, and it has its own core system based in experience, rather than in abstract theoretical discussions on paper (Shu Wang, 2009). That is Chinese tradition. Architecture is mastered not only by elites, but also by a large number of illiterate craftsmen. Inspired by landscape painting, Wang creates living spaces based on traditional Jiang-nan (South-east part of China) yuan-lin. Even though the scale, materiality, and cost of contemporary manifestations hardly come close to those of historic precedents, the poetic feeling of spaces created by Wang—for example, the sense of distant nature and of spatial depth or vastness—and experience of those spaces provide
valuable models for contemporary design.

3.2. **Elite culture and popular culture**

Yu’s understanding and classification of Chinese traditional culture is simplistic. Chinese traditional culture is more complicated than he suggests. In the past thousands of years, elite culture and popular culture could not be easily separated. Ancient China was a self-sufficient society with an individualized mode of production. The closed-market economy and backward transportation limited communication, so that the development of popular culture in society was influenced mainly by elite culture (Daqiang, 2006). In fact, popular culture could be seen as both an index or archive of elite culture and a standard. Confucius said that, when the elites lost their customs, they should be found again in civil society (Analects). In more tangible terms, when artifacts of elite culture were destroyed or abandoned, as in war or dynastic change, they could sometimes be recovered through popular sources. For example, when many classical books were lost in a big war, Emperor Yang Jian of the Sui Dynasty paid for copies to be made from popular editions. That kind of mutuality ensured the continuity of Chinese culture.

In cultural terms, elite people and common people cannot be so neatly separated. Admittedly, Chinese society was long ruled by an emperor and an elaborate aristocracy. In the early centuries of such governance, members of the low class could not attain high class status. However, after the Sui dynasty (about 600AD), the Imperial civil service examination system was invented, which used tests to select government officials. Even someone from a poor family could pass the exam and become elite by virtue of ability. Because of that, the definition of elite people had a
fluidity that warrants consideration.

Elite culture has lost its position in contemporary China, where popular culture has become mainstream through economic development and democratization (Daqiang, 2006). Today, popular culture relies on social media and is a sort of consumer culture. Many popular cultural products are aimed not at aesthetic or spiritual value but at maximizing exchange and use value (Xia, 2014). The creation of popular cultural products has become a major industry, and one way to define the public is as the consumer of that culture industry. In the meanwhile, fewer and fewer people today are interested in reading classical books; they prefer simple, easy novels, written by contemporary writers. That phenomenon also exists in landscape architecture. In order to obtain higher profits, many real estate developers have built “western style” residential communities during the past decade (Xia, 2014). More and more designers ignore traditional cultural identity and superficially imitate the west. In the meanwhile, the public has lost a sense of traditional aesthetics and has put faith, instead, in consumer culture (Daqiang, 2006). Given that situation, the main challenge regarding the reintroduction of traditional practices in contemporary design is how to translate those approaches to fit public taste and to co-exist with popular culture.

3.3. Meaning of nature in traditional Chinese culture

In Chinese culture, the word “nature” has two meanings: one refers to the natural landscape, and the other means following one’s heart. The latter meaning came from the culture of the literati, and one story illustrates it best. Once there was a scholar named Wang Xianzhi, who
wanted to visit his friend. After a long time on the way, he finally arrived the gate of friend’s home. However, he did not come into the house but instead went back home without seeing the friend. When others asked him why he did that, he said, “I came on an impulse, and I came back because I have reached my will, so there was no need to see him.” This story exemplifies the “natural” character valued by the literati, which is also an important essence of traditional Chinese landscape.

However, such a sensibility could hardly be found in contemporary Chinese society. With the high pressures of work, society, and personal and professional relationships, many conflicts have been enlarged in people’s lives. Confined within the limited area of the house, people are becoming more and more eager for the traditional lifestyle, including being close to natural landscape, where they can be released from busywork and relax. Accordingly, one priority of landscape architecture today should be to improve the ecological environment of life, to restore the experience of nature to contemporary Chinese society.

3.4. Meaning of landscape in traditional Chinese culture

There is an appropriate name for landscape in Chinese, which is yuan-lin. Yuan-lin should not be translated simply as “garden”; it refers, more broadly, to the bringing of nature into urbanity and the way architecture is shaped to accommodate nature.

Yuan-lin is not limited to high cost gardens made for elite enjoyment. It could reference the emperor’s palace, but it could also mean the dream of paradise, the literati’s bamboo forest, or the fisherman’s Peach Blossom Spring. It is a conceptual space within which people can get
close to nature and reflect about themselves. *Yuan-lin* is therefore a bridge between human beings and nature. It is also a negotiation between nature and society (Yuan-lin, 2014). At past times, cultural elites not satisfied with society would withdraw from it and live in solitude in the mountains. They were self-sufficient, living in poverty but with high accomplishments in culture and art. They were willing to be poor in order to keep their values. During the Jin Dynasty (about 400AD), literati abandoned pure nature and looked for new ways to sustain their faith in the society. They believed in the value of nature, but they also did not deny their social needs. The desire for conflicting ideals of nature and society led to *yuan-lin* as a concept engaging both (Keswick, 2013). *Yuan-lin* a conceptual vehicle through which literati could escape from court life and express their interests in nature. Through *yuan-lin*, a landscape aesthetic brought an end to older seclusion culture. The literati’s interest in separation could be satisfied without relocation to remote regions; there was no longer any need to hide in the mountains. Through *yuan-lin*, the practice of cultured isolation expanded from a small minority to the entire caste. *Yuan-lin* became a sort of social compact and an essential part of literati culture. Later, when members of the literati became leaders of social and cultural development, their aesthetic codes became culturally mainstream. In that way, a specific elite group contributed much to the legacy of Chinese traditional culture.

During the Tang Dynasty, the poet and painter Wang Wei created the famous Wangchuan Villa in a place near the capital city, Chang’an, and also not far from a traditional seclusion area, Zhongnan Mountain. The design of the Wangchuan Villa was guided by a system for harmonizing people, the city, and nature. Another famous poet, Bai Juyi, reconciled the conflict
between his official career and his personal faith by consolidating a new space between them. Wang, Bai, and others turned their backs on the corruption of society by locating themselves in gardens, where they could express relevant ideas and emotions through poems and paintings. Bai’s idea of yuan-lin also had large influence on the traditional Japanese garden. During the Song Dynasty, the yuan-lin idea became more available to common people. The ideal of sharing resources with ordinary people stimulated the secularization and popularization of yuan-lin. Many elite gardens were opened to citizens and became venues for their spring outings, and some such gardens did not even have enclosure walls (Keswick, 2013).

After many centuries of development, from an elite private escape to popular culture, yuan-lin has became a meaningful part of Chinese culture, not only of the elites but also in terms of popular tradition. Given that background, as well as its relevance to contemporary concerns, such as sustainability, its aesthetic rigor, and its practical and conceptual integrity, yuan-lin is a highly relevant paradigm for Chinese landscape architecture today.

Through deep understanding of yuan-lin, it can be realized that architecture is a relationship among buildings and with landscape, rather than buildings as isolated objects. In western architectural culture, building as object is the core concept (Shu Wang, 2009). In China, however, the buildings are less important than relationship with other buildings, nature, and human beings, which is key. In addressing that relationship, Wang Shu has made highly compelling work. He has studied ancient Chinese urban design in order to understand how buildings and cities might rely on nature. In his view, there is no need to have landmark architecture in Hangzhou, where he is based (Shu Wang, 2009). Only half of the city is dominated by architecture while the other half
is a natural landscape of mountains and lakes. Ultimately, the buildings should be subservient to the environment, in keeping with the traditional Chinese approach. Wang’s design of the Xiangshan campus of the China Academy of Art gives half of the site back to nature, making that part as if undeveloped land. Similarly, a large amount of farmland has been retained on the Xiangshan campus, to be used for cultivation.

3.5. Changing role of landscape

The Chinese yuan-lin is not only a type of garden or an approach to architecture; it is also the spirit of literati in ancient China. As the construction of society has changed over time, the role of yuan-lin and of landscape in general has changed. Designed landscape is not only for elite enjoyment or symbolic meaning; its new audience is the public. Satisfying the contemporary public is the most important concern in the contemporary landscape design. But that situation is also an opportunity to prioritize not only the form, appearance, and aesthetics of traditional gardens, but also the methods, concepts, and principles that informed them. Traditional Chinese gardens were constructed through a comprehensive sequence of procedures pertaining to situation, layout, buildings, fittings, and so on (Cheng, 1631). Those methods were recorded and are known to us through source descriptions, but designers tend to focusing on outward appearance even when aspiring to emulate traditional landscapes.

Traditional Chinese gardens were mostly private spaces, but public spaces are wanted in contemporary society. As a result, the priority of public works in western landscape makes it a relevant precedent for China. However, with some transformation, traditional Chinese garden
design could also have value and meaning design today. For example, in public places of large scale, the construction methods and artistic conceptions of traditional gardens might be adopted without retaining traditional forms.

3.6. The Craft of Garden by Ji Cheng

The book *The Craft of Garden (Yuanye)*, completed in 1631, is now considered the definitive work on traditional Chinese garden design among many produced over time, and it has been called the first monograph dedicated to garden architecture in the world and among the great masterpieces of garden literature (Conan, 1999). In the book, the author, Ji Cheng, summarized his idea of garden design as, “though man-made, they will look like something naturally created.” Cheng unified nature and artifice through the garden, making it an artifact through which to admire the beauty of nature (Cheng, 1631/2012). In Chinese thought, the beauty of nature has two meanings: one refers to the elegance of nature world, while the other refers to the original beauty showed by a person without excess ornamentation. Cheng’s concept of beauty blended these two meanings. “Naturally created” is the aim of “man-made.” It engages not only the beauty of natural appearance but also the state of nature and cultural connotation after the process of being man-made.

For example, in a chapter about how to arrange a site, Cheng emphasized the importance of natural beauty in determining the layout of the garden. More specifically, arrangement should accord with the natural context. In laying the foundations of a garden, its orientation should not be restricted by convention. The shape of the ground will have natural highs and lows. Like sites
among mountain forests, where there are high slopes and hollows, winding fissures and deep gullies, tall overhanging cliffs and flat level ground, every site has developed its own natural attractions without the interference by human handiwork (Cheng, 1631/2012). As this example suggests, Cheng had a distinctive opinion about design and innovation. So long as nature was respected, he thought that there should be no fixed rules for designing gardens. Each designer should follow his heart rather than predetermined rules. Design should accord with the contemporary situation. It is useless to copy patterns of the past.
4.1. China Academy of Art, Xiangshan Campus, by Wang Shu

The Xiangshan Campus of the China Academy of Art is the most famous project of Wang Shu, who won the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2012. The Xiangshan Campus is a product of traditional thinking by Wang, after analyzing the concept, space, time, and practice of traditional garden craft. He has a very deep insight into the modes of traditional Chinese landscape architecture and, through that, how humans get exist in harmony with nature.

Wang believes that, when choosing a site, original landscape features should be much more important than eventual architecture (Xingjian, 2014). He chose the Xiangshan site, on the outskirts of Hangzhou, because of its original topographic features. He then retained natural landscape features, such as the creeks, lakes, and reeds, as well as cultural landscape features, such as farmland, and constructed the buildings of the campus within those parameters. The resulting design is in harmony with both natural and traditional cultural landscape.

With a large spatial distribution, the Xiangshan Campus is a series of courtyards distributed seemingly at random, facing the mountains (Figure 4.1). All of the courtyards are connected by corridors and together compose a complex architectural whole (X. Ma, “The return of architectural traditional culture,” 2014). Wang studied the layouts of the ancient cities of Hangzhou and Beijing and noted a pattern that is half urban and half natural landscape. Buildings on the Xiangshan Campus are compressed in the south-east corner and along the north boundary.
of the site and form a relationship with the original mountains (Wang Shu, 2005).

![Figure 4.1 Master plan of Xiangshan campus (Source: Shu Wang, 2005)](image)

The architecture here is no longer limited by function; instead, it frames spaces within which people can walk and stay, like the walls and galleries without specific function in the Chinese
garden. When walking through the series of buildings, one could have a sense of shifting perspective of surrounding landscapes. Techniques from traditional Chinese garden like borrowing views and framing scenery are used here to organize a sense of unfolding space. Even the buildings themselves are landscapes (Lv, 2014).

Traditional gardens are much smaller than contemporary public landscapes. So, at the Xiangshan Campus, the architecture has been imagined as a condition similar to the surrounding mountains. More detailed relationships and smaller scales can be found within buildings or between them, so that the whole landscape sequence is structured like an intricate garden.

Figure 4.2 Architecture in Art Academy of China (source: http://www.caa.edu.cn)

Realization of the Xiangshan Campus involved more than seven million pieces of recycled brick, tile, stone, and ceramics as Figure 4.3 shows. The work also demonstrates a new technique for combining concrete and masonry (Shu Wang, 2005).
4.2. Suzhou Museum by I.M. Pei

The Suzhou Museum is located in the center of that city, next to an important traditional Chinese garden of the Ming Dynasty, the Zhuozheng Garden. The museum was designed by I.M. Pei in 2006. The buildings are well integrated into the surrounding environment and have a spacious layout. Traditional Chinese ink painting represents well the relationship of different layers and distances in the design, distinguishing foreground, body, and background. In the Suzhou Museum, Pei enlarges the sense of scale by connecting the north part of the museum with the Zhuozheng Garden. That makes the courtyard have richer layers and makes the museum and the garden become sceneries for each other. Pei likes to use triangular shapes to represent the roof style in the southeast region of China. But geometric architecture dissolves in this context.
The area of the courtyard is small and, in order to increase its scale, Pei used methods from traditional Chinese garden design, such as forced perspective and using reflection on water to enlarge the sense of space. In a similar way, practices such as “borrowing scenery” and “framing scenery” are used in the museum. The views at different locations are integrated together into people’s visual fields, making the small courtyard seem like part of a large garden (L. Cao, 2011). For example, there are many windows in the museum, which will reveal views of the outside. The sequence of views encountered changes according to each visitor’s route. Some of the windows are backed by planted screens that makes the views more vague. Also, the artificial mountain wall borrows the trees from the Zhuozheng Garden, which enlarge the original scenery.

**Obstructive scenery**

In the meanwhile, a grove of bamboos with a path going into it grows along the west side of courtyard. The bamboo grove blocks the back scene while structuring a way through which visitors pass.

Pei thinks that light is the best designer. To work with light, he borrows techniques from traditional Chinese architecture, opening skylights at the middle of the roof to let the light infiltrate. In the Suzhou Museum, metal strips intertwined with wood surfaces compose shadows, creating distinct visual layers in different spaces, with contrasting of light and dark created by adjusting the shading strips (L. Cao, 2011).
Figure 4.4 Courtyard of Suzhou Museum (Photo by author)

4.3. Square Pagoda Garden by Feng Jizhong: Endowing the old with new

The Square Pagoda Garden is located along the south side of Zhongshan East Road in Songjiang town, Shanghai. This is a traditional style park built at early 1980s by Professor Feng Jizhong of Tongji University. The location of the Square Pagoda, for which the garden is named, was the center of Huating County in Song dynasty. Many dispersed relics of the Tang and Song Dynasties were discovered during the construction process, which began in 1978 and took ten years to finish. The garden covers an area of 11.5ha, and the Square Pagoda, erected during the Song Dynasty, comprises 9 levels with a total height of 42.65m. It was built with brick and wood and presents an elegant shape with a slender body and far-reaching eaves (Xu, 2015).

Even though the Square Pagoda Garden is features a historic building and is therefore a kind
of reliquary space, its main purpose is to serve the daily needs of residents in the Songjiang district. So, the form of Square Pagoda Garden is contemporary in style and reflects the idea that form should follow function. Figure 4.5 represents the layout of the garden.

Figure 4.5 Master plan of Square Pagoda Garden (source: http://www.youthla.org/2011/01/new-understanding-to-old-cases-fangta-garde-shanghai/)

Space, construction, and sight

As noted, many relics were discovered on the original site, including major features such as the Square Pagoda (Song Dynasty), the Screen Wall (Ming Dynasty), the Stone Bridge (Yuan Dynasty), and old ginkgo trees. Close to each other, the Square Pagoda and the Screen Wall form
a square, and the whole garden was designed according to that square.

The main concept of the square is to highlight the tall pagoda by subtly lowering the ground level. If the pagoda could be seen at first glance by visitors entering the gate, it would lose its mystery. Instead, a series of steps descends slowly from the northern gate to the lower square. Two-hundred-year-old ginkgo trees have been preserved by constructing stone pedestals to protect their root systems. These stone pedestals vary in size and protect to the original bottom mounds. They reinforce the space of the square together with the pedestal of Tianfei Palace, another historic feature. The path from the north gate is also made of stone and composed by rectangular planes at different elevations. They interlock and decline layer by layer. One side of the path is a curved retaining wall around the flowerbeds; the other side is rectilinear retaining wall. The stark contrast between these “strong” and “soft” sides conditions the processional path.

Descending the path, visitors come into the square, which is the main center of the whole garden. To make that space seem less secluded, the path was skillfully dimensioned and marked by openings to scenery at appropriate points, a method inspired by traditional corridors (Xu, 2015).

Feng also broadened the river to the south of the pagoda to form a lake, and he made a series of enclosure walls along the bank to be the base of pagoda and to offset the shadow. Earth excavated in that area was used to build the processional road to hide surrounding buildings (Figure 4.6).
Figure 4.6 Pagoda of Song Dynasty in Square Pagoda Garden (source: http://www.youthla.org/2011/01/new-understanding-to-old-cases-fangta-garde-shanghai/)

Corner design

The four corners of the garden are in styles different from the central part. The southwest corner has relics of Ming Dynasty as the theme, so the galleries and pavilions there are in Ming Dynasty style. This group of buildings is separated from the main pagoda by a mound, which is a self-contained scene. At the east entrance, two ancient ginkgo guide visitors through a narrow winding path and let the Square Pagoda suddenly appear before them, creating a sense of surprise (Zhao, 2007).

Helou Pavilion is the theme of the southeast corner (sees in Figure 4.7). It is covered by large roof with relatively large plane. As the main body of the southeast corner, the size of the structure is important. The small pavilion in Suzhou Garden would not suit this context. Because of limited financial resources, Helou Pavilion is built of bamboo and straw by simple techniques. The white bamboo with black points make the bamboos look like it has been cut and gives the whole building a floating effect. After viewing the scenes in the garden on the dynamic tour, the
visitors might have a rest here to have a cup of tea, chat, or play chess (Zhao, 2007). Helou Pavilion has shaped a scene of “stasis in action, and movement in stasis”; when people sit there, they can feel the continuous change of light and shadow.

Helou Pavilion also echoes the context beyond the garden. The vernacular traditional of residential buildings in Songjiang is different from other areas in Shanghai; the ridges of their roofs are curved. Professor Feng used a modern approach to represent the typical form of local residences.

There are many broken walls in the garden. Two white walls in the southeast part are broken in the corner to form an exit; the enclosure walls beside the water in Helou Pavillion are also broken to parts; and even the bamboo bench in the pavilion has been cut (Figure 4.8). These elements follow a principle of cutting at the turning point. Disconnected elements are morphologically similar, but the break allows for changes in scale (Zhao, 2007). This kind of breaking allows spaces to remain connected while also screening them.

Figure 4.7 Helou Pavilion in Square Pagoda Garden (source: http://p5.qhimg.com/t01dc95f2873bf9f60b.jpg)
Kuang Ao Theory

To help explain his approach, Professor Feng advanced the Kuang Ao Theory. *Kuang* means vast and spacious, therefore upward and light; while *ao* means deep and secluded, therefore quiet and both inward and downward (Zhu, 2014). *Kuang ao* is a sense of space enhanced by contrast. Simply speaking, *Kuang Ao* theory addresses the relationship among contrasting spaces through adjacency or sequence. When two different spaces are arranged next to each other; their characteristics could be set off by the contrast.
Cultural inheritance

The Square Pagoda Garden largely follows the Song Dynasty style, but more so in spirit than in form: an authentic flavor, or special charm, which could be reflected in the porcelain of that period. Song Dynasty bowls are small and simple in form, with clear lines, rich colors, and well-proportioned bodies. Professor Feng said that he wanted the Square Pagoda Garden to have those qualities, rather than emulating western styles or becoming an amplified Suzhou Garden. According to Feng, the spirit of the Song period is open, free, and seeking nature (Zhu, 2014). The focus of his design on the Song pagoda and the use of a large area of water, lawns, and plants convey that spirit. Experiencing nature in new ways is a translation of Song spirit. “Old” points to the spirit of traditional culture; “new” means using modern techniques to explain tradition (Z. Li, 2012). In the Square Pagoda Garden, the traditional approach is renewed through contemporary design that can be appreciated by local residents.

4.4. Jixi Museum by Li Xinggang, Jixi, Anhui

Emulating the forms of mountains in the surrounding environment, the designer of the Jixi Museum, Li Xinggang, made the roof seem folded and continuous (X. Li, 2014). To break the monotony of a continuous roof, some spaces have been cut off, leave courtyards with features such as a 700-year-old locust tree (Figure 4.9). There are many courtyards, patios, and streets in the layout, creating comfortable and pleasant indoor and outdoor environments, which reinterpret the urban architectural layout of Anhui (Figure 4.10).
4.5. Quarry Garden in Shanghai Chen Shan Botanical Garden by Zhu Yufan

The Quarry Garden is a scenic feature within the recently developed Shanghai Chen Shan Botanical Garden. The site was a relic of mining over the course of one hundred years. The designer, Zhu Yufan, inspired by the reclusive ideals of Peach-Blossom Spring, took advantage of the existing landscape conditions and constructed waterfalls, a moat, path, and caves, integrating them closely with the natural topography. The garden has three parts: the flat lake, the platform garden, and the deep lake. The flat lake is located at the west side, and it is the first scene encountered by visitors, who comprehend it at a glance. The designer excavated the lake and rebuilt the landform to constitute two features there: the mirror lake and flower sea (Figure
4.11). The space is balanced and enlarged by the mirror lake (Sun, 2010).

An attractive channel has been created to connect the west and east mining areas so that visitors could experience them from different perspectives, thereby having an experience similar to that of shifting perspective in the traditional Chinese gardens and paintings.

Figure 4.12 Pool in Quarry Garden (source: http://s7.sinaimg.cn/middle/673c8b9egcb9ad99c02c6&690)

Figure 4.13 Quarry Garden (photo taken by author)
4.6. No. 59-1 Fuxing Road, Beijing, by Li Xinggang

At No. 59-1 Fuxing Road, Beijing, designer Li Xinggang engaged the introverted quality of the traditional garden and translated the paths of the garden into a complex interior condition. A visit to the interior space is in some ways like the experience of a garden; the designer uses galleries, and pavilions to construct a linear exhibition space, both explicitly and abstractly. For example, in the west side, steps enlarge the original excavation and transform the area into a three-dimensional gallery, connecting various exhibition spaces at different levels through stairs and corridors that extend from the bottom to a roof garden. This system could be regarded as a vertical garden (Xinggang et al, 2008).

Figure 4.14 Building surface and elevation plan
(source: http://static.zhulong.com/photo/small/201008/20/41973_0_0_760_w_0.jpg)
CHAPTER 5
DESIGN PRINCIPLES

5.1. Space Construction

Contrast of spaces: Kuang Ao Theory

As noted earlier, *kuang* means vast, spacious, and light, while *ao* means deep, secluded, quiet. In literature, *kuang ao* could be understood as a contrast that sets some thing or condition into unexpected relief. The most famous prose to represent this theory is Peach-Blossom Spring (Zhu, 2014). The fisherman entered and followed the long cave in the hill at the end of the creek, which narrowed until it was only wide enough for one person to pass through. After several more steps, it then became spacious and bright, and farmlands and houses appeared suddenly. The sequence of the long, dark cave followed by sudden opening and light sets the spacious landscape into dramatic relief and gives the readers a novel experience.

*Kuang Ao* Theory addresses the relationship between contrasting spaces, where the distinctive character of each is cast into relief through the contrast (Zhu, 2014), illustrated by Figure 5.1. This approach is very common in traditional Chinese garden design. For example, Liu-Yuan has a very narrow entrance and aisles, which connect directly to a spacious courtyard (Figure 5.2).
In contemporary design, the Square Pagoda Garden offers a good example where the entrance path connects to the vast square.

Besides such singular moments of contrast, continuous contrasts are used in some places, such as the arrangement of open flats at regular intervals in a secluded long path in the Square Pagoda Garden. The path there is framed by high walls on both sides, which might make visitors feel tired, so openings have been provided at specific distances (Xu, 2015) (Figure 5.3).
**Figure 5.3 Series of compared space**

Sense of spatial expansion: juxtaposing reality and reflection

Flat surfaces of water have important reflective properties and can be used to create a sense of spatial expansion (Figure 5.4).

**Figure 5.4 Suzhou Museum (source: https://zaihaoxin.tuchong.com/12646733/)**

**Division by partitions**

Influenced by Confucianism and other traditional philosophical systems, Chinese aesthetics prioritize introversion and indirect communication, rather than straightforward expression. In order to manifest that in the design of traditional gardens, sweeping views are avoided (L. Cao 2011), and partitions are commonly used, often to separate spaces of different styles or functions (L. Cao, 2011). Of course, partitions should not isolate a space completely; some gaps must be
left, even if only as hints. In traditional design, such openings can be subtle. For example, a hole might be excavated under the wall let the water pass through.

Figure 5.5 Liyuan Garden (Source: http://www.nipic.com/zhuanti/1350422.html)

**Permeable division**

Permeable division refers to openings, such as doors and windows. In traditional Chinese garden design, such perforations are used to create interrelationship between otherwise segmented spaces. There are two main approaches to permeable division: one is to introduce courtyard scenery into the architecture; the other is to increase a sense of depth through the penetration of multiple spaces in a sequence. Traditional gardens are often divided into several small courtyards by whitewashed wall; the doorways and windows on the walls make people see a continuously penetrated space and give them a sense of depth and distance (L. Cao, 2011). At the same time, the position of the viewer is also in movement, so the relationship among the various spaces changes, as does the sense of landscape. The synchronization of time and space gives visitors more enjoyment through the process of viewing.

Besides doorway and windows, galleries, pergolas, pavilions, bridges, waterfalls, artificial
mountains, and plants can be used as “permeable” ways to divide space. They are penetrating elements and could also connect the spaces.

![Image of Suzhou Museum and Liyuan Garden](https://zaihaoxin.tuchong.com/12646733/)

**Figure 5.6 Suzhou Museum and Liyuan Garden (Source: [https://zaihaoxin.tuchong.com/12646733/](https://zaihaoxin.tuchong.com/12646733/))

Spatial extension: View borrowing

In order to engage the horizon and increase a sense of spatial depth, traditional garden design makes connections between inner scenery and the surrounding environment by incorporating views of outside places, a practice called “far borrowing.” To be successful, this technique should be anticipated at the beginning of construction, and the theme of the garden should be decided according to the surrounding environment (L. Cao, 2011). One successful practice is Zhuozheng garden, see in Figure 5.7. “Near borrowing” is the practice of opening views onto the nearby scenery, such as an adjacent courtyard or area of water or vegetation, to enhance the sense of layered space that seem to permeate each other. Like the courtyard scenery in Suzhou Museum, shows in Figure 5.7.
View framing

View framing is another approach to spatial extension and visual enrichment. There are many approaches to framing; the most common way is through the door and window to an adjacent space.

Figure 5.7 Suzhou Museum and Zhuozheng Garden (Source: http://dyzdy.cn/dyzdys/ZDnlgJ_cmma8.html/)

Figure 5.8 Frame scenery in Suzhou Museum (Source: http://www.sj33.cn/architecture/jgsj/201012/26270.html/)
5.2. Spatial arrangement

Meandering

The spatial layout of the traditional garden in southeast China is not like the regular pattern in the imperial palaces and temples in north China. Palace design was guided by Confucianism and followed orthodox doctrine; so their layout is horizontal with vertical emphasis and symmetrical (Feng, 1997). However, garden design was influenced by Taoism, which is a place to get away from the orthodox, so that the layout is irregular.

In order to manifest the changeable natural landscape and to make scenery attractive, traditional Chinese garden design prioritized indirect paths. One of the most typical forms in gardens of south China was the zigzag veranda. Those gardens had an almost freestyle layout and relied on the veranda to connect spaces. (Feng, 1997). The veranda itself did not have many programmatic functions, but it had great formal flexibility and could be manipulated to form a complicated garden experience within an otherwise simple space.

![Veranda in Suzhou garden](http://www.mafengwo.cn/i/1112270.html/)

Figure 5.9 Veranda in Suzhou garden (Source: [http://www.mafengwo.cn/i/1112270.html/](http://www.mafengwo.cn/i/1112270.html/))

A successful reinterpretation of the veranda in contemporary architecture is the Xiangshan Campus of the China Academy of Art. The designer connected the buildings on campus by corridors, so that each individual building is part of an integrated system. The corridors on the
Xiangshan Campus are not only on the ground plane but also go up and down, right and left, creating a rich spatial experience (Figure 5.10).

![Figure 5.10 Corridors in Xiangshan Compus (Source: Art Academy of China, http://www.caa.edu.cn/)](image)

**Layering**

In the *Theory of Chinese Garden Construction*, the author, Linti Cao, summarized spatial awareness as a sense that the view and tour extend beyond their real limits. There are very rich layers in traditional Chinese landscape painting (L. Cao, 2011). Traditional gardens often terminate in ambiguity by structuring a sense of endless landscape, which is inspired by the theory of painting that, if you want the water to seem to flow for a long distance, you need to cut it off and hide the distant part of it.

**Empty space**

Empty space is one of the most important aspects of Chinese painting, and it has also has significance for garden design. In the art of painting, the white space is left around or beside the depicted object to set it off, through contrast. In garden art, unlike the white space in painting,
which is on the plane, the white space is three-dimensional so that the edge of one area will disappear and become transparent (Liu, 2010). For example, the upper space on the water, the vast space constructed by a lawn, and the blank space between buildings, are all the kinds of white space in garden.

In the Square Pagoda Garden, the central object is the Song pagoda. In order to stress the pagoda, the designer extended the area of the lake in front of it, and the lake is connected with a vast lawn. This arrangement creates a large area of three-dimensional “white space” in the garden, and the figure of pagoda is successfully set off (Zhu, 2014).

![Figure 5.11 Square Pagoda](http://www.youthla.org/2011/01/new-understanding-to-old-cases-fangta-garde-shanghai/)

**5.3. Experience of space in time**

**Diurnal and seasonal change in the tour**

The relationship between time and space is very important in the traditional Chinese garden. Chinese scholars engaged in making the different scenes in the garden according to changes of time. “There is an old Chinese saying: spring has various flowers, while autumn has a beautiful moon; summer has cool wind, while winter has clear snow.” Every time in the year has its
distinctive beautiful scenery. In the past, designers of traditional gardens in China took advantage of the seasons, as well as of different times of day. For example, the West Lake in Hangzhou has many famous scenic spots named according to time-related information, such as Three Pools Mirroring the Moon, which could be seen at the mid-autumn festival, and the Melting Snow at Broken Bridge, which is most beautiful in winter after being covered with snow. Plants are also a typical method to distinguish different scenes according to seasons. In terms of one day, from morning to night, the changing locations of shadow can significantly impact a sense of space. For example, in the Square Pagoda Garden, the Helou Pavillion, which is a pavilion under which visitors take rest, has a series of walls with holes. Sunlight passes thorough the holes and projects bright spots and shadows on the ground of the interior space, changing throughout the day.

**Shifting perspective in the garden**

As with shifting perspective in traditional Chinese painting, scenes vary significantly in the traditional Chinese garden. Winding paths lead visitors through “mountains,” beside “lakes”, alongside beds of flower, and near to interesting stones, suggesting a wide range of landscape environments (M. Wu, 2009). Visitors’ sights will be closed or opened according to the different environments; every movement could construct a framed view, like a painting, illustrated in Figure 5.12. As noted, the yuan-lin is conceived as a “four-dimensional space,” incorporating time in spatial understanding of the garden. That way of thinking makes plain that beauty and character of the yuan-lin cannot be apprehended at a glance but only through movement in time. The sense of landscape presented to visitors is constantly changing according to the relationship
of layers, distance, dimension, visibility, and framing, among other factors.

Figure 5.12 Shifting Perspective

5.4. Conclusion

Relative to the past, scholars today have significantly less cultural influence, and the public has become the focus. The development of traditional culture, including garden design, faces a significant dilemma pertaining to relevance. Unlike in the past, when spiritual development was a valued pursuit, consumer satisfaction is the most important criterion of design for the public. Most of today’s landscape designs prioritize function and popular appeal. The new generation of architects and landscape architects is not enthusiastic about traditional design, of which they also lack meaningful understanding. However, a small number of important designers have been inspired by tradition, among them Jizhong Feng, I.M. Pei, Shu Wang, and Xinggang Li. Building on understanding of traditional poetry, painting, and garden design, they design meaningful public spaces. While the traditional garden should not be emulated today in formal terms, the methods and aesthetics of traditional design can be inspired meaningful contemporary approaches, especially against the backdrop of so many superficial imitations of western precedents.
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