The Chinese Garden
GARDEN TYPES FOR CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
After a long period of near-oblivion, the Chinese Garden seems to be entering a fruitful new season. Recent years have brought many books and articles on the subject, and international periodicals now regularly publish landscape projects conceived in China. The development leading to this recent success of the Chinese Garden outside China has been decidedly irregular, almost as though it were following the principles - so influential in Chinese Gardens - of *fengshui*, where linearity has no place.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, when a few European visitors - Catholic missionaries, first of all - gained access to the court of Beijing, capital of a willfully isolated country, they discovered gardens whose composition was based on evocation of natural landscape features reproduced in iconic and allusive forms. Their letters describing those highly original gardens, published in the West, contributed not only to the birth of the Landscape Garden in England, but aroused a gardening sinophilia; images of Chinese Gardens appeared on porcelain and tapestries, and fantastic imitations were created in aristocratic parks à la mode. But with the political decline of the empire toward the end of the 18th century, international consideration of China changed, and the country was no longer seen as a place of ancient culture but rather as an appetizing prey. During the long eclipse that began with the dissolution of the empire, the gardening tradition was all but forgotten. It was only thanks to the general improvement in communications and above all the development of photography that documentation of that tradition became available to the world.

In 1909, the genial French banker, philanthropist, traveler and dreamer Albert Kahn launched the project of collecting a photographic record of the entire earth. The resulting collection provided glimpses of ancient gardens, including a series of photographs made in China by the French photographer Stéphane Passet in 1912. These melancholy images, made with pioneering color technique the same year the last emperor abdicated and the Republic was proclaimed, reveal an ancient world about to disappear. Thanks to them, we can see the majestic imperial gardens of Beijing.

Decades later, the first panorama of Chinese Gardens was given to the world by a northerner, Osvald Sirén, a great early scholar of Chinese art history. When he became a professor of fine arts at Stockholm University in 1908 he also, like many European intellectuals of that period, became a student of theosophy; it was perhaps for that reason that he developed an interest in Asia and particularly in Chinese art. The expertise he developed led to his nomination in 1926 as curator of Chinese painting and sculpture at the National Museum of Art in Stockholm.

Sirén was a passionate photographer. During his four visits to China and Japan between 1918 and 1935, he was able to document the gardens of Beijing, Hangzhou and Suzhou. His records of those fragile green spaces have great value and were the basis of his *Gardens of China*, a book published in 1949 but written in Lidingö during the war; in this island town north of Stockholm Sirén had a country retreat featuring its own little Chinese garden. *Gardens of China* is not only an extraordinary collection of photographs, but also a scholarly text on the ways Chinese Gardens were composed, ways Sirén began to study both in terms of modalities and of general organization.
Sirén understood both the decorative and the symbolic value of the gardens’ huge rocks, as well as the complementary value of the water, and he also understood that the mode of composition of a Chinese Garden was inspired by the way painted landscape scrolls were unrolled for viewing: “The Chinese garden can never be completely surveyed from a certain point. It consists of more or less isolated sections which must be discovered gradually and enjoyed as the beholder continues his stroll... he is led on into a composition that is never completely revealed.” He noted compositional tricks, like the idea of “borrowing scenery”, which was a technique of framing sections of the landscape outside the garden so as to bring it inside, with the ultimate aim of making the garden appear larger than it actually was.

Sirén’s pioneering work was followed by many other books which dealt at least partially with the techniques used to create Chinese Gardens, beginning with the first modern treatment by a Chinese author, the scholar Liu Dunzhen, *Classical Gardens of Suzhou*, published in a Chinese edition in 1979, then in a partial English translation in 1982 and eventually as a complete English edition in 1993.

With the spread of oriental philosophies and literature, which undoubtedly do influence these gardens, spatial organization has come to be viewed as secondary to the metaphysical component. Rarely has there been an analysis of the material elements constituting a Chinese Garden, aimed at discovering the rules of distribution, proportions and relations guiding the use of those elements. Philosophical, religious or literary interest has prevailed, creating confusion between the references behind a composition and the compositional techniques used to elicit the desired effects. To paraphrase a maxim borrowed from another context, the message got confused with the medium.

It is precisely in the ways and strategies of composition that the Chinese Garden features characteristics that are unique in the history of gardens. These become fully evident in an analysis of the physical apparatus created within the garden’s space in order to inform the visitors’ visual and mental perceptions. Investigation of the material ways in which Chinese Gardens were engineered can offer ideas for current research and design - elaborating on the Chinese Garden’s capacity for constructing a narrative, for integrating with the built environment, but also for its manner of embosoming the individual in a natural system. These gardens foreshadow environmental sustainability. Evocation of the elements and landscapes of the Chinese Garden is not merely a delicate historical note, but parallels today’s interest in environmental requalification and reconstruction of damaged habitats. Far from being a precious intellectual exercise, the search for a harmonious microcosm constitutes a vigorous enunciation of the need for sustainability in all creations. Studying the compositional methods of Chinese Gardens is not only a deeper way to understand one of the great adventures in humanity’s relation with nature, but also an important contribution to the evolution of contemporary landscape architecture.

Franco Panzini
Chapter 1

Evolution

and

Typology
In the second act of Turandot, Giacomo Puccini’s unfinished opera written in the early 1920s and set in fabled Imperial-era China, three ministers of state improbably named Ping, Pong and Pang are complaining about the rigid life they are forced to lead at the court of the beautiful and cruel princess Turandot. They would prefer to live in their peaceful country homes far from the capital:

“I have a house in Honan with a little pond so blue, all surrounded by bamboo. And here I am, wasting my life, racking my brains over sacred books...”

Puccini composed Turandot at a time when Europe had long been fascinated by the exotic Orient, and the libretto’s description of the private garden of one of those officials shows clearly what Westerners saw as the essence of the green architectures of the Far East: naturalness (I-1). The libretto mentions bamboo and a little pond, stereotypical features of a Chinese Garden, but in previous centuries many Western visitors to China - merchants, travelers, missionaries, ambassadors - had far more thoroughly described the parks they had been able to see. These visitors always commented on the natural aspect of these gardens, as well as on what appeared to be a complete lack of order in their plans, something far different from the Western approach (I-2).
Artificiality and Naturalness

Western visitors, in their accounts and descriptions, were often attempting to outline the inherent characteristics of Chinese Gardens, as distinct from all other gardens. Their “natural appearance”, implying “irregularity” of forms and thus an apparent general confusion, was a constant theme. But the French Jesuit missionary Pierre-Martial Cibot (1727-1780) explained how, in fact, this irregularity was entirely calculated, an artifice intended to evoke the simplicity of a natural landscape (I-3; I-4). The apparent simple appearance of the Chinese Garden, with its anti-urban quality, its placid hamlets of pavilions, its silences, suggested to the Jesuit the image of a rural naturalness.

The ability of the Chinese to grasp the many forms through which “real” nature could present itself in the artificial context of the garden was, for Westerners, quite striking. The Englishman Lord George Macartney (1737-1806), who in 1793 led the first British embassy to the Qianlong Emperor, commenting on the design of the imperial garden of Yuanming yuan, “Garden of Perfect Brightness”, near Beijing (I-5), noted in his journal: “[The Chinese gardener’s] point is to change everything from what he found it… and introduce novelty in every corner… If there be a smooth flat, he varies it with all possible conversions. He undulates the surface, raises it in hills, scoops it into valleys and roughens it with rocks. He softens asperities, brings amenity into the wilderness, or animates the tameness of an expanse by accompanying it with the majesty of a forest”.

The concept of the park deals with an investigation into the sense of naturalness which first engendered Chinese Gardens.

I-1: Olympic Forest Park, Beijing. The concept of the park deals with an investigation into the sense of naturalness which first engendered Chinese Gardens.

I-2: Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”, Shanghai. A pavilion overlooking one of the many ponds of the garden.

I-3: Canglang ting, “Surging Waves Pavilion”, Suzhou. The pond is bordered with rocks.

I-4: Yu yuan. Rocks simulating a crest of a hill are arranged around the reflecting pool.

I-5: Tang Dai and Shen Yuan, Forty Views of Yuanming yuan, 1747, vol. 1, view n. 4, Luyue kaiyun, “Engraving the moon and carving the clouds”. Ink and watercolor on silk.
If we wanted to condense into a slogan Chinese garden design’s distinctive attribute through time, thus identifying a unique compositional formula, it could be this: artificiality in nature (I-6). Chinese Gardens show an apparent natural simplicity, an endeavor to restore, sometimes in rather tiny areas, the rhythms and diversity of nature. Occasionally this result is achieved through a concentration on a few elements, but more often nature’s multi-faceted appearance is evoked through diversification of the garden’s aspects. The presence of different and often surprising settings, which follow one another without any apparent hierarchy, makes the spatial perception of the garden difficult. But, despite their apparent confusion, Chinese Gardens are in fact organized and ordered. They are places where the visitors’ senses are continually stimulated through compositional effects intended to awaken curiosity, surprise and aesthetic appreciation. Chinese Gardens are slow. Like films, their effects are built through a sequence of different scenes and settings; separated by screens, walls and doorways, theirs is an unfoldment, a revelation by degrees. Chinese Gardens are never perceived in their entirety. Like music and poetry, they are built through progression, variation and repetition of theme, rhythm and elements, which make them coherent and harmonious. These can be considered the common characteristics defining the Chinese Garden type through time.

In this composite character derived from the natural landscape, Chinese Gardens show analogies with traditions developed in other historical and geographical contexts. Chinese Gardens are in fundamental harmony with Japanese Gardens, whose origin was influenced by the Chinese tradition (I-7). The two types share the intent of representing the basic characters of the natural environment in miniaturized and metaphorical form. Where they differ is in the manner of that representation. Japanese Gardens express a predilection for a formal sobriety of rural inspiration, a compositional understatement which reached its peak in Zen monasteries toward the end of the 15th century with the creation of karesansui, dry gardens made up of a few essential elements: rocks, gravel, moss. The great aristocratic Japanese Gardens, organized as itineraries through different scenes as in China, are more fluid in moving from one scene to another; they do not adopt those explicitly artificial visual devices of Chinese tradition like walls of separation between zones of the garden (I-8).
The similarity of Chinese Gardens with the English Landscape Garden at a first glance is surprising. Yet the celebration of naturalness shared by both traditions was engendered by quite different motives. The English Landscape Garden was born of an almost epic exaltation of the productive countryside; it is a romantic presentation of nature lived in and transformed by men and women through the course of time. The Chinese Garden, by contrast, represents the superior natural order which human beings belong to and to which it is right for them to submit: at least for the time when they are in the garden (1-9).

Historical Chinese Gardens are linked with their contemporary version and current trends in composition by the way these both feature water as an important presence, and both emphasize naturalness. This connection is not limited to formal similarities, and even moves beyond differences in metaphysical interpretation, because both the traditional and the contemporary approach are based on the recognition of the innate human need to maintain contact with nature’s vitality, even if experienced in a distilled form, as happens in a garden.

**Ethics**

The philosophical and metaphysical historical context which created the palimpsest of meanings implicit in the Chinese Garden is characterized by two main doctrines: Confucianism and Daoism⁶. These two philosophical systems were born in the same period, the 6th century BC, a period of great political and social changes. Their origins lay in the teachings of Kongfuzi, “Master Kong”, whom the West knows as Confucius (551-479 BC), and Laozi (6th century BC), the “Old Master”, a legendary figure, considered as the author of the main Daoist foundational texts.

Confucianism as a group of philosophical doctrines engendered a political ethic rather than a religion. Social relations and obligations were central to its teachings, and the underlying principle was that only in society could an individual reach self-fulfillment; life’s ultimate purpose was considered in function of the role and activity of the individual. The family, as the original, spontaneous and natural form of association, was taken as a model for society. Confucianism looked at man working in a definite context, in society and within the family.

Daoism, based on the principle of the unity of the cosmos, taught rather that man belonged to a vaster order of things: the purpose of life was to seek harmony with the forces of nature. Both conceptions influenced gardens in China. The garden, as part of the family dwelling, was a place for social relations, but as a protected and isolated place it was also a space for...
the meditation and contemplation of nature. This double philosophical inspiration was even more apparent in the radical juxtaposition of the conceptions of domestic architecture and of the garden: the former followed a geometric matrix based on symmetry and hierarchical relations among the parts, while the latter remained rather the realm of spontaneity and imagination (I-10). In proposing a connection with the natural world, the garden maintained a complete formal autonomy, which neither had its source in the architecture of the main building nor was subordinate to it, as instead was the case in the Western tradition (I-11). If the domestic structure responded to Confucian principles, the green open space, in its search for a concentrated and allusive natural quality, was rather a response to the dictates of Daoism and Buddhism, the latter being a later cultural and religious import from India, spreading into China from the 1st century AD onwards.

This apparent separation of references did not produce any dichotomy. China had an assimilative attitude to religion: Confucian geometry was joined, through Daoism and Buddhism, to a mystical appreciation of nature as expressed in garden design (I-12). In the heart of Chinese cities, private gardens attached to urban dwellings integrated a *summa* of Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist ethics: they were created by high officials with the purpose of finding moments of calm and contemplative appreciation of nature without distancing themselves from their duties toward their families and the state.

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1: Entrance Hall  
2: Ancestral Hall  
3: Hall of Joyous Feasts  
4: Small Square Hall  
5: Hall Bowing to the Mountains Peaks and Facing the Cypress Trees  
6: Chamber Lying in the Clouds  
7: Tower with View of Mountains  
8: Lotus Flower Hall  
9: Ancient Five Pines Courtyard  
10: Pavilion of True Delight  
11: Hall of Faint Fragrance and Thin Shadwes  
12: Stone Boat  
13: Flying Waterfall Pavilion  
14: Pavilion in the Heart of the Lake  
15: Asking the Plum Trees Tower  
16: Twin Fragrance Celestial House  
17: Fan-shaped Pavilion  
18: Pavilion in Memory of Wen Tansiang  
19: Imperial Stele Pavilion  
20: Tower of Tall Slender Bamboo  
21: Hall of Standing in the Snow

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I-12: Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”, Shanghai. Several pavilions are scattered through the many rock arrangements of the garden.

Origins and Spatial Evolution

The Gardens of the Ancient Dynasties

The most remote precedents of Chinese Gardens were the royal hunting enclosures and animal preserves of the earliest dynasties. The first reports of hunting preserves come from the Xia, Shang (c. 1600-1050 BC) and Zhou (c. 1050-256 BC) kingdoms, partly mythical dynasties having fenced properties featuring watercourses and pools, as well as wild animals and pavilions for court ceremonies. The habit of possession of animal preserves continued in time to be considered an attribute of royalty.

The empire was constituted in 221 BC, when the ruler of the state of Qin, having unified the country, declared himself the sovereign of China with the name Shihuangdi, “First Emperor” (reigned 221-206 BC); he established his capital at Xianyang, northwest of the modern city of Xi’an. It was near Xianyang that the first great park was created: Shanglin, “Supreme Forest”. In addition to using it as a hunting preserve, the emperor had reconstructed fragments of gardens and palaces of the lands he had conquered, and to underscore the symbolic value of the park, he also gathered there animals and plants offered as tribute from vassal states.

The following dynasty, the Han (206 BC-220 AD), built its capital near the site of the capital of the Qin. The new center was called Chang’an (today’s Xi’an); it was a lively cosmopolitan city, commercially influential as the place where what became known as the Silk Road began. The Shanglin park, inherited from the preceding emperor, was expanded and enriched by the sixth emperor of the Han dynasty, who ascended to the throne with the name Wudi (reigned 141-87 BC). There he brought plants and animals from distant lands, and had pavilions and little temples built, as well as a great artificial body of water, named Kunming Lake. Even though it remained mainly a hunting park, Shanglin became a miniature of the empire itself, with wooded heights, watercourses and pools. That was how one of the characteristics of China’s garden culture came to be developed through time: the aesthetic of a collection of landscapes.

In that park, Wudi had an original composition built, destined to be replicated many times in later periods: the Islands of the Immortals. According to legend, the Immortals were semi-divine beings who, thanks to the practice of magic, had managed to acquire eternal life; they were thought to live in richly wooded mountainous islands beyond the coasts of China. The emperor decided to have those places represented in his park, creating three little islands in an artificial pool called Taiye Lake.
During the Han the formation of a new elite of state functionaries - aristocratic scholars appointed to run the civil service after tough examinations based on Confucian classics - and the possibility of private ownership of land, which enabled wealthy families to expand their properties through acquisitions, set the stage for the spread of private gardens. The end of the Han dynasty led to the dissolution of the empire and general political instability under the Six Dynasties (220-589).

In contrast with the political turbulence of the times, or perhaps as a direct reaction to it, paintings of nature, architecture and the art of the garden were pervaded by an aesthetic of detached elegance and simplicity. Created in cities by aristocrats and high officials, private gardens were intended to express the Daoist tendency to evade the complexity of daily life, in a search for harmony with nature and unity with the universe. Instead of vast spaces where emperors exhibited wealth and political power, these gardens were intimate and protected places where it was possible to take temporary refuge from harsh social and political surroundings.

The search for ways to create an idyllic atmosphere for increasingly cultivated patrons led to an accentuation of the gardens’ literary and evocative nature (I-14). Trees, groups of plants, little hills and islands were poetically composed to recall real landscapes. The evocation in gardens of famous Chinese landscapes became a habitual practice, promoting the invention of techniques for realizing artificial heights and bodies of water (I-15).


I-16: Suzhou. The city is crossed by a large number of canals.

I-17: Suzhou. The canal flowing along the southern perimeter of the Ou yuan, “Couple’s Garden Retreat”.
The Gardens of the Sui and the Tang

At the end of the 6th century, the Sui dynasty (581-618) reunited the country. The second emperor of this brief dynasty, Yangdi (ruled 604-617), made the city of Luoyang the eastern capital of the empire and had a huge park created nearby, Xi yuan, “West Garden”. In it a brook wound its way through 16 small gardens before dashing into a great lake marked by three islands graced with pavilions. Other channels of water connected this central lake with smaller pools, and it was only through this dense navigable network that it was possible to reach the main palace, so that water was the protagonist of the garden.

The form of this river-style garden, created by a complex system of serpentine channels connecting its various parts, reflected the significant advances Imperial China had made in hydraulic engineering. The highest expression of this technological process was an impressive territorial achievement of the Sui dynasty: the Grand Canal.

This was not a single channel, but rather a complex system of waterworks connecting rivers, lakes and already existing canals, making a waterway which then was roughly 2,500 km long. From the city of Hangzhou, located south of the Yangtse River delta and famous for its production of silk, tea and salt and surrounded by China’s best land for rice production, the channel went north toward the city of Suzhou; it turned toward the interior then to reach the Yellow River and the capitals Luoyang and Chang’an, thence proceeding northeast toward the area of today’s Beijing. Dug between 605 and 611, the Grand Canal testified to the reunification of the Chinese Empire, of which it became the main communication artery.² (L-16; I-17).

The following era, the Tang dynasty (618-907), was a period of great development and well-being for China, in particular of creativity in the arts and technology: it was at this time that gunpowder was invented. The parks of the Tang emperors imitated some features of the gardens of preceding dynasties, thus legitimizing their rule. Like the parks of the Qin and Han periods, the Tang imperial gardens were huge and contained vast collections of
plants, both native and exotic, fruit of the institutional practice of sending tributes to the imperial court from the provinces of the kingdom, their transport now being facilitated by the Grand Canal (I-18; I-19; I-20).

The central element of garden design continued to be water, as it had been under the Sui dynasty. The grand imperial park Huqing created by the Xuanzong Emperor (reigned 712-756), sixth sovereign of the Tang dynasty, near the imperial city of Chang'an, at the foot of the Lishan hills, was an example. Sources of thermal water in the hills were enclosed within the park’s perimeter, whose design was organized around a series of artificial basins. The late Tang period was marked by a widespread aesthetic interest for rocks taken out of lakes or rivers, or quarried in mountains. Single weather-beaten or particularly shapely rocks, curious in outline or color, were placed on sculpted pedestals, or placed inside pots and situated in the gardens (I-21; I-22). A great number of beautifully formed rocks could be admired in the Pingquan zhuang, “Pingquan Villa”, a suburban garden built south of the city of Luoyang. Created in 825 by Li Deyu (787-850), one of the Tang dynasty’s most important political figures, this garden was a sort of open-air cabinet of curiosities; exotic plants and trees and rocks of unusual and fantastic appearance from various zones of China formed the collection, whose owner had elaborated a proper catalogue for them.
The Gardens of the Song and the Yuan

In the following centuries, under the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), this interest in rocks exploded, and the single rocks earlier praised by connoisseurs were now joined by entire rock compositions, which became a specific design element in Chinese Gardens (I-23). It was the imperial park Genyue, “Northeast Mountain Peak”, which marked the beginning of a new garden style, where stone landscapes dominated. Commissioned by Huizong (reigned 1101-1125), eighth emperor of the Northern Song, Genyue was a vast park created in 1117 and 1118 in the city that had become the capital of the empire, Bianliang (today’s Kaifeng), situated in the eastern part of China, in a plain south of the Yellow River. The park presented as its central scene the evocation of a famous natural landscape, that of the Phoenix Mountain, a height near the city of Hangzhou, in southeastern China.

The creation of the park served as an occasion for exploration of the diverse aesthetic possibilities of rocks, which in their various compositions presented the entire repertory of scenes from an ideal mountain landscape. Rock masses of elaborate shapes were brought together to form hillocks and valleys, steep slopes and little grottos, while a high double-peaked artificial mountain dominated the picture. A waterfall surged out of its side, leaping into a basin placed at the foot of the rocky composition (I-24).

The Huizong Emperor was an energetic collector of rocks, trees and exotic plants, which he exhibited in his imperial park. His collector’s passion had led him to set up a special imperial office in the city of Suzhou, named “Flower and Rock Network”. This was an efficient service in searching out and transporting rare geological and botanical specimens, transported by ship on the Grand Canal to the capital Bianliang, to enrich Genyue’s collections11. During the reign of the Song, the class of scholars emerged as the defining elite of intellectual enlightenment. Literati and high officials were the great creators of gardens in this period, to the degree that the Chinese Garden got its imprint as a scholarly icon.

Poems and writings about gardens composed by scholars and officials flourished under the Song dynasty, bearing witness to the importance gardens were assuming within Chinese society.

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I-23: Liu yuan, “Lingering Garden”, Suzhou. A great single rock from the Lake Tai, the “Cloud-capped Peak” stands 6.5 m high in an open courtyard, overlooking a little pond.


I-26: Canglang ting. The garden features a unique characteristic: one of the pathways runs along an external canal bordering the garden.
One example is the *Luoyang mingyuan ji*, *Record of the Famous Gardens of Luoyang*, written about 1095 by Li Gefei (c. 1041-1106), in which the author, a distinguished classical scholar, described gardens in the city of Luoyang he had personally visited. These were gardens to be discovered slowly; in the Dong Family’s West Garden, for example, “a little path runs to the lake, south of which there is a hall facing a pavilion set high up. Though the hall is not grand it twists and winds far back so that visitors often lose themselves there”12. In other gardens, it was a surprising vista or an unexpected effect which prevailed. In the Dong Family’s East Garden, marked by the presence of a large lake, “water spouts into the lake from all sides, but leaves by concealed exits; so it seems as though there are incessant cascades and yet the lake never overflows”13. In other gardens, the presence of elevated heights made it possible to embrace the landscape beyond; this was the case of the Hu Family Gardens north of the river, where “there is a terrace with views in every direction of more than thirty-five miles within which the Yi River winds and the Luo River meanders; dense forests are obscured by mist and clouds; high towers and winding verandas are one moment hidden, the next apparent; such as a painter after the utmost contemplation could not depict”14.

In his descriptions, Li Gefei includes the vegetation used in the private gardens of the city, and mentions of junipers, pines, bamboos and cypresses recur, evergreen plants, therefore, while the rare but intense spots of color were due to flowering bushes and small trees – paulownias, peaches and plums – and to peonies which, Li Gefei writes, were planted in all of Luoyang’s gardens: “Many flowers are cultivated in Luoyang but only one is just named as ‘the flower’, it is the tree-peony. In every garden peonies are grown”15.

Many private gardens flourished in the prosperous southern regions, as in the city of Suzhou, one of the most populous of the empire. A successful trading place with a lively cultural life, Suzhou was one of the main stops along the Grand Canal, and the city itself was crossed by a network of navigable canals. Here was the *Canglang ting*, “Surging Waves Pavilion”, a garden created in 1045 by the scholar Su Shunqin (1008-1048), after he had retired as an official (I-27). In its original composition, *Canglang ting* presented a very simple design, which played on the contrast between two artificial hills and a reflecting pond (I-25). Its main characteristic, however, was that it had been created alongside one of the canals crossing the city. A pavilion facing the canal made explicit this union between the space of the garden and that of the course of water outside16 (I-26).

I-28: Map of Dadu, modern Beijing, during the Yuan dynasty, with the Taiye Lake, the artificial lake excavated in the western part of the imperial city.

I-29: Beihai Park, Beijing. The artificial lake covering more than half of the entire park is dominated by the artificial hilly island called Qionghua dao, “Jade Islet”.

Evolution and Typology
The Mongols, who conquered China in 1279, were no great garden-builders, but Khubilai Khan (reigned 1260-1294), who founded the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), built Dadu, “The Great Capital”, on the site of what is now Beijing. There he began creating what later became part of the so-called Beihai and Jingshan Parks, by developing further the Taiye Lake, an artificial pool first dug by the Jin rulers (1115-1234), as well as the artificial island elevated on its surface, and by designing an imperial garden in the northern part of the Palace City. These landscaped areas, which at the time were contained in the imperial city, were transformed during the following dynasties and then served to mark respectively the western and northern perimeter of the Forbidden City (I-28).

It was in this period that Europe first learned of the existence of an Asian tradition of garden art. The first Westerner to speak of it was Marco Polo (1254-1323), the Venetian merchant and traveler who reached China during the reign of Khubilai Khan. In his account of that adventurous journey, The Description of the World, he includes several depictions of great gardens. In describing the parks of what is now Beijing, he noted the presence of wild animals and flora, but also the capacity to construct entire natural landscapes out of nothing. This was what had happened in the area next to the imperial palace, where, with the material excavated in enlarging the artificial body of water called Taiye Lake, a hilly island covered by forest was expanded (I-29). He in fact noted “a hill which has been made by art... This hill is entirely covered with trees that never lose their leaves, but remain ever green. And I assure you that wherever a beautiful tree may exist, and the Emperor gets news of it, he sends for it and has it transported bodily with all its roots and the earth attached to them, and planted on that hill of his. No matter how big the tree may be, he gets it carried by his elephants; and in this way he has got together the most beautiful collection of trees in all the world” (I-29).

As described by Marco Polo, the imperial gardens of Khubilai Khan had archaic qualities, in their resemblance to the ancient hunting preserves, and also in the name kept for the artificial lake: Taiye Lake was in fact the most famous reflecting pool created by the Han emperors.
The Gardens of the Ming

The Mongol dynasty of the Yuan was violently replaced by the Chinese Ming dynasty (1368-1644), who governed in a period of a strong nationalistic spirit. Once they had defeated them, the Ming tried to erase all traces of the Mongols on Chinese soil. When the third Ming emperor, Yongle (reigned 1403-1424), transferred the capital definitively from Nanjing to Beijing, the urban and garden works of Kubilai Kahn were largely destroyed, except for the great lake excavated in the western part of the imperial city: and even this was entirely transformed. It was expanded on the south side and divided into three oblong lakes called the Three Seas. Three artificial islands completed the composition, evoking, according to tradition, the mythical dwellings of the Immortals lost in the oceans. Gardens and pavilions were distributed along the shores of the three lakes and the complex, which embraced the western part of the imperial palaces, took the name Xi yuan, “West Garden”.

The Ming period was marked by a strong centralization of power in the figure of the emperor and by a progressive closure of the empire to outside influences as a way of protecting China from invaders. Political centralization also found expression in urban construction. The work carried out in the area of the Three Seas was only part of an impressive plan to transform Beijing into a great imperial capital (I-30). Using part of the foundations of the Beijing of the Yuan, the Ming built new city walls, palaces, temples and gardens. The design of the new capital followed the classical urban structure of Chinese cities, with its rectangular plan oriented according to the cardinal directions and enclosed within high walls. At the center of the walled rectangle rose the Forbidden City, a city within the city, containing the complex of imperial palaces made up of a progression of great courtyards and buildings set along a central south-north axis.

I-30: Map of Beijing during the Qing dynasty, with the Three Seas named Beihai, “Northern Sea”, Zhonghai, “Middle Sea”, and Nansha, “Southern Sea”.

I-31: Forbidden City, Beijing. The “Golden Water Stream”, the artificial channel that meanders through the Forbidden City, is supplied by the moat.

I-32: Forbidden City. With its marble balustrades the “Golden Water Stream” flows through the first paved court between the Meridian Gate and the Gate of Supreme Harmony assuming a bow shape, overpassed by five parallel marble bridges.

I-33: Forbidden City. Four watchtowers are built in correspondence of the corners of the wall, encircled by the moat, encompassing the Forbidden City. A branch canal from the Beihai supplies the moat.

I-34: Beijing. The artificial hill built to the immediate north of the Forbidden City, nowadays a public park called Jingshan Park, is characterized by five peaks, each of which features a pavilion.
The Forbidden City in turn was enclosed within walls surrounded by a wide moat, from which a channel flowed crossing the interior of the complex (I-33). In correspondence with the first court of the Forbidden City, the twisting course of this stream formed a wide arch and was crossed by five richly decorated marble bridges (I-31; I-32). The soil excavated for the moat was used to build an artificial hill, the Jingshan, “Coal Hill”, that marked the northern perimeter of the Forbidden City19. That was the completion of the sequence of natural elements, placed according to the principles of geomancy, which surrounded the Forbidden City: the curve of the stream to the south, the Three Seas to the west, and the hill to the north (I-34).

While the Ming sovereigns were not great builders of new parks, private gardens flourished in all the main cities during their rule; and it was not only the intellectuals and officials who built them. In the second half of the 16th century, China experienced a strong economic expansion, concentrated in its initial phases in the already flourishing region south of the Yangtse River called Jiangnan. It was in this area, and particularly in the cities of Suzhou and Hangzhou, that rich merchants began to make gardens to beautify their urban residences. That favorable situation saw the emergence of the figure of the garden designer, a man at the service of private patrons who, by now, were quite varied. It was in this period, perhaps partly because of the unprecedented creation of private gardens, that the first theoretical work on Chinese garden art appeared. It was a compendium of compositional principles and of planning techniques, published with the title Yuanye, The Craft of Gardens. This practical three-volume manual, dated 1634, was the work of Ji Cheng (1582-?), a master designer of the age, who suggested diverse general solutions to garden plans in relation to their sites, proposing a big repertory of elements to use in composing the garden’s various parts20.
The Gardens of the Qing

The last imperial dynasty, the Qing (1644-1911), came from Manchuria. Because of this foreign origin, it went to great lengths to be accepted by the Chinese people, and did not hesitate to follow the taste in design developed under the preceding dynasty. The new parks it created were impressive, as were the private gardens, and the Quing dynasty showed great vivacity in keeping the tradition alive until at least the end of the 18th century.

In this period, garden design developed differently in the north and the south. The cold dry climate of the north, and the limited range of building materials, gave birth to a solid and sober style, especially in Beijing and the surrounding area. The southern gardens, especially in the cities near the Yangtse River - Suzhou, Hangzhou, Yangzhou - were more graceful, open and luminous. The reason can be found in the milder and more humid climate, which enabled luxuriant vegetation and flowering periods that were significantly longer than those of the north. But the differences also concerned the structures in the gardens: southern gardens boasted pavilions with roofs which show a more sweeping curvature rising at the corner of the roof than those in the gardens of the north (I-35; I-36); walls and facades facing the green spaces were pierced by many more doors and windows, in an effort to bring the residential pavilions’ indoors and the garden into close relation with each other21 (I-37).

If private gardens had more modest dimensions than those of the Ming period, because the cities’ population was more dense and their area was limited, they were created with compositional techniques that enabled a great variety of visual effects even within limited space. The secret for achieving rich diversity was a series of means to deal with the garden’s visual segmentation by offering a sequence of different views.

An admirable example of an articulated composition in a relatively small area is the Ou yuan, “Couple’s Garden Retreat”, in the city of Suzhou (I-38). It occupies 8000 m², and was created in the early Qing period and enlarged in 1874. The garden is divided into two main parts, East and West Garden, separated by the residential quarter. A rockery made of lake stones
I-35: Yihe yuan, “Garden of the Preservation of Harmony”, Beijing. Tiled roofs with slightly curved overhanging eaves are characteristic of pavilions in the gardens of northern China.

I-36: Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”, Shanghai. Pavilions in the gardens of the southern regions feature roof forms with soaring edges.

I-37: Canglang ting, “Surging Waves Pavilion”, Suzhou. The many openings, screens and lattice-works framing the walls of the garden pavilions establish a sense of continuity between indoors and outdoors.

characterizes the West Garden, while the East Garden is articulated around an elongated pond, dominated by an artificial yellow granite mountain. The pond is crossed by a zigzag bridge and bordered by rocks and pavilions (I-39: I-40).

In the course of the 18th century, the urban gardens of Suzhou, as well as the natural landscapes near the lower Yangtze River, served as inspiration for the design of the big imperial parks. Through the evocation, and sometimes the deliberate replica, of certain famous places of southern China, the Qing sovereigns tried to recreate the atmosphere of the south in their suburban parks near Beijing\textsuperscript{22}.

It was during the reign of three consecutive emperors of this dynasty, Kangxi (reigned 1662-1722), Yongzheng (reigned 1723-1735) and Qianlong (reigned 1736-1795), that the art of the garden in China knew its richest era. The emperors distinguished themselves in commissioning parks, and their summer residences near the capital became the privileged realm of experimental compositions (I-41).

The residence of \textit{Bishu shanzhuang}, “Mountain Hamlet to Escape the Summer Heat”, was built in a mountainous area northeast of Beijing, near the city of Chengde (I-42). The park was begun in 1703, during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor, and its construction lasted for nearly the whole century. The site was a valley with many wooded undulations. In its southern part, the valley opened into a flat area where the imperial palaces were built. On a reduced scale, these were modeled on the Forbidden City, with a sequence of courts. Behind the more private area, toward the north, a great natural-looking lake was excavated, its surface punctuated by numerous islands linked by bridges. Pavilions, temples and other structures of varying functions were sprinkled around the lake and on the heights enclosing the park (I-43).

A few years later, in 1709, on a plain rich with water sources northwest of the walls of Beijing, construction began of what would become the \textit{Yuanming yuan}, “Garden of Perfect Brightness”. This vast property covered about 300 ha; it underwent continual expansion during the century, and was later destroyed in 1860 in the course of a military campaign conducted by Anglo-French troops, linked to the request for greater trading privileges. It was composed

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image1.jpg}
\caption{Bishu shanzhuang, “Mountain Hamlet to Escape the Summer Heat”, Chengde. Plan of the park.}
\end{figure}
of three distinct gardens, independent from each other but connected: Changchun yuan, “Garden of Everlasting Spring”, Qichun yuan, “Garden of Ten Thousand Springs”, and Yuanming yuan. This last one was the biggest and gave its name to the whole complex (I-44). While the Bishu shanzhuang was dominated by mountainous heights, the diverse parts of the Yuanming yuan were linked by a water network. The three gardens, visually separated by artificial hills, were organized around lakes of varying dimensions, connected by canals of serpentine shape. The whole complex included hills, valleys, rock formations and it contained a number of palaces, pavilions and small gardens inserted in larger green spaces, making for ever-changing scenic spots. Because of its vast dimension, compositional complexity, and function in representing imperial dignity, the European Jesuits who visited Yuanming yuan in the 18th century did not hesitate to call it the “Versailles of China”, experiencing it as comparable only to that noblest and most impressive park ensemble in Europe23.
The Qianlong Emperor was a true collector of landscapes; in 1771 he ordered from Suzhou a model of a garden from that city, called *Shizilin*, “Lion Grove”, celebrated for rock compositions that made it resemble a petrified forest. On the basis of that model, he had two replicas created: one within the garden of *Changchun yuan* and the other in the summer residence of Chengde. Yet the practice of constructing scenes which evoke famous natural or man-made landscapes, within the perimeter of parks and gardens would reach far greater results. This happened in a third summer residence of the Qing period, the *Qingyi yuan*, “Garden of Clear Ripples”, in which the whole general composition was inspired by the natural landscape of the *Xihu*, “West Lake”, a big lake surrounded by high hills on three sides west of the city of Hangzhou. Built between 1750 and 1764 west of the *Yuanming yuan*, this later imperial park was twice damaged by Western troops. On both occasions it was rebuilt by the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) and it was after the first reconstruction that it took its present name: *Yihe yuan*, “Garden of the Preservation of Harmony”.

The design of the 300-ha park is centered on the harmonious composition of an elevated crest and a great lake, both artificial. The hill, named *Wanshou shan*, “Longevity Hill”, occupies the northern part of the site; covered by thick woods, it is graced by temples, pavilions and gardens spread over the hill’s irregular slopes, connected by winding paths. At the foot of the hill, the big lake opens toward the south, inspired by the West Lake of Hangzhou. This body of water, which following the imperial tradition bears as well the name Kunming Lake, is the principal element of the composition, occupying three quarters of the surface of the park. A perfectly circular artificial island, connected to the shore by a long marble bridge, was created in the southern part of the lake. In its northwestern part, the Kunming Lake narrows into a channel and it is along this watercourse that another famous place is evoked, neither a garden nor a natural landscape but a piece of a city: the canals of Suzhou and the intense commercial activity conducted along their quays. This is Suzhou Street, with its rows of low buildings which once housed shops facing the canals. When the Qianlong Emperor had them built, they made up a living microcosm imitating an urban trading quarter, an occasion of amusement for the imperial court.
The two reconstructions of the park of Yihe yuan commissioned by the Empress Dowager Cixi represent the last green bulwark of imperial power in a period of great political turmoil. It seems that in order to pay for the first reconstruction, which was executed in 1888, Cixi used funds allocated for the expansion of the fleet; the empress saw the reconstruction of the park as a more effective signal for affirming the imperial supremacy than an improvement of the navy could have been. And the second reconstruction, stubbornly carried out in 1903, was intended by the empress dowager as a powerful symbolic act, an extreme attempt to demonstrate the imperial family’s capacity to face internal chaos and foreign challenges, while casting a veil on the dynasty’s decline (1-50). The imperial gardens over time had become the persistent emblem of the Chinese empire itself, and the reconstruction of Yihe yuan, epic or pathetic as one may perceive it, offers a paradigmatic example of an archaic world’s resistance to the forced and violent modernization to which the country was to be submitted in the 20th century.

When the Republic of China was established in 1912, the last Qing emperor, Puyi, titled the Xuantong Emperor (1906-1967; reigned 1909-1911), was deposed and confined to the northern part of the Forbidden City. That at least guaranteed the survival of the imperial gardens within the perimeter of the complex26 and also of the summer residence of Yihe yuan, which until 1924 remained the main scene of the life of Puyi and his court. Meanwhile, the President of the new Republic settled down in the area of the Three Seas, west of the Forbidden City, where his residence and government offices were placed in the southern part of the park; from that moment, these areas were separated from the northernmost lake, Beihai, which together with the surrounding green area subsequently became a public park (1-51). Other imperial parks were transformed into public parks. This happened in Beijing with the Altar of Land and Grain, a sacred space where the emperors had offered sacrifices to the divinities of the earth and of agriculture, located southwest of the Forbidden City. In 1914 this space became a public park with the name “Central Park” (now Zhongshan Park); the name itself, adopted from New York’s park, showed that modernization was inherent to its transformation.
Many gardens belonging to the imperial family, also some green spaces connected to temples or in private use, fell progressively into a state of abandonment in the long period of disorder – the internal strife among warlords, civil war, and the Japanese invasion – which shook China in the first half of the 20th century. After the establishment in 1949 of the People’s Republic of China under Mao Zedong, the few newly created parks and gardens had a mainly utilitarian character and were rigid and monumental in design. No longer considered as a cultural patrimony, some historical gardens were destroyed between 1966 and 1976 during the Cultural Revolution; some were saved only because they were occupied by government offices or by important members of the Communist Party. It was only around the 1980s that the historical tradition of the gardens began to be appreciated and studied, and was recognized as a powerful contribution to the Chinese cultural identity. A symbol of this renewed interest is the small garden around the Hong Kong headquarters of the Bank of China, designed starting from 1982 by the New York-based Sino-American architect I. M. Pei (I-53). The bank’s steel and glass tower is complemented by a garden of rocks and water which, integrating the geometry of triangular lines that shapes the profile of the jagged tower, reinterprets the traditional stylistic elements in entirely new forms (I-54; I-55).

When on August 8, 2008, the opening ceremony for the Olympics took place in Beijing, the stadium built for the occasion by Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, with the participation of Chinese artist and architect Ai Weiwei, was transformed into a global stage for Chinese history and culture. The succession of choreographic scenes recounting the salient events in China’s long history had a precise meaning: it demonstrated how China had decided to reaffirm its own identity in the global context, with the weight of its extraordinary history and the permanence of its cultural heredity. Outside the stadium, the Olympic Green (2003-2008) underlines the principle of continuity between past and present in the name of a Chinese tradition stirred into the global cauldron (I-56). The Olympic Green, designed on the basis of a masterplan first developed by Sasaki Associates, consists of the Olympic Central Area, the new urban park alongside the Olympic...
venues, and the Olympic Forest Park; the latter, designed by a team led by landscape architect Hu Jie, closes the Olympic area to the north (I-57). The very position of the two parks in the urban structure of Beijing expresses a wish to connect to the past: the Olympic Central Area, a park of linear form, constitutes the prolongation northward of the central axis of the Forbidden City (I-58). Thus it extends the spine along which the imperial capital has been organized since the era of the Yuan, connecting the past glories of China in the Forbidden City with the ones hoped for for the future, represented by the Olympic site (I-59). The Olympic Forest Park, with its artificial hills, concludes this axis northward in a design gesture so often used in Chinese parks, that of using heights and vegetation to protect them against the north, considered inauspicious in geomancy (I-59).

Within the two parks as well, the Chinese garden tradition has been fully exploited. The Olympic Green is organized around a winding stream which falls northward into a lake at the center of the Olympic Forest Park, whose jagged edge evokes the head of a dragon (I-60). Behind the lake there is an artificial hill, whose rocky slopes echo the imperial parks of the Qing dynasty. In a semantic operation almost cartoon-like in its immediacy, the strong and long-shared metaphor of imperial China, the dragon, takes its place at the heart of the composition to evoke the link with the past, while water, rocks, artificial hills and rice paddies interpret the landscape tradition in new compositional forms, continuing that infinite investigation into the meaning and essence of naturalness which first engendered the Chinese Garden (I-61).
I-62: Shanghai Houtan Park. Completed in 2010, the park is organized around a constructed wetland, designed to create a new ecological water treatment and flood control system.

I-63: Shanghai Houtan Park. Reclaimed industrial materials, forming small structures offering shade and shelter, are inserted in the matrix of an ecologically regenerated landscape.

I-64: Shanghai Houtan Park. Structures conveying memories of the industrial past have remained on site and have been transformed to accommodate new functions, like the Hanging Garden.
Functions and Use

In recent years, China has created many completely new public parks. The largest of these were designed on the occasion of grand events which provoked the reconfiguration of entire urban areas and were intended to represent contemporary China to the world: this is the case of the Olympic Green in Beijing made for the 2008 Olympics, or of the Shanghai Houtan Park in Shanghai (2007-2010), created since 2007 as part of the Expo 2010 by landscape architect Kongjian Yu, founder of the Beijing-based firm Turenscape (I-62). This latter park features walking paths through rich and diverse flora, open spaces for leisure and socializing, more intimate and isolated areas for tranquil recreation and solitary repose. But this functional design, aimed at enhancing the visitor’s well-being, is integrated with compositional features soliciting memory and imagination. The park stretches on a former industrial area once occupied by a steel factory and a shipyard along the Huangpu River. The recovery of this degraded space was through a regenerative design strategy, with transformation of the site into a living system that offers comprehensive ecological services, like food production and water treatment (I-63).

This park is thus a wetland that can be traversed by the public, with integration of fragments of the agricultural landscape that once existed alongside the river as well as of its industrial past, all in a context denoting the future of our post-industrial eco-civilization. With its educational purpose, its aesthetic form, the park intends to present a synthesis of the cultural and natural memory of the place (I-64).

Integrating thus recreational and representational functions with visual and intellectual stimuli, mixing spaces for physical activity and for appreciating nature with reminiscences of the terrain’s past, China’s new public parks offer a compendium of uses that Chinese Gardens have fulfilled historically.

The representational function appeared as central from the origins onwards, since the first parks we have knowledge of, those of rulers of the earliest dynasties, were essentially vast properties with woods and lakes, fenced in mainly for hunting purposes, but also for conducting the propitiatory rites reserved as part of the imperial function, linked to agricultural practices.

With consolidation of centralized power, the imperial parks’ value in representing that power increased: they became the scene of court rituals and of state affairs. Paintings commissioned by the sovereigns and replicated in multiple series, as well as poems sometimes written by the emperors themselves, made known the grandiose forms of these sophisticated green architectures and underlined their celebratory role. These were the places where ambassadors and foreign delegations were received. In 1793, the English diplomatic mission led by Lord Macartney was received successively at Chengde, in the residence of Bishu shanzhuang, and in the residence of Yuanming yuan. The Empress Dowager Cixi invited the wives of the Western ambassadors in Beijing to her summer residence of Yihe yuan.

Replicating on a small scale the role of imperial gardens, private gardens as well were understood as spaces for refined exhibition of the economic status and social level reached by the owner, where friends could be entertained informally while banquets, feasts and musical events could be held as well. This was particularly evident after the 16th century, as purely aesthetic interest in the forms of gardens and social activities in gardens increased. The gardens of the literati and high state officials in the Ming period became more and more theaters of cultivated competition in matters of taste; spaces for entertaining acquaintances and building social relations. Entertaining and leisure activities were not lacking also in imperial gardens, which served for the amusement of the court, and they were the scene of parties and games. Sports were not lacking either; while cuju, the Chinese soccer reserved to nobles, was practiced from the Han period, the Tang dynasty saw the rise of jiju or polo, perhaps imported from India.
The habit of opening private gardens to visitors is ancient; in the Song period, the peony gardens of Luoyang and like other private aristocratic gardens were open to the public at least for certain periods, as were other urban gardens. In the Ming period some imperial gardens and the gardens of the hereditary imperial aristocracy were opened to visitors as well. But Chinese Gardens were also appreciated as private retreats, as they offered a place for solitary meditation. The private gardens often created by high officials who had retired from public life were spaces of a more reserved character, destined above all to contemplation and study. Historical descriptions tended to consider these gardens, often located within cities, as a sort of refuge, at least momentarily isolating their owners from worldly concerns, enabling them to find anew the equanimity to face life beyond the garden’s walls.

Private gardens were, at least in part and in certain periods, productive resources. The cultivated withdrawal from public life, the Confucian ideal of auto-sufficiency and the search for ancient simplicity did not exclude the possibility that aesthetic enjoyment might be accompanied by economic return on agronomical production. Many green spaces helped enrich the table and improve the financial situation of their owners, and in some cases acquired a mainly utilitarian character. In the Song period, the city of Luoyang was famous for the production of ornamental plants and above all of peonies, which were cultivated in special gardens by horticulturalists and sold all over China. The official Sima Guang (1019-1086) preferred in his Dule yuan, “Garden of Solitary Enjoyment”, located in the ancient capital of Luoyang, medicinal plants to ornamental ones: their sale also was a source of income, since they played a fundamental role in Chinese pharmaceuticals. The garden thus constituted a sort of autarkic landscape: it offered its owner quiet and prestige; it also produced products useful in daily life of the household; then too it guaranteed an income, because those same products were sold in city markets. The presence of utilitarian cultivation in the garden was recorded in the Ming period as well. The Zhuozheng yuan, “Garden of the Humble Administrator”, was created in Suzhou in the first decades of the 16th century and often altered since. The original composition of his garden, long since lost, included a substantial number of useful plants including fruit trees, cypresses and junipers, as well as medicinal herbs, and in the garden’s reflecting pools fish were raised. After the 16th century, that productive function diminished.

A renewal of the idea of the garden as a productive site can be recognized in some contemporary landscape architecture projects. Inspired by Chinese agricultural landscape, its fields and plantings, they rediscover the aesthetic quality of horticulture.
1: Cibot writes: “The great art of these gardens is to copy nature in all her simplicity, to avoid her disorder, and to hide under the veil of her irregularity.” Pierre-Maritail Cibot, “Essai sur les Jardins de plaisance des Chinois”, in Mémoires concernant l’histoire, les sciences, les arts, les mœurs, les usages, & c., des Chinois: par les Missionnaires de Pékino, vol. VIII (Paris: Nyon, 1782), 318. Translation by the author.


5: These were the words used by Chen Congzhou, a great Chinese expert in the field, to characterize Chinese Gardens, as recorded in Hui Zhou, “The jing of a perspective garden”, Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes 22, 4 (2002): 326, note 139.


10: The dynasty of the Song is divided chronologically into two periods: the Northern Song, with its capital at Bianliang, and the Southern Song (1127-1279) with its capital at Lin'an (present-day Hangzhou). Following the Jurchen invasion of the central-northern regions of China and the seizure of Bianliang in 1127, the court took refuge in the south of the country, thus beginning the Southern Song dynasty. The Jurchen established the Jin dynasty in the north of the country and were defeated in 1234 by the Mongols. See Kchay, China, 327-50.


13: Quoted in ibid., 42.

14: Quoted in ibid., 47.


17: On Dadu, capital city of the Yuan dynasty, see Nancy S. Steinhardt, Chinese Imperial City Planning (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 154-60. For an historical excursus on the evolution of Beijing from the origin to recent years see Claudio Greco and Carlo Santoro, Beijing. The new city (Milano: Skira, 2008). See also Peter G. Rowe, East Asia Modern. Shaping the contemporary city (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).


19: For a discussion of Beijing in the Ming and Qing periods, see Steinhardt, Chinese Imperial City Planning, 169-78. On the construction of the Forbidden City and its changes in the Ming and Qing periods see Frances Wood, "Imperial Architecture of the Qing: Palaces and Retreats", in China. The Three Emperors, 1662-1795, ed. Evelyn S. Rawski and Jessica Rawson (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), 54-60.

20: Ji Cheng’s manual filled three volumes. The first contains general principles: evaluation of the site, general composition and garden architectures; the second deal with balustrades; the third volume is dedicated to doors and windows, pavements as well as rocks and hills, and includes a study on how to create artificial mountains, as well as on the choice of stones for gardens, with indications of where to find them. The last chapter of the third volume focuses on how to choose the various stones and their sequence inside the garden. For Ji Cheng and Yuanyue see the bibliography.


25: A similar but much bigger quarter, almost a miniature city, must have existed also within the imperial park of Yuanming yuan. The French Jesuit Jean-Denis Attiret offered a description in a famous letter sent from Beijing in 1743. The miniature city in the Yuanming yuan was a lively animated place set up by eunuchs for the emperor and his court, where games and spectacles were staged in an urban setting of festive confusion. See Attiret, “Lettere”, 22-29.

26: The Yuhua yuan, the imperial garden north of the imperial palaces, and the Qianlong garden in the complex of the Ningshou gong, “Palace of Tranquil Longevity”, are in the northeastern quadrant of the Forbidden City, built in 1689 and enlarged by the Qianlong Emperor from 1771 onwards; this is where he withdrew after his abdication in 1795.

27: The work by the pioneering Chinese architectural historian Liu Dunzhen, Suzhou guidian yuanlin [Classical Gardens of Suzhou], considered of primary importance for the theoretical research about the traditional garden in China, was published in 1979.

28: In 2002 the US-American interdisciplinary design and planning firm Sasaki Associates Inc. won the commission for the masterplan for the Olympic Green through an invited international design competition. The masterplan (2003) was further developed in collaboration with the Beijing Tsinghua Urban Planning and Design Institute, Tsinghua University (Beijing). From 2004 to 2005 a large Dem&Ren & Research Institute Hu Jie, director of the Planning and Design Branch of Landscape Architecture, Beijing Tsinghua Urban Planning and Design Institute, Tsinghua University (Beijing), finished the implementation of the Olympic Forest Park. The project, completed in 2008, was in collaboration with: China Research Center of Landscape Architecture Design and Planning (Beijing), Top Sense Landscape Design Co. Ltd. (Beijing), Beijing Beilin Landscape Architecture Institute Co. Ltd., Beijing Institute of Landscape and Traditional Architecture Design and Research, Beijing Zhongyuan Engineering Design & Consulting Co. and China Urban Construction Design & Research Institute (Beijing). The Olympic Central Area was designed by a team comprising the following companies and institutions: Beijing Institute of Architectural Design, Beijing General Municipal Engineering Design & Research Co. Ltd. (Beijing), Beijing University of Water, Beijing Urban Engineering Design & Research Institute Co. Ltd.


33: Clunus, Fruitful Sites, 22-59.
Chapter 2

Composition and Effects
The rapid urbanization and remarkable economic development China has undergone in recent decades has had a devastating impact on the country’s cultural and natural heritage. In the past few years, regional and local authorities have become more conscious of their extensive environmental problems. They have consequently reconsidered development strategies and have accepted, at least partially, the contribution of landscape architecture as a tool for minimizing environmental degradation and restoring dilapidated sites.

Emblematic of this trend are two projects by Turenscape: the Zhongshan Shipyards Park (2000-2002), built in the city of Zhongshan in Guangdong Province (II-3), and the Yongning River Park (2002-2004), an urban waterfront park along the Yongning River in the coastal city of Taizhou, south of Shanghai.

Both projects aim at reclaiming polluted and abandoned industrial sites. Their way of recovering the sites for collective use is to create a visual narrative able to convey memories of the past use of the place, while establishing its new destiny as a public space (II-1). The visual narrative takes the form of paths leading visitors to a series of areas, each of a different character, whose access is marked by real gates opening through screens often brightly colored so as not to pass unnoticed.

Spatial Articulation

The strategy of spatial articulation employed in these recent examples evokes a compositional technique specific to Chinese Gardens: the construction of a narrative through episodes, through scenic views juxtaposed so as to draw the visitor into a visual experience (II-2). The impact of this strategy on garden art can be appreciated from a long letter written from Beijing on Nov. 1, 1743, by the French Jesuit Jean-Denis Attiret (1702-1768), in which he sketched a description of the imperial garden of Yuanming yuan, situated near the capital city. That letter was to contribute enormously to the fortunes of the Chinese Garden in Europe, even though the writer explained in his first lines the difficulty of the
task he had set himself, “since nothing here has a relation with our way of building and with our architecture... Only the eye can grasp the true conception”. At the time of the letter, Europe’s garden tradition was still firmly bound to geometrical spatial organization, regulated by an orderly hierarchy of perspective views beginning from the central axis of the park. But in the garden described by Attiret, there was no grand line dominating the perceptions of the garden; the park seemed rather a sequence of disparate spaces and scenes. Its spatial construction was therefore difficult to describe for a cultivated Western observer, as it strongly appealed to the eye. In the absence of perspective scenes constructed from specific vanishing points, the vision of a Chinese Garden melts into a succession of emotional moments engendered by aesthetic seduction and a sense of discovery: elevations, screens, pavilions and paths twisting in a seemingly casual way, complicate and distort the perception of space, concealing its extension and the concatenation of its parts, fracturing the overall design into a series of different scenes (II-4).

The result is a labyrinthine composition which has not only an aesthetic aim, but also the goal of heightening the observer’s attention to the space he is about to cross, encouraging him to forget the external context (II-5). It was no coincidence that some of the pavilions destined for more challenging intellectual activities, like study or writing, can be reached only after having traversed rocky and meandering walkways (II-6).

The space of the Chinese Garden is a mental space, originating in a compositional mechanism. Moving along the winding walks, the visitor feels increasingly immersed in the composition and forgetful of what lies outside the garden’s perimeter (II-7).

This original method of composition is inspired by two traditions. On the one hand, Chinese Gardens reflect the principles of fengshui (ensemble of the rules of geomancy) which dictate the general practical rules for the position of volumes and voids and the conformation of paths. On the other hand, the gardens respond to the taste for a collection of microlandscapes, a composition organized in episodes, with strong similarities to the patterns of landscape paintings.
These two sources of inspiration merged in the course of time and together gave birth to gardens of a distinctive character, so that it is difficult to determine precisely what motives generated a particular spatial arrangement. For walkways, as an example, *fengshui* rejects linear paths as unlucky, favoring those that zigzag in such a way as to block negative influxes (II-8); but this prescription, unchangingly acknowledged in garden design, is also influential in articulating the overall garden space as a sequence of scenes hidden from each other (II-9).
Fengshui

In the Chinese Garden the general principles of garden design, such as what is the garden’s correct position in relation to the buildings, are strongly influenced by the practice of geomancy, a group of concepts which originated in ancient China to explain natural phenomena and even existence itself. This has been known in more recent centuries as fengshui, “wind and water”. Geomancy is an amalgam of mystical philosophy, superstition, common sense and aesthetic ideas, inspired by the principle that a harmonious environment favors not only a serene life, but a fortunate one. It is based on the conviction that the environment is permeated by a vital energy, a cosmic breath called qi, a dynamic positive or negative life force which moves through the earth following the features of the environment: the conformation of valleys, rivers, mountains, the slope of the land, vegetation, soil quality and its interaction with man-made structures.

The currents of auspicious qi, which flow as directed by natural morphology, are considered capable of influencing the fortunes of individuals, and therefore, it is necessary to find the correct location and orientation for all of their earthly places, for life and beyond. Whether it is a city, a house or a tomb, all human structures must be situated in harmony with the earth’s breathing, taking advantage of the beneficial influences and avoiding the negative ones called sha, which have their origin in an incorrect flow of qi³.

Every transformation of the landscape, every man-made construction, influences the flow of qi, and consequently a series of rules were developed, still obeyed today, to guide construction activity, be it building or landscape construction.

The basic rule is that buildings must be oriented toward the south, but their positioning in relation to topography is also of vital importance: sites considered particularly fortunate are those in flat areas, open to the south but protected from the unfortunate winds of the north by hills and mountains, and surrounded by low elevations on the other sides. The terrain must be dry, but crossed by a winding stream flowing preferably from northwest toward southeast³.

In former times, the choice of a site and the planning of a city, as that of a garden or park, were guided by the principles of fengshui. Before construction began, a geomancer was consulted. He checked the site and its water resources, which symbolized well-being and good fortune, and then indicated the correct orientation. In the case of gardens, he defined the position of the green space in relation to the main buildings and the placement of its different elements⁴.

In the case that the chosen site, even though considered propitious, did not fully offer the desired characteristics, it was an option to intervene and significantly alter the conformation of the place. Thus, according to the topographical principles, a wooded hill called Jingshan, now the central element of Beijing’s Jingshan Park, the imperial park opposite the north gate of the Forbidden City, was artificially created to protect the imperial palaces and the Forbidden City against evil influences coming from the north. Likewise, the designers of the recent Olympic Forest Park in Beijing created Yangshan Mountain, which protects the southern side of the park and, by extension, the whole metropolis (II-10)⁵.

In the creation of the imperial park of Yuanming yuan, it was the natural water system which underwent the heavy modifications dictated by a geomancer. The springs in the southwestern part of the garden were deviated and moved northwest, so that the water flowed into the imperial park from the north and flowed out to the southeast, in conformity with geomantic principles⁶.

II-8: Wangshi yuan, “Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets”, Suzhou. A stone bridge designed according to fengshui principles twists over water.

II-9: Zhuozheng yuan, “Garden of the Humble Administrator”, Suzhou. Leaving the main path, a zigzagging bridge leads to an island-pavilion.

II-10: The Forbidden City and the Olympic Forest Park are placed along the same ideal south-north axis. Following the fengshui principles, both complexes have been protected by an artificial hill on the northern quadrant.
II-11: Shizi lin, "Lion Grove", Suzhou. The water system has its outlet in a smaller pool located in the southeastern quadrant.

II-12: Shizi lin. The waterfall situated in the northwestern quadrant supplies the garden’s water system.


II-14: Shizi lin. The reflecting pool around which the garden is organized. According to fengshui, water was considered accumulating beneficial energies.

II-15: Bank of China, Hong Kong. In front of the main entry into the lobby of the Bank of China Tower the garden design features a goldfish pond.

II-16: Bank of China. The rock-and-water garden embracing the tower was designed according to fengshui principles.
On another scale, the garden was an important annex to a residence, because thanks to its components water, rocks, hills and trees, it was able to correct any defects of the site and improve its potential. When deemed necessary, the planner introduced artificial earth and rock hillocks or wooded groves to screen the unlucky quadrants; he then indicated the most appropriate arrangement of the waters that were to flow slowly through the garden. This procedure was followed in the Shizi lin, “Lion Forest”, a garden originally created in the first half of the 14th century in Suzhou, where a waterfall located in the northwestern quadrant feeds a series of pools which ring the entire green space and then find their outlet southeast (II-11; II-12).

Since it was believed that inauspicious influences, sha, ran in a straight direction, twisting paths imitating the lines of the natural landscape were preferred. When it was not possible to avoid creating areas whose position entailed the flow of unfavorable influences, their defects were mitigated by a series of devices. The sha could in fact be blocked or deviated by walls, groups of rocks or trees arranged in an irregular manner (II-13). And the planners were able to contribute to that the positive flows, once they were collected, would not be dispersed: thus the gardens always had perimeter walls and presented internal divisions as well - walls pierced by narrow doorways - whose task was to conserve the positive vital spirits generated by the passage of the qi. Similarly, pools of water were considered points where the qi’s beneficial energies accumulated, and this was one of the reasons why they were given a central position in the garden (II-14).

The rules of geomancy continue to guide the orientation of large building complexes and the composition of many green open spaces. When I. M. Pei designed the Bank of China Tower, it was decided that despite the modest size of the lot, good business would be propagated if three of its sides were occupied by a water garden opening into a basin with gold carps on the southern side of the building, in front of the main entry into the lobby (II-15). The garden design is entirely modern despite its inspiration by the ancient practice of geomancy (II-16). On a bigger scale, an emblematic contemporary example is the new Botanical Garden of Chenshan near Shanghai, designed by a group led by the German landscape architects Donata and Christoph Valentien7, in 2010 (II-17). The garden is enclosed by a crown of low artificial tree-covered elevations, and has in its southern part a winding lake, while a big hill marks the northern part. It thus reflects the principles of perimeter walls, northward protection and the presence of a pool of water; moreover it features a stream flowing through it out to the south. And it goes without saying that the entry to the botanical garden is on the southern side.
II-17: Shanghai Botanical Garden, Chenshan, Masterplan. The complex, built 2005-2010, is enclosed by a ring of elevations.

II-18: Shen Zhou (1427-1509), Traveling in Xishan Mountains. Handscroll, Ming dynasty.
Painting and Poetry

While adherence to the principles of fengshui guides the general distribution of the primary elements of the Chinese Garden, its narrative quality as visual account construed by a sequence of views of beautiful scenery is equally influenced by painting and poetry, in a sort of symbiotic development. The convergence is due to the fact that the Chinese meritocracy, through which the high state officials were chosen according to Confucian principles, required that its members study painting, poetry and calligraphy. These arts combined to affect the characteristics of gardens, whose owners for the most part belonged to a class of scholar-officials, the versatile aristocracy of state.

By the late Tang dynasty, in the mid-9th century, a period of political turmoil for China, the stylistic principles of landscape painting had found authoritative expression, and landscape painting emerged as an independent genre. It epitomized the longing of cultivated men to escape their quotidian world to feel in close spiritual contact with nature. As the Tang dynasty collapsed, the concept of withdrawal into the natural world became a major thematic focus of arts: faced with the failure of the human order, learned men sought permanence within the natural world. Painters represented dramatic aspects of the Chinese landscape, mountains and hills, deep gorges, mist-filled valleys, rivers and waterfalls—secluded places in which retreating from the chaos of dynastic disintegration and of the period of disunion which followed.

The works were composed on paper that was strong and at the same time flexible, so that it could be pasted onto canvas and form long rolls, which could be organized vertically and hung on walls, or horizontally, to form handscrolls. These could be several meters long, integrating true painting cycles or representing a whole natural microcosm. Scrolls of this kind are mounted on a roll and are opened from right to left, flat on a table, the viewer seeing no more than a segment at a time. The form of the horizontal scroll is a genuine visual device, bringing the observer to progress through a composition of many scenes following one another in linear succession, with multiple vanishing points, one fading imperceptibly into the next. As the landscape scroll is unrolled, the observer becomes part of it, entering into the artist’s world of winding mountain paths, peaks and streams. This early technique reverberates in video animations visualizing contemporary projects for instance by Turenscape, where the common video strategy of “flying” over the terrain gains in cultural depth on the background of the traditional, horizontally manipulated handscroll.

The same spirit of progression through a multiple-faced landscape inspires the Chinese Garden. As the handscrolls are never spread out and viewed in their entirety, the green architectures are planned so as to never be perceived as a whole. Unrolling a scroll means following a story; by analogy, a person who experiences a garden enjoys a sequence of scenes which similarly make up a spatial narration, as they are related to each other.
Also the tradition of giving poetical names to some elements, a pavilion or sections of the garden, enhances the perception of the garden as a planned sequence of views (II-19; II-20). Names or quotations of literary passages offer an interpretation of the green space, revealing the owner's intentions in a play of cultured citations between man-made landscape and literary tradition\textsuperscript{10}. The intellectual charge of the names and quotations associated with the various parts of the garden assumed an ever more important role, to the degree that they became a real challenge to owners of gardens. As a scholar of the Ming period, Chen Jiru (1550-1639), noted: "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"\textsuperscript{11}.

\textbf{II-19:} Yu yuan, "Garden to Please", Shanghai. The inscription on the horizontal board introduces the scene behind the wall. It is composed of the character \textit{liu}, flow, and the character \textit{cui}, green. A possible transliteration reads "Flowing green". Both \textit{liu} and \textit{cui} conjure up the images of femininity in nature, suggesting that green water is flowing and moving like a woman.

\textbf{II-20:} Wangshi yuan, "Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets", Suzhou. The inscription on the horizontal board is composed by the character \textit{yun}, cloud, and the character \textit{ku}, cave, cellar. The poetic implication of \textit{ku} refers to a hideout. A possible transliteration, and the name of the scene behind the door, could read "Hideout in the clouds".

\textbf{II-21; 22:} Zhuozheng yuan, "Garden of the Humble Administrator", Suzhou. A covered walkway along a pond. The set itinerary of paths defines the rhythm of the garden's unfoldment.
The Spatial Framework

In his volume *On Chinese Gardens* published in 1984, the Chinese garden scholar Chen Congzhou (1918-2000) classified gardens in two categories: those intended for in-position viewing and those intended for in-motion viewing\(^1\). The first category, which concerns small gardens, links the appreciation of them to a stationary view gained by stopping movement, and this requires specific vantage points - a pavilion, a terrace - from which it is possible to view the green space. In the more extensive gardens or parks of the second type, visitors are led along a promenade which enables them to appreciate the great variety in composition. This subdivision of gardens into two classes is flexible, however, and often the two intentions overlap in the same garden; but Chen Congzhou’s approach still has the merit of clarifying the link between motion, rest and the experience of gardens.

The object of the composition of a Chinese Garden is the modulation of perception in a visual narration presupposing movement through its different parts at different paces, required or suggested by the formation of the spaces.

Let us consider the means used to shape the garden so that it can tell its story. The organizational pattern of spatial articulation in a Chinese Garden is hidden from the visitor and consists of a hierarchy of places and points. Each garden contains a certain number of spaces, each endowed with a specific characterization. We can call these thematic units. All units have a varying number of scenic views, each of which in turn concerns a portion of the unit’s area and is made up of a defined viewing zone and of the *jing*, the view enjoyed\(^13\). The garden unfolds according to a predetermined itinerary for visitors, one that leads them through the individual thematic units and induces them to pause at the various viewing zones to enjoy the designed views. The paths thus define the sequence of the narration, the story line as it were, whose rhythm is set by the alternation of movement toward new spaces and pauses for admiration of the scenes (II-21).

The main walkway may offer alternative routes, temporarily running alongside or intersecting the main path. But all walkways have analogous characteristics: they all twist continually, with variations in gradient and paving, which, along with the succession of spaces and views, contribute to the sense of surprise and discovery (II-22).
The apparently casual winding of paths serves to multiply the viewing zones, offering a non-linear progression from one thematic unit to the next, from scenic view to scenic view, helping immerse the visitor in a kaleidoscope of situations. The process is enhanced by the strategy of mixing concealment and revelation along the path: sections of the garden first are occluded, then suggested through glimpses, and then progressively revealed according to the precise visual means selected for the appreciation of the respective portion of the garden (II-23).

The organization into thematic units and scenic views produces the typical Chinese Garden plan in its succession and in its different landscapes, adjacent to but hidden from one another. What reveals them to the visitor are the paths which serve as active agents of the garden, organizing movement through it, establishing places to pause, to slow down or speed up, thus defining the rhythm of the garden’s unfolding (II-24).

II-23: Zhuozheng yuan, “Garden of the Humble Administrator”, Suzhou. With its changes in gradients, the winding covered walkway contributes to the studied mix of concealment and revelation of sections of the garden along the paths.

II-24: Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”, Shanghai. Openings along the wall dividing a double corridor offer glimpses on secluded parts of the garden.

II-25: Wangshi yuan, “Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets”, Suzhou. Delimited by walls, this courtyard constitutes a thematic unit within a defined perimeter.

II-26: Yu yuan. The pool with rocky shores planted with trees is an example of a thematic unit within a permeable perimeter.

II-27: Canglang ting, “Surging Waves Pavilion”, Suzhou. A hill placed just behind the main entrance hides the view of the garden, increasing the sense of expectation.
A Garden of Episodes

The general articulation of the garden is thus based on dividing its space into separate episodes or thematic units, which are the basic components of the garden’s design. These spaces are visually circumscribed and relatively autonomous, and each is characterized by its own aesthetic and formal identity. The thematic units are sometimes configured like proper rooms, as is the case of the courtyards delimited by walls (II-25). At other times the units take the form of less definite spaces, with permeable and porous perimeters, as is generally the case of reflecting pools and big rock formations (II-26). They can be adjacent to one another and even overlap, as happens in smaller gardens, or they can have filter zones, which in the case of imperial gardens can be quite extensive. Filter zones are also sometimes placed to mediate the units’ relation with the different residential areas or with the external perimeter of the property. For the most part they constitute a connective tissue in which the thematic units float.

The subdivision of the garden’s surface into thematic units creates a sort of visual tension for the visitor, along with a sense of expectation, heightened by the ways in which the various units are revealed one by one. The Chinese literary masterpiece, Hong Lou Meng, The Dream of the Red Chamber, written in the mid-18th century and attributed to Cao Xueqin, contains an account of a visit of a group of friends to the Daguan yuan, “Grand View Garden”, a phantastic garden in which the drama is set. In crossing the green space, the group comes into disparate spaces hidden from one another, in line with a philosophy invoked in the first lines of the description: “When he [Chia Cheng] forthwith asked that the gate [of the garden] should be thrown open, all that met their eyes was a long stretch of verdant hills, which shut in the view in front of them. - What a fine hill, what a pretty hill! - exclaimed all the companions with one voice. - Were it not for this one hill - Chia Cheng explained - whatever scenery is contained in it would clearly strike the eye, as soon as one entered into the garden, and what pleasure would that have been?” (II-27).

Perhaps it was traditional handscroll painting, which recounted stories and places in different episodes on a single scroll, that engendered this way of articulating gardens. Or perhaps, more simply, the narrative construction of a Chinese Garden is analogous with that of the scrolls.
The pictorial principle of separation of episodes has a counterpart in the garden’s organization of the successive thematic units. If in a scroll painting the scenes are separated through a void of space, in the form of a depiction of a foggy zone or a riverbed or hill, in the garden the diverse thematic units are separated – and at the same time connected – by filter zones made of walls or rocky areas, covered walkways or wooded groves (II-28). This idea of separation can already be perceived in the entrance to the garden, which is often narrow, never direct or particularly convenient. By creating physical and visual separation between the thematic units, these elements constitute larger or smaller moments of suspension and pause, as a prelude to the next thematic unit (II-29; II-30).

The succession of thematic units and the ensuing juxtaposition of different ambiances lend the garden a kind of geographic dimension: in the garden described in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, a verdant hill is followed by a cave, a winding stream, a pond, an orchard, a paddy and enclosed green courtyards. Passing from a literary garden to a real one, the composition is equally varied. In the Wangshi yuan, “Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets”, in the city of Suzhou, originally created in the early 12th century to be completely redesigned in the second half of the 18th century (II-31), the variety of thematic units includes a rock garden featuring a precious pavilion, a lake where small buildings simulate a village, a paved court with big rocks and a spring, a sequence of smaller courts with rock compositions and a flower garden (II-32). The Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”, in Shanghai (II-33) features a mountain next to a pond, a rushing stream, hillside pavilions, a big lake crossed by bridges, a reflecting pool with a vertical rock composition, a sequence of paved courts and a rock labyrinth with little studios (II-34). The garden was originally created between 1559 and 1577 and much altered over the years.
Main Entrance
Sedan Chair Hall
Reception Hall
Hall of Capturing Grace
Hall of Sweet Osmanthus
Hillock
Literary Chamber
Hall of Harmony
Tassel-washing Waterside Pavilion
Hall of Dewy Grace
Pavilion Welcoming the Advent of the Moon and Breezes

Late Spring Study
Cold Spring Pavilion
Watching Pines and Appreciating Paintings Studio
Study of the Ethereal
Veranda of the Slanting Bamboo Twig
Five Peaks' Library
Cloud Stairway Pavilion

Thematic Units
1 Rock Garden with Pavilion
2 Lake
3 Paved Court with Rocks and a Spring
4 Sequence of Small Courts
5 Flower Garden
1 Sansui Hall
2 Yangshan Hall
3 Yiou Pavilion
4 Wangjiang Pavilion
5 Yule Pavilion
6 Relaxation Store Boat
7 Wanhua Chamber
8 Liangyu Study
9 Ancient Well Pavilion
10 Bais Hall
11 Xuepu Study
12 Dianchun Hall
13 Acting and Singing Stage
14 Kuaiou Pavilion
15 Heu Hall
16 Nine Lions Study
17 Huiying Tower
18 Toasting Pavilion
19 Yuhua Hall
20 Tower of Containing Watery Jade
21 Dongtianfuo Pavilion
22 Kay Hall
23 Brayoulian Pavilion
24 Yangqing Tower
25 Songri Pavilion
26 Jingguang Hall

Composition and Effects
33: Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”, Shanghai. Plan of the current layout of the garden.

34: Yu yuan. Plan showing the sequence of the thematic units, which constitute the organizational pattern of the garden's spatial articulation.
The size of the thematic units is variable; places of modest dimension alternate with more extensive ones, according to a compositional technique of inserting, with irregular frequency, open areas like those of bodies of water, among more introverted areas like the paved courts or narrow winding passageways between walls and rock formations. The effect is a sort of irregular pulsation, a systolic rhythm of opposing spatial qualities like narrow and wide, offering restriction and release, enclosure and openness.

Several factors accentuate the perception of this play of contradictory juxtapositions. The sensation of being in a tight space is emphasized, for example, by the zigzagging of paths between narrow rocky and rough-surfaced grottos. The amplitude and luminosity of open spaces is intensified, vice-versa, by the surface of pools reflecting the sky and the architecture - covered walkways, pavilions, buildings - placed along the shore, making the area seem bigger.

The subdivision into thematic units produces a multiplication of sensations, but it does not generate a feeling of real fragmentation. Even the antithesis between the spatial qualities of the successive areas implies a sense of general harmony: each space contains elements which in fact may be found in successive thematic units, in a different arrangement, order or hierarchy. The repetition of these elements makes for a play of flashbacks and foreflashes which maintain a feeling of the overall unity of the garden.

A particular type of thematic unit is in itself based on this play of repetition. They reproduce the general characteristics of the garden in a condensed way, containing a “garden within the garden”: a sort of archetype, a smaller, enclosed garden floating in the larger garden or park domain. An example is the small Xiequ yuan, “Garden of Harmonious Interest”, inserted into the vast park of Yihe yuan, northwest of Beijing. Situated at the base of the northeastern slope of Longevity Hill, the garden was created by the Qianlong Emperor in the 1750s (II-35). Hidden from direct view by trees and high walls, Xiequ yuan is a sort of secret garden reached by crossing a simple, entirely ordinary pavilion. The dark entrance produces a strong contrast with the luminous space beyond - a pond encircled by a garland of pavilions, which are reflected in the water. A ring of covered walkways, interrupted by short bridges and terraces, borders the reflecting pool, marking the itinerary for a visit to the “garden within the garden” (II-36).
II-35: Xiequ yuan, “Garden of Harmonious Interest”, within the Yihe yuan, Beijing. The garden is arranged around a lake, which is surrounded by a ring of covered walkways and a garland of pavilions.

II-36: Xiequ yuan. Plan of the current layout of the garden (left) and scheme of its location within the Yihe yuan imperial park (right).
Scenic Views

The sequence of thematic units ensures dynamic enjoyment of the garden. The other aspect of its perception comes, by contrast, from pauses and relates to scenic views. These are static pictures conceived to attract the eye and awaken different sensations: elegance, majesty, astonishment.

Each thematic unit, according to its extension and configuration, may be linked to a single scenic view or offer many of them. The scenic views are enjoyed for their aesthetic and compositional quality, and are made up of two distinct but associated parts: the picture offered for view and the area prepared for admiration of the view.

Elements of formal identity characterize the scenic views, giving each its own compositional harmony. The character of a specific scene can originate in a complex composition: a lake with buildings reflected in it or a waterfall coming down from a group of rocks. But it can also be given by simple elements: a sculptural rock in a bamboo grove, a pavilion shaded by willows. Or a seasonal characterization may prevail, generated by particular flowers or leaf colors. For example, the Ge yuan, "Isolated Garden", in Yangzhou, probably created in the second half of the 17th century and remodeled in the 19th century, presents four distinct scenic views which evoke the seasons: they are characterized by four different rocky compositions, built of different types of stone and surrounded by different plants (II-37). Because they are static pictures, the scenes are abstract and meditative; they imply the visitor’s participation in interpreting them and his willingness to be transported into an immaterial place through the visual experience of the physical environment.
A series of devices favor this form of intellectual enjoyment: some scenic views refer to well-known paintings or landscapes, or include literary references, or bear poetical names. A visit to any garden entails reading inscriptions and name plaques in the elegant Chinese self-expressive calligraphy on stone, wood or paper, placed on walls and pavilions. The inscriptions carry the names the owner has given to parts of the garden, a scene, a view, a pavilion, or they are verses or literary passages evoked by the part of the garden that is being discovered. In the *Liu yuan*, “Lingering Garden”, in Suzhou, which dates back to the first half of the 16th century and was rebuilt in the early 19th century, the pavilions composing a series of scenic views beyond the central reflecting pool have names referring to verses of famous Chinese poets: Passable Pavilion, Refreshing Breeze Pavilion, Winding Stream Tower, Green Shade Pavilion (II-38), while a small pond featuring an imposing sculptural rock in the northeastern part of the garden is called Washing Clouds Pool (II-39). These appealing features engender emotional responses in the observer and form the evocative counterpart of the scenery, loading it with deeper meanings and symbols, suggesting poetic allusions and arousing sentiments: appreciation of gardens involves imaginative engagement.

In addition to poetical references, scenic views succeed by enhancing visual perception: first of all depth of field and framing. The Chinese Garden alternates scenic views with different depths of field, thus keeping perception ever keen. Scenes with a short depth of field emphasize the subject close to the observer; this is the case of the stunning rocks exhibited in courtyards, or of the collections of potted landscapes that need to be appreciated from up close (II-40). In this case, the background limiting the view, usually a wall, is given a neutral treatment so as to offset the principle subject of the scene.
When the scene calls for a medium or long depth of field, the composition takes advantage of the positioning of various elements at increasing distances from the observer (II-41). This is the "principle of the three depths", a pictorial convention of Chinese landscape painting. It consists in configuring the foreground, the middle ground and the background of each single scene according to a sequence of planes (II-42; II-43; II-44), increasing the sense of depth and thereby influencing the perception of the scale of the whole.

The construction of a scene with a long depth of field can adopt the compositional technique called jiejing, "borrowed scenery". This entails bringing into the scenic view what lies beyond the garden walls, framing portions of the outside landscape near and far, as a chain of hills or a high pagoda (II-45). That establishes a relation between what is near and what is far, merging the sweep of the view into the larger landscape, which functions as a background for the garden's design. The garden, thus linked with the landscape beyond, seems in this way to become boundless (II-46). Some gardens in areas enjoying unique natural landscapes feature pavilions or belvedere terraces as viewpoints from which to enjoy the panorama beyond the garden. In the Ou yuan, "Couple’s Garden Retreat", in Suzhou a two-storied edifice built along the eastern boundary of the garden offers a view onto the canal that runs alongside the green space (II-47).

The perception of the borrowed scenery represents a moment of interruption of the enclosure inside which the garden composition unwinds. While the Chinese Garden presents a continuously introverted mechanism of spatial arrangement and scenic organization, the borrowed scenery creates an instant of exceptionality, breaking the perimeter wall by using a feature which physically does not belong to the context of the garden. From this point of view, it is rather different from the technique of the borrowed landscape which establishes a spatial continuity between garden and landscape in the English Landscape Garden, because the latter is instead based on the visual - and, at the same time, ideological - negation of the boundaries of the park.
Another means of influencing the perception of a scene’s depth, or making certain parts of it stand out, is the way it is screened. Placing a screen or frame between the viewpoint and the view itself can affect that view. This is an expedient strategy for directing or forcing the sight; it is also a way of extending the variety of scenic views in a Chinese Garden. Examples of architectural frames are doors and windows (II-48; II-49), or the openings of covered walkways marked by the vertical supports of the roof, but framing can also be achieved by natural elements, like branches of trees or groups of rocks placed in the foreground. Doorways are always narrow, so much so that only one person at a time can pass through them, thereby increasing the perception of the garden as an individual experience.18 Screening devices make the perception of scenic views become less certain but more intriguing. Examples are window frames and latticework of a geometric or naturalistic design placed in windows in pavilions or in the walls separating parts of the garden (II-50). Such screens were used to offer protection from the sun, filter the light and control its intensity inside the pavilions, and let cooling breezes enter the garden buildings (II-51). Along with the functional and decorative purpose, these devices, with their complicated patterns and textures, intercept the glance and invite it to linger over the decorative motifs, altering the perception of the real quality and extension of the scene glimpsed beyond the screen. They create a sort of anticipation of the scenes beyond without revealing either their content or the way to approach them (II-52).

In some cases, door and window openings can frame mirrors that are not immediately recognizable as such, which reflect trees and rocks placed at a distance, deceiving sensory perception yet again (II-53). Moreover, instilling doubt in the visitor whether other mirrors may be hidden in the frames of successive doors and windows, they contribute to the general sense of perceptual uncertainty (II-54).
II-48: Wangshi yuan, "Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets", Suzhou. An octagonal window frames a view onto the garden.

II-49: Wangshi yuan. A view of the garden is framed by a rectangular door.

II-50: Ou yuan, "Couple's Garden Retreat", Suzhou. The windows of a pavilion are framed with woodwork, which displays a cracked ice pattern.

II-51: Wangshi yuan. A window with a geometric frame features a central circle, which focuses on a close-by artificial mountain.
II-52: Zhongshan Shipyard Park, Zhongshan. The steel structure of the pavilion and the shrubs form the frame of a view.

II-53: Yu yuan, "Garden to Please", Shanghai. The central opening on the back of the pavilion is in fact a mirror reflecting the opposite scene.

II-54: Wangshi yuan, "Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets", Suzhou. What appears like a door is in fact a framed mirror.

II-55: Wangshi yuan. Plan showing an analysis of viewpoints and viewing areas in the garden.

II-56: Yu yuan. Plan showing an analysis of viewpoints and viewing areas in the garden.
An essential part of the planning of any scenic view is the definition of the area from which to enjoy it. These viewing areas offer full perception of the proposed scene, and they are, for this reason, always easily identifiable (II-55; II-56). Paths are designed so as to encourage slowing down or stopping at these places for admiring a particular scene. They explicitly invite to pause by featuring a pavilion with seats, or a rocky promontory over the water, but they also use other devices to interrupt the continuity of the walk (II-57): an outsized stone inserted into the paving, the elbow of a covered walkway, a doorway with a threshold to cross, or a cartouche hung on the wall announcing the name of the scene (II-58). These devices all serve to mark a viewpoint or viewing area.

In a play of reflections and cross-references, the element that highlights the viewpoint can in turn be integrated into a scenic view appreciable from another spot. A little pavilion on the shore of a lake, from which there is a beautiful view of the water covered with lilies, will probably constitute the focal point of a scenic view to be enjoyed from the other shore; a little bridge placed downstream from a waterfall, making it possible to admire the cascade up close, will be at the center of the view observed from the top of the hill from which the water cascades (II-59; II-60; II-61).

II-58: Liu yuan. By hindering the descent and forcing a pause, the stone placed at the entrance of the pavilion highlights a viewing point.

II-59; 60; 61: Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”, Shanghai. The waterside pavilion is both a viewing point and part of a scene observed from other spots.


3: In geomancy, the four cardinal directions are associated with animals, real or mythical: the red Bird equated the southern quarter, the Blue Dragon the eastern quarter, the Black Turtle the northern quarter and the White Tiger was associated to the western quarter.

4: As Hui Zhou recalls, "Although the role of fengshui was crucial in garden planning and especially so for imperial gardens, it was never elevated to the level of garden theory that was highly developed in private gardens". See Zhou, "The jing", 326, note 21. In fact, in the Yuan or the Ming, a treatise written in the first half of the 17th century on the principles and techniques of planning, fengshui is never mentioned. On the role of fengshui in Chinese Garden design, see also Wong Yong-tsu, A Paradise Lost: The Imperial Garden of Yuanming Yuan (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 21-22.

5: Jingshan Mountain is 40 m high; Yangshan Mountain, in Olympic Forest Park, rises 48 m. It was created with the earth dug out for the new section of the subway system that leads to the park, as well as for the construction of Olympic Avenue and other nearby urban development. Liu Hui and Zhao Jing, eds., Olympic Forest Park Planning and Design (Beijing: Beijing Tsinghua Urban Planning and Design Institute, 2008), 14-15.


7: The project was in collaboration with Straub+Thurmayer Landschaftsarchitekten and Auer+Weber+Assoziierte Architekten.

8: In this period, known as the Five Dynasties (907-960), northern China was ruled by five short-lived military regimes. See Keay, China, 290-300.

9: See the examples of presentation videos on the Shanghai Green Dragon Park and the Changsha Oranges Island project by Turenscape on the DVD included in the book by Elke Mertens, Visualizing Landscape Architecture (Basel, Boston, Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2009).


11: Quoted in ibid., 193.


13: The layout of Chinese Gardens as an itinerary through different connected scenes to be observed from specific points was perceived in the mid-18th century by the Swedish-born architect William Chambers. In his book Design of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines, and Utensils, published in London in 1757, he explains that "the whole ground of [the garden] is laid out in a variety of scenes, and you are led, by winding passages cut in the groves, to the different points of view, each of which is marked by a seat, a building, or some other objects. The perfection of their gardens consists in the number, beauty, and diversity of these scenes". Quoted in John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, eds., The Genius of the Place. The English Landscape Garden, 1620-1820 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998).


16: George Rowley notes: "The Chinese perfected the principle of the three depths, according to which spatial depth was marked by a foreground, middle distance, and far distance, each parallel to the picture plane, so that the eye leapt from one distance to the next through a void of space". See George Rowley, Principles of Chinese Painting (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 64.

17: For the compositional technique of borrowed scenery, see Ji Cheng, The Craft of Gardens - Yuan ye, trans. Alison Hardie (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 119-21. See also Che Bing Chiu, "The traditional Chinese Garden: a world apart", in In the Chinese city, ed. Edelmann, 64-65. The principle of "borrowed scenery", by which a distant view is incorporated into the garden, enjoyed a great fortune in Japan as well, where it took the name shakkei. It was often applied in creating stroll gardens; the imperial villa Shigaku-in in Kyōto is one of the most interesting uses of the technique. See Marc Treib, "Moving the Eye", in Sites Unseen. Landscape and Vision, ed. Diane Harris and D. Fairchild Ruggles (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 86.

According to ancient animistic beliefs, rocks were the earth's skeleton and rivers its arteries, living elements that were complementary in the harmony of the cosmos. Water and mountains represented the fertile juxtaposition between yin and yang, the dualism of the feminine and masculine aspects present in all natural phenomena. The robust vigor of rocks evinced the solid masculine element, while water's fluidity suggested the changeable feminine.

Thus every garden needs to evoke the mountains and bodies of water, even if only in metaphorical miniaturized form. The marriage of these two elements constitutes the primary goal of the creative effort (III-2). To these primary elements are added flora, whose changes introduce the dimension of seasonal cycles and thereby time into the garden, and architecture. The pavilions dotting the garden denote the human presence in nature and the central role of the individual in the imaginative and poetical interpretation of the landscape.
Mounds and Rocky Compositions

The sacred nature of mountains in China has been evidenced by a preference for mountain sites for the construction of temples and monasteries, sometimes even in places that appear wholly hostile to human life, thereby displaying the will to commune uncompromisingly with the natural environment (III-1). In gardens, mountains are represented by the use of rocks. Through time a strong aesthetic sensitivity for rocks developed, and led to widespread collecting of them (III-3).

Rocks are placed in many different settings in gardens, but they are used in two main ways: single rocks as sculptures and rock compositions as artificial mountains1. Sculptural rocks are individual stones of particular elegance, or simple compositions of such stones that can be placed so as to exalt the formal quality of each single piece (III-4; III-5). Rocks are also considered in relation to each other; delicate stones suggesting feminine qualities are balanced with rugged ones considered to represent the masculine. Single stone blocks are chosen for their characteristic qualities: conformation, substance, color, texture, presence of fissures and openings, veins. In the search for and choice of rocks, preference is given to those with animal and human shapes, or those displaying signs of erosion by water and wind, thus evoking the passage of time, or again those whose particular characteristics might serve to invoke landscapes presented in literature or in paintings (III-6; III-7). The best stones for these characteristics are sedimentary rocks quarried in mountains or taken from lakes and rivers. Northern China is rich in calcites, but it is the region near the Yangtze River delta, in the central-eastern part of the country, that is best known for its abundance and diversity of rocks2.
The rocks are either placed directly on the ground, or arranged on a base. The bases are sometimes decorated, presenting the stone similar to a sculpture.

Rocks can be gathered together to form little collections or rock gardens. Often they are displayed at a central point within a small courtyard, or they are positioned against a wall, which eliminates visual interference and permits full appreciation of their beauty (III-9). Positioned near the main pavilions or covered walkways, their proximity to architectural elements creates an effective contrast between nature and architecture (III-10). And they can be associated with exceptional plant specimens, like an old pine or a tree with extraordinary branches; bushes or flowers can be planted in the cavities of rough stones, thus creating a natural micro-landscape.

Artificial mountains, on the other hand, are compact structures formed by rocks and earth, or by large rocks assembled and held together with mortar (III-11). Their forms evoke varying natural types of morphology, and they are intended to awaken visitors’ emotions. Mountains and cliffs suggest wild nature; meanders and grottos astonish; rushing waters and cascades recall the flow of life. Because of this symbolic charge, mountains are never placed in the central space of the garden, but rather dispersed around the whole garden, so that their visual importance and the energy they possess do not dominate the whole composition (III-8).

The fabrication of artificial mountains is a weighty commitment, similar to constructing a building. Foundations capable of sustaining their weight have to be created, often by digging tree trunks into the ground to make a stable base. On this underpinning are placed solid monoliths, stones regular in shape with surfaces smooth enough to form a good basis. The upper part is made up of smaller rocks with less robust forms, put together in such a way as to give the mountain a mimetic, highly varied form.

III-9: Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”, Shanghai. A linear artificial hill offset against a white wall.

III-10: Shizi lin, “Lion Grove”, Suzhou. Hidden by a rocky mountain, the pavilion creates an effect of contrast between architecture and nature.

III-11: Yuhua yuan, “Back Garden of the Imperial Palace”, Forbidden City, Beijing. The artificial mountain is topped with a pavilion-belvedere.
III-12: Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”, Shanghai. Piles of stones rise from the rocky shore of a stream.


III-14: Yu yuan. A rocky shore introduces a rugged separation between the flat plains of water and pathway.

III-15: Shizi lin. The garden composition plays on the ingenious and pervasive use of rocks.
The artificial mountains' summits are made up of single rocks forming isolated peaks or crests. There can be multiple peaks without apparent order, or a main summit can be surrounded by secondary ones. Fantasy mountain chains can thus be created, while others are reminiscent of specific existing heights or rock formations (III-12). The stone compositions can feature defiles or meanders or caves leading the visitor into the mountain itself or even up toward the summit. Terraces and belvederes with picturesque pavilions along the way offer privileged views of the surroundings. In order to accentuate the verisimilitude of the mountain scene, pines and other trees are planted among the rocks, correlated in height with the artificial mountain and controlled in growth so as to maintain their reciprocal scale. In addition to serving as sculptures and artificial mountains, rocks are also adopted to create the shores of ponds and streams, while flat rocks are placed on the stream beds to create fords for crossing (III-13).

Gardens that present today impressive and beautiful rock compositions include the Shizi lin in the city of Suzhou, and the Yu yuan in Shanghai. In the Shizi lin, “Lion Grove”, the visitor arrives through a sequence of regular courts displaying arrangements of sculptural rocks, leading into an area where great rocks atop one another are reminiscent of a mountain chain, with narrow defiles and grottos, while the path becomes a series of rapid ascents and descents. The artificial mountain conceals a large artificial lake encircled by jagged boulders, on which single vertical stones were placed to suggest the body or head of lions in various positions (III-14). In Shanghai’s Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”, rocks again dominate the composition. The garden combines a yellow granite mountain, a long rockery set against a wall, a sequence of high rockworks on which various pavilions are built, and stony passageways. Different types of rocks are bordering the ponds within the garden. A composition of three sculptural rocks evoking a mountainous landscape overlooks a pool (III-15).

The symbolic and compositional value of rocks emerges in some contemporary landscape architecture projects in China as well. The Olympic Forest Park of Beijing includes some
big rock compositions near pine groves, a feature traditional in taste (III-16); there is also a great streaked stone mass which greets visitors at the entrance (III-17). A heterodox and more poetical use of rock is that of the architect and artist Ai Weiwei in his project for the banks of the Yiwu River, which crosses the city of Jinhua, south of Shanghai. Completed in 2004, the project entailed building wide promenades on both sides of the river (III-18). Using local granite, Ai Weiwei has transformed the riverbanks into a tectonic structure terraced down toward the water. The forms are sharp and highly sculptural, evoking rocky bluffs in a dialogue with the distant mountain chain that closes the horizon (III-19).
Water Surfaces

Historically, the Chinese countryside’s most evolved areas were characterized by rice paddies. The flooding of these fields was regulated by complex hydraulic systems which provided the water necessary for a crop on which the prosperity of entire regions depended. With their shining surfaces animated by birds and the brilliant green of their vegetation, with their adherence to the terrain’s morphology and their areas interspersed with little groves of trees or bamboo, traditional rice paddies are among the most pleasing landscapes ever created by man. It is not unlikely that they became one of the original inspirations for Chinese Gardens.

Surface water’s liquid horizontality, contrasted with the stony verticality of rocks, makes it the second foundational element of the Chinese Garden (III-20). The presence of water conveys a sense of spaciousness, dynamism and vitality to the composition; by adding the dimension of sound – the gurgling of streams and the splashing of carps – it responds to the principles of fengshui, according to which reflecting pools are reservoirs of positive energies. They also improve the local microclimate. For all these reasons, when water was available it was allocated significant space: in the city of Suzhou, which is crossed by canals, waters cover on the average half of the gardens’ surfaces; in Beijing, three quarters of the Yihe yuan park is covered by water (III-21). The pervasive presence of water in various forms is the distinguishing trait of some gardens. Such is the case of the Zhuozheng yuan, “Garden of the Humble Administrator”, in Suzhou, an artificial lagoon on an extensive urban property, marked by a series of irregularly shaped islets adorned with the garden’s various pavilions (III-22). The current design of the garden features a succession of peninsulas and isles linked by zigzagging bridges, with tongues of water between rocks and pavilions (III-23; III-24).

III-23: Zhuozheng yuan. This large garden is designed as a series of connected pools with islands.

III-24: Zhuozheng yuan. Three ways of enjoying the water view: a covered walkway, an open-air path, a pavilion to sit.

III-25: Wangshi yuan, “Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets”, Suzhou. The pond is the central element around which interconnected courtyards and pavilions are arranged.

III-26: Liu yuan, “Lingering Garden”, Suzhou. The height of the pavilions and the breadth of the lake match to ensure the reflection of the complete scene.

III-27: Chi Lin Nunnery, Hong Kong. A reflecting pool of regular shape is delimited by marble edges topped with balustrades.

III-22

III-23

III-24

III-25

III-26

III-27

Elements
Water is used in a multitude of ways, evoking its many changing forms in nature; it is concentrated in ponds usually located at the heart of the garden, running out in brooks that then cross the different parts of the green space (III-25). In its wide range of apparitions, it adopts different intensities of movement: in fishponds and basins it is relatively still; it moves at different speeds in streams, torrents and waterfalls. In all cases, it is not the depth of the water which is important, but its surface appearance, shape and sinuosity. Its reflecting quality is highly sought after, and for this reason pavilions and rock compositions are often situated near still water surfaces. It is a common design intention that they should be mirrored in their entirety; therefore the proportional relations between the dimensions of reflecting pools and of the objects to be reflected are carefully studied (III-26). Reflecting pools are generally delimited by sinuous rock borders, with inlets, promontories and belvederes jutting out over the water. But there are also basins of regular quadrangular shapes, whose geometry is underscored by marble steps and balustrades (III-27). If the reflecting pool is large enough, islands are created in it. They can be irregular in outline or perfectly circular, rather flat or displaying steep heights; they may also feature little groves of trees, simple pavilions or complex works of architecture. In the larger dimensions of imperial parks, the waters of artificial lakes are sometimes subdivided into different sections by earthen dykes. This is the case of the Kunming Lake in the imperial park of Yihe yuan, where a long dyke planted with trees separates the main lake from an area with secondary bodies of water.
Streams never ran straight. They can appear as rustic creeks with overgrown banks, or rocky mountain torrents (III-30), or they can also take man-made forms like canals with artificial embankments; this is the case of the elegant stream curving across the Forbidden City, or the irregularly edged canal along Suzhou Street in Yihe yuan. A garden’s waters are to appear to come from a natural spring, and therefore water is channeled to a high point from which the system is supplied. From there, a little waterfall spurs through the rocky wall of a mountain, or a brook rushes into the main reflecting pool.

The traditional Chinese Garden’s use of islets and winding waterways was given a recent ecological updating in several projects by the landscape architect Kongjian Yu of Turenscape, like the restoration of the beach along the Bohai Sea in the city of Qinhuangdao, east of Beijing, completed in 2008 (III-29). This project’s goal was to transform a section of coastal dunes and adjacent wetland that had been degraded by previous uses, which left the site in an ecologically and environmentally damaged condition. Environmental recovery included the creation of a group of round islets in an existing pool of water, both to make the landscape more interesting and to attract birds (III-28); concurrently, a counter-image of the lake with islets was created closer to the shore, where little round ponds were dug in the flat ground, recomposing the wetland (III-31).
III-28: Qinhuangdao Beach Restoration. Qinhuangdao. A group of round islets set into the existing lake. The park was constructed between 2006 and 2008.


III-31: Qinhuangdao Beach Restoration. In the central part of the park little round ponds were dug to recompose the wetland.
Garden Paths

In creating a Chinese Garden, the designer aims at laying out a pathway along which the various components of the green space would gradually reveal themselves to the visitor. It is this mechanism of a series of unexpected scenes that is to induce the visitor to investigate the entire garden (III-38).

The play of progressive disclosure depends on twisting and winding paths. Leading from a building to a grove, following the shore of a pond, insinuating themselves between rock formations, the walkways serve the function not only of linking all the various parts of the garden, but of determining the sequence or story-board of its narrative. The system of footpaths orients the movement of the visitor toward defined points, and changes in the track’s paving material and elevation determine the tempi of perception of the scenes. The paths thus constitute a key element in the orchestration of the garden’s story - but the composer behind it all has to remain hidden (III-32; III-33).

One characteristic is common to all paths: they are never linear except for short sections. Following the principles of fengshui and the inspiration of the natural environment, the paths can be twisting, zigzagging, or form a series of broken curves (III-34; III-35). Changes in height add to the intended unpredictability, contrived by adding ramps, steps and little bridges; changes in width likewise make for variety (III-37). The careful planning behind all this must never show, and the paths’ variations are to seem simply an adaptation to the irregular topography of the site. Following this principle, narrow paths are also made meandering among compositions of rocks, just like in the garden described in the novel The Dream of the Red Chamber where the visitors encountered “white rugged rocks looking either like goblins, or resembling savage beasts, lying either crossways, or in horizontal or upright positions; on the surface of which grew moss and lichen with mottled hues, or parasitic plants, which screened off the light; while, slightly visible, wound, among the rocks, a narrow pathway like the intestines of a sheep” (III-36).


III-33: Xiequ yuan, “Garden of Harmonious Interest”, within the Yihe yuan, Beijing. Scheme of the garden paths.


III-35: Olympic Forest Park, Beijing. A sequence of large curves characterizes a main route within the park.


III-37: Zhuozheng yuan, “Garden of the Humble Administrator”, Suzhou. A long covered walkway built alongside a wall runs by the shore of a pool; the continuous variations in the inclination of ramps produce changing perceptions of the reflecting flat water surface.


III-40: Shizi lin, "Lion Grove", Suzhou. The route follows a sequence of contrasts: a stone bridge zigzagging over water, a meander inside a cave.

III-41: Wangshi yuan, "Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets", Suzhou. The crooked shape of the stone bridge is accentuated by the slanting pine.


III-43: Yu yuan, "Garden to Please", Shanghai. The winding footbridge seems to float over the waters of the lake.

III-44: Tianjin Waterfront Corridor, Tianjin. Twisting paths over shallow water allow a playful use of the space of the public park, designed 2005-2008.
In addition to open-air paths, there are covered walkways, which serve not only to protect visitors from the weather, but also to alter the luminosity and therefore the perception of the various parts of the garden. Their covering often consists of a tiled roof upheld by round or square slender columns of lacquered wood, interconnected by a low balustrade. The galleries thus formed may be open on either side to allow a wider view, or built alongside a wall which in turn can be solid but also punctured by screened openings, thereby allowing glimpses of the adjacent garden space (III-39). As an alternative, the covering of a path can consist of simple pergolas, overgrown by flowering plants like wisteria.

Brooks and inlets serve as occasions for constructing the many types of bridges the Chinese garden tradition is famous for; these can be rectilinear or zigzag, of wood or stone, supported by a single arch or a series of arches that are not necessarily symmetrical (III-40; III-41; III-42). Where the intention is to give the visitor a more direct contact with the water, the bridges become flat footbridges made of planks or paving stones, without parapets and so close to the water as to create the sensation of walking on its surface (III-43; III-44).

The different types of open or covered paths alternate unpredictably, so as to enhance the sense of surprise and contribute to the general complexity of the garden. In the same spirit, paths are often made of different materials in different sections. The choice of paving depends on the context and on the function of the paths (III-45; III-46; III-47). Some have paving of a regular design executed in bricks or smooth stones, others use irregular stones or river pebbles of different colors placed so as to compose figures.


III-47: Canglang ting, “Surging Waves Pavilion”, Suzhou. Black and white river pebbles are composed in a courtyard to create a geometrical pattern.

III-48: Yu yuan. Stone slabs pave a garden path by the water.

III-49: Canglang ting. A winding bridge with low balustrades over a canal leads to the entrance of the garden.
The garden designer Ji Cheng commented: “A narrow way set around with flowers is better paved with stone, while an open courtyard surrounded by buildings should be laid out in bricks... pebbles are suitable for laying on paths that are not frequently used⁴, while a paving in simple stone slabs of irregular outline seems appropriate “for paths through a mountain gully or on a slope by the water, or before a terrace or beside a pavilion”⁵ (III-48).

A sort of built catalogue of the many variations a Chinese garden path may take can be found in the Canglang ting, “Surging Waves Pavilion”, in Suzhou. Here, a zigzag bridge leads to the entrance of the garden, which features a double covered walkway made of two parallel corridors separated by a wall with ornate screen windows, followed by simple covered walkways connecting the pavilions and winding around the irregularly shaped pool in a rapid succession of ramps, as well as open-air paths flanking the roofed walkways, and narrow passageways climbing the rocky mountain, winding among the rocks and penetrating grottos (III-49; III-50; III-51; III-52).

A playful contemporary interpretation of a traditional path can be found in the Red Ribbon Tanghe River Park, completed in 2008 by Turenscape (III-53). Built along the shores of the Tanghe River, which flows through the coastal city of Qinhuangdao, east of Beijing, the linear park has as its central compositional element a winding path with broad curves and slight changes in elevation. Running alongside the river walk is a continuous three-dimensional element, a big red fiberglass ribbon of solid but changing form. This ribbon serves both as seating and as a base for lighting. Its variations echo the irregularity of the path itself, and its showy red lacquer surface evokes the traditional finish of garden seats placed to facilitate appreciation of the most picturesque views (III-54).
Architectural Elements

Chinese Gardens appear dense with pavilions and buildings, but the architectural structures never dominate the overall composition. The color range of the buildings, and their airy structures trimmed with openings and latticeworks give them a quality of transparency: architecture is dematerialized; loosing its tectonic component, it is completely integrated with the garden (III-55).

The irregular forms created by rock compositions and reflecting waters establish a dialectic tension with the regularity of architectural structures. In fact, architectural elements are intended not to contrast with the garden’s naturalness, but to create a complementary symbiosis through the studied elegance of their placement and their architectural forms (III-56). The siting of architectural elements in gardens is carefully considered and follows the general logic of surprise: for this reason, pavilions are hidden by trees and rocks or situated along shores or atop artificial hillocks, conforming to the idea of the garden’s natural irregularity (III-57). At the same time, pavilions are special places for observing the surrounding arrangements; for this purpose their external walls are pierced by several windows, which are in turn screened by wooden latticework panels. The geometric design of the wooden panels contrasts with the natural forms glimpsed through the windows (III-58).

The structures built in gardens are of diverse types, dimensions and functions, ranging from little structures for resting, meditating or simply stopping, to more elaborate architectural works, sometimes of more than one storey, for tea rooms, libraries, studies or guest-lodging.

The typological vocabulary is extensive, including the important edifices called tang, “halls”, large buildings surrounded by porticos, with a large space in the front. Tang usually occupy the most central and public part of the garden, they are the places where guests were received. Other types are lou, “towers” of normally two stories, and ge, “belvederes”, storied structures with open windows on all four sides. In addition to these bigger buildings, which sometimes feature wings connected by covered passageways, there are modest pavilions in protected and isolated sites away from the garden’s public areas.
III-55: Zhongshan Shipyard Park, Zhongshan. Two old boat hangars peeled off to structural skeletons were transformed into lakefront pavilions.

III-56: Shizi lin, "Lion Grove", Suzhou. The crooked bridge traversing the lake features an hexagonal pavilion at the center.

III-57: Ou yuan, "Couple’s Garden Retreat", Suzhou. The siting of architectural elements in the garden follows the logic of surprise.


They can be the simple resting points from which a scenic view can be enjoyed, like ting, little single-storied pavilions open on all sides, or xie, “gazebos”, which usually rise alongside reflecting pools. Pagodas and other religious buildings may be part of a garden design, while memorial archways, built of wood or masonry, may mark the entry to thematic units or the beginning of a path. Terraces delimitated by balustrades, facing the bodies of water or placed on elevated points, are used as viewing points or viewing areas (III-59).

In addition to these architectural forms, Chinese Gardens present another category of structures: walls that function as internal divisions delimiting different parts of the garden. They are used to separate thematic units and to organize sequences of different scenes; and while separating them they also connect them into a visual narration by means of openings varying widely in their forms (III-60; III-61; III-62). The French Jesuit Jean-Denis Attiret wrote about this in amazement: “It was necessary for me to come here [to China] to see doors, windows of all types and shapes: round, oval, square, and polygonal of all sorts, fan-shaped, flowers, vases, birds, animals, fish, in short, any form either regular or irregular”7. The doorways between different parts of the garden may in fact be rounded or of complex outline, inspired by natural elements or man-made objects, as is the case of circular doors, called yuemen, “moon gate”, or doors shaped like a vase, leaf, petal or flower (III-63; III-64; III-65; III-66). Like doors, windows have geometrical or irregular shapes, with elaborate panels or wood and stucco screens (III-67). Doors and windows are conceived as diaphragms for views, disclosing glimpses of the gardens but only through screened openings, which renders it impossible to grasp the real extension of the area they give access to (III-68; III-69; III-70).
When the garden designer Ji Cheng wrote at the beginning of the 17th century, he maintained that it was not important what architectural style was followed in designing pavilions: “the construction of your buildings should be in accordance with the spirit of the times, while their appearance should elicit the appreciation of the most cultivated visitors”⁸. This principle is echoed in the Jinhua Architecture Park (2002-2006) along the banks of the Yiwu River in the city of Jinhua, south of Shanghai. Conceived by the architect and artist Ai Weiwei, its 17 pavilions were designed by as many architects from various countries. They are all different in form and function, sheltering a coffee house, an archeological archive, a restaurant and a multimedia or exhibition room, while others serve more traditional Chinese functions: a tea house and a reading space. The Reading Space, for example, a solid multi-storey pavilion designed by Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron along with their practice Senior Partner Ascan Mergenthaler, is built over one of the pedestrian paths going through the park. Its form evokes the classical moon gate, and it serves the corresponding function in framing a view of the park (III-71). The variety in types of pavilions and the unique quality of each, as well as the search for the unusual and the surprising that they represent, give the Jinhua Architecture Park a sense of constant diversity, an atmosphere of playful fragmentation that is very close to the spirit of the historical gardens of China.
Plant Arrangements

Vegetation is appreciated both for its compositional effect and the ensuing atmosphere, as well as for the symbolic meaning that specific botanical specimens bear. In the design and construction process of a Chinese Garden, both masses of vegetation and single exemplars are planted only after pavilions and rock compositions are in place, so as to counterbalance them and give each individual scene its character. The different parts of the garden have to remain harmonious even as the flora changes during the course of the year. The highlighting of the progression of the seasons is one of the main effects controlled by the botanical characterization of the garden (III-72).

Plants flowering in different seasons are placed so as to confer on different parts of the garden a special prominence in certain periods of the year. Individual botanical species associated with different seasons are magnolias (*Magnolia denudata* Desr., *Magnolia liliiflora* Desr.), peonies (*Paeonia suffruticosa* Andr.; *Paeonia lactiflora* Pall.), peach and cherry trees in spring; summer is announced by the blooming of wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis* Sweet), roses of multiple varieties and the lotus; fall comes in with the flowering of chrysanthemums (*Chrysanthemum morifolium* Ram.), maple leaves turning red and ginkgoes turning gold (*Ginkgo biloba* L.); winter’s grey is interrupted by early-blooming species like camellias (*Camellia japonica* L., *Camellia sasanqua* Thunb.), rhododendrons (*Rhododendron racemosum* Franch.), calycanthus (*Chimonanthus praecox* K. Koch.) and above all flowering plums (especially *Prunus mume* Sieb. et Zucc.).

In arranging plants, artistic effects are sought through juxtaposition of different shapes, leaf types and colors. Even the way stems move in the wind or rain and the sounds produced by the leaves are considered elements of the composition, which add to the garden’s atmosphere. Gardens often feature pines (like *Pinus bungeana* Zucc., *Pinus tabulaeformis* Carr.), solid trees dark in color, placed in contrast with bamboo (above all *Phyllostachys*), willows (*Salix babylonica* L.) and bananas (*Musa sapientum* L.), supple plants with brilliant green foliage. Appreciated in Chinese Gardens are also the Sweet Olive (*Osmanthus fragrans* Lour.), the Wax Tree or Chinese Tree Privet (*Ligustrum lucidum* W. T. Aiton).

III-72: Garden of Friendship, Sydney. The yellow foliage of the weeping willows underlines the autumn season.


III-76: Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”, Shanghai. The sparkling leaves of banana trees contrast with the shady walkway.

The plants’ sculptural forms and the changes in the plants’ form and appearance throughout the seasons are criteria for selecting the position of every plant in the garden. Poplars (e.g. *Populus simonii* Carr., Rev. Hort.) and willows are planted close to water, the latter in little groups so that their foliage can make a continuous green cover (III-73). Banana trees are planted toward the corners of courtyards or next to white walls to bring out the shape of their soft leaves (III-75; III-76). Bamboo is regularly used for the brilliant color of its foliage, and is positioned so as to form a translucent undulating curtain, often so as to project its shadow onto adjacent walls (III-74). The lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera* Gaertn.), with its tough blue-green foliage, and other water lilies (*Nymphae* species and cultivars) are widely used in reflecting pools, but in order not to ruin the reflection or the effect of unlimited space that the water is intended to suggest, aquatic plants are placed mainly along the edges and their development is carefully controlled (III-77).

In smaller gardens, deciduous trees are preferred because they visually suggest a sense of openness; in larger parks groves of evergreens like pines, cypresses (e.g. *Cupressus chengiana* S. Y. Hu), cedars and junipers (*Juniperus chinensis* L. syn., *Sabina chinensis* (L.) Antoine) are juxtaposed with deciduous species like the large-leaved Chinese parasol tree (*Firmiana simplex* W. F. Wight), acacias, ash and plane trees. Thujas (*Biota orientalis* (L.) Endl., syn. *Thuja orientalis* L.) are used both for their ornamental qualities and for their religious associations; it was in fact thujas, also called Chinese Arborvitae, that adorned the graves of emperors. Specimens with particularly sculptural or knotty trunks, or by contrast those particularly beautiful in form, are planted in exposed positions.
Climbing plants like crossvine, morning glory and kiwi are grown on rocks or walls; wisteria, clematis and vines cover pergolas and arbors (III-78). They are also allowed to wind around tree trunks.

Fruit trees used include peach (*Prunus persica* Batsch.), apple (e. g. *Malus spectabilis* Borkh., *Malus sieboldii* Rehder, *Malus yunnanensis* C. K. Schneider.), cherry (e. g. *Prunus pseudocerasus* Lindl.), pomegranate (*Punica granatum* L.), loquat or Japanese medlar (*Eriobotrya japonica* (Thunb.) Lindl.) and Japanese apricot (*Prunus mume* Sieb. et Zucc.), appreciated for their blossoms (III-79). The preferred flowering trees are the scholar tree (*Sophora japonica* L.) jasmine (*Jasminum sambac* Ait.), hibiscus (*Hibiscus mutabilis* L.), Japanese rose (*Kerria japonica*), and the *Magnolia grandiflora*, an evergreen tree native to North America which has become popular in China and is used in gardens, for instance in the *Yu yuan*, “Garden to Please”, in Shanghai.

Various species of orchid, azalea and forsythia are planted along paths or near doorways and passageways. Flowering groups are planted in intimate little courtyards against a background of bamboo; in small gardens flowering plants are often protected by a fence. Roses are highly appreciated, but the protagonist role is played by peonies, both woody (e. g. *Paeonia suffruticosa* Andr.) and herbaceous (e. g. *Paeonia lactiflora* Pall.). As early as the Song period, numerous varieties of woody peonies were known, and the city of Luoyang was famous as a center for cultivation of these ornamental plants. The importance of the flowering tree was such that in the same period the historian Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) dedicated an important monograph to the tree peony entitled *Luoyang mudan ji*, *Notes on the Luoyang Tree Peonies*. Written in 1034, the text named 24 varieties and gave their horticultural characteristics and histories. A few years later, in 1082, the civil servant Zhou Shihou noted 109 varieties of tree peony in his *Luoyang hua-mu ji*, *Notes on the Trees and Flowers of Luoyang*. A more general treatise testifying to the importance of flowers in the Chinese Gardens is *Mizhuan huajing*, *The Mirror of Flower*, written by the man of letters Chen Haozi. Published in six volumes in 1688, the treatise was very successful both in China and in Japan; it was a sort of practical guide to gardening, dedicated exclusively to ornamental plants.
In gardens, but also inside homes, dwarf shrubs and trees are grown in low pots or ceramic or stone trays a few centimeters high. These are the *pentsai*, “tray plants” or “dwarf potted trees”, the result of pruning young tree roots and forcing the growth of their trunks and branches. The custom came from representations of the Islands of the Immortals in the gardens, evoking mountainous islands, mythical dwellings of the semi-divine beings called Immortals, where ever more miniaturized iconic reproductions were used to create a penjing, “tray scene”, also known as “tray landscape” (III-81). Originally these were executed with beautifully formed rock fragments placed in flat containers filled with a sheet of water to reflect the rocks. To complete the landscape effect, dwarf trees are grown on the rocks that imitate mountain peaks rising out of the sea, and moss and ferns and little shrubs and, sometimes, small figurines representing people or architectural features, complete the picture. The earliest record of miniaturized plants was found near the city of Xi’an in the tomb of a Chinese crown prince, Zhang Huai, who died in 706; the wall paintings in his tomb represent two servants in court attire, each of whom holds dwarf plants, one in a flat tray, the other in an oval bowl. The technique of miniaturization became widespread, and potted landscapes occupied prominent positions in noble mansions of the time. Gardens began to have areas dedicated to miniature landscapes. An example is the landscaped area of Huqiu shan, “Tiger Hill”, created in the city of Suzhou in the 10th century, which even now exhibits a big collection of such compositions (III-80).

The art of *penjing* enjoyed great fortune in Japan, where it was introduced during the Kamakura period (1185-1333). The technique of *pentsai* took the name of *bonsai*, a word coming to refer to both the particular method of growing trees in flat containers and the plants themselves. In Japan, the making of miniature landscapes was not limited to a rendition of a landscape scene onto a tray. Some gardens present miniaturizations of idealized natural landscapes within their enclosures, like the Daisen-in in Kyoto, a *karesansui* garden created in 1509 as part of the large Zen temple complex of Daitoku-ji. The section along the eastern side of the main building, or *hojo*, features carefully scaled rocks and plants composed to represent a mountainous scene, with a (dry) waterfall feeding a sinuous stream flowing between islands.

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2: Among the most sought-after are the calcareous rocks from Taihu, a large lake near Suzhou. These are big rocks of singular forms, which varied in color from white to dark grey. Sculptural and irregular, they are pierced by fissures and cavities resulting from the joint action of wind and waves. See Ji Cheng, *The Craft of Gardens*, 112-19.


5: *Ibid*.


Chapter 4

Reconfiguring the Chinese Garden
In the course of its long history, Chinese garden art has strongly influenced surrounding countries, beginning with Korea and Japan. It has also awakened interest in more distant lands.

In Korea, a country where the presence of parks is documented from the first centuries of the common era, planners adopted the Chinese manner of organizing gardens into distinct episodes, and also the Chinese way of giving water a central role. At the same time, the Koreans showed a taste for gardens which were less artificial, less sophisticated, with more integration between landscaped areas and natural spots.

In Japan, early garden designs emulated Korean or Chinese prototypes. Archaeological excavations in the ancient capital of Nara have brought to light the remains of what seem to be among the earliest parks in the country: two 8th-century gardens associated with the Imperial Court. One was a pond-and-stream garden, the other a stream garden, both clearly showing, in their general organization of natural forms and water and rocks, that their model came from the continent.

The Chinese Garden and Europe

A more subtle and complex matter is the effect Chinese garden style had on Europe. This style found an unambiguous expression in the garden architecture of the 18th century, whose forms and decorations had begun to display a vaguely Chinese taste by mid-century. It was also present in the cultural debate surrounding the radical change of aesthetic and stylistic principles in the move away from the formal geometrical manner toward artistic naturalness.

In early-18th-century England, growing discontent with formal compositions in the French manner - which had political and social overtones - gave way to a new approach in garden design entailing the progressive abandonment of regularity in favor of natural forms. This approach was characterized by an apparently random disposition of natural and architectural elements. Gentle artificial hills, meandering paths, clumps of trees, irregular bodies of water and a variety of garden structures were used to arouse changing sensations, and were associated ideally with the country's civil liberties. This new conception of parks, whose succession of scenes presented a sublimation of country landscapes, was probably influenced to some extent by information about Chinese Gardens sent to Europe by Jesuit missionaries. The Jesuits understood and emphasized the aesthetic manipulation of natural forms in Chinese Gardens. This idea was welcomed in Europe, where the rococo taste in painting and decorative arts was turning more and more toward an imaginary but naturalistic arcadia. The explicit artificiality of Europe’s great formal gardens, with their architecture based on geometry, could now be countered with a different method based on an artistic imitation of natural forms: the aesthetic interpretation and recomposition of the elements of nature.

The Jesuits’ convincing reports were widely read by European scholars even earlier, beginning in the last decades of the 17th century, and it was certainly in the wake of those descriptions, underlining that the emphatic naturalness of Chinese Gardens hid the art of emulating nature and its form, that some English authors began to refer to the gardens of China as a possible source of inspiration for the new style coming into being. This was the case of William Temple (1628-1699), diplomat and essayist, who in his 1685 work, Upon the Gardens of Epicurus, was the first to write about the ability of the Chinese in obtaining beautiful forms in gardens “without any order or disposition of parts.” Likewise Joseph Addison (1672-1719), politician and writer, affirmed in 1712 that the Chinese “chuse [sic] rather to shew [sic] a Genius in Works of Nature, and therefore always conceal the Art by which they direct themselves.” And in his volume The Villas of the Ancients Illustrated of 1728, Robert Castell (?-1729) wrote that Chinese Gardens were characterized by an artificial irregularity expressed through a “close imitation of Nature; where, tho’ the Parts are disposed with the greatest Art, the Irregularity is still preserved...”
For the intellectuals of England, a nation where the new concept of the Landscape Garden was taking shape, the idea of a possible affinity with the garden art of ancient China brought with it the underlying seduction of a relationship with a great empire with its millennia of history and above all a tradition completely unrelated, geographically and culturally, to that of the detested continental Europe. For the English theorists, it was not mimesis per se, but the artistic naturalness of the forms of Chinese Gardens that meant a liberation from Baroque formalism and a spur to the will to modernize.

If Chinese Gardens were initially appreciated for the liberation from abstract geometry they represented, what was more inspiring about them from the middle of the 18th century onwards was their brio, their surprises. The principal promoter of this way of understanding Chinese Gardens was the Scottish architect Sir William Chambers (1723-1796), who in the 1740s, as an official of the Swedish Company of the Indies, had visited the Chinese port of Canton. Upon his return, Chambers presented himself as an expert on Chinese architecture and gardens in publishing two successful works on the subject, *Design of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines, and Utensils* (1757) and *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1772). These books accelerated the evolution of the English-born Landscape Garden toward more playful and surprising forms of composition. Using Chinese Gardens as a starting point, Chambers in fact proposed a type of garden perceived as an adventure in landscaping, whose many curious views were intended to arouse different emotions in the visitor. Nature, rediscovered after the end of the reign of geometry, was to provide evocative scenery tinged with exoticism.

These ideas found fertile terrain in continental Europe, where an initial enthusiasm for the English landscape style had become, by the end of the 18th century, a confirmed taste for livelier and more dynamic garden designs. These produced hybrid gardens which, designed like theatrical scenes, were full of unexpected and bizarre arrangements, enriched with a proliferation of grottos, rocailles and exotic fabriques for which a “Chinese” style was preferred. Because of evanescent allusions to China in the gardens’ fairy-like character, which was the result of applications of Chinese ideas by Western designers, this style of gardens was also called chinois or anglo-chinois.

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**IV-1: Kew Gardens, London. The Chinese pagoda designed by Sir William Chambers in 1761-1762. It was designed for Princess Augusta, the Dowager Princess of Wales, who wanted the estate at Kew landscaped in accordance with the prevailing fashions of the day.**
In 1761-1762, Chambers himself planned a ten-storey pagoda in the Chinese style for the royal property of Kew in London (IV-1), which became probably the most important example of “Chinese” architecture in Europe. Beginning in the mid-18th century, structures in the Chinese style – bridges, pavilions, pagodas – spread through European gardens. These included the pagoda in the park of Chanteloup, of 1775 (IV-2), the Chinese House also built around the same year in the eclectic Désert de Retz near Chambourcy, both in France, the Chinese Teahouse in the park of Sanssouci in Potsdam, Germany, built in 1754-1757 (IV-3; IV-4), the Chinese Pavilion in the park of the Swedish royal palace of Drottningholm, built in 1753 (IV-5), and the Chinese village created at Tsarskoe Selo by Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, in the 1780s, where courtiers dressed as Chinese and pretended to live in a far-eastern city (IV-6; IV-7).

These architectural fantasies offered mythic visions of distant places in a game of geographical alienation. Their vigorous assertion of the capricious enchantment of Chinese Gardens, as perceived by westerners, also helped interrupt the age-old European formal tradition. The startling success of Chinese Gardens on the international scene began to diminish in the second half of the 19th century, following the decline of the empire and the later travails of the Chinese republic. To see its resurrection, it was necessary to await the last decades of the 20th century.
Chinese Gardens on the Contemporary Scene

Beginning in the 1980s, new gardens which reconsidered the historical forms of Chinese Gardens began to be created outside China. They reflected the new-born interest for Chinese culture which came first with the thaw between the People’s Republic of China and the West, and then with the more recent emergence of China on the world scene as an economic power.

This period began in 1981, a few years after US president Richard Nixon reestablished diplomatic relations with his official visit to China, when the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York created, for its Asian Art section, an evocation of a Chinese Garden within Astor Court. The design was prepared by a team of the Suzhou Garden Administration, while architects Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo implemented the plans for the garden and designed the pyramidal glass and steel roof enclosing the court. The Astor Court design is based on a courtyard in the Wangshi yuan in Suzhou, and this court has, like its model, three typical garden structures: a covered walkway, a small main hall, and a half-pavilion along the west wall (IV-8).

In 1986, the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden was built in Vancouver, Canada, the result of a non-profit organization’s attempt to “bridge understanding between Chinese and Western cultures”. Designed by a team of the Suzhou Garden Administration together with two local designers – landscape architect Don Vaughan and architect Joe Y. Wai – the garden evokes a classical Chinese Garden of the 15th century with a central reflecting pool crossed by a covered walkway linking the various pavilions and rock formations.

In 1988 in Sidney, Australia, the refined Garden of Friendship was inaugurated (IV-9). Promoted by the Chinese community of the city, it was created on the occasion of the bicentennial celebration of Sidney’s founding and of the arrival of the first immigrants from China. The design was developed by the Guangzhou Garden Planning and Building Design Institute in Sydney’s sister city, Guangzhou. Another garden inspired by classical examples, it features a sequence of different episodes: a mountain, two waterfalls, a rushing stream and a bamboo grove (IV-10). These come into view as one walks along paths around a large lake in the center, which is crossed by bridges (IV-11). Several pavilions stand around the lake amidst the vegetation, and the water’s surface is broken by the emergence of single vertical rocks (IV-12).

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IV-2: Chanteloup Park, Amboise. Designed in 1775 by Louis-Denis Le Camus, the pagoda was one of the follies dotting the 14-ha park created for Étienne-François Duc de Choiseul.

IV-3: Sanssouci, Potsdam. The Chinese Teahouse, surmounted by a seated Chinese figure carrying a parasol, was built by the architect Johann Gottfried Büring in 1754-1756 after sketches by Frederick the Great.

IV-4: Sanssouci. The outer design of the Chinese Teahouse features gilded sandstone sculptures by the workshops of the sculptors Johann Gottlieb Heymüller and Johann Peter Benckert. They represent Chinese figures drinking tea and playing music.

IV-5: Drottningholm, Stockholm. Built by Carl Fredrik Adelcrantz in 1753, the Chinese Pavilion is essentially a rococo architecture whose exoticism is strengthened by some decorative elements.

IV-6: Tsarskoe Selo, Saint Petersburg. The Creaking Pavilion, built in 1778-1786 to designs by Yuri Matveevich Velten, is adjacent to an intricate water landscape and preludes the Chinese Village, which was the largest group of Chinese buildings in Europe.

IV-7: Tsarskoe Selo. The Great Caprice, designed in 1770 as an archway surmounted by an open gazebo with an arched roof in the Chinese style, was used as the main entrance to the Catherine Park and led to the Chinese Village.

IV-8: Astor Court, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, NY. The half-pavilion along the west wall clearly refers to its model: the Wangshi yuan, “Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets”, in Suzhou. The garden was built 1980-1981.

IV-9: Garden of Friendship, Sydney. Built 1986-1988, the garden celebrates the sister-state relationship between Guangdong province and New South Wales, as symbolized by the twin pavilion with a double roof facing the lake.
Europe as well created Chinese Gardens; among them we can mention the Garten des wiedergewonnenen Mondes, “Garden of the Reclaimed Moon”, built in the Marzahn Recreational Park in 2000 in Berlin, Germany (IV-13). The garden is a sort of catalogue of the typical elements of the Chinese Garden: there is a little lake crossed by a crooked stone bridge, a waterfall over boulders, some pavilions, a moon gate, a covered walkway and some rock formations (IV-14). The fact that the garden site is covered by a proper English lawn intentionally increases the disorientation of the whole. The Marzahn Recreational Park contains a collection of gardens in various regional styles.

The Pacific coast of the United States turns toward China not only geographically but also culturally, and has long been the preferred destination of immigrants. Among the many Chinese Gardens created here recently are the Lan su yuan, “Garden of Awakening Orchids”, in Portland, Oregon, built in 2000, and the first portion of Xi hua yuan in Seattle, Washington, opened in 2008 (IV-15). The park of Huntington, the San Marino cultural institution near Los Angeles, contains a collection of botanical and thematic gardens, to which in 2008 a Chinese Garden was added, the Liu fang yuan, “Garden of Flowing Fragrance” (IV-16). Here again traditional elements characterize the design: a lake, with water flowing in on the north and out on the south, crossed by various types of bridges, while a series of buildings line the eastern and southern shore (IV-17). The composition is adapted to the landscape of the park, which is dominated by local woods in a mix of East and West.
IV-15: Lan su yuan, “Garden of Awakening Orchids”, Portland, OR. The lake at the center of the garden, built 1999-2000, is crossed by two bridges, one of which, modeled on the Shizi lin of Suzhou, features a hexagonal pavilion.


IV-17: Liu fang yuan. The garden, built 2004-2008, presents five stone bridges set against a woodland of native California oaks and pine species.
The design philosophy of all these gardens is tinged with neo-historicism. Their constant points of reference, at least in the intentions of their planners, are the classical gardens of Suzhou, which are evoked through a patchwork of diverse citations. The initial motive for the adoption of these as models was the international fame of the gardens of Suzhou, eight of which - four since 1997 and four more since 2000 - are registered on the World Heritage List by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. Another factor is the role played by Chinese immigrant communities, who are often at the origin of initiatives to plant these green spaces. For these communities, the creation of traditional Chinese Gardens is a way of affirming their cultural identity and social position. From this point of view, it is perhaps no coincidence that historically-styled gardens, clearly evoking Chinese cultural identity, were created in two Chinese territories long under foreign domination: Macao and Hong Kong.

The Lou Lim Ieoc Garden, realized in the port city and former Portuguese colony of Macao in the 19th century by the local merchant Lou Kau and remodeled in 1906 by his son, Lou Lim Ieoc, was restored in the 1970s (IV-18). Conceived in the Chinese garden tradition, it is a miniaturized landscape dotted with narrow paths meandering through groves of bamboo and blossoming bushes, with a nine-turn bridge crossing a large pond filled with lotus flowers (IV-19). Similarly, in the port city and former British colony of Hong Kong in the 1970s, the Good Wish Garden was created around the Wong Tai Sin Temple (IV-20). Several pavilions, connected by covered walkways, dot the green space, which features a waterfall leaping into a pond and several rock compositions (IV-21).
More recently, awareness of the historical dimension of Chinese Gardens has provoked a recovery of stylistic canons from more remote epochs. After its full return to China as a special territory, Hong Kong became the scene of the most surprising example of a neo-historical garden: the Nan Lian Garden, a public park opened in 2006 (IV-22). It is the replica of a garden of the Tang period, which lasted from the 7th to 9th centuries and is regarded by historians as a high point in Chinese civilization. This little green space is an experiment in evoking the distant history of garden art. Its two rock-lined reflecting pools connected by a twisting brook make water the protagonist of the composition, and its architectural features and botanical riches are explicit reminders of Tang gardens (IV-23; IV-24).

Because most of these new gardens of historicist taste are limited in size and have been created in a cultural context far from that of the originals which inspired them, they lack that sophisticated construction typically based on the progressive unfoldment of different scenes. What prevails in them is the intent to strike the visitor through the spectacular presentation of an exotic landscape, emphasized by the upward curves of the pavilion roofs, and by a profusion of moon gates. The reason for this reductive approach lies obviously in the difficulty of proposing to contemporary users, who are used to rapid consumption, a composition conceived to be savored slowly and based on elegant visual surprises.

What these reconstructions do show clearly is that the traditional garden is considered an emblematic and exportable artifact of the age-old Chinese culture. Their re-creation constitutes an efficacious demonstration of the special quality that the Chinese Garden incorporates: the joining of a refined composition, in itself a witness to history, with an attention to nature that intercepts the entirely contemporary interest in the environment.
Reinterpreting Tradition

If the neo-historical garden seems destined for further development, due also to the wider knowledge of the gardens of ancient times that archeology has uncovered, an intriguing development, parallel to but distinct from this revival of historicist taste, is the revisitation of tradition in a contemporary way. This does not imply that these contemporary gardens and parks are necessarily directly inspired by Chinese tradition. It rather suggests that some compositional elements and principles of Chinese garden design are now reconsidered as bearers of modernity, and are applied and readapted as such to contemporary landscape design. A forerunner of this design approach is the architect I. M. Pei, who in planning the open spaces for his architectural projects in China has several times included gardens that are interpretations of the classical tradition in a modern idiom. An example is the Bank of China in Hong Kong (1982-1989), or the Xianshan “Fragrant Hill” Hotel (1979-1982). The latter is located within the former imperial hunting grounds outside Beijing, not far from the Summer Palace, and the architect took that history into account. The hotel complex is highly articulated, with various wings built around a covered central court which contains a small rock-and-water garden (IV-25), designed by Pei himself with the close collaboration of Chen Congzhou. The meandering plan respects the presence of the old trees and also made possible the subdivision of the garden into areas with different characters, where winding paths lead through wood groves and rock-and-water compositions¹¹. The biggest open space features an irregularly shaped reflecting pool at the foot of a little hill. The pool is crossed by two bridges, one of which leads to a platform on the water reminiscent of places traditionally used for poetry games. A winding watercourse is cut into the paving of the platform, in a reference to the pavilions in historical parks, where cups of wine were floated on a winding stream, called Floating Cup Stream, and the person standing where a cup stopped had to drink the wine and improvise a poem.
Thus the garden respects the traditional rule of a composition in episodes, and it integrates explicit references to historical gardens without making romantic concessions: the language is generally that of the tight abstract geometry characteristic of Pei’s contemporary projects. The same planning philosophy and an intense sense of abstraction inspires the project for the Suzhou Museum, completed in 2006. The organization in separate pavilions brings to mind traditional types of aristocratic residential constructions, while the use of contemporary materials like steel, glass, and cement, as well as the underlying geometry, exalted by white walls wrapped in a network of grey stone, make clear that this is a modern expression echoing tradition. The garden by Pei was created in the open space between the pavilions (IV-26). The principal element of its composition is a pool crossed by a crooked low stone walkway, which serves to connect the museum’s east wing with the west one. The shores of the pond feature essential and modern renditions of traditional stylistic elements – a grove of bamboo, an open polygonal pavilion, a terrace-belvedere (IV-27). Great stone fragments emerge from the stony low northern shore, closed off by a white wall. The highly sculptural composition was inspired by traditional landscape painting, and clearly evokes hilly and mountainous scenery (IV-28).

Many gardens and open spaces created in the last decade have designs tending toward the geometrical and marked by the repetition of certain elements. These traits indicate the desire to link the new gardens and open spaces with the regularity of the urban context in which they are situated; at the same time, their plans, incisive and essential in their design, clearly speak of a sense of modernity. This decidedly new approach does not completely exclude tradition, but rather favors new forms of hybridization.
IV-29: Shanghai Carpet, Shanghai. Master plan.

IV-30: Shanghai Carpet, Model. This project was in collaboration with Skidmore Owings and Merrill LLP, San Francisco. Tom Leader Studio was responsible for the landscape design.

IV-31: City Balcony, Hangzhou. Built 2004–2008, the project was in collaboration with Obermeyer Planen und Beraten, Munich, and with ECADI - East China Architecture and Design Institute, Shanghai - who were responsible for the architecture. Jörg Michel with POLA was responsible for the landscape architecture.

IV-32: City Balcony, Hangzhou. Master plan.
The aesthetic principle of the collection of miniature landscapes has found an original interpretation in the Shanghai Carpet (2003-in completion), a sunken pedestrian plaza designed by Tom Leader Studio, a landscape-architectural practice based in Berkeley, California, and located in Shanghai in the Yangpu district, for the University City Hub (IV-29). Built over an underground parking garage, the linear composition plays with a dense alternation of planted strips and bands of different paving and material; lotus pools, bamboo groves, and intricate stone patterns evoke the alternating spaces of traditional gardens (IV-30). On a bigger scale, an analogous inspiration lies behind the City Balcony Hangzhou (2004-2008), whose landscaping was planned by the German Berlin-based landscape architect Jörg Michel and built in an area of expansion of the city of Hangzhou (IV-32). Placed at the end of a strip lined with important urban amenities like theaters and convention halls, the balcony is a big multi-level creation facing the Qian Tang River. It contains sports and recreation facilities and is covered by a great hanging garden which - functioning as a connective tissue for the new architecture of the complex - alternates irregular bands of greenery and water with different types of paving, juxtaposing a sequence of artificial landscapes with the view of the big river. Elevated glass-enclosed walkways wind their way among the buildings they connect, like the covered walkways of historical Chinese Gardens, and offer ever-changing views of the green space around (IV-31).
The vernacular language of tradition takes a different turn in the Shanghai Botanical Garden in Chenshan (2005-2010), planned by a group led by the German landscape architects Donata and Christoph Valentien. The garden is configured like a closed space protected from its outside surroundings by a ring of artificial elevations, whose summit is covered by an arboretum which is punctuated by pavilions sited in correspondence with particularly scenic spots (IV-33). The central space of the botanical garden is characterized by a series of irregularly shaped ponds for aquatic plants. Emerging like islands from the surface of the water and the surrounding terrain, 37 different thematic gardens present a show of greenery boasting a high biodiversity quotient (IV-34). The vision of the garden as a space from which the outside is excluded, the contraposition of the waters and the sculptural effect of the crown of artificial hills, the presence of islands, the central position of the ponds, the general powerful dynamism of the composition, all these are elements of a design reflecting Chinese garden tradition (IV-35). But here that tradition is interpreted through the latest technologies for sustainability: a modern biological water purification system was created, and biomass and waste materials are collected and converted into energy for cooling and heating. The complex result harmonizes the didactic aims of a botanical garden with a landscape that is aesthetically pleasing and ecologically sustainable (IV-36).

IV-33: Shanghai Botanical Garden, Chenshan. Aerial perspective of the botanical garden, which was built 2005-2010.

IV-34: Shanghai Botanical Garden. The Iris Garden is one of the 37 thematic gardens spotting the botanical garden. It presents a selection of irises for dry locations, irises for moist locations and bulbous irises.

IV-35: Shanghai Botanical Garden. The large Garden for Medicinal Plants features Chinese medicinal plants at its center, surrounded by curative herbs from other countries.
IV-36: Shanghai Botanical Garden, Chenshan. A series of irregularly shaped ponds characterize the central space of the garden.

IV-37: Paddy Rice Campus, Architectural University Campus, Shenyang. Completed in 2004, the open space of the campus is designed as agricultural fields subdivided according to a geometric pattern of quadrangular areas, which are planted with rice and other native crops.
Sustainability and cultural identity are also the distinctive traits of the studio Turenscape’s intriguing project for the green space around the Architectural University Campus in Shenyang (2003-2004), which was inspired by traditional agricultural landscapes (IV-37). The campus was built on former rice paddies, and it is precisely the geometrical landscape of these paddies that Turenscape’s project evokes. A grid marks the open space, creating quadrangular pieces of different sizes, planted with rice and other native crops. Rectilinear paths, flanked in part by rows of trees, underscore the design of the rice fields (IV-38). Students are involved in farming processes and the rice produced is packaged and sold at the university or offered as a gift to visitors, thus becoming the symbol of the university itself (IV-39). This very simple composition creates a fruitful landscape that unites the conservation of the memory of the place to the current themes of local food production and sustainable land use (IV-40).

A narrative mixing local history and natural environment forms also the basis of another project by Turenscape, the Zhongshan Shipyard Park in the city of Zhongshan in southern China (2000-2002). The project aims at the recovering of an industrial area, the site of a former shipyard. The inlet of the shipyard was reshaped into a winding lake that insinuates itself around big cranes, and the industrial structures were reduced to abstract and colorful metal skeletons, in an environment rich with flora, partly planted and partly spontaneous. Paths, which are linear but segmented, lead the visitor through different parts of the park in a play of successive revelations: green rooms, small intimate spaces for reading and relaxing, alternate with wide open spaces dominated by water whose surface reflects, like a memory of times gone by, tremulous images of the bare metal forms of an industrial past (IV-41).
IV-38: Paddy Rice Campus Architectural University Campus, Shenyang. Sitting areas are located within the rice paddies.

IV-39: Paddy Rice Campus. Traditional agricultural practices inspired the design for the open spaces for the campus.

IV-40: Paddy Rice Campus. Sheep cut the grass, providing a fully sustainable maintenance.

IV-41: Zhongshan Shipyard Park, Zhongshan. Buildings reduced to metal skeletons, evidence of the site's industrial past, synthesize the history of the place.
Toward Sustainable Open Spaces

Sustainability is the common denominator of all recent planning experiments and will continue to inform trends in the near future. It is not alien from tradition, because the founding premises of the Chinese Garden are the same as those principles inspiring the current conception of a sustainable environment. The Chinese Garden is an ecological microcosm: it puts the visitor into an environmental metaphor, where compositions symbolizing the riches of nature are inhabited by fish and birds. The Chinese Garden is a space of balance, where people recognize without prevarication that they are an integral part of the system of nature. The Chinese Garden is also an economical construct: not only in its creation, but even more in its management. This fact was stated already more than two centuries ago by the French Jesuit Pierre-Martial Cibot, as a key motive for suggesting the Chinese Garden as an appropriate model for Europe: the rustic quality of the Chinese Garden appeared to be far superior to the very costly European gardens, which required infinite care to maintain the geometrical forms into which the greenery was forced at the time.14

Even though the new experiments are far from the traditional stylistic canons, the contemporary turn that landscape architecture in China is taking can be considered as part of the evolution of an ancient tradition. The process has been accelerated by the anthropization of China’s countryside in the last few decades, which has had a devastating impact. The widespread degradation of ecosystems has generated recent efforts in the country to recreate the natural landscape in areas sharply affected by human activities.

Kongjian Yu, founder of the Turenscape firm for landscape architecture and urban design, has experimented with processes of environmental regeneration in many of his projects, including the Yongning River Park (2002-2004), an urban waterfront park along the Yongning River in the coastal city of Taizhou, south of Shanghai. The natural setting of the river had been destroyed by concrete embankments as a result of local flood control policy. Turenscape’s task was to reconstruct the natural riverbank and the transition from the water to the urbanized area. In line with an ecological approach to flood control, the landscape architect reconstituted a riparian wetland along the floodplain, and replaced the concrete embankments which constricted the river with an earth bank consolidated with native grasses. Beyond the riparian wetland, the main park features a second and wider wetland, which connects in turn with an outer network of ponds. This wetland is crossed by paths and walkways, and features little groves of greenery and small architectural structures.
In the Qiaoyuan Wetland Park (2005-2008) in the northern coastal city of Tianjin, Turenscape has recalled the original qualities of the area, once wetlands and salt marshes, used then as a polluted garbage dump. A series of gentle elevations flank twisting depressions dug into the ground at different depths and dimensions. Ponds, some permanent, some seasonal, occupy these depressions, and they change shape according to seasonal rains (IV-44). Winding paths make the park enjoyable and take visitors to botanical points of interest. The result is a new landscape in the form of a low-maintenance park, which serves as a manifesto of the natural processes of the original ecosystem of the area as well (IV-45).

The Lotus Lake Wetland Park (2006-2009) in the city of Tieling was planned by a group led by landscape architect Hu Jie (IV-46). Intense agricultural exploitation had altered the original character of a water-rich area, once a natural refuge for birds. The park was created so as to offer ideal habitats for different species of migratory birds (IV-47). The lake was enlarged and flanked by a swampy area and an artificial hill to attract raptors. Three low islands constructed in the center of the lake afford safe and isolated avian breeding areas. Paths cross the park, giving access to tiny structures for bird-watching (IV-48).
IV-49: Wetland Park, Hong Kong. The park, completed in 2005, was created to compensate for a considerable loss of wetlands caused by large-scale housing development.

IV-50: 52: Wetland Park. Guided paths take the visitors through the different wildlife habitats.

IV-51: Wetland Park. Information panels explain to visitors the biodiversity of wetlands.
In Hong Kong, the Wetland Park (completed 2005) was planned by Urbis Limited with MET Studio Designer and created by the Special Region’s Government in the New Territories, the big mountainous and well-watered wooded area beyond the metropolis, where new towns have been built in the course of the last 50 years to provide housing for immigrants. The park lies next to the most recent of the residential satellite cities, thick with skyscrapers, called Tin Shui Wai (IV-49). Construction of the city completely altered the original environment, which featured ponds and swamps offering refuge to birds along the routes of their seasonal migrations (IV-50; IV-52). The Wetland Park is a natural environment with a big visitors’ center aimed at teaching the public about the ecology of wetlands. The park includes guided paths, some of them over floating walkways, which offer spots for observing the wetland biodiversity (IV-51).

In the ongoing globalization of the world, research on the local cultural as well as natural history of specific sites guides recent landscape architecture projects. The strategy seems to be to capitalize what is already there, to give a meaning to the conscious transformation of the site, and, at the same time, to reveal the beauty of the unexpected contrasts raised by this approach.

To that common pattern, to the most current international debate, contemporary Chinese landscape architecture adds the revitalization of the historical legacy as a tool to reestablish a common confidence in the long-term capability of managing the relationship with the environment. Environmental awareness melts with the Chinese Garden legacy in a synthesis of international and traditional styles.

In a country like China, which always pays attention to signs and gestures, even the creation of a garden or a park can be seen as a good auspice for the future of the country.

1: Beginning in the penultimate decade of the 16th century, the religious order of the Jesuits got established in China, aiming to introduce Christianity to that ancient, vast and well-ordered empire. The history of the Jesuits’ efforts in China began in 1582, when the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci succeeded in establishing a mission in the Chinese empire, and ended with the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV, whose brief officially reached missionaries in China only two years later. For the reception of the Jesuits’ descriptions of Chinese Gardens in Europe see Bianca Maria Rinaldi, "Borrowing from China. The Society of Jesus and the Ideal of Naturalness in XVII and XVIII Century European Gardens", Die Gartenkunst 2 (2005): 319-37.

2: William Temple, "Upon the Garden of Epicurus", in Miscellanea, the Second Part. In Four Essays (London: Simpson, 1696*), 132.

3: Joseph Addison, The Spectator 414, June 25, 1712, quoted in Dixon Hunt and Willis, eds., The Genius of the Place, 142.


6: In February 1972 Richard M. Nixon visited the People’s Republic of China, where he met with Mao Zedong and other Chinese officials.

7: There are also a Japanese Garden, a Korean Garden, a Balinese Garden, an Italian Renaissance Garden, a hedge maze and a paved labyrinth symbolizing European garden art, as well as an Oriental Garden.

8: An exception to this general trend is represented by the Yu hwa yuan, the Chinese Garden built in Singapore in 1975, and by the Chinese Garden in Zurich, opened in 1994. The designs of both gardens evoke the character of parks in northern China.

9: Since 1997, Zhouzheng yuan, "Garden of the Humble Administrator"; Liu yuan, "Lingering Garden", Wangshi yuan, "Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets", Huanxiu shanzhuang, "Mountain Villa with Embracing Beauty", have been registered; since 2000, Canglang ting, "Surging Waves Pavilion", Shizi lin, "Lion Grove", Yipu, "Garden of Cultivation", Ou yuan, "Couple’s Garden Retreat", have been added to the list.

10: The model for the Nan Lian Garden was the Jiangshouju, a garden of the Governor of Jiang in today’s Xinjiang County, Shanxi Province.


12: The project was in collaboration with Skidmore Owings and Merrill LLP, San Francisco.

13: The project was in collaboration with Obermeyer Planen und Beraten, Munich, and with ECADI – East China Architecture and Design Institute, Shanghai, partners for the architecture; Jörg Michel, principal of POLA Landschaftsarchitekten, was responsible for the landscape design.

Short Portraits of Parks and Gardens

Chapter 5
This section comprises a selection of 45 parks and gardens, ranging from historical ones to most recent realizations, which are discussed as case studies within the book. All the examples have been chosen by reason of their particular features and compositional characteristics, as representatives of the design principles examined in the book. In addition to that, historical parks and gardens have been selected in relation to their historical relevance, and also because these are well preserved and accessible; contemporary projects have been selected with consideration to their compositional innovation.

The 45 parks and gardens are organized into four typological groups: Imperial Parks, Classical Gardens, Neo-historical Gardens and Contemporary Landscape Design; within each group, the sequence of the parks and gardens is arranged according to geographical location and presented in alphabetical order. The page numbers refer to the mentions of the gardens and parks in the text.

**IMPERIAL PARKS**

**Beijing**

*Beihai Park*

This green space, which now serves as a public garden, occupies the northernmost part of a bigger imperial park which even today embraces the entire western side of the Forbidden City. The park as a whole features a sequence of three different artificial lakes, separated by narrow strips of land. The largest, situated beyond the northwestern corner of the Forbidden City, bears the name *Beihai*, “Northern Sea”; south of it lies the *Zhonghai*, “Middle Sea”, and the *Nanhai*, “Southern Sea”. Out of the waters of the *Beihai* rises an island called *Qionghua dao*, “Jade Islet”, because of the color of the wooded hill that covers it almost entirely. Islands also mark the other lakes (V-1).
The complex, altered several times through the centuries, owes its origin to the presence of an imperial lodge constructed in the 10th century, then transformed into an imperial residence in 1179, during the Jin dynasty. An oblong lake was created near the palace, featuring a circular island with a hill. In 1266, when Khubilai Khan chose Beijing as the new capital of the empire, he had the walls of his imperial city built with the lake at the center, enriching the island with pavilions and planting the hillside with evergreens. In the Ming period, in the first half of the 15th century, the lake was expanded on the south side and radically reshaped. It was then that the existing three bodies of water were created, and gardens and pavilions were distributed along their shores. The whole complex took the name Xi yuan, “West Garden”. But it was the next dynasty, the Qing, and especially the Qianlong Emperor, who built most of the buildings and pavilions and gardens now visible within the Beihai Park. In 1925, the area containing Lake Beihai was transformed into a large public park of about 70 ha; the remaining part of the imperial park was transformed after 1949 by the newly founded People’s Republic of China into a government center, housing the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, as well as the State Council.

Scenic sites within the Beihai Park evoke the gardens on canals in the southern Chinese cities of Suzhou and Hangzhou. Examples of this include the pavilions of the Huafang zhai, “Studio of the Painted Boats”, on the northeastern shore of the lake, which face onto a quadrangular basin and are flanked by a long canal; or the Jingxin zhai, “Studio of the Rested Heart”, an emperor’s summer retreat in the northern part of Beihai Park, featuring a famous “garden within the garden”. The garden is remarkable for the construction of its pavilions and the covered passageways which open onto irregular pools enclosed by rock formations. A white stupa, placed at the highest point on Qionghua Island, is the visual focus of the whole composition.

**Yihe yuan, “Garden of the Preservation of Harmony”**

Known as the “Summer Palace”, Yihe yuan is today a big public park just within the northwestern stretch of Beijing’s Fifth Ring Road (V-2). Its origins date back to a small palace built in 1153 during the Jin dynasty, used by the sovereigns as a residence during their travels throughout the empire. The area has changed often through the centuries, with the most important transformation taking place under the Qianlong Emperor, who in 1750 decided to expand the whole park in honor of his mother’s 60th birthday in 1751. Work was not completed until 1764, however, and the park took the name Qingyi yuan, “Garden of Clear Ripples”. With the hydrographic situation of the West Lake in the city of Hangzhou in mind, Qianlong expanded the lake at the center of the park and created two more distinct but connected bodies of water in its western part, separated by wooded strips of land; each of these three parts featured an island. The hill dominating the lake was also heightened, and numerous structures were built within the park’s perimeter. The park was damaged first in 1860 by the Anglo-French troops in the Second Opium War and again in 1900 by the troops of the Eight-Nations Alliance during the Boxer Rebellion, but both times it was rebuilt by the Empress Dowager Cixi. It was following the first reconstruction that the park got its present name.
The 300-ha park is centered on the harmonious juxtaposition of a hill and a big lake, both artificial. The hill, called Wanshou shan, “Longevity Hill”, occupies the northern part of the area; densely wooded, it is dotted with temples, pavilions and gardens nestled in its intricate topography. These include the little garden called Xiequ yuan, “Garden of Harmonious Interest”, model of a “garden within a garden”, where the irregularly shaped lake is surrounded by elegant pavilions with terraces, linked by a series of paths (V-3). A high octagonal pagoda on the hilltop, the Foxiang ge, “Buddha Fragrance Pavilion”, gives the whole park a focus. At the foot of the hill lies the big Kunming Lake, which occupies three quarters of the whole park. The lake narrows at its northwestern edge, becoming a canal at the foot of the hill. Here a landscape composition was created in imitation of a lively urban scene: two rows of low houses with shops face the canal. This is the famous “Suzhou Street”, where the imperial court amused itself shopping.

In 1998 the Yihe yuan was added to the World Heritage List of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO.

**Yuanming yuan, “Garden of Perfect Brightness”**

Yuanming yuan, the “Garden of Perfect Brightness”, was born as a grand complex of palaces and gardens for the sovereigns of the Qing dynasty. Situated in the northwestern outskirts of Beijing, the park was begun in 1709 by the Kangxi Emperor as a summer palace for his fourth son, the future Yongzheng Emperor. Once on the throne, Yongzheng started to expand the complex in 1725 and made it his principal residence. But it was during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor that the greatest expansion took place, making a park of over 300 ha. Qianlong added two more gardens to the original nucleus: to the east, between 1745 and 1751, he created Changchun yuan, the “Garden of Everlasting Spring”, and to the south he commissioned Qichun yuan, the “Garden of Ten-Thousand Springs”, whose construction began in 1772. The Yuanming yuan was the biggest of the three gardens and gave its name to the whole complex. It was a sort of miniature of the Chinese empire; high hills built at its western end evoked the Himalayas and a large watercourse crossing the complex represented the Yellow River.
The three gardens were independent from one another yet connected through an intricate network of waterways and winding paths. Each of them featured pavilions and other structures, hillocks, valleys, groves, watercourses, rockeries, lakes, ponds and islets (V-4). The Qianlong Emperor commissioned the Jesuit missionaries, who were at the court as artists and scientific experts, to plan a further expansion of the park: a western-style formal garden called Xiyang lou, or “European Palaces”. The team of Jesuits who took part in the project was composed of Giuseppe Castiglione, who was entrusted with the overall plan and the architecture; Jean-Denis Attiret and Ignaz Sichelbart, who designed the building details and the painted and interior decoration; Pierre d’Incarville, who took charge of the botanical aspect and landscaping; Gilles Thébault, who directed the iron work, and Michel Benoist, who managed the hydraulics, which he undertook with the aid of Pierre-Martial Cibot. Created in two phases between 1747 and 1759 in the northern part of the Changchun yuan, the Xiyang lou lay in a narrow piece of land surrounded by a wall. The Jesuits created a compendium of ornaments typical of Western gardens, including a rectangular stone labyrinth, fountains and various hydraulic devices, and an open-air theater. The various elements were presented in the form of single scenes separated by walls, in the Chinese manner. A new building was added in 1768 to display some Beauvais tapestries woven according to designs of François Boucher and presented to Qianlong by the missionaries. The European Palaces became a sort of Wunderkammer; Qianlong placed many gifts from European missionaries or ambassadors there, along with artifacts made by the missionaries themselves (V-5).
In October 1860, during the Second Opium War, the park was first looted and then burned by Anglo-French troops. Further vandalism took place during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. The park was partially rebuilt in the 1870s but soon dismantled to reconstruct the Yihe yuan, and it was never rebuilt.

Since the 1980s, the destiny of the Yuanming yuan has been the subject of a lively international debate over whether to protect the place as a heritage site, preserving the remains, or reconstructing it in part or completely. While no consensus has come out of the debate, in the mid-1980s one section of the European Palaces, the stone labyrinth and its central pavilion-belvedere, was completely reconstructed (V-6). In 1988 the park was declared a National Historical Relic and was partially opened to the public; some areas have undergone protective intervention and others have been examined by archeologists.

The park, both for the rich original conception and for the manner of its destruction by occupying armies, has made a strong impression on Chinese popular culture, so much so that in 1997, a miniature of part of the Yuanming yuan was reconstructed as part of an amusement park in the city of Shenzhen. The park has also been the subject or location of films and television series, like the successful documentary Yuanming Yuan, released in 2006 (produced by the Beijing Science Educational Film Studio and directed by Jin Tiemu), a mix of historical narrative with quotations from Western accounts that presents digital reconstructions of sections of the park as well as the story of its sack.

Yuhua yuan, “Back Garden of the Imperial Palace”, and Qianlong Garden, Forbidden City

Within a rigidly organized structure featuring a progression of palaces and great courts along a south-north axis, the Forbidden City also includes some small courtyard gardens, the largest of which is the imperial garden called Yuhua yuan, “Back Garden of the Imperial Palace”.

Placed at the end of the Forbidden City’s central axis, Yuhua yuan lies within a quadrangular courtyard near the Northern Gate. It was created in the 15th century during the Ming dynasty; its original plan consisted of an axial composition maintained through the following times, despite the general rebuilding which took place during the Qing period. The small green space has a walled pavilion at its center, called Qin dian, “Hall of Imperial Tranquility”; the garden has a symmetrical plan, with trees in a row, regular flower beds, a collection of single rocks placed on sculpted pedestals, rectangular pools and little pavilions. Three artificial hillocks break the tight geometry of the ensemble.

Entirely different is the plan of the Qianlong Garden, sited within the Ningshou gong, “Palace of Tranquil Longevity”. This complex, organized like a miniature Forbidden City into a sequence of palaces and courts, was built in the northeastern quadrant of the Forbidden City by the Qianlong Emperor beginning in 1771, and it was here that he withdrew in 1795 after abdicating. The garden occupies the western part of the complex and is organized around five courts, whose tone is given by stone landscapes. Rocks are placed so as to create little mountains topped by terrace-belvederes, with grottos and narrow defiles below.
Chengde, Hebei Province

Bishu shanzhuang, "Mountain Hamlet to Escape the Summer Heat"

Bishu shanzhuang, "Mountain Hamlet to Escape the Summer Heat", was built as an imperial summer residence in a mountainous area about 250 km northeast of Beijing, near the city of Chengde. Situated in Hebei Province, Chengde was originally a military outpost placed on the empire’s northern frontier. The Kangxi Emperor decided to transform the place first into imperial hunting grounds and then into the site of the Qing dynasty’s summer palace. This choice was intended to consolidate national unity by showing favor to the people living in the border regions. Each year the Qing emperors spent a good deal of time at the resort, which became another political center for the Qing dynasty.

Construction was undertaken in several phases. In the first of these, between 1703 and 1714, the large park and its artificial lake and islands were created, as were a series of palaces and pavilions. The most significant aspects of the property at this time were depicted in a collection of 36 copper engravings made in 1712 by the Italian missionary Matteo Ripa, who was employed at the imperial court. Later in that century, during the reigns of the Yongzheng and Qianlong Emperors, expansion and construction of more palaces and temples took place, resulting in a vast ensemble of buildings and gardens which blended harmoniously into a landscape of lakes, pastureland and forests.

Covering more than 500 ha and enclosed by a wall that ran for about 10 km, Bishu shanzhuang is the largest complex of imperial palaces and gardens in China. It is divided into two parts. The northwestern one is characterized by high wooded hills which cover about 80% of the whole. In the little valleys separating the heights, numerous pavilions, gardens, temples and monasteries were created. The southeastern part of the park is flat and features, from south to north, the imperial palaces, the lake shaped into several pools and a lowland that is partly pasture, partly woods. The palaces are smaller-scale replicas of the Forbidden City, with a sequence of successive courts. The lake is divided by causeways and bridges into sections of different sizes, with several islands. Part of the flat area north of the lake was used for horse races, and the western section included a number of buildings among which stood Wenjin Hall, one of the largest imperial libraries. UNESCO added the Bishu shanzhuang to the World Heritage List in 1994.

Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province

Xihu, "West Lake"

Situated west of the port city of Hangzhou, the West Lake is a large and more or less quadrangular body of water of about 6.5 km², once linked to the open sea, surrounded on the other three sides by hills. The place has always been famous for the beauty of its landscape, but it also has deep associations with Chinese poetry and literature, as well as with important personalities. In the buildings gracing the heights, it preserves the historical memory of ancient religious devotion (V-7).
In the 7th century, Hangzhou became the southern terminus of the Grand Canal, the system of navigable waterways that reached all the way to Beijing. In 1127, during the Southern Song dynasty, the city became capital of the kingdom and a great cultural and economic center thanks to trade with Korea and Japan. In the same period, the shores of the lake and the surrounding hills were enriched with temples, pagodas and sacred grottos, acquiring a highly picturesque character.

To protect against flooding, the lake was given long dykes along its shores, which were planted with trees and linked with bridges, with secondary lakes beyond, making for a special landscape still admired. At the same time the lake was dredged, and the sediment was used to create islets.

The Kangxi and Qianlong Emperors of the Qing dynasty visited southern China often, stopping frequently at Hangzhou. Kangxi was the one who formulated the names of the “Ten Scenic Spots of West Lake”, concise definitions of the views enjoyed in spots celebrated for the beauty of the panoramas. Those names, like “Two Peaks Piercing the Clouds” and “Moon over the Peaceful Lake in Autumn”, were inscribed on stone by local authorities and placed in pavilions, which became fixed places for admiring the views.

The main body of water has three artificial islands. The principal one is called Xiaoyingzhou, “Small Seas Islet”; it was built in 1607 and is a famous example of a water garden within a larger water garden. Even though from outside it appears to be a luxuriant green island, Xiaoyingzhou in reality is another body of water, delimited by a curved dyke on which pavilions were built amidst a thick grove of trees. The trees make a green curtain hiding the lake within. In a play of Chinese boxes, the lake in turn has an island, rather elongated, linked to the shore by two narrow strips of land and two bridges, which divide the lake into four enclosed ponds (V-8).
Shanghai

Yu yuan, “Garden to Please”

This garden was completed in 1577 by an imperial official named Pan Yunduan, under the Ming dynasty; Pan built it for his parents as a place for them to enjoy a tranquil old age. With the decline of the Pan family fortunes at the end of the Ming period, the garden was abandoned. It was then restored in the 1760s as Xi yuan, the “West Garden”, and its owners, a merchants’ guild, transformed it into a place of business. It was at this time that a market was developed in the area southeast of the green space, and even today this part of Shanghai maintains a strong business character. During the Opium War of the 19th century, Yu yuan was severely damaged. Restoration began in 1956 and took five years; the garden was opened to the public in 1961. A few pavilions were recently added around the edges of the garden.

Covering an area of 2 ha, the garden has a meandering layout with a great variety of spaces, which have in common, however, an elaborated relation between rockwork and water. A large serpentine lake lies at the center of the garden, divided into two different sections by a bridge. The longer section is lined by shade trees, with compact yellow granite stones marking the shoreline; the other part of the lake features grayish white rocks of fantastic shapes along the shore (V-9). Around this central area, a series of distinct sections are connected by gates and passageways opening in the white walls that surround them. An impressive artificial mountain dominates a reflecting pool in the northwestern corner; a web of winding paths leads to a belvedere pavilion above, which enjoys a borrowed view of the Huangpu River which runs through Shanghai beyond the garden wall. To the north, two sections are divided by a narrow stream bordered on one side by rockwork set against a whitewashed wall and, on the other, by a sequence of pavilions linked by a double covered corridor. In the northeastern corner there is a broad airy paved court, with pavilions set on rockeries. The southern part of the central area is embellished by a reflecting pool crossed by a zigzagging covered walkway and a composition of three sculptural rocks evoking a mountain landscape. A sequence of paved courts flanked by a river is followed by a composition named Nei yuan, ”Inner Garden”, a small garden created next to the Yu yuan in the early 18th century that is now part of the overall complex.
Suzhou, Jiangsu Province

**Canglang ting, “Surging Waves Pavilion”**

This garden, apparently the oldest in Suzhou, was created around 1045, when the retired scholar Su Shunqin (1008-1048) acquired a property flanked by streams and ponds in the southern part of the city, with lush vegetation and two small hills. Su Shunqin had a solitary pavilion built there facing a canal, and it was from this pavilion that the present garden takes its name. Over the centuries the garden was used for different purposes, and only in 1695 did it become a garden again, thanks to the restoration and redesigning undertaken by Song Luo, provincial governor of Jiangsu. *Canglang ting* was never owned by any individual or family but remained a property of the local government; it functioned as a semi-public park, a place for visiting and sight-seeing. In 2000, the garden was added to the list of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The main features of the garden include a big tree-covered rock-built mountain and a little lake bordered by a covered walkway with steep changes in grade (V-10). This central space is flanked on the north by a series of small sections made up of pavilions with planted courtyards and bamboo groves; a little study-pavilion rises atop a miniature rocky mountain. These sections are separated by walls punctuated with exquisite lattice screens. On the south, the garden faces a canal which, in correspondence to its southwestern corner, expands into a pond. Two pavilions connected by a covered walkway link the space of the garden and the watercourse outside.

**Liu yuan, “Lingering Garden”**

Located west of the historical city of Suzhou, this garden originated in a green space named *Dong yuan, “East Garden”* and was created under the reign of the Jiajing Emperor (reigned 1522-1566) for a retired official named Xu Taishi. At the end of the 18th century, the garden was owned by Liu Shu, an official who had likewise retired from public life; he enlarged the property and changed its name to *Hanbi shanzhuang, “Cold Emerald Mountain Villa”*. 

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V-10
The next owner, Sheng Kang, bought it in 1873 and gave it the name it bears now, having made big changes by expanding it on all sides around the original nucleus with its central pool. After a period of abandonment in the first half of the 20th century, restoration of the garden began in 1953 under the Suzhou Municipal People's Government, which opened it to the public in the following year. In 1997, the garden was added to the list of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The garden covers about 2.3 ha and is centered on an irregularly shaped lake dominated on the north and east by an artificial mountain with a belvedere; it is girded on the opposite sides by pavilions with wide terraces. A path crosses it and connects the two promontories jutting above the shores. Residential pavilions rise south of this central scene, and the other quadrants feature four different thematic units (V-11).
To the west, preceding a series of pavilions with small paved courts and rockeries, a larger open space features an extensive flower garden. The northeastern corner displays a collection of elevated vertical rocks of extraordinary forms rising out of a flower garden bordered by a little pool. Several pavilions face the rocks. To the north, there is a bamboo grove and a walled garden containing a collection of *penjing*; these include a rock composition rising out of a basin as an evocation of the Islands of the Immortals. Finally, to the west, there is a big rocky hill covered by trees with pavilions and a stream.

The overall composition is of great complexity in its juxtaposition of diverse thematic units, revealing that the garden was created through time with progressive additions. Nonetheless, the area around the central body of water and the portions of the garden leading up to the collection of vertical rocks offer scenes of exquisite elegance (V-12). The garden conserves notable specimens of ginkgoes around its central lake.

**Ou yuan, “Couple’s Garden”**

Covering about 8000 m², this garden is separated by a residential complex into an East Garden and West Garden, and that coupling has given the whole site its name. The East Garden was the original nucleus, created in the 12th century by Lu Jin, a district magistrate. Its present form dates to 1874, when the garden was acquired by the governor Shen Bingcheng, who expanded it and added the West Garden, giving the complex its name. In 1941 it was bought by Liu Guojun, a textile magnate and deputy governor of the Jinagsu Province, who gave it to the city of Suzhou in 1955. The East Garden was restored and opened to the public in 1965; the West Garden was opened in 1994. In 2000, the garden was added to the list of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The present entrance is through the West Garden, which features two adjacent courts with rock compositions. The larger and more open East Garden is articulated around an elongated pond, dominated by an artificial yellow granite mountain covered with trees. The pond has a zigzag bridge and is bordered by rocks and pavilions connected by covered walkways. A canal surrounds the garden on three sides and a two-storied edifice built on the southeastern corner offers a view onto the canal (V-13).
Shizi lin, “Lion Grove”

This garden was planted in a place where a temple and green space had been created by the Buddhist monk Tianru Weizi in 1342, during the Yuan dynasty, when the first great stone masses, some evoking the figure of a lion, seem to have been placed. Tradition has it that these forms recalled the mountainous area where the monk had studied, called “Lion Cliff”. Rebuilt many times, modified and expanded in the course of the centuries, the garden was bought in 1917 by the family of the Sino-American architect I. M. Pei. Its remodeling lasted until 1926, and some aspects of the garden date to that period. The Pei family were the last private owners of the garden, which was opened to the public in 1954. Since 2000, the garden has been registered on the World Heritage List by UNESCO.

It occupies a surface area of 1.1 ha. The composition is a play on the pervasive presence of rocks, displaying different aesthetic possibilities in the various thematic units. The approach to the garden is through the residential area, where a number of paved courts display single sculptural rocks. A flower-shaped gate leads to the first thematic unit of the garden proper; it is characterized by an artificial mountain made of highly irregular rocks and crossed by a web of paths which lead through grottos and up the slopes. The mountain hides a valley with a secret pavilion. A promontory extends toward the next scene, made up of a pool bordered by a sort of mountainous chain from which springs the water feeding the pool. Various pavilions look onto the pool, which is crossed by two bridges; one of them, which zigzags sharply, has a hexagonal belvedere at its center (V-14).
Yi yuan, “Joyful Garden”

The garden was created at the end of the 19th century by the high official Gu Wenbin, who enclosed a portion of an earlier garden created in the Ming period. Even though it is relatively small - the garden covers only about 6000 m² - it presents a certain variety of scenes (V-15). A high, tree-covered artificial mountain, topped by a belvedere, is located in the center of a little lake of complex design, and separates two distinct thematic units, one larger and the other more intimate, both featuring pavilions facing the water. East and south of this rock-and-water composition there are two distinct sections separated by covered walkways, which present a series of green courts containing rock collections (V-16). The garden contains some remarkable specimens of loquat trees and ginkgos planted around the central pool, as well as banana trees located in the courts.
Wangshi yuan, “Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets”

This garden is a refined example of how to create a complex and intricate spatial framework in a small space. It originated in an early-12th-century garden, created in the period of the Southern Song by the official Shi Zhengzhi. It assumed its present name in the second half of the 18th century, when it was acquired by the retired scholar Song Zongyuan (1710-1779), who redesigned it completely. In the last years of the 18th century, its next owner, the scholar Qu Zhaokui (1741-1808), modified the design yet again, creating rockeries, planting trees, building new pavilions and restoring old ones. The garden remained in private hands until 1958, when it became public property and was opened to visitors. In 1997, the garden was named one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The 6000 m² garden is a dense sequence of green rooms and paved courtyards enclosed by wall screens, articulated around a central open space, where a continuously interrupted path follows the irregular perimeter of a reflecting pool bordered by rock compositions and pavilions (V-17).

V-15: Yi yuan, “Joyful Garden”, Suzhou. The garden is centered on a little lake crossed by a zigzag bridge, with several pavilions facing the water.

V-16: Yi yuan. Plan of the garden.

V-17: Wangshi yuan, “Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets”, Suzhou. The full extent of the central pond is not visible from any one point.
**Zhuzheng yuan, “Garden of the Humble Administrator”, also known as “Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician”**

The original nucleus of the Zhuzheng yuan was created at the beginning of the 16th century for the imperial inspector Wang Xianchen after his retirement. The long-lost original design was apparently simple and open, including few modest buildings but a great number of useful plants, including fruit trees and medicinal herbs. Abandoned at the end of the Ming period, it was rebuilt during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor. In the second half of the 19th century, it was divided into three separate but contiguous walled properties, of which the central one maintained the original name. In the 20th century, the three gardens were restored and reunited, and were opened to the public in 1952. Since 1997, the garden has been registered on the World Heritage List by UNESCO.

The garden covers an area of 4 ha. Its earlier division into three sections remains evident because of the walls crossing it, but reflecting pools, which give the garden its special character, unify the ensemble (V-18). The garden is entered from the easternmost point, which has taken on contemporary forms. Through a long wall punctuated by windows with latticework panels, the entrance opens into a small paved court enclosed by white walls. The court has a little grove of loquat trees that give the name Pipa yuan to this section: the “Loquat Garden”. A second gateway leads to the biggest part of the complex, where an artificial lagoon is punctuated by a succession of irregularly shaped islets with various pavilions, linked by zigzagging bridges. Another wall separates another section of the garden which contains a serpentine reflecting pool surrounded by a winding covered walkway and dominated by an artificial hill, which is topped by a small belvedere pavilion. A twisting stream, whose banks are lined with rocks and low vegetation, forms a perimeter around all this, while at the westernmost edge of the complex there is a collection of penjing.

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**Yangzhou**

**Ge yuan, “Isolated Garden”**

Probably created in the second half of the 17th century, this garden was remodeled in the 19th century for the salt merchant Huang Yingtai, who made it his private residence.

In its 5500 m² space, the garden presents four thematic units evoking the progression of the four seasons. The entrance, north of the residence, originally was through the thematic unit representing spring: bamboos and single vertical rocks fill two raised beds placed symmetrically on the sides of a moon door. This leads to the thematic unit representing summer: it is the garden’s largest space and occupies its central area, with a series of...
irregular reflecting pools alternating with rock compositions. The pool at the end of this sequence is dominated by a very elaborate artificial mountain of eroded limestone, topped by a belvedere pavilion. A large grotto is reached by a little zigzagging bridge crossing the reflecting pool. The unit expressing autumn, located in the northeastern part of the garden, is dominated by an artificial mountain made of yellow granite stones, traversed by a winding path shaded by maple trees, pines and cypresses. The thematic unit dedicated to winter in the southeastern part of the garden features rockeries of an especially white hue, set in a paved courtyard.

The garden conserves a bamboo collection; it is the shape of the leaves of this plant, which resemble the Chinese character “ge”, which gave the garden its name.

In recent years, the garden has been enlarged considerably: north of the original nucleus a green area crossed by twisting paths has been added, and this provides a new access to the garden.

**NEO-HISTORICAL GARDENS**

**Berlin, Germany**

*Garten des wiedergewonnenen Mondes, “Garden of the Reclaimed Moon”*  

The Garden of the Reclaimed Moon lies within the Marzahn Recreational Park in Marzahn-Hellersdorf, in the northeastern periphery of Berlin. The project was initiated and coordinated by producer and director Manfred Durniok, who involved various institutions: the Grün Berlin Park und Garten GmbH, Beijing Institute of Landscape and Traditional Architectural Design and Research and the Beijing Gardens and Ancient Buildings Construction Company. The garden was designed in 1994, then created between 1997 and 2000 by Chinese workers using Chinese materials.

Covering 2.7 ha, the garden displays a catalogue of typical elements of a Chinese Garden: a small lake is crossed by a zigzagging stone bridge, and there are buildings and solitary pavilions, a little waterfall over rocks, a moon-shaped door, a covered walkway, rockeries, and single vertical rocks rising out of the water (V-19).
Kowloon, Hong Kong, China

**Good Wish Garden**
The Good Wish Garden lies in the northern part of the urban area of Kowloon, in Hong Kong. It was created in the 1970s within the complex of the Wong Tai Sin Temple, a Daoist temple established in 1921. The garden features several very colorful pavilions connected by winding covered corridors, disposed around two reflecting pools fed by an artificial waterfall. A series of rock compositions complete the green space (V-20).

**Nan Lian Garden**
The Nan Lian Garden is a public park located in the residential area of Diamond Hill, in the northeastern area of Kowloon in Hong Kong. It was completed in 2006. The garden occupies an area of about 3.5 ha and is a faithful replica of a Tang era garden, the Jiangshouju, which was part of the residence of the Governor of Jiang in today’s Xinjiang County, Shanxi Province. It is organized around two separate rock-lined reflecting pools connected by a winding stream. The smaller of the two pools has an island at its center, on which stands a two-storey octagonal pavilion. Isolated vertical rocks, or groups of them, punctuate the green space.

The northern part of the garden is connected to the Chi Lin Nunnery, a large Buddhist temple originally built in 1934 and then completely rebuilt in 1990 in the style of the typical Chinese architecture of the Tang period (V-21).
Macao, China

Lou Lim Ieoc Garden
The Lou Lim Ieoc Garden is in the heart of Macao’s mainland section. It was built toward the end of the 1800s by the Macao merchant Lou Kau as part of his residence, remodeled then in 1906 by his son Lou Lim Ieoc. When the family fortunes declined, the garden changed owners several times and then became public property. After a general restoration, it was opened to the public in 1974. It offers paths meandering through groves of bamboo and blossoming bushes and is marked by rock compositions and single vertical rocks, as well as by artificial mountains. A nine-turn concrete bridge traverses a large pond filled with lotus flowers, which is fed by a high artificial waterfall (V-22).

New York City, New York, USA

Astor Court, Metropolitan Museum of Art
Within the Asian Art collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Astor Court is a Chinese courtyard garden created from the beginning of 1980; it opened to the public in 1981. The project was promoted by Brooke Russell Astor, chairwoman of the Visiting Committee of the Metropolitan’s Department of Far Eastern Art and a trustee of the Museum. The design was prepared by a team of the Suzhou Garden Administration; the architects Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo, who since 1967 had been working on the masterplan for the whole museum, implemented the plans for Astor Court. It was built by Chinese artisans using traditional methods and materials. Its design was strongly influenced by a small paved courtyard in the Wangshi yuan, “Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets”, in Suzhou. Like its model, this court has three typical garden structures: a covered walkway running along the east wall, a small main hall with a terrace which lies at the north end of the court, and an open half-pavilion along the west wall. The south wall is dominated by a single sculptural rock and four lattice windows. The courtyard is completed by elaborate compositions of Taihu rocks, plantings and a small pool intended to evoke the spring of the original garden (V-23).

V-20: Good Wish Garden, Hong Kong. The colorful pavilions are surmounted with turquoise tile roofs.
V-21: Nan Lian Garden, Hong Kong. A two-storey octagonal pavilion in the middle of a pond is the hallmark of the garden.
V-22: Lou Lim Ieoc Garden, Macao. The nine-turn bridge in concrete crosses a large pond and forms the central element of garden.
V-23: Astor Court, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, NY. A glass roof covers the entire courtyard.
Portland, Oregon, USA

*Lan su yuan, “Garden of Awakening Orchids”*

The *Lan su yuan*, “Garden of Awakening Orchids”, is located in the heart of Chinatown in Portland. It occupies an entire city block previously used as a parking lot, covering ca. 3700 m². Work began in 1999 and the garden was finished in 2000. The garden was designed by the Institute of Landscape Architectural Design in Suzhou, with Kuang Zhen Yan as project leader and principal designer, and He Feng Chun as project landscape architect. In Portland, a local team formed by landscape architects Ben Ngan, Nevue Ngan and Associates and led by the architectural firm of Robertson Merryman Barnes supported the Chinese team. The plan was executed using traditional materials - roof and floor tiles, hand-carved woodwork, lattice windows, and over 500 tons of Taihu rocks and granite - and traditional methods, with the participation of craftsmen from Suzhou, Portland’s sister city since 1988. These workers prefabricated the wooden structures in China and completed the project in Portland, adding the pathways to the garden’s buildings, while the American companies of AC Schommer & Sons and Teufel Landscape were the local contractors.

A stone gateway leads into the garden, which is entirely walled in. The green space surrounds a centrally located reflecting pool, which is lined with 14 pavilions and separate spaces interconnected by winding paths. The lake can be traversed by a covered walkway and by a crooked bridge which, following the example of the *Shizi lin*, “Lion Grove”, of Suzhou, presents a hexagonal pavilion at its center (V-24).
San Marino, Los Angeles, California, USA

*Liu fang yuan*, "Garden of Flowing Fragrance", Huntington

*Liu fang yuan*, the “Garden of Flowing Fragrance”, is situated within the park of the Huntington cultural institution in San Marino, in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. It was begun in 2004 and completed in 2008, when it was opened to the public. The project was developed by a team of professionals led by He Fengchun, chairman of the Suzhou Institute of Landscape Architectural Design. A large group of Chinese craftsmen skilled in traditional Chinese construction methods, affiliated with the Suzhou Garden Development Company, constructed the garden. The architects Bob Ray Offenhauser and Jim Fry, of the Burbank-based architectural firm Offenhauser Associates Inc., were the U.S. architects of record for the project.

In its 4.8 ha space, the garden features the traditional Chinese elements: a large lake traversed by arched and zigzag bridges; two winding streams with rocky banks; simple solitary pavilions; a series of main buildings connected by a meandering covered walkway along the eastern and southern shore of the reflecting pool. A collection of rocks from Lake Tai, near Suzhou, is displayed as well. The garden’s composition is dominated by thick groves of native trees, including California oaks and different pine species.

An expansion of the garden is planned, with the creation of other pavilions, a large courtyard and a covered walkway in the northern area of the green space; while in the western part of the garden a boat-shaped pavilion will be built as a viewing platform. The complex will also be enriched by a bonsai garden and a small pavilion to dominate the green space from the top of the hill southwest of the lake (V-25).

Seattle, Washington, USA

*Xi hua yuan*, "Seattle Chinese Garden"

The *Xi hua yuan* covers about 1.8 ha at the north end of the South Seattle Community College in West Seattle. It is a joint project of Seattle and Chongqing, its sister city in Sichuan province. The garden is divided into a sequence of different spaces: there are several paved courtyards, a mountain and two serpentine lakes linked by a rocky gorge. The composition is completed by 12 pavilions and other structures, including an education center. The garden is being completed at the time of writing; a first portion was opened in 2008, while in 2010 a second phase, with a paved courtyard, is under way. The whole project will take a total of ten years.

Singapore

*Yu hwa yuan*, "Jurong Chinese Garden"

The *Yu hwa yuan*, “Jurong Chinese Garden”, is in the heart of Singapore’s western residential district of Jurong East. It was built in 1975 according to plans of the Taiwanese architect Yuen-chen Yu, as part of a larger recreational development, organized around a big body of water called the Jurong Lake, and including a Japanese Garden and the Jurong Bird Park. The 13-ha garden occupies one of the irregularly shaped islands marking the lake. Unlike many other Chinese Gardens built outside China, which are inspired by the classical gardens of Suzhou, the design of the *Yu hwa yuan* evokes the character of parks in northern China: the broad bridge sustained by asymmetrical arcades, which offers access to the

V.24: Lan Su Yuan, “Garden of Awakening Orchids”, Portland, OR. Nested in the Chinatown neighborhood of the Old Town, the garden design was inspired by the classical Chinese Gardens spotting the city of Suzhou.

V.25: Liu Fang Yuan, “Garden of Flowing Fragrance”, Huntington, San Marino, Los Angeles, CA. Traditional elements of Chinese garden design are merged into dense groves of local vegetation.
garden, is inspired by the Seventeen-Arch bridge in the Yihe yuan imperial park, near Beijing, while the design of the four pavilions built in the green space is based on the style of northern Chinese pavilions. The seven-storey pagoda atop an artificial hill has a configuration like that of the Linggu Pagoda, built in 1929 on the grounds of the Buddhist Linggu Temple, in Nanjing.

In 1992, the Yun xiu yuan, “Penjing Garden”, was added to the complex, characterized by a series of walled courtyards in which are displayed examples of penjing.

Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Garden of Friendship
The Garden of Friendship lies at the southern end of Darling Harbour, on the edge of Chinatown, in Sydney. It celebrates the sister-state relationship between the southern China province Guangdong and New South Wales. The design was created by the Guangdong Landscape Bureau in Sydney’s sister city, Guangzhou, as a joint government project to be undertaken by a combination of Chinese and Australian craftspeople and artisans. Local consultants completed the planning, the detailed design and documentation of all elements within the garden: the Sydney-based architecture firm Tsang & Lee prepared architectural documentation for buildings and pavilions; the documentation for the landscape elements was executed by EBC Consultants. Its construction was begun in 1986, and the garden was inaugurated in 1988 as part of the celebrations for the bicentennial of the foundation of the city of Sydney.

One ha in extent, it is one of the biggest neo-historical gardens built outside China. The garden presents a sequence of episodes: a mountain, two waterfalls, a rushing brook, a bamboo grove, all linked by paths girdling the big central lake, which is crossed by zigzagging bridges. Various pavilions are immersed in the vegetation, and single vertical rocks arise here and there. A twin pavilion with a double roof erected along the shore of the lake symbolizes the friendship and cooperation between Guangdong province and New South Wales (V-26).
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden
Named after the revolutionary leader and first president of the Republic of China, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925), this garden sits in the heart of Vancouver’s Chinatown. It was begun in 1985, with both craftsmen and materials imported from China, and finished in 1986 in time for the Expo 86 in Vancouver.
The garden covers an area of about 1000 m². Inspired by the classical gardens of Suzhou, it features a little reflecting pool at its center, surrounded by various spaces linked by winding paths. Rockeries and individual vertical rocks rise here and there throughout the green space. A pavilion atop an artificial hill creates a visual point of reference for the whole composition.
The little garden was built next to a bigger public park, also neo-historical in composition, the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Park, completed in 1983 as part of the nearby Chinese Cultural Center. The two green spaces are connected by the artificial lake and separated by a zigzagging double covered walkway. The park is organized around the larger section of the lake. Crossed by various bridges, it features at its center an hexagonal pavilion built on a little, flat, rocky island, while the main buildings are arranged along the shores.
The project for the garden and the park was conceived as a whole. The overall plan was designed in Vancouver and resulted from the collaboration between a team of the Suzhou Garden Administration – led by Zhang Bao-rong, with Wang Zu-Xin as chief architect, and with Zhou Guan-Wu, Feng Xiao-Lin and Yao Ba-Sun –, the Vancouver-based landscape architect Don Vaughan and the Vancouver-based architect Joe Y. Wai, who was also chief architect for the garden and park.

CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE DESIGN

Beijing

Beijing Olympic Green (Olympic Central Area and Olympic Forest Park)
The Beijing Olympic Green is a combination of two urban parks formed on the occasion of the Olympic Games; it was completed in 2008. Located on the northern extension of the historical city’s central axis, it is the green backbone of a vast urban expansion and transformation of Beijing’s periphery. It consists of the Olympic Central Area, the new urban linear park alongside the Olympic venues, and the Olympic Forest Park, which closes the Olympic area to the north.
The masterplan for the Olympic Green was first prepared by Sasaki Associates Inc., an interdisciplinary design and planning firm based in Boston and San Francisco. In 2002, the company won the international competition for the conceptual planning and design of the area, and it was further developed in collaboration with the Beijing Tsinghua Urban Planning & Design Institute. In 2004-2005 a large team led by chief designer Hu Jie, director of the Planning & Design Branch of Landscape Architecture, Beijing Tsinghua Urban Planning & Design Institute, Tsinghua University (Beijing), finished the establishment of the Olympic Forest Park.
The Olympic Central Area was designed by another team comprising several companies and institutions. It is organized around a winding stream that flows to the north into a lake at
the center of the Olympic Forest Park, whose shape evokes a dragon’s head. The Olympic Forest Park constitutes a filter between the urban areas and the peripheral areas of Beijing. It covers an area of 650 ha and is divided by the distinctive Fifth Ring Road, a super-highway which traverses it from east to west. The southern part of the Olympic Forest Park, which is connected to the Olympic Central Area, is organized around the big lake and has a more urban character; here you find diverse educational and recreational facilities, a large paved piazza, children’s playgrounds, an open-air theater and exhibition centers, all immersed in an ecosystem made of woods and wetlands (V-27). A steep rocky hill was created behind the lake. The northern part of the park has a more natural character which preserves the local biodiversity. An ecological corridor crosses the Fifth Ring Road and links the two areas of the park, facilitating migration of various animal species. A sophisticated self-sustaining and self-regulating water system was created. It is made of a network of streams, lakes and wetlands and is based on the reclamation and reuse of grey water, surface runoff, rain and flood water. An ecological purification system was built using constructed wetlands as natural water filter. (V-28). The Olympic Forest Park won a 2009 Honor Award of the American Society of Landscape Architects – ASLA.
Garden of the Xianshan ("Fragrant Hill") Hotel
The Xianshan ("Fragrant Hill") Hotel, designed by I. M. Pei & Partners and completed in 1982, is located within a former imperial hunting grounds outside Beijing, not far from the Yihe yuan, "Garden of the Preservation of Harmony", which is now a large public park. The hotel complex is made up of various wings which extend out from a central open court with a small rock-and-water garden. The different parts of the building, which follow a meandering plan, subdivide the garden into areas with distinctive characteristics, where paths wind among compositions of wood, rocks and water. The main open space is in the southern part of the complex, near the most private area of the hotel, with an irregularly shaped lake crossed by two short bridges. The bigger of the two leads to a platform over the water; the floor of the platform is crossed by a curving channel, a citation of a cup-floating stream, which is a peculiarity of historical garden design in China, linked to friendly poetry contests.

Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province

City Balcony Hangzhou
City Balcony Hangzhou was designed by a team made up of the Berlin-based landscape architect Jörg Michel, who was responsible for the landscape design, and Obermeyer Planen und Beraten of Munich with ECADI – East China Architecture and Design Institute of Shanghai, in charge of overall planning and the architecture of the buildings. Designed and built 2004-2008, it is located in the southern part of the city of Hangzhou along the northern shore of the Qian Tang River, where it forms part of a series of interventions of urban transformation for the new central district of Qiangjiang. Situated at the end of a green strip along which were positioned some important new urban structures, theaters and convention halls, the City Balcony is a big multi-storey structure facing the river, a complex of green plazas and promenades on various levels, which function as connective tissue for the building works of the complex (V-29). It contains sports facilities and parking garages, and the facades are covered by a hanging garden, alternating irregular bands of planting, water and paving, thus juxtaposing a series of artificial landscapes all with a view of the big river.
Hong Kong

Bank of China
The Bank of China Tower, built between 1985 and 1989 by I. M. Pei & Partners and opened in 1990, is located at No.1 Garden Road, in Hong Kong’s business and financial core. The building is characterized by four prism-shaped shafts of glass and steel, which tower 70 stories above the ground floor level.
The building is surrounded on three sides by a rock-and-water garden, which integrates the geometry of the triangular lines that make up the profile of the sharp-edged tower. Designed by Pei himself from 1982 onwards and completed in the same year as the building, the garden covers 1300 m² on several levels, following the steep topography of the site.
In its highest part, corresponding to the main entrance to the bank’s lobby, the garden opens onto a calm reflecting pool featuring golden carps; the whole water composition begins here, branching out into two angular terraced basins below, situated along the opposite sides of the building. The basins respond to the sloping site by using a small number of compositional elements that are organized in a variety of ways: triangular grey granite slabs and big single rocks interrupt the water streaming down, creating a series of little waterfalls, which feed various pools (V-30).

Wetland Park
Located in the New Territories and completed in 2005, the Wetland Park is a naturalistic park created as a refuge for migrating birds, to compensate for a substantial loss of wetland habitats caused by large-scale housing and urban development. The project team included: the firm Urbis Limited, as landscape architects; MET Studio Design, as exhibition designers; and the Architectural Service Department of the HKSAR (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region) Government. Covering 61 ha, the Wetland Park shelters a series of wildlife habitats ideal for various species of migrating birds: marsh, reed bed, fishpond, wet woodland and wetland agricultural fields were created to maximize biodiversity. The park includes a large visitor center, located near the main entrance, as well as exhibition and educational facilities focusing on the themes of sustainable development, protection of the environment and wetlands conservation. Guided paths, including floating walkways, traverse the various areas of the complex, marked here and there by blinds for bird-watching (V-31).
Jinhua, Zhejiang Province

Jinhua Architecture Park
Adjacent to Yiwu Riverbank, the Jinhua Architecture Park, designed by the architect and artist Ai Weiwei was created 2002-2006 on a strip of terrain only 80 m wide and 2200 m long. With a slight S-shape, the park follows the curving line of the river. The highly articulated project entailed the layering of three different systems: the paths, the flora and the buildings. The paths are organized on a rigorously geometric grid, intersected by plantings in regularly shaped groves. To the park belong 17 functional structures designed by as many architects of international fame, among them Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron who, along with Ascan Mergenthaler, designed the Reading Space, Till Schweizer who designed the Welcome Center and Fernando Romero who designed the Bridge Tea House, as well as Ai Weiwei himself who planned the Archeological Archives. The pavilions display a great variety in their designs; one-storey structures alternate with more complex multi-level constructions and others raised above ground to offer visitors ever-changing views of the garden landscape.

Yiwu Riverbank
The Yiwu River crosses the city of Jinhua, south of Shanghai, in a section that required stabilizing to provide flood defense. The new design and renewal of the riverbanks (2002-2004) was planned by Ai Weiwei and his firm FAKE Design. The project is located in the western part of Jinhua on the southern and northern banks of the river, along the segment traversing the central district of Jindong, a vast urban expansion area, whose planning was prepared by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron. The new landscape, created out of local granite, is geometrical and stark. For a 2.3 km section on the southern shore and a 3.5 km one on the northern shore, the designer transformed the riverbanks into a sharp-edged tectonic structure of terraces sloping down toward the water, with two public promenades at the top. The wedge-like terraces jutting out from the steep banks afford views of the river and landscape (V-32). In its central part, where the river makes a wide bend, the promenades are flanked by two parks on long lots also designed by Ai Weiwei: on the south bank lies the Ai Qing Cultural Park, dedicated to Ai Qing, a famous poet born in Jinhua and the father of the architect; on the north bank of the river the Jinhua Architecture Park was created.
Qinhuangdao, Hebei Province

**Qinhuangdao Beach Restoration**

This coastal restoration project, designed 2006-2007 by the Beijing-based office Turenscape and built in 2008, is located in the coastal city of Qinhuangdao, 300 km east of Beijing on the Bohai Sea. It covers an area of 60 ha and stretches for 6.4 km along the shoreline. Aim of the project was the ecological recovery of a heavily eroded section of coastal dunes and of the adjacent wetland, formerly degraded as a theme park, by transforming the site into a public linear park. The park is divided into three sections, each with specific characteristics: the shoreline, the wetland and the lake.

Along the shoreline, coastal dune and wetland vegetation has been planted to protect the sand dunes from erosion. A winding boardwalk follows the shoreline at a distance; it makes the site accessible and at the same time helps maintain coastal dunes. It features pavilions and small structures which have been placed in correspondence with particularly interesting scenic views. The central area features the recovered wetland. Little ponds were dug in the flat ground to recompose the wetland, and a wetland museum has been designed. In the last section of the project, environmental recovery has included the demolition of an existing concrete embankment and its replacement with ecologically friendly riprap. A group of round islets has been designed in an existing lake, both to make the landscape more interesting and to create a favorable habitat for birds (V-33). The project won a 2010 ASLA Honor Award.

**Red Ribbon Tanghe River Park**

The Tanghe River Park, realized on the design of Turenscape in 2005-2008, lies on the banks of the Tanghe River in the eastern urban fringe of the city of Qinhuangdao, located on the sea 300 km east of Beijing. It is a linear riparian corridor covering an area of 20 ha. Once occupied by an illegal garbage dump, the site was badly degraded. But it had also undergone a significant process of renaturalization, making the riverbanks inaccessible even as it created several spontaneous habitats.
The project for the riparian urban park was organized as part of an ecological approach to flood control, based on preservation of the absolute natural originality of the site. Spontaneous vegetation was consolidated both along the natural shore of the river, by intensifying the aquatic and riparian flora as a way of responding to seasonal flooding, and beyond this floodplain area, where a network of paths was created among the existing groves so as to make the park accessible. A winding path follows the shoreline at a distance, and features a continuous element, a ribbon made of red fiberglass, that extends over 500 m and functions both for seating and as protective device for lighting. With its fluid form, it represents the central compositional element of the park, connecting four cloud-shaped steel pergolas which serve as meeting places and viewing stations (V-34). The project won a 2007 ASLA Honor Award.

Shanghai

Shanghai Botanical Garden
Completed in 2010, the new Shanghai Botanical Garden is located in Chenshan, about 30 km west of Shanghai. It was designed by a group of landscape architects, urban designers and architects led by Donata and Christoph Valentien of Valentien+Valentien Landschaftsarchitekten und Stadtplaner SRL, and including landscape architects Dietmar Straub and Anna Thurmayr of Straub+Thurmayr Landschaftsarchitekten, and architects Fritz Auer, Carlo Weber and associates of Auer+Weber+Assoziierte Architekten.

The Botanical Garden covers an area of about 200 ha and is surrounded by a ring of small artificial rises, 5 km long and up to 14 m in height. The laurel forest covering this hilly ring is the setting for the diverse architectures functional to the botanical garden: information pavilions are located near scenic points, while more important buildings – the reception
building with exhibition halls, the botanical research center, the glasshouses - are integrated into the new sculptural topography, generating a dynamic landscape of the convex and the concave.

The central space of the Botanical Garden is characterized by a system of serpentine lakes extending over a total of 34 ha. Rising above the surface of the water and the surrounding wet areas like islands, there are 37 different thematic gardens. Some of these are dedicated to collections of single botanical species (the rose garden, the osmanthus garden, the iris garden); others feature plants characteristic of a specific ambient (the water garden, the riparian and tall grass garden, the fern garden); others present useful plants, while still others, like the labyrinth garden, have a purely ornamental purpose (V-35).

**Shanghai Houtan Park**

Planned by Turenscape as part of the 2010 Shanghai Expo, Shanghai Houtan Park is a public waterfront park occupying what was once the site of a steel factory and a shipyard. Situated on the east bank of the Huangpu River, the park corresponds to the southernmost part of the Expo grounds. Covering 14 ha, it consists of a band of terrain about 1.7 km long and varying in width between 30 and 80 m, with the river on one side and an urban expressway running parallel to the riverbed on the other (V-36).

The area was badly degraded and the project’s main objective was to remedy the severe pollution of the soil and water, restoring that section of the river’s shore by eliminating its concrete banks, the result of the local flood control policy. The process of environmental regeneration entailed substitution of the existing concrete floodwall along the riverbank with an eco-friendly riprap as an alternative flood control tool. This allows native species to grow along the riverbank while protecting the shoreline from erosion. A big wetland area was created, and different species of water plants were planted, so that this wetland vegetation can provide treatment of local wastewater (V-37).
The park is in fact a meandering wetland, with layered remnants here and there of the agricul
tural and industrial past of the site (V-38). Terraces planted with crops, rice, sunflowers,
golden blossoms and green clover recall Shanghai’s agricultural landscape; at the same
time, as the vegetation changes during the year, they display the course of the seasons.
The site’s industrial past is recorded in some pavilions, which take the shape of colorfully
painted metal skeletons; the existing cargo pier has been transformed into a platform over-
looking the Huangpu River. Metal panels found in the area have been recycled into small
structures offering shade and shelter while also serving as passages between the various
sections of the park and functioning as well as screens to enhance particularly attractive
views. The park won the 2010 ASLA Award of Excellence.
Shanghai Carpet
The Shanghai Carpet, designed by Tom Leader Studio, a landscape architecture practice based in Berkeley, California, from 2003 onwards and under construction at the time of writing, lies in the northeastern part of Shanghai in the district of Yangpu, within a vast area undergoing transformation called Shanghai Yangpu University City Hub. The Carpet is a T-shaped sunken pedestrian plaza, built on top of an underground parking garage. The composition features a sequence of green bands alternating with strips of various types of paving, juxtaposed according to an aesthetic of a collection of different landscapes. The sequence is interrupted by a wide reflecting pool crossed by low linear walkways (V-39).

Shenyang, Liaoning Province
Paddy Rice Campus, Architectural University Campus
Inspired by the landscape of rice paddies, the project for the open spaces of the new campus of the Shenyang Architectural University was designed in 2003 by Turenscape and completed in 2004 (V-40). The site of the university was formerly occupied by rice fields, and Turenscape’s project represented a fragment of that landscape. The main part of the park, a rectangular area of about 3 ha, lies in the southwestern part of the campus, and appears as an orderly rice-growing area, filling the spaces between university buildings with a series of rice paddies crossed by a grid of elevated paths bordering the quadrangular fields. These paths are partly lined by trees, and lead to other quadrangular areas midst the cultivated fields, provided with benches (V-41). In 2005, the project won an ASLA Honor Award.

V-39: Shanghai Carpet, Shanghai. Model. The project is characterized by a sequence of green bands alternating with strips of different types of paving.
V-40: Paddy Rice Campus, Architectural University Campus, Shenyang. Masterplan.
V-41: Paddy Rice Campus. Quadrangular fields planted with rice and other native crops are crossed by a grid of elevated paths.
V-42: Suzhou Museum, Suzhou. The small enclosed garden, built in the museum’s core, features a geometrical pool crossed by a stone walkway.
V-43: Suzhou Museum. Sculptural rocks and plants are displayed in the courtyards between the museum galleries.
V-44: Suzhou Museum. A series of great stone slabs evoking a mountainous landscape is arranged along the wall, which separates the museum garden from the adjacent Zhuozheng yuan, "Garden of the Humble Administrator".

pp. 120, 121, 166, 166
pp. 125, 126, 127, 166, 166
Suzhou, Jiangsu Province

Suzhou Museum
The new building for the Suzhou Museum, designed by I. M. Pei and completed in 2006, stands in one of the oldest parts of the historical center of the city of Suzhou, on a site adjacent to the World Heritage garden Zhuozheng yuan, “Garden of the Humble Administrator”, from which it is separated by a white wall. With its spatial organization reminiscent of traditional aristocratic houses, the museum consists of a series of pavilions enclosing the exhibition spaces. The museum garden is set in a clearing among the pavilions. Its principal element is a pool traversed by a low stone walkway, which links the eastern wing of the museum to the western one. Along the shores of the reflecting pool, different traditional elements are given a modern interpretation: a grove of bamboo, a polygonal open pavilion, a belvedere terrace. Above the northern shore, low and stony and closed by a white wall, a highly sculptural composition emerges, a series of great slabs of stone evoking hills and mountains (V-42; V-43; V-44).
Taizhou, Zhejiang Province

Yongning River Park
The Yongning River Park, designed in 2002-2004 and completed in 2004, extends for about 21 ha along the Yongning River in the coastal city of Taizhou, south of Shanghai. It was designed by Turenscape for an area where the river’s original shore had been destroyed by concrete embankments intended for flood control.

The project integrated an ecological approach to flood control and storm water management with the creation of an urban waterfront park. This entailed combining two systems: the first, intended to restore the riverbanks in acceptance of seasonal flooding, is made up of a sequence of wetlands which are accessible to visitors; the second system is that of small architectural structures and groves of trees, ordered geometrically and connected by a grid of regular paths and walkways (V-46). The project won a 2006 ASLA Honor Award.

Tianjin

Qiaoyuan Wetland Park and Tianjin Waterfront Corridor
The Qiaoyuan Wetland Park, built in 2008 in the northern coastal city of Tianjin and designed 2005-2008 by Turenscape, is an example of ecological recovery in a neglected area occupied by dumps. Inert on-site waste was reclaimed as fill material to manipulate the site’s topography. Covering 22 ha, the park features a series of soft elevations rising alongside low reflecting ponds, which are shaped by the seasonal rains that change the quantity of water in the valleys. Each of these constitutes a different habitat; the project thus presents a wide panorama of associations in its flora, made up of native species and adaptive plant communities, which are allowed to develop freely. A winding red asphalt road offers access and wooden platforms jut over some reflecting pools, making it possible to reach points of particular botanical interest (V-45).

The park is completed by the Tianjin Waterfront Corridor, a sequence of gardens arranged on different levels, which are interconnected by pathways and elevated walkways. Their design is inspired by the local agricultural and natural pattern, i.e. crop fields, harvested farmlands, pasture, marsh. The Qiaoyuan Park won a 2010 ASLA Honor Award.

V-45: Qiaoyuan Wetland Park, Tianjin.
The reflecting ponds are shaped by seasonal rains, offering habitats for diverse native species and adaptive plant communities.

Tieling, Liaoning Province

Lotus Lake Wetland Park
The goal of re-creation of a natural landscape in an area transformed by agricultural use, and of construction of habitats for diverse species of migrating birds, inspired the plan of the Lotus Lake Wetland Park in the northeastern Chinese city of Tieling. Planned by landscape architects Hu Jie and Yixia Wu, along with the engineers Lushan Lu and Yi Han, the park was completed in 2009. The park lies under the East Asian Flyway of Migratory Birds on a site that was originally wetlands and ponds but which had been altered by intense agricultural use. It was created around a big pre-existing lake which was extended on the south and east by a sequence of smaller bodies of water. Three low islets in the lake’s center offer safe and isolated breeding areas for birds. A hill, covered with a great variety of trees and bushes, flanks the main lake on the south; it welcomes singing birds, wild birds and land birds and functions as a barrier between the city and the rest of the park. North of the lake, a new wetlands area has been created for water birds and shore birds, completing the park in that direction. There are simple paths crossing the park and tiny structures for bird-watching (V-45). The project won second place at the 2009 International Torsanlorenzo Prize.

Zhongshan, Guangdong Province

Zhongshan Shipyard Park
The Zhongshan Shipyard Park resulted from the transformation of a highly polluted former shipyard in use from the 1950s until 1999. It is located in the central district of Zhongshan, a city which lies south of the Pearl River Delta. Designed by Turenscape in 2000-2001 and completed in 2002, the new park occupies 11 ha around the shipyard harbor, transformed into a lake along whose twisting shores different sections of the park were created: the Green Rooms, small intimate spaces for reading and relaxing, the Red Box, a room for contemplation enclosed by a red steel wall, the Ecological Island, created to protect a group of pre-existing banyan trees, and an art museum, all of which alternate with big open spaces dominated by the water. Linear but segmented paths link the different sections in a play of progressive revelations (V-46). Evidence of the site’s industrial past – buildings reduced to metal skeletons, painted in brilliant colors, train tracks which form part of the network of paths, big cranes for raising ships that mark the park’s entrances as giant totems - synthesizes the history of the place. The project won a 2002 ASLA Honor Award.
APPENDIX

ON THE AUTHOR

Bianca Maria Rinaldi is Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at the School of Architecture and Design at Ascoli Piceno, University of Camerino, Italy, which she joined in 2010, and co-editor of JoLA - Journal of Landscape Architecture.

She received a degree in Architecture from the University of Camerino in 2000 and a Ph.D. in Landscape Architecture from the Leibniz University of Hanover, Germany, in 2004. She has been a Research Fellow at the CGL, Centre for Garden Art and Landscape Architecture of the University of Hanover from 2002 until 2004.

Her previous faculty appointments were as Assistant Professor (Universitätsassistentin mit Doktorat) of Landscape Architecture at the Institute for Landscape Architecture, University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences in Vienna, Austria, where she taught from 2005 until 2008, and at the Institute for Architecture and Landscape, School of Architecture, Graz University of Technology in Graz, Austria, from 2009 until 2010. She has taught courses in history and theory of landscape architecture as a visiting faculty member at the National University of Singapore (2010).

She is the author of The ‘Chinese Garden in Good Taste’. Jesuits and Europe’s Knowledge of Chinese Flora and Art of the Garden in 17th and 18th Centuries (2006) and numerous other book chapters and articles published in scholarly journals, including the Journal of Landscape Architecture and Die Gartenkunst.

Her scholarly studies focus on both historical and contemporary landscape architecture with an emphasis on Far East Asia; on cross-cultural influence in landscape architecture; and on the history and criticism of landscape architecture.

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