

The Classical Gardens of Shanghai

Shelly Bryant

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Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Acknowledgements | vi |
| 1. Introduction: Shanghai's Gardens in Context | 1 |
| 2. Zuibaichi: A Historical Perspective | 24 |
| 3. Qushui Yuan: Space and Text | 41 |
| 4. Guyi Yuan: Revival, Restoration, and Expansion | 61 |
| 5. Qiuxiapu: A Literary Perspective | 83 |
| 6. Yu Yuan: Staging a Family Drama | 102 |
| 7. Conclusion | 120 |
| Glossary | 131 |
| Bibliography | 133 |
| Index | 138 |



1

Introduction: Shanghai's Gardens in Context

The wise take pleasure in water, and the kind find
happiness in a mountain.

—Confucius¹

Conventional wisdom in the Chinese classical gardening tradition says that it takes three hundred years to build a garden. The appreciation of a garden is likewise not something that happens in a short space of time, but instead is cultivated over the course of a lifetime. A scholar's garden involves the cultivation of the land, the self, the family, and the surrounding society and culture, all in the confines of one household's walled residential compound. The role that the garden played in the daily lives of families in times past was to create spaces for reading, entertainment, and enjoyment. The residential portions were meant to be secluded, reading areas quiet, entertainment spaces convenient, and enjoyment sections relaxing.²

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1. Lou Qingxi, *Chinese Gardens*, trans. Zhang Lei and Yu Hong (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2003), 126. Hereafter cited as Lou 2003.
 2. *Ibid.*, 56.

Viewing a garden is not meant to be a passive activity. The visitor is expected to enter the garden not only physically, but also intellectually and emotionally, and to respond to what she or he encounters on all three levels. The viewer should seek to put him or herself into the art when visiting a garden.³ A garden must be experienced with the senses, with the mind, and with the heart, the last of which is the true goal of garden construction. Ji Cheng (計成) writes, ‘There is no definite way of making the most of scenery; you know it is right when it stirs your emotions.’⁴ Engaging the senses—which Lou Qingxi (樓慶西) terms ‘the image, or realm of the substance’ in contrast with ‘the meaning, or artistic/emotional realm’⁵—is the most obvious and accessible level for experiencing a garden, while it could be argued that responding emotionally is not possible without first engaging in an intellectual response. Lou states that the real appreciation of a garden’s beauty comes from an understanding of the general artistic realm behind the scenery presented there, which leads to an understanding of the philosophy and view of life it represents.⁶ This intellectual response depends entirely on the viewer’s familiarity with the Chinese tradition of gardening.

This monograph seeks to provide information that will help readers interact with Shanghai’s gardens intellectually, in hopes that this intellectual engagement will open up the possibility for emotional engagement as well.

Chinese landscaping is a fundamentally different endeavour from Western gardens, where wide vistas are laid out, usually

3. 彭一剛：《中國古典園林分析》（北京：中國建築工業出版社，1986），8。Hereafter cited as Peng.
4. Ji Cheng, *The Craft of Gardens*, trans. Alison Hardie (Shanghai: Shanghai Press and Publishing Development Company, 2012), 120.
5. Lou 2003: 125.
6. *Ibid.*, 126.

symmetrically over a large piece of land, and floral scenes are foregrounded. In a classical Chinese garden, the symmetry is not spatial but philosophical, and the grounds are partitioned so as to create winding paths that reveal the whole in piecemeal fashion, employing screens to create and frame miniature landscapes, resulting in a layered effect that seems to expand the relatively small confines within the garden's walls.

In English writings, the term 'classical Chinese garden' generally refers to the gardens found in the Jiangnan region (江南, the southern part of the Yangtze River Delta), with Suzhou serving as the long-established centre of the landscaping techniques found in this style of garden. The terms private, scholar's, poet's, southern, classical, Suzhou, Chinese, and Jiangnan are all used interchangeably to denote the gardens that grew up in the region, forming one of three distinct styles of gardens in Chinese tradition, alongside imperial and landscape gardens. Temple gardens, which are sometimes treated as a fourth classification, generally follow the Jiangnan style in smaller grounds and imperial gardens in larger compounds.⁷

A typical Suzhou garden is composed of four elements—waterways, rockeries, buildings, and plants—with walkways and corridors arranged to connect them while also situating guests to the grounds at the most advantageous viewing positions. These four types of features are arranged to enhance the natural topography and are arranged in relation to one another in such a way as to create a variety of views from many different angles. Each feature can serve simultaneously as a part of a view, a point from which to observe other scenes in the grounds, and a partition to separate sections of the garden.

7. Ibid., 6.

The southern-style landscaping tradition reaches back as early as the fourth century BC in the Chu Kingdom,⁸ but the techniques by which the grounds are designed and built in a classical garden were not written down in systematic fashion until the Ming dynasty designer, Ji Cheng, composed his 1631–34 volume *The Craft of Gardens*.⁹ Since this is the period during which Shanghai's gardening culture flourished, Ji is a good place to begin a study of Shanghai's gardens. Even in contemporary writing about Chinese gardens, it is not uncommon for a significant work in Chinese publications to be overlooked for decades by both Chinese and foreign scholars,¹⁰ and this was even more true of older texts. Ji Cheng's handbook on landscaping techniques was 'lost' for generations until Japanese scholars, who had long relied on the work, reintroduced it to China in 1931.¹¹ Ji's text was unusual for its time, as most traditional writings on gardens were records 'focused on concrete particulars [of a specific garden], and there is an enduring reluctance to operate at the level of treatises on general principles.'¹² Probably from a humble background, Ji Cheng describes himself as well-travelled, though nearly all of his design work was done in his native province of Jiangsu. Ji Cheng's reputation was apparently established not by rights of birth, but by his skill. The goal in his philosophy of design was to make a visitor feel that she or he had explored the whole of Jiangnan, even if the actual journey had only covered a path of a mile or so.¹³

8. Ji, 15.

9. *Ibid.*, 11.

10. Stanislaus Fung, 'Longing and Belonging in Chinese Garden History', *Perspectives on Garden Histories* 1999: 205–19. Print, 205.

11. Ji, 12.

12. Fung, 215.

13. Ji, 39.

Ji's summary of the techniques of garden building focus on the four elements mentioned above. In the preface to his guidebook for garden design, he writes:

To make a garden here, one should not only pile up rocks to emphasize the height, but excavate the earth to increase the depth in proportion with the tall trees scattered on the hillside here, with their roots curled around sheer rocks just as in a painting. Following the course of the stream we should construct pavilions and terraces whose reflections will be scattered on the surface of the pond, with winding gullies and flying galleries leading on from them, so that people will be taken beyond anything they could have imagined.¹⁴

From this brief summary, it is evident that rocks and waterways play the more prominent role in a Suzhou garden, with buildings and plants serving to enhance the layout of the other two elements. This is fitting with the conventional concept of a classical garden functioning as a series of landscape paintings, termed *shanshui* (山水, literally 'mountains and water/streams') paintings in Chinese. The rockeries serve as miniaturized mountains with waterways surrounding them, setting up a conceptual symmetry between permanence (mountain) and change (water) that represents balance and harmony in Chinese aesthetics, and the relationship between the two is always foregrounded. 'The waters follow the hills, and the hills are brought to life by the waters' in a Chinese garden.¹⁵ Plants serve as forestation in the miniaturized landscape, and the buildings function simultaneously as parts of the landscape, framing devices through which to view the grounds, and

14. Ji, 37.

15. Chen Congzhou, *On Chinese Gardens* (Shanghai: Shanghai Press and Publishing Development Company, 2008), 16.

places of rest to break up the walk. The views in a garden serve as a ‘concentration of scenery’, or what Lou Qingxi calls a ‘world in a teapot’,¹⁶ that is meant to make the viewer feel that the grandeur of nature has been brought near.

The literal translation of the common term for garden building in Chinese is ‘digging ponds and piling mountains’ (挖湖堆山, *wa hu dui shan*).¹⁷ Ji Cheng gives extensive attention to both aspects of garden building. When laying rocks, it is most important to begin with an overall picture in mind, leaving the details for a later stage.¹⁸ The process begins with using wooden posts as models to estimate the height and length of the hills, and also to test the firmness of the ground on which the miniature mountain range will be built. A block and tackle is then set up, using ropes to lift the stones. The base of the mountain should consist of large, rough stones that can be laid so as to completely hide the wooden pillars around which the hill will be built. These pillars, serving as the ‘bones’ of the mountain, should be driven far into the ground. When the large, solid rocks have been laid, smaller, jagged pieces can be added as the mountain gains height, bringing texture and variety to the hill’s layout. Ji Cheng adds that ‘thin’ and ‘riddled’ rocks are naturally impressive, while smoother pieces have to rely on the garden master’s ability to position them perfectly in order to create an imposing view.¹⁹

The two types of rocks most commonly used in gardens are *huang* and *Taihu* stones. The base is easier to lay for *huang* formations, while it is difficult to situate the top of the structure. The reverse is true of *Taihu* rockeries. *Huang* stones are solid

16. Lou 2003, 20.

17. Ji, 22.

18. Chen, 66.

19. Ji, 104.

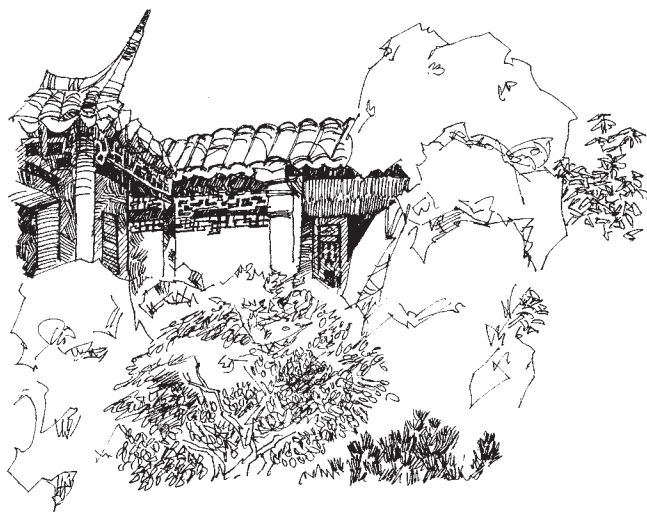


Figure 1.1

A Taihu stone with plants, forming a typical scene in a classical Chinese garden (© 2015 Song Jie)

and vigorous, with a hint of hollowness and flexibility detectable. In contrast, Taihu stones emphasize hollowness. Each type also comes with disadvantages. For instance, huang rocks lack a sense of change, while Taihu's stones can appear fragmentary and scattered.²⁰ An approach that carefully balances the strengths and weaknesses of these two forms of rocks is fundamental to good garden design.

When choosing rocks, one should seek pieces without cracks, strong enough to be piled up, and with jagged edges that can be fitted together. Even ordinary rocks can be beautiful when stacked

20. Chen, 66.

together properly. 'Rocks,' Ji Cheng writes, 'are not like plants or trees; once gathered, they gain a new lease on life.'²¹

If one finds an especially beautiful rock, it may be displayed on its own in a garden, and individual stones are often positioned as the centrepiece of a view within the grounds. For the Confucian thinker, the contemplation of rocks was traditionally an aid to cultivating character, as rocks are sturdier than trees or plants, and therefore represent solid character.²² Ming rockeries, characterized by strength and massiveness, aimed to evoke contemplation. During the Qing dynasty, there was a push for more refinement and sophistication in rock formations, but it often resulted in structures that were too fragile to last.²³ Taihu stones have long been favoured for this sort of individual display. These stones were traditionally drawn from Taihu, usually from the edges of the lake near Dongting Hill or from Xiaoxia Bay.²⁴ The ideal stone is firm and glossy, full of hollow spaces, holes, twists, and intriguing grooves. They may be of a variety of shades of white, grey, or black. A good stone will give out a faint sound when tapped.²⁵

Ming rockeries, of which there are several examples in Shanghai's gardens, were generally kept quite simple. They included steps, main peaks, flat terraces, ravines, and caverns in their arrangements, laid out in a myriad of styles. The two main classifications were 'open,' with ravines hewn out of hills, and 'closed,' in which the main peaks are piled one above another.²⁶

Surrounding the various rockeries in a classical garden will be a system of waterways, the juxtaposition of these two elements

21. Ji, 112.

22. *Ibid.*, 134, note 165.

23. Chen, 66.

24. Ji, 112.

25. *Ibid.*, 112.

26. Chen, 67.

representing a yearning for virtue and wisdom, even as it mimics natural landscapes.²⁷ As a general rule, roughly 30 percent of the grounds are dedicated to water. If the mountains are the skeleton of the garden, the waterways are the arteries, and in them one feels the pulse of the place. The ponds and canals are the yin to the mountains' yang.²⁸ In Zheng Yuanxun's (鄭元勳) 1635 foreword to Ji Cheng's volume, he refers to streams that appear as an 'undulating ribbon' winding through the artificial hills.²⁹ This is the ideal that the waterways in a garden aim for.

In the earliest gardens, mountains were the most important elements, favoured for the representation of the houses of the gods. As time wore on, water was more heavily emphasized, leaving the mountains to the immortals. The purpose of the garden was to escape the confines of reality, and the canals in a garden were seen as a pathway for that journey, much like the fisherman escaped to the utopian society beyond the peach orchard in Tao Yuanming's classic 'The Land at the End of the Peach Grove'.³⁰ The emphasis on reconnecting with nature meant that pools and canals should appear as they might in the wild, winding in paths shaped by the topography of the land, asymmetrical and seemingly random.³¹

The ponds should be of irregular shape like natural bodies of water.³² More expansive ponds or lakes can be used to showcase the change of seasons, reflecting the colour changes surrounding it.³³ As much as possible, gardens should be constructed to

27. Cai Yanxin, *Chinese Architecture*, trans. Andrea Lee, Selina Lim, and David Gu (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2010), 126.

28. Ji, 22.

29. *Ibid.*, 31.

30. Peng.

31. Lou 2003; 62.

32. Ji, 51.

33. *Ibid.*, 45.

incorporate natural waterways. Dredging and pumping water in is also acceptable, but the pumps should be hidden from view. In a compound that is surrounded by natural bodies of water, it is advisable to ‘borrow’ the view, a technique used to great effect in Suzhou’s oldest surviving garden, the Surging Waves Pavilion. Though every garden is self-contained, when one can make use of such natural elements surrounding it, the creative employment of windows, doorways, and corridors to frame those views and draw them into the garden is not only acceptable, but commendable. Ji Cheng’s sage advice is that vulgar views surrounding the garden should be blocked out and beautiful ones borrowed.³⁴

In the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), lakes in imperial grounds were given names such as Beihai, Zhonghai, and Nanhai, *hai* (海) being the term for ‘sea’. Building on this tradition, just as the rocks represented miniature mountains in southern gardens, the lakes and ponds stood for oceans.³⁵ In southern gardens, unlike their northern counterparts, it was necessary that the water in a garden came from a source inside or very near the edges of the walled compound,³⁶ so the presence of a ready water source was always a primary consideration in choosing a site for gardens in Jiangnan. In a place like Hangzhou, where a major body of water dominates the topography, landscape gardening is seen as a natural activity in which to engage.³⁷ Throughout the Yangtze Delta area, the ready availability of natural canals means that finding a good waterway to build around was never a very big obstacle to garden designers. The preference for building around waterways in the south also

34. *Ibid.*, 43.

35. Peng, 3.

36. 樓慶西：《中國古建築二十講》（北京：生活·讀·新知三聯書店，2001），167。Hereafter cited as Lou 2001.

37. Peng, 4.

bore a subtle political note in the earliest days, as northerners were plainsmen, good with horses, while southerners were more skilled with boats, and water emphasized their area of strength.³⁸

It was preferred that waterways be not too large, and that water not overwhelm the grounds.³⁹ Bridges were often used to separate the watery expanses,⁴⁰ and stone bridges became an iconic representation of Jiangnan over the years. Ideally, bridges should be lower than the pond's banks, so that they will seem to hover on the surface of the water.⁴¹ When water is situated near a building, it should appear to flow out from the roots of the structure. Rocks should be situated so as to create high spaces from which to view the water, and also to make the edges of the pools, ponds, and canals more jagged and their shapes irregular.⁴²

Chen Congzhou (陳從周), the renowned professor of Chinese architecture at Tongji University until 2000, makes the observation that the buildings in a garden are where human life is contained, and therefore are the means for generating an artistic sense within the site's natural scenes.⁴³ Ji Cheng describes the architecture found in a classical garden at great length, including illustrations of the various types of structures, and also the doorways, windows, and balustrades that ornament them. He points to the consideration of views in order to determine the layout of the buildings in a garden as one of the most important things that a designer will do.⁴⁴ For residential buildings, Ji advises that one 'should always follow

38. *Ibid.*, 5.

39. Lou 2001, 173.

40. Lou 2003, 62.

41. Chen, 32.

42. Lou 2001, 174.

43. 唐名聲：《海派園林》（上海：文匯出版社，2010），35。Hereafter cited as Tang.

44. Ji, 55.

what is elegant and simple, and take what is most orthodox and straightforward from ancient times.⁴⁵ Painting, decoration, and carvings should always be avoided in residential structures within the grounds.⁴⁶

For other buildings, Ji's theory goes to the opposite extreme. He writes, 'You must search out the unconventional and make sure it is in accord with your own wishes. The trite and conventional should be totally eliminated.'⁴⁷ This range of structures, in contrast to the residential buildings, are made for enjoying the grounds, and so the buildings should be laid out so as to both capture and create scenery,⁴⁸ and they should 'serve to screen different parts of the grounds, so that they may be revealed at leisure, thus creating a perception of depth within the garden.'⁴⁹ The garden's study should not have a strict separation between inside and outside, creating instead a secluded site with easy access to the scenery.⁵⁰ Terraces can be built atop a rockery,⁵¹ while pavilions are made to be places for guests to stop and rest. Gazebos, meant for taking advantage of a particular view, are usually situated beside a waterway or plant arrangement, and galleries are spacious, lofty halls for showcasing art or floral arrangements.⁵² Penthouses, built against a cliff face, are not complete in themselves, but use the rocks to form part of the structure.⁵³ The consideration of buildings such as those

45. *Ibid.*, 64.

46. *Ibid.*, 64.

47. *Ibid.*, 66.

48. Lou 2003, 57.

49. Ye Shengtao, 'The Suzhou Garden'. Author's translation, original text available online at <http://www.5156edu.com/page/07-06-07/24814.html>.

50. Ji, 60.

51. *Ibid.*, 69.

52. *Ibid.*, 70.

53. *Ibid.*, 71.

described in detail by Ji Cheng rose to a position of prime importance in garden layout during the Ming dynasty, and Shanghai's historic gardens contain many examples of Ming structures.⁵⁴

Windows and doorways are important parts of the buildings within a garden. 'Wooden walls should have many window-openings so that one can secretly enjoy looking through them into different worlds.'⁵⁵ In Suzhou's gardens alone, one may find hundreds of styles of window lattice patterns and window shapes, looking from a distance like flowers drawn on a white piece of paper.⁵⁶ The windows, a trademark of the region's gardens, are moulded with black strips and clay, with clean outlines to create sharp images.⁵⁷ Balustrades, usually constructed offsite and brought in, should remain simple but elegant. Intricate carvings are not preferred, and religious designs should be reserved for temple gardens.⁵⁸

Carvings in doorjambs should be avoided. Ji Cheng's view of the ideal doorway is that it 'should lead one on to the open spaces and . . . draw one close to the scenery.'⁵⁹ Walls should be white-washed and covered with a mix of paper pulp and lime⁶⁰ and they should be free of carvings. Ji Cheng offers two reasons for this

54. Tang, 9. Throughout this discussion, an indication that a particular feature dates from a certain dynastic period (i.e., 'Ming structures') does not necessarily mean that the current brick and mortar building has stood since that time. Rather, following Chinese convention, it refers to the time the building was designed, named, and first built, and/or the style employed in the reconstruction. Unless otherwise stated, it should be assumed that most current structures are rebuildings, as most of the gardens have been through numerous phases of decline and rebuilding throughout their history.

55. Ji, 75.

56. Lou 2003, 66.

57. *Ibid.*, 66.

58. Ji, 86.

59. *Ibid.*, 93.

60. *Ibid.*, 96.

preference, stating that carvings on walls are ugly, but also impractical, as they create spaces for birds to build nests and creepers to grow.⁶¹ Even the plainest sort of wall, a blank white 'mirror wall', can be used to create exquisite scenery by providing a reflective surface for the play of light at various times of day. Open brickwork walls are used freely throughout a garden at any point where there is something worth viewing. These walls create an impression of protecting the scene from outside elements, and also conceal what is waiting so as to allow for a slow revelation of the garden's treasures.⁶² A good rule of thumb is that 'walls divide but do not separate.'⁶³

Plants are arranged in the grounds so as to emphasize the change of seasons. 'There are few flowers that do not wither, but fresh scenes can be enjoyed all year round',⁶⁴ so the use of plants helps to generate a feeling of newness throughout the year and keeps the garden always interesting. Ji Cheng advocates that plants, like rocks and water, should be used in a way to imitate natural scenery. He writes, 'Don't commit crimes against the hills and forests. A man of sensibility will never treat them irreverently.'⁶⁵ Lou Qingxi, professor of the history and theory of ancient Chinese architecture, notes that a garden's plants should be arranged with consideration of whether rocks or earth are more important in a given scene. If rocks, then plants should be kept to a minimum, while more plants can help emphasize the earth in a scene.⁶⁶ Chen Congzhou, in his extensive studies and garden restoration works, notes that specific types of plants were often emphasized in a given

61. *Ibid.*, 90.

62. *Ibid.*, 96.

63. Lou 2003, 59.

64. Ji, 120.

65. *Ibid.*, 52.

66. Lou 2001, 173.

garden, such as pines in Liu Yuan, plums and pines in Yi Yuan, and bamboos in the Surging Waves Pavilion—three of Suzhou's classical gardens—but that today, different species are generally mixed together in most restored sites, diminishing the individual character of the original garden.⁶⁷ Ming dynasty writer and painter Wen Zhenheng (文震亨) writes about the use of plants in a Jiangnan garden: 'Plants and trees should not be mixed together, but one should plant them in the right places, so that there is always something to look at throughout the four seasons, as though one were living within a painting.'⁶⁸ In southern gardens, some commonly used plants include peach blossoms and willows for the spring, maples and osmanthus for the autumn, and pines, cypress, banana trees, and bamboo to provide greenery all year. Lotus and water lilies are often used in ponds, with the lotus planted so as to be viewed from a distance and the lilies standing closer to the banks. Bonsais are frequently scattered throughout the grounds as a sort of finishing touch.⁶⁹

Chen reminds his readers of one key difference between not only Chinese and Western gardens, but also scholar's and botanical gardens in China. In a Jiangnan garden, the quantity of plants is not significant. Rather, it is the creation of views that matters, and laying out the small space of the grounds so as to capture a wide variety of scenes that is of primary consideration.⁷⁰ The result is that a very small space is enlarged in the mind of the visitor, in part because the viewer is drawn into the scene and invited to walk through it. Lou says, 'With every step, the view will change'

67. Chen, 21.

68. Quoted in Alison Hardie, *Chinese Garden Pleasures* (Shanghai: Shanghai Press and Publishing Development Company, 2014), 109.

69. Lou 2003, 69.

70. Chen, 22.

in a classical garden,⁷¹ and so the space seems to be expanded. At the same time, the miniaturized scenes are meant to be more than merely an imitation of natural landscapes. The designer will purposely employ exaggeration, aiming not merely to represent nature, but to express and inspire certain feelings about it.⁷² In ideal situations, 'a mood [is] created from nature but surpassing nature, a mood unique to Chinese culture.'⁷³

Though various stages of the gardening tradition had begun much earlier in China, it was during the Song dynasty (960–1279) that the southern style began to gain widespread popularity. During this period, economic development was on the wane, but the arts, including landscape designing, flourished. The Song dynasty was the period that saw the rise of *wenren* (文人, 'cultured person' or literati), a class who was mainly responsible for the development of the scholar's or poet's gardens of the Jiangnan region.⁷⁴ Importantly, as Shanghailander and twentieth-century translator of Chinese poetry, Florence Ayscough notes in her essay on Chinese gardens, 'The only aristocracy which has ever existed in China, excepting members of the Imperial clan, was an aristocracy of the brains.'⁷⁵ During the period when this cultured, educated elite was rising, a theory of the arts was formulated, a mindset that eschewed realist representation in favour of meaning.⁷⁶ Landscaping techniques had an obvious appeal for the literati, since '[i]n contrast with natural scenery, the beauty of Chinese gardens lies in their combining

71. Lou 2001, 171.

72. Peng, 8.

73. Lou 2003, 26.

74. Peng, 3.

75. Florence Ayscough, *A Chinese Mirror* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 126.

76. Peng, 3.

culture and art into one,⁷⁷ and while one did not need to be rich to construct a garden, he did need to be cultured.⁷⁸ It was this framework that allowed for the phenomenal growth in gardening culture, moving from the more linear styles of the imperial garden to an approach that embraced the 'random orderliness' of nature.⁷⁹

It was also during the Song dynasty that contrasts and balances began to take clearer form in landscape design. The term *yuanlin* (園林, 'garden') is made up of two characters, the first which emphasizes the walled compound (i.e., artificial) and the second meaning 'forest'. This sort of juxtaposition of seeming opposites is another feature that is fundamental to the composition of a classical garden. Alongside artificial/natural, Chinese gardens will purposely juxtapose light/dark, mountain/water, straight/curved, and large/small, among other similar binaries, to emphasize the notion of finding balance through tension. Similarly, the use of plain whitewashed walls sets off the more elaborate scenes depicted throughout the grounds. Chen points out that white is bland, but all colours come from it, and water is colourless, but all hues become richer when reflected in water.⁸⁰ In a Chinese garden, then, scenery is sought where there is no scenery, sound in soundlessness, and motion in stillness.⁸¹

There are two basic approaches to viewing a classical garden, which have been best described as 'in motion' and 'in position', motion and repose being another important binary often emphasized in landscape design.⁸² The interaction between motion and repose is a key to garden design, one that Chen considers so

77. *Ibid.*, 3.

78. Ayscough, 218.

79. Peng, 3.

80. Chen, 65.

81. *Ibid.*, 65.

82. *Ibid.*, 149.

important that he claims that if we simply grasp this dynamic, a garden's layout will resolve itself.⁸³

In-position viewing refers to a lingering observation from fixed angles. Experiencing a garden in this way is ideal if the grounds contain numerous points of visual interest, and is generally preferred for smaller gardens.⁸⁴ The viewing points frame wider scenes than those seen through doorways and windows, and open onto the garden's best views.⁸⁵ In a garden designed with in-position viewing in mind, there will be numerous buildings that invite the visitor to linger.⁸⁶

In-motion viewing is the opposite approach. The visitor tours the grounds, viewing each scene from changing angles. There are more and larger vistas available for viewing, and it is the preferred way of experiencing more expansive gardens.⁸⁷ The winding paths mean that even relatively static sights will seem to alter with the change in viewing angle.⁸⁸ Grounds designed for in-motion viewing will include many paths that wind around ponds, long corridors, and twisting walkways, and the view will change angles often.⁸⁹ In-motion viewing capitalizes on the way the path shifts the perspective of the visitor as she or he tours the grounds. 'Each move from one area to the next brings renewed scenes, extending the time and expanding the space for enjoyment.'⁹⁰

The five gardens presented here, include Zuibaichi in Songjiang District, Qushui in Qingpu District, Guyi Yuan and

83. *Ibid.*, 151.

84. *Ibid.*, 15.

85. Lou 2003, 138.

86. Chen, 16.

87. *Ibid.*, 15.

88. Lou 2003, 138.

89. Chen, 16.

90. Lou 2003, 61.

Qiuxiapu in Jiading District, and Yu Yuan in Shanghai's Old City—the only remaining samples of Shanghai's original classical gardens. Historically, Shanghai's gardens have been more prominent than many outsiders first realize, particularly those in Jiading and Songjiang. In fact, Nanxiang, a small town in Jiading and home to Guyi Yuan, was often favourably compared to Suzhou, with claims that its gardens rivalled those in the old centre of gardening culture in both beauty and number, despite Nanxiang being so small.⁹¹ For over five hundred years, Suzhou held prime position in the gardening scene, standing with Yangzhou and Hangzhou as a representative of the Jiangnan landscaping design style. Yangzhou has long been known for its numerous gardens in which buildings were most prominent, while the water/mountain scenes occupied prime place in Hangzhou's gardens. Suzhou's style, known as *huicui* (薈萃, 'to gather important articles or personages', or in this instance, 'collage' or 'bricolage'), combined the best elements of all other styles of garden design. Shanghai's gardens built on the Suzhou tradition and, typical of much of Shanghai's culture, added a *haipai* (海派, 'fusion' or 'local colour') element.⁹² Early interest in gardening blossomed in the city as people migrated from Suzhou to Shanghai beginning in the late Ming dynasty, resulting in hundreds of gardens emerging in Shanghai in the Ming-Qing period,⁹³ and all of the gardens explored in this monograph are examples of this period of growing interest in the landscaping tradition. The chapters that follow seek to open up for readers several avenues for how one might experience a garden, and so each chapter has

91. Yan Junming, *Enchanting Nanxiang* (Shanghai: Shanghai Cultural Arts Publishing, 2010), 5.

92. Tang, 10.

93. *Ibid.*, 9.

been structured so as to allow a slightly different approach to the garden featured.

Extensive restoration works have been undertaken in all five of Shanghai's classical gardens, usually adhering to the garden chronicles that were written in the days of their construction. These chronicles usually did not contain images, but descriptions of the grounds and the philosophy behind their construction. Stanislaus Fung, an associate professor of architecture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who has widely published in the field of Chinese garden history, explains, 'If we turn from twentieth-century writings to traditional writings on Chinese gardens, there is a significant "blackout". The use of visual means to record gardens takes a clear second place; the primacy of the word is conspicuous.'⁹⁴ The chronicles that describe the original gardens, then, are text-based and allow some space for interpretation when in the hands of a designer planning restoration works.

Like most of Jiangnan's gardens, Shanghai's five classical gardens have all been through a series of decline and rebuilding. Perhaps some will find it surprising that the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) was not as cruel to the region's gardens as to some other aspects of classical Chinese culture. Zhou Enlai, then premier of China, was instrumental in protecting the gardens from complete ransacking at the time, often referring to Jiangnan gardens as 'China's calling card', and urging that they be left intact for the time when China was ready to open its borders to the outside world.⁹⁵ Much damage had been done to the gardens prior to that time at the hands of the Japanese occupational forces, and that experience seemed to endow the gardens with a special measure of nationalistic signification that preserved them from being completely

94. Fung, 214.

95. Peng, foreword.

lost. It is hard to estimate how much the ransacking of the gardens during occupation, a matter that enraged local people much like the ransacking of Yuanmingyuan (the Summer Palace) in Beijing the previous century had been used to stir nationalist sentiment in the early 1900s, might have contributed towards a gentler treatment during the turbulent period of the Cultural Revolution. Also important is that, for many Chinese, the gardens represent nature at least as much as they represent culture, and so, while many of the inscriptions, paintings, and scrolls were destroyed, damaged, or lost during that period, the grounds remained relatively intact. The gardens of Suzhou were also among the earliest cultural sites to receive attention by rebuilding and restoration groups after the Cultural Revolution. The five classical gardens covered in this monograph were designated for preservation and restoration by the Nationalist government in May 1949, and so were under some measure of protection since that time.⁹⁶

The restoration works that have since taken place are effective to varying degrees, with some very sensitive thought and planning being given to certain aspects of each garden. Chen Congzhou began setting out a systematic philosophy for garden restoration as early as 1978, shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution.⁹⁷ Chen was Shanghai's most prominent figure in modern garden restoration and rebuilding, and also in designing contemporary landscapes. His writings will be cited often in this volume, particularly in the chapter on Guyi Yuan (Chapter 4), which he helped restore.⁹⁸ The work of Chen and other contemporary authorities on gardening culture can be seen as a part of a particular tradition (though not fully systematized) in the study of classical Chinese

96. Tang, 10.

97. Chen, 6.

98. *Ibid.*, 6.

gardens—a system that has been underway for about seventy years and that combines Western and Chinese thought to create an understanding of classical garden design. Many of the Chinese scholars who have engaged in such work have gone about it with a conviction that Chinese culture of the past is valuable and can be preserved—even advanced—in the new, modern China.⁹⁹

It should not be imagined that scholars giving attention to garden restoration after the Cultural Revolution were engaged in trailblazing work. Classical gardens have long been understood to be at the pinnacle of cultural expression in China, and invading forces were often known to ransack the grounds of both private and imperial gardens as a show of power.¹⁰⁰ Stanislaus Fung writes that ‘the focus of narration in traditional writings does not shift from particularity toward generalization and abstraction, but broadens to show how gardens were part of the transformation of dynastic fortunes.’¹⁰¹ Tales of rebuilding after such acts of aggression are common in the histories of many gardens in China generally, and Shanghai and the surrounding region specifically.

Even more frequently, restoration works were undertaken at different stages of each garden’s life due to the more mundane problem of neglect. Chen Jiru (陳繼儒, 1558–1639), a renowned member of the literati during Ji Cheng’s day (and apparently an acquaintance of Ji Cheng’s associate Zheng Yuanxun), laments:

I once said that there are four difficulties with gardens: it is difficult to have fine mountains and waters; it is difficult to have old trees; it is difficult to plan; and it is difficult to assign names. Then there are three easy things: the powerful can easily seize the garden;

99. Fung, 208.

100. Lou 2003, 145.

101. Fung, 215–16.

Introduction: Shanghai's Gardens in Context

in time, it can easily become unkempt; and with an uncultivated owner, it easily becomes vulgar.¹⁰²

Many of the families that originally designed and built gardens in Suzhou and Shanghai were members of the *nouveau riche* during the Ming-Qing era, and the grounds were sometimes erected more as a show of wealth than with an understanding of the cultured tradition from which gardening first emerged. When the gardens passed hands from father to son, it was not uncommon for the care of the grounds to be neglected, or even for the whole compound to be sold or gambled away. But, keeping in mind the notion that it takes three centuries to properly construct a Chinese garden, such tales of neglect and restoration should not be surprising, as it follows a pattern of rise and decline that is common in the tale of families all over the world. In this and many other ways, each garden can be seen as an encapsulation of the unique stories of the women and men who designed, built, inhabited, maintained, and sometimes neglected it. In understanding the gardens of Shanghai, we may also gain a new appreciation of the story of the city and its people.

102. Quoted in Fung, 214.

Glossary

Terms to Note

City God Temple (城隍廟): located in each town and city, a temple dedicated to a prominent local figure who, after death, was believed to serve as spirit protector of the city and its inhabitants

haipai (海派): 'local colour' or 'fusion'

huaniao hua (花鳥畫): Chinese bird-and-flower painting

huicui (薈萃): collage or bricolage

Jiangnan (江南): the region south of the Yangtze Delta

shanshui hua (山水畫): Chinese landscape painting

wenren (文人): literati class

Features in a Classical Garden

artificial mountains (假山): rocks piled to imitate mountains and mountain ranges in miniature form; usually built on the edge of a waterway

covered walkways (廊坊): roofed paths that wind through the garden, framing and screening the views as they twist through the grounds

dragon wall (龍牆): a garden wall whose top is patterned to look like a dragon's body, featuring a dragon's head (or several dragons' heads) at some point in the garden

four-sided pavilion (四面廳): a structure open on four sides, framing four different views of the garden for those situated inside the pavilion

galleries (軒): the word implies a spacious, lofty area; galleries are often situated in high, open spaces and incorporated into the scenery

Glossary

- gate tower (門樓): traditionally, the gate tower was the only structure with a prescribed orientation, being aligned with the great hall and situated in relation to it
- gazebo (榭): gazebos are made to 'borrow' or take advantage of the scenery; usually situated beside water or plant arrangements
- great hall (廳堂): one of the largest buildings in a garden; in ancient times, it was preferable for the great hall to either be three or five spans, depending on the space allowed for the garden
- huang stone (黃山石): large, flat stones stacked up to construct various parts of a Chinese garden, especially miniature mountain ranges
- marble boat (石舫): pavilion built to look like a boat, with three sides over the water; the best create a feeling of movement
- pavilion (亭榭): shady gazebo, usually among plants or flowers, or on the edge of a pond
- penthouse (簷): built up against a cliff face, or buildings which are not complete in themselves but use a cliff face to form part of their structure
- study (書房): studies can come in a variety of shapes; usually the inside and the outside of the structure are not strictly delineated
- Taihu stone (太湖石): limestones taken from Lake Taihu and displayed in gardens, often as a single piece
- terrace (台): the word means support; garden terraces may be made from rocks piled high with a flat surface on top or constructed of flat planks laid on a high wooden framework, with no buildings on top
- tower (樓閣): the tower should be situated behind the great hall, amid hills and water

Index

- Annals of Jiading* 91
Ayscough, Florence 16, 17, 104,
106, 117, 118, 133
- Bai Juyi 31, 32, 40, 67, 94
bamboo 15, 32, 53, 56, 57, 63, 64,
65, 70–71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 81,
82, 92, 95, 100, 116, 127
Battle of Shanghai 77
beamless ceiling 48
bonsai (*penjing*) 15, 35, 39, 82
Book of Songs 70
borrowed views 10, 43, 50
bridge 11, 32, 38, 43, 50, 51, 53, 55,
67, 81, 94, 106, 112
Buddhism 29, 30
buildings, garden 3, 5, 11–12,
13, 18, 19, 36, 38, 46, 48, 53,
55–56, 69, 71, 73, 74, 75, 79,
81, 86, 94, 98, 100, 105, 107,
116, 132
- Cai Yanxin 120, 123
calligraphy 28, 29, 49, 58, 59, 69,
70, 74, 77, 86, 97, 113, 123
- Chen Congzhou 11, 14, 21, 50, 55,
79, 89, 114, 118, 121–22
Cheng Jiasui 91
Chen Jiru 22
Chen Qiucuo 97
chronicles 20, 33, 64, 70, 73, 75,
104, 105, 113, 121
City God (Temple) 41–43, 59, 60,
67, 73, 78, 85, 86, 87, 88, 98,
107–9, 120, 131
*Collection of Poems Composed at
the Orchid Pavilion, A* 44
Confucius/Confucian 1, 8, 49,
60, 74
Craft of Gardens, The 4
Cultural Revolution 20–22, 27, 39,
49, 64, 79, 87
- Dai Sigong 100
Daoism/Daoist 37, 52
deer 37
Dong Qichang 24, 26–30, 31, 33,
34, 35, 40, 69, 77, 86, 91, 105
Dong Zuchang 27
dragon/dragon wall 116, 117, 118,
131

Index

- Dream of the Red Chamber, The* 91
 Du Fu 96
- Fung, Stanislaus 20, 22
- gingko tree 115–16
 Gong Hong 85
 Gong Xijue 85–86
 Gu Dashen 25, 30–33
 Guo Moruo 34–35
 Guyang Yuan 27, 29
 Guyi Yuan 18, 19, 21, 60, 61–82,
 89, 90, 91, 121
- Hangzhou 10, 19, 61, 102, 117
 Hou Fang 91
 huang stones 6–7, 47, 52–53, 113,
 132
 Huhai Shen 107
 Hu Juwen 78
 Humble Administrator's Garden
 102
- immortals 9, 37, 51–53, 89
 'In Memory of Drunken Bai' 31
 inscription 21, 31, 36, 41, 49, 57,
 58, 63, 65, 78, 79, 83, 88, 89,
 91, 92, 93, 94, 123
 intertextuality 80, 83, 88, 93
- January 28 Incident 76
 Japan/Japanese 4, 20, 35, 39, 66,
 76–78, 87, 104, 122, 125, 126
 Jiading 19, 60, 61, 64, 65, 70,
 71–72, 84, 86–87, 91, 98, 99,
 100, 110
- Jiangnan 3, 4, 10, 11, 15, 16, 19, 20,
 29, 38, 46, 52, 61, 68, 81, 83,
 90, 94, 99, 102, 108, 115, 118,
 119, 120, 124, 131
 Jiang Zemin 123
 Jiang Zhuang 102
 Jichang Yuan 102
 Ji Cheng 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13–14,
 22, 26, 45, 52–53, 55, 56, 59
 Jin Erxi 47, 49, 51, 52, 54–55
- Kangxi 25, 91, 108
 Keswick, Maggie 59
 Kezhi Yuan 121, 124
 Kinnas, Miho 125
kunqu (Suzhou opera) 79, 110, 124
- 'Land at the End of the Peach
 Grove, The' 9, 80, 126–29
 Liao Shoufeng 67
 Li Liufang 91
 Lingering Garden (Liu Yuan) 15,
 102
 literati 16, 22, 27, 28, 29, 34, 61, 85,
 91, 102, 120, 121, 131
 Liu Yuan (*see* Lingering Garden)
 Liu Yunfang 44, 58, 91
 Liu Zhuang 102
 Li Yizhi 64
 lotus 15, 31, 32, 34, 46, 47, 50, 52,
 53, 54, 65, 67, 68, 79, 96
 Lou Jian 91, 94
 Lou Qingxi 2, 6, 14
 Lu Hong 63
 Lu Longqi 98
 Lu Shaoming 74, 93, 111

Index

- marble boat 48, 49, 54, 66–67, 73,
 78, 82, 132
 Master-of-the-Nets Garden 102
 Min Shiji 65, 70
 mirror wall 14, 54–55
 Mukden Incident 77
- Nanxiang 19, 60, 61–62, 63, 65, 67,
 68, 70, 71, 73, 76–78, 80, 121
 New Suzhou Museum 126
- Odes to Qin* 70
 ‘On the Pond’ 31–33, 94
 osmanthus 15, 48, 53, 56–57, 95,
 98, 101, 106, 115, 125
- painting 5, 15, 21, 26, 27, 28, 19,
 30, 40, 44, 46, 49, 53, 56, 71,
 74, 81, 91, 93, 116, 118, 123,
 125, 131
 Pan Boying 113
 Pan En 104, 115
 Pan Fu 107
 Pan Mansion 118
 Pan Yunduan 102, 104–7, 109, 110,
 111, 115, 117
 Pei, I. M. 126
 peony 33, 57, 75, 124
Peony Pavilion, The 124
 pine 15, 40, 53, 57, 71, 76, 99, 100
Pipa Ji 110
 plants 3, 5, 7, 8, 14–15, 36, 39, 40,
 46, 56, 57, 58, 71, 76, 78, 90,
 92, 95, 100, 105, 106, 132
 plum blossoms 15, 57
- ‘Poetic Sequence on a Pavilion,
 A’ 90
 poetry 16, 27, 33, 40, 44, 51, 58,
 64, 67, 89, 91, 96, 113, 116,
 123, 125
- Qianlong 41, 63, 86, 91
 Qingpu 18, 41, 43, 44, 45, 59, 60,
 121, 124
 Qingpu Museum 43, 60
 Qin Yubo 107
 Qiuxiapu 19, 60, 61, 71, 83–101
 Qushui Yuan 18, 41–60, 89, 90, 91,
 120, 124, 125
- rebuilding and restoration 13n54,
 14, 20–23, 31, 36, 38, 39, 43,
 45, 59, 60, 66, 78–79, 80, 82,
 87, 122
 rockeries 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 38, 39, 40,
 43, 48, 52, 53, 70, 73, 79, 81,
 82, 86, 88, 89, 94, 95, 96, 105,
 107, 113, 114, 117
Romance of the Three Kingdoms,
 The 38, 39
- Shanghai Incident 76
 Shaoxing 44
 Shen Hongzheng 86
 Shen Shoudong 49, 125
 Shen Yuanlu 73
 Shi Fan 110
 Small Swords Rebellion 76, 116
 Small Voice Society 66, 78
 Songjiang 18, 19, 24, 26, 28, 31, 33,
 34, 36, 38, 58, 63

Index

- staged performance 72, 87, 106,
108, 109, 110, 116, 118, 119,
123, 125
- stele 58, 64, 109
- Su Dongpo 31
- Sun Yat-sen 36
- Surging Waves Pavilion 10, 15, 85
- sutra pillar 63, 64, 78, 79
- Suzhou 3, 5, 10, 13, 15, 19, 21, 23,
28, 36, 62, 67, 73, 79, 85, 91,
102, 110, 117, 121, 126
- Suzhou opera (see *kunqu*)
- Taihu stones 6–8, 52, 53, 56, 89,
117, 132
- Taiping Rebellion 45, 76
- Tan Garden 80, 121–22
- Tang Shisheng 91
- Tang Yu 72
- Tang Yun 70
- Tao Yuanming 9, 80, 105, 126–29
- temple garden 3, 13, 41–43, 44, 46,
52, 59, 60, 63, 65, 67, 69, 73,
78, 80, 85, 86–87, 88, 98, 106,
107–9, 111, 116, 119, 120, 131
- ‘Three Dialogues’ 61
- Three Massacres of Jiading 72, 86
- ‘Twenty-Four Scenes of Ling Yuan,
The’ 46–47, 49, 52, 54, 55
- Wang Bo 90
- Wang Mingshao 99
- Wang Quan 58
- Wang Xiyi 43
- Wang Xizhi 44
- Wang Zhideng 106
- waterways 3, 5, 8–11, 44–45, 48,
68, 73, 74, 89, 99, 105
- Wen Zhenheng 15
- wine drinking 27, 32, 33, 44, 74,
128
- Wu Gang 95
- Wu Jiayou 109
- Wuxi 102
- Xiang Yuanbian 27
- Xu Keqin 91–92
- Xu Yongzhang 114
- Yangzhou 19, 26, 28
- Yao Wennan 110
- Ye Changchun 64
- Ye Jin 73
- Ye Shengtao 37
- Ying Yuan 26
- Yi Yuan 15
- Yuanmingyuan 21
- Yu Yuan 19, 41, 74, 83, 90, 93,
102–19, 123
- Yu Yuan Ji* 105
- Zhang Nanyang 105, 114
- Zhang Senyu 69
- Zhao Yixi 58
- Zhao Yu 92
- Zheng Banqiao 81, 114
- Zheng Yuanxun 9, 22, 26
- Zheng Zhaolin 107
- Zhou Chengzhi 95, 97
- Zhou Enlai 20
- Zhu Delin 58
- Zhujiajiao 121

Index

- Zhu Kongyang 36
Zhu Sansong 65, 70
Zhu Wei 76
Zhu Zhichun 24
Zuibaichi 18, 24–40, 89, 105



A Taihu stone in Zuibaichi
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A Huang stone formation next to a waterway in Yu Yuan (© 2014 Susie Gordon)