

Art and the Shift in Garden Culture in the Jiangnan Area in China (16th - 17th Century)

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Abstract

The remarkable growth in interest in aesthetic gardens in the late Ming period has been recognized in Chinese garden culture studies. The materialist historical approach contributes to revealing the importance of gardens' economic functions in the shift of garden culture, but is inadequate in explaining the successive burgeoning of small plain gardens in the 17th century. This article integrates the aesthetic and materialist perspectives and situates the cultural transition in the concrete social and cultural context in the late Ming period. Beginning with describing a taste change and an expansion in the number of gardens, this article focuses on the small plain garden phenomenon by exploring the unique role that the arts (e.g., poetry and painting) played. A series of artistic criteria were established in the late Ming period. The application of these aesthetic rules to gardens enabled more people to own gardens. This is process that economic requirements for owning gardens were lowered, giving way to the aesthetic appreciation and exploration of literati individuals' artistic talents. Gardens thus became more widely accessible and provided enhanced pleasure to the middle and lower class families. The conclusion is that the 'major shift' in garden culture was closely associated with the change of garden owners' aesthetic tastes, in addition to the economic conditions in the Jiangnan area. In the increased popularity of gardens, the arts played a significant role.

Keywords: Chinese garden, gardens in the Ming and Qing period, gardens in the Jiangnan area, literati garden, literati aesthetic taste

1. Introduction

Historians in Chinese garden culture studies have reached a consensus on the remarkable expansion of interest in aesthetic gardens in the Jiangnan area (Note 1) in the late Ming period (16th - 17th century) (Joanna, 1992, pp. 55-81). By exploring the phenomenon from a materialist perspective, Craig Clunas asserts that there was 'a major shift' signified by the change of the 'garden' concept (Clunas, 1996, p. 21). The methodology that he draws upon breaks away from previous patterns and reveals the significance of gardens' economic functions in the shift. He states that 'in laying so much stress on the productive potential of the garden landscape, I may be overstating the case, as a way of correcting an equally unbalanced concentration on aesthetics in the study of Chinese garden practices' (Clunas, 1996, p. 49).



Figure.1 The geographic scope of Jiangnan area

However, more recent scholarship on culture and economy suggests that aesthetics and economy is often not situated in a relationship of antithesis. In other words, the aesthetics is not as counterpoised to economic considerations. In particular, if light is to be cast on the continued expansion of interest in the garden into the Qing period, a pure materialist perspective often appears to be inadequate in explaining the 'major shift.' The other gap in Chinese garden history studies is the neglect of social historical context in which the garden culture is embedded. Georges Métaillé remarks that past researchers like Maggie Keswick and Stewart Johnston idealized the Chinese garden 'by identifying an ideal model based on the gardens of some southern Chinese cities, particularly those in Suzhou with an 'unhistorical picture' (Métaillé, 1998, p. 248). Chinese gardens have long been regarded as a certain reflection of the ancient Chinese philosophy of Daoism, or the painting theories of the Northern Song master: Guo Xi. Seldom is garden culture placed in a concrete cultural context as in the late Ming and Qing period.

To fill the two gaps, this article presents a perspective that integrates the aesthetics and materialism; it provides new accounts for what caused the expansion in the number of gardens as well as the shift in the Jiangnan area garden culture. Documentary analysis of the key literature is the major research method. Signs, symbols and other visual components are extracted in the process of analyzing garden, painting, calligraphy and literature. Comparisons are made among these artworks across the various arts realms. This article argues that the 'major shift' in garden culture was closely associated with the change of garden owners' aesthetic tastes, in addition to the economic conditions in the Jiangnan area. In the increased popularity of gardens, the arts played a significant role.

It comprises three sections. The first section outlines the context and provides a general description of a taste change and an expansion in the number of gardens. This is succeeded in the second section with the elaboration of a series of artistic criteria were established in the late Ming period that preconditioned the transition in the aesthetic taste of gardens. The final section examines the application of these aesthetic rules to gardens and how this enabled more people to own gardens. It shows that in the process of lowering the economic requirements for

owning gardens, literati aesthetic pleasure made up the conditions for owning gardens. Gardens thus became more widely accessible and provided enhanced pleasure to the middle and lower class families.

2. Changes in Garden Taste

My attention was first drawn to the ‘major shift’ by two cultural phenomena. Chinese garden is often interpreted with reference to ancient Chinese cosmic thought during the period of the Warring States. However, the expansion of interest in the garden beginning in the late 15th century suggested an obvious obsession with the taste in the Wei and Jin period (c. 220 – 311 A.D) instead of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. Many garden landscape view names were referred to the stories and anecdotes of the Wei and Jin period (Note 2). For instance, the name of ‘Garden of Reposing My Arrogance’ (*Ji Ao Yuan*) came from one of Tao Yuanming’s (Note 3) (365-427) poem, ‘I lean to the Southern window to repose my arrogance’. The name of the ‘Garden of Setting Feet Everyday’ (*Ri She Yuan*) of the Yang family in Taicang was also from a Tao poem, ‘interest arises as I set feet into the garden everyday’. The same was true of the ‘Carefree Pavilion’ (*You Ran Ting*) in Kunshan, alluding to Tao’s poem, ‘I see the Southern Mountain without care’. Another garden, named ‘Coming Back to Live in the Field’ (*Gui Tian Yuan Ju*) in Suzhou was inspired by Tao’s article of the same title. Other names were given according to the poems of Tao’s peers, one of them, the ‘Garden of Harmonious Enjoyment’ (*Xie Shang Yuan*) in Suzhou, was named after Xie Lingyun’s work (385-422), ‘enjoy the landscape in the city, reading the literature passed down from the ancient’. In addition, many gardens included the Chinese character of ‘reclusion’ in their names, indirectly suggesting the same concerns. These include the ‘Garden of Summoning me to Recluse’ (*Zhao Yin Yuan*), ‘the Garden of Reclusion in Peace’ (*An Yin Yuan*) in the Dong Ting Mountain, ‘Little Recluse’s Pavilion’ (*Xiao Yin Ting*) in Suzhou, the ‘Mountain Villa for a Tentative Recluse’ (*Qia Yin Shan Fang*), ‘Tentative Reclusion in the Northern Mountain’ (*Bei Shan Xiao Yin*), and ‘Reclusion in Chinese Plum Flowers’ (*Mei Yin*) in Suzhou.

The style of Wei and Jin scholars was distinguished by its taste for landscape aesthetics and the spiritual ideal of ‘aptness’ (*Shi*) and ‘satisfaction’ (*Zu*). A scholar in the Jin Dynasty: Zhi Dun (314-366) wrote:

(Ancient Sages) were Bohemia, unfettered infinitely. They possessed materials but were not restrained by materials. In reality, many things are out of my reach, so I do not make efforts to pursue them, never being too hasty, or too impatient. Then there is nothing I cannot feel suited to. This is called ‘being at large’ (*xiao yao*). If our desires are satisfied and we do not expect more beyond what we have obtained, then we will feel really happy, as innocent as children (Zhi, 1958, p. 2366).

Ge Xiaoyin believes the new explanation Zhi Dun gave that ‘possessing materials without being restrained by materials’ was exactly the state of mind yearned by these scholar officials: most of them had a certain material basis and simultaneously desired spiritual freedom. So they learned to be satisfied with whatever they encountered, from which the concept of ‘aptness’ and ‘satisfaction’ were derived (Ge, 1998). Some garden owners in the late Ming period borrowed this concept and included the Chinese character ‘aptness’ (*shi*) or ‘satisfaction’ (*zu*) when they named their gardens. The scholar official Wang Ao (1450-1534) constructed his garden at the Eastern Dong Ting Mountain in the Wu County and named it ‘Truly Apt Garden’ (*Zhen Shi Yuan*) to show that his wishes were fulfilled after retirement. Later his younger brother Wang Quan constructed the ‘Tentatively Apt Garden’ (*Qie Shi Yuan*) at Heng Quan Tang Bridge east of the Tai Lake; his nephew Wang Xue built the ‘Following Aptness Garden’ (*Cong Shi Yuan*). Wen Zhengming (1501-1583) expressed more explicitly in his ‘Postscript to the Tentatively Apt Garden’ (*Qie Shi Yuan Houji*) for a cloistered official: Tan Yuanzhen in Shanghai. It said:

At that time you were admitted by the government institution, but were not granted an official post, so you named your garden ‘Tentatively Apt Garden’ and composed the preface yourself, ‘everybody has to adapt to something. Somebody follows other people’s will, while I follow the heaven’s will. The heaven (*tian*) has refused to grant me what I want by cutting me off from official posts, and then I have to do my own will and live in ease and comfort’ (Wen, 1971).

A study of garden names in Suzhou based on *A Book of the Gardens of Suzhou in Past Dynasties* (Note 4) shows that 30 of the 256 (11.8%) Ming private garden names collected in the book revealed the owners’ interests, tastes or purposes (others were simply named after the owners’ family names or the locations). 24 of the 30 names (80%) were related to Wei and Jin anecdotes.

However, this phenomenon would soon change dramatically. In the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), 78 of the 220 (35%) private garden names recorded were testaments to the owners’ personal tastes and garden meanings but only 12 names (5.5%) revealed Wei and Jin tastes; far more names reflected the owners’ personal experiences or were linked to other ancient literary allusions. For instance, the owner of the ‘Garden of Retreating for

Introspections' (*Tui Si Yuan*) (located in Tong Li in the Wu County) was discharged from his official post for malpractice for selfish ends. So he named the garden after an admonition in the Left Record (*Zhuo Zhuan*), 'when you work in the court, be loyal to the emperor; if you are dismissed from the official post, then return for introspections.'

A concomitant phenomenon arose in the 16th century: small and plain gardens were very much the flavor of the day. As Craig Clunas noted, names along the lines of 'Half Acre Garden' and 'Mustard Seed Garden' burgeoned (Note 5). This taste continued into the Qing period. Georges Métaillé discovered that gardens in the Qing period could even 'be reduced to a single potted plant or a miniature landscape' (Métaillé, 1998, p. 254). And it was highly praiseworthy to have a plain garden. Qian Yong (1759-1844) recorded a successful garden named 'Washing Fragrance Garden' (*Huan Xiang Yuan*) in his hometown constructed by Mr. Li Jiexuan, a person in coarse cotton clothes (*bu yi*) (which means the person is a commoner, not an official). The main building was only three spans (*ying*) wide with two or three osmanthus in front of the hall. He then pointed out that gardens are never good for being spacious or extravagant. The fame of a garden would be established by the virtue of the owner (Qian, 1979, p. 546). For that reason, gardens, big and small, in the Jiangnan area, divested of their separate identities, showed an identical plain view distinguishing them from that in North China: grey tilts, white walls, transparent water and small landscape buildings without decoration. On the contrary, a mediocre work against the plain aesthetic standard for ostentation was frequently scoffed at. Li Yu (1611-1679) commented:

Some people spend millions of gold, only to achieve poor mountains and stones. That is a portrait of him by gods and ghosts, making stones and mountains just look like the owner (Li, 1991, p. 196).

Li Yu, a scholar official in the early Qing period, attacked an extravagant way of life for depriving the poor of the means for survival and seducing rich families into corruption. He emphasized that both the rich and poor should abstain from extravagance in constructing residential buildings (Li, 1991, p. 157), and stated that the way of life introduced by his book was based on the principle of frugality. The wealthy owning the country could do, while the poor without a penny were also able to achieve (Li, 1991, p. 1).

These two phenomena suggest a rudimentary shift in garden culture underlying the continued expansion of interest in the garden. There was another trend beyond 'the problematic realm of consumption, excess and luxury' (Clunas, 1996, p. 22) and also beyond what could be explained with the prior aesthetic framework. These aroused my interest: in similar economic conditions, what caused the continued interest in gardens in the 16th and 17th century, and the series of changes? The cultural context provides the answers.

3. Arts: Set up Rules for Gardens (Note 6)

The second half of the Ming period witnessed the beginning of the 'looking back to the ancient movement (*Fugu Yundong*)'. It was recorded, 'Hong Zhi (1487-1505) was a prosperous period for poetry. Classics began to thrive and scholars behaved in a refined manner' (Li, 2009(1531)a, p. 14). The first climax of the movement, from the 1490s to the 1530s (Liao, 1994), marked the end of long-term cultural decadence (Note 7). The importance of the movement has been considered to be equivalent of the High Tang period. During the same period of the Ming Movement, when culture flourished and rose to a new height with the emergence of a medley of aesthetic models, the expansion of interest in the garden began. Several points demonstrate the close relationship between the cultural context and the late Ming garden culture:

First of all, there emerged a unanimous taste toward antiquarianism. In the first climax, the Former Seven Scholars (*qian qi zi*) (Note 8) argued that literature in the Han and Wei period was the most classical after the Three Dynasties (the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties) (Li, 2009 (1531) c, p. 3), whose style was hence set as a classical model for writers to follow. We may easily relate this literary taste with the Wei and Jin predilection in names of gardens in the 16th century, a way in which garden owners tried to model themselves on ancient anchorites. And in garden design, landscape views also showed strong ancient aesthetic tastes, as painters in the Ming and Qing period looked back to the past as well (Note 9). Dong Qichang (1555-1636) put forward the theory of the separation of the Southern and Northern School, highly admiring the former. In the Late Ming period, most painters in the traditional style hence followed the Southern School. Ji Cheng said he himself liked painting from childhood, especially Jin Hao and Guan Hong's style (Ji, 1981a, p. 36). His book *the Crafts of Garden* (*Yuan Ye*) guided garden designers to lay out views (*jing*) with pictorial effects in the Song and Yuan style. Stones should be raised to 'show deep meaning of painting, together with personal emotion filling the mountains' (Ji, 1981b, p. 197); plants should be uneven and irregular half way up the mountain with twisted roots embedded in rocks, suggestive of a Yuan painting (Ji, 1981a, p. 36).

Second, it was the rules of literature and painting that shaped the garden aesthetic standards. By studying ancient aesthetics and patterns, Ming scholars and painters laid down a series of criteria emphasizing the artistic mood

(*yi jing*), ethos and styles (*ge diao*). Wang Xiangting (1474-1544) stated four points for literary creation: wield ideas (*yun yi*), decide ethos and styles (*ding ge*), schedule the structure (*jie pian*), polish sentences (*lian ju*). He then explained that the idea and mood should be complete and energetic; ethos and styles should reflect antique spirits (T. Wang, 1976 (1536), p. 5). All these about the artistic mood, ethos and styles were directly applied to garden practices (Note 10). In the second climax (1533-1592), the 'Latter Seven Scholars' (*hou qi zi*) continued the 'looking back into the ancient movement' by further discussing ancient aesthetic criteria, tastes and literary patterns. In order to tailor artworks to the newly established aesthetic pattern, a new method for composing poems was innovated: borrowing and assembling the vocabulary from ancient masters to make new works. In landscape poems, 'views' were cut out and reorganized for an idealized beautiful effect (Note 11).

It might not be a good method for literary creation, in Yuan Hongdao's (1568-1610) words, 'cutting leaves and picking up flowers, with fragments left' (Yuan, 1981a, p. 1049); however, it provided reference for garden design and construction in a three dimensional space. The garden, as a sort of artificially reconstructed nature, limited by the space, was emphasized to create condensed beauty through assembled and reorganized views, named 'moving mountains and shrinking lands' (*yi shan suo di*). Ji Cheng explained that the principle of raising artificial mountains did not lie in owning stones with a specific feature, delicate or awkward, but the mountain should be suited to the terrace (*tai*) and pavilion (*xie*) close to it, and the moon and clouds in nature, with paths and flowers and willows hidden (Ji, 1988, p. 197). It was a typical way to assemble views by cutting out and reorganizing landscape views. Wang Shizhen (1526-1590) in the Ming period said that his 'Yan Mountain Garden' (*Yan Shan Yuan*) matched flowers, snow, wind, rain and the moon (S. Wang, 1970, p. 2959). Shi Lu in the same period inscribed 30 views in the 'Eastern Land Wide Hall' (*Dong Gao Cao Tang*) in Changshu, 'Willow Screen on the Peach Bank', 'Pagoda Shadows in the Middle Flow of the Water', 'Buddhism Poems Resonating among Bamboos', 'Fragrant Mist Lingered in Curved Corridors', 'the Sinking Moon beside the Rainbow Bridge', 'A Little Boat Flowing in a Stream with Lotuses', 'Mist and Rain Covering the Painted Bridge'... Each name created an idealized effect through careful organization.

Third, influenced by painting rules developed in the study of the Song and Yuan masters, individual garden elements began to be reevaluated. Si Magang (1019-1086) in the Song period described a beautiful landscape scene with elegant water, plants and landscape buildings in the essay about his Garden of Solitary Pleasure (*Du Le Yuan*), but showed no interest in any specific landscape aesthetic element, which was also notable for its exclusion of rocks. This shows gardens at that stage still remained in an idealized space with immature methods of aesthetic expression. However, in the late Ming period, rocks and artificial mountains became the decisive elements (usually the most expensive part) of any garden. Garden designers put great emphasis on stone selection, and were fastidious about the color, shape and grains. Ji Cheng commented on the Dragon Pool Stone:

One type of this stone bears simple and unsophisticated color and grains without holes. It is fit to be separately interspersed. Another type is green, like a walnut, evocative of various strokes (*cun*). The effect of strokes in paintings can be achieved if they are arranged together (Ji, 1988, p. 218).

Rocks and mountains were regarded as a suitable media to recreate the styles and the brush and ink (*bi mo*) of Song and Yuan masters (Note 12). Li Zhujin believed painters in the Ming and Qing periods stressed 'the continuation of the painting styles and techniques of their illustrious predecessors, particularly the great Yuan masters. Compared with the painters of the Song period, when "taking nature as one's master" was the highest principle, the late Ming painters were more partial to the subjective side. Brush and ink and spirit-resonance became the most important criteria for evaluation, while the accurate description of nature was relegated to a subordinate position' (Li & Watt, 1988, p. 55). A fixed model of the two-dimensional art guided garden designing methodologies. Wang Shizhen drew on the styles of the Yuan masters as a standard to categorize rocks, and Dong Qichang gardened Wang Wei's scrolls (Clunas, 1996, p. 100). The man-made mountain in the Mountain Villa of Encircled Elegance (*Huan Xiu Shan Zhuang*) constructed by the stone craft master: Ge Yuliang in the early Qing period, has long been considered an invaluable treasure and the best example of a man-made mountain in the Jiangnan area. It showed the remarkable brushwork of the Yuan master: Wang Meng (?-1388). A comparison demonstrates the similarity between the grains in Ge's work and the Curly Hair Strokes (*Juan Mao Cun*) in Wang's scroll, and the same is true of the atmospheres of the two pieces of artwork. The mountain raised by Ge Yuliang was a concrete three dimensional representation of Wang Meng's scrolls (Figure 2- Figure 5). Garden tastes did not lie in how realistic garden views were compared with nature, but in how close they were toward the styles, techniques and atmospheres in those landscape paintings by the masters in the Song and Yuan periods (Note 13) (Figure 6- Figure 7).



Figure 2. The artificial mountain in the Mountain Villa of Encircled Elegance (Huanxiu Shanzhang) in Su Zhou
Comparison 1: the similarity between Ge's artificial mountains and Wang Meng's painting



Figure 3. Wang Meng, Qin Bian Yinju Tu (Reclusion in the Qin Bian Mountain)



Figure 4. 'Source of water for the pool built with lake stones in Mountain Villa of Encircled Elegance', Liu Dunzhen, tans. Chen Lixian, ed. Joseph C. Wang.: Chinese Classical Gardens of Suzhou (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993)

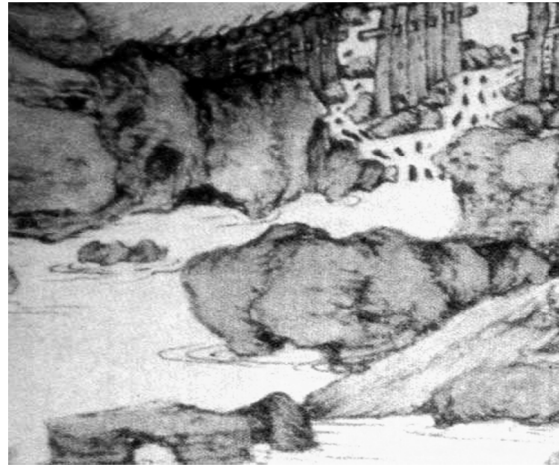


Figure 5. Wang Meng, Ge Zhichuan Yiju Tuzhou (A Painting of Ge Zhichuan who is moving his family)



Figure 6. The artificial mountain in Zhou Zheng Yuan (the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician) (See David H. Engel, *Creating a Chinese Garden*) (London: Croom Helm, 1986, p. 61)



Figure 7. Ni Zan, Rong Xi Zhai Tu (Painting of a Room for Chatting)

Comparison 3: the similarity between gardens in Su Zhou and Yuan Yuan masters' paintings

Garden formats were also influenced by painting rules. Garden routes were designed to represent the effect of a hand scroll. Chen Congzhou noted that routines in a garden should guide visitors in the way they enjoy a hand scroll from the Beginning (*dao yin*), Main Body (*juan*) to the End (*tuo wei*) (Chen, 1994, p. 45). In the arrangement of the whole space, 'borrowing views' (*jie jing*) was widely used. Successful cases can be adduced such as the Garden of Reposing Pleasures (*Ji Chang Yuan*) in Wuxi, and the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician (*Zhuo Zheng Yuan*) in Suzhou.

In addition, the late Ming period was noteworthy for being an era when people followed ancient tastes, set up patterns and simultaneously freely expressed their personalities (Note 14). It has almost been a universal principle that any advocacy of antiquarianism is nothing but a method drawn on to express contemporary innovative ideas. Renaissance artists did not intend to recreate the ancient Greek and Roman art but put forward the new concept of human's freedom and rights; the architecture of Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. was not built in a style to celebrate Roman architectures but to define their own new culture and express the concept of democracy. The same is true of the Ming Movement. The artistic pattern with some ancient taste was structured

for the better personal expression of ideas and emotions which were stressed to be the foundation of any literary creation (Note 15). The new rule for literature was widely applied to gardens, where such names as the 'Pavilion that Rests its Head on the Water Flow' (*Zhen Liuting*), the 'Hall where Clouds Linger On' (*Xi Yun Tang*) in the Harmonious Enjoyment Garden (*Xie Shang Yuan*), the 'Veranda where the Moon Wells Up' (*Yong Yue Xuan*) in the Fifteen Pines Mountain Studio (*Shi Wu Song Shan Fang*) emerged. View names in prior gardens were straight and plain, such as 'A Building to see Mountains' (*Kan Shan Ting*) or 'the Veranda facing the Water' (*Mian Shui Xuan*) in the 'Surging Waves Pavilion' (*Cang Lang Ting*) (constructed in the Song period), compared with which, those of Ming and Qing gardens were obviously more charming, colorful and individual. Though the change was small, it greatly contributed to stimulating the visitors' passion and emotions. Landscape views were no longer objects being passively looked at, but influenced and touched travelers with their own personalities and emotions, ultimately leading to the mutual communication between visitors and views. This trait of Chinese gardens has been noted by Edwin T. Morris, 'a great emotional change could be wrung from a garden that was only a few acres in physical space, but expansive in poetical space' (Morris, 1983, p. 47).

Garden rules, as John Makeham mentioned (Note 16), were grounded on those of art like poetry and painting, and were represented in a space. Gardens were not directly connected to Zhuang Zi or Lao Zi but through the framework of contemporary literature; neither were gardens direct imitations of real nature but paintings. Qian Yong suggested, 'constructing a garden is the same as composing a poem or an essay' (Qian, 1979, p. 545). Li Yu explained the principle of raising artificial mountains was the same as composing a prose (Y. Li, 1991, p. 196). Cheng Congzhou questioned if people had not learned poetry and painting, how could they construct gardens? (Chen, 1994)

4. Gardens: Seek Much Pleasure through Art

The same time a set of artistic criteria was set up to serve as a reference to gardens, a successful application of art to gardens was noticeable also due to the rise of a new field of study: Commoners' Everyday Use (*Baixing Riyong Zhi Xue*). In the Late Ming period, craftsmen in all fields enjoyed a much higher social status than ever before (Xia, 1994, p. 165). It was recorded that 'Fashion changes through eras. Today, slight skills and small crafts all enable people to achieve fame' (Yuan, 1981a, p. 731). The rise of the new field ensured a better representation of intellectuals' ideas and tastes through garden elements. On another level, some scholars delved more and more into the new field. Li Yu wrote a series of books on gardens, showing people how to apply aesthetic tastes to their daily lives. His wisdom and aesthetic taste of literature, painting and music were reflected in doors, windows, book shelves, plants, and so on. For example, in his design plans for interior decorations, he suggested windows could sometimes be made in the shape of fans. When viewed from the outside or inside, people could always enjoy the shape as if viewing a fan painting. Another kind of fan window he designed in a more realistic style was called the *bian mian* window: boards were used to cover the edges of a window from the inside to create a fan shape, and artificial flowers and trees were stuck in the middle (Y. Li, 1991, p. 176) (Figure 8, Figure 9). Another case was called 'Landscape Window'. These windows usually faced mountains showing a good landscape view; their frames suggesting the edges of a Chinese painting. Sometimes the window was covered with a painting (stuck to a card-board); sometimes it just showed real nature outside, which was conducive to creating a constantly innovative visual illusion of 'painting' (Note 17) (Figure 9). He also created many designs for small decorations, like the horizontal inscribed board (*bian e*). He suggested boards could be made in the shape of leaves:

It has been an elegant matter for a thousand years to inscribe poems on red leaves and float them in a stream (*Yugou tihong, qiangu jiashi*), so boards in the shape of leaves are able to convey a sense of elegance (Figure 9) (Li, 1991, p. 195).

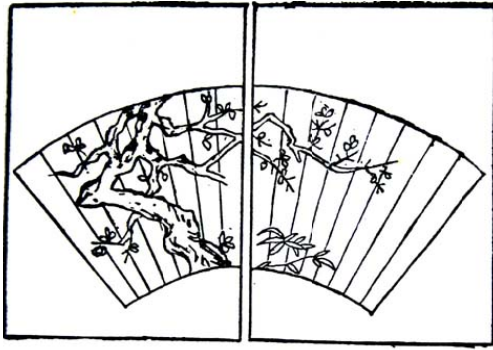


Figure 8. The *bian mian* window Li Yu designed (see Li Yu, *Li Yu Quanji* (The Entire Corpus of Li Yu's works) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Press, 1991) vol.3, p.157.)
Comparison 4: Figure 9. is a typical fan painting in the Ming and Qing period. The comparison suggests Li Yu tried to create a fan painting effect in his design.

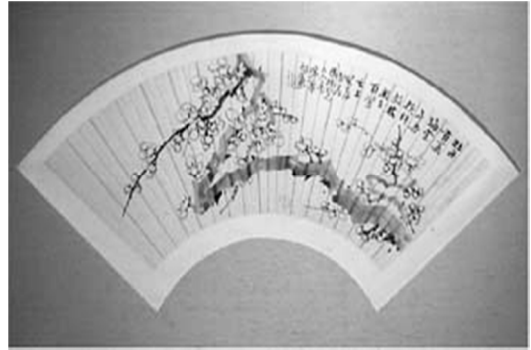


Figure 9. Unknown artist, *Gift of Mr. Fong Chow*, (Qing Dynasty)

In these cases, painting and calligraphy were applied to the articles for everyday use (Note 18). Another case was pertinent to indoor plants. He explained why the fragrance of orchids disappeared when people stayed long in an orchid room (Note 19). He suggested that people just entered the room, but had no idea to leave. If they leave and then enter again, the fragrance would be much stronger. The best solution was that if there were two rooms, the flower should be placed in one room only. When they alternatively used the two rooms, the fragrance could be felt at any moment, even in the room without flowers (Y. Li, 1991, pp. 283-284). Poetry, literature and classic morals began to be enjoyed in people's daily lives after being artistically treated. Aesthetic standards in art were no longer limited to painting or literature, but spread to interior decoration, antique collection, architectural decoration, building, furniture, cooking, planting, and music. All of these were encompassed and reflected in the garden culture. A set of garden rules based on those of other art forms that had matured earlier were set up. Several important garden books completed in the first half of the 17th century such as Ji Cheng's *the Craft of Gardens* (*Yuan Ye*) regarded as the first and a classic Chinese garden book, and Li Yu's *Leisured Feeling Jotted* (*Xian Qing Ou Ji*), showed people what gardens should look like, or what the concept of garden should be. A garden pattern was systematically constructed, representing the maturity of Chinese garden culture.



Figure 10. Gerrit Rietveld: *Red blue chair* (1918). It was designed in the style of Mondrian's abstract art.
Comparison 4: It is not unique in China that painting styles are applied to the articles for everyday use

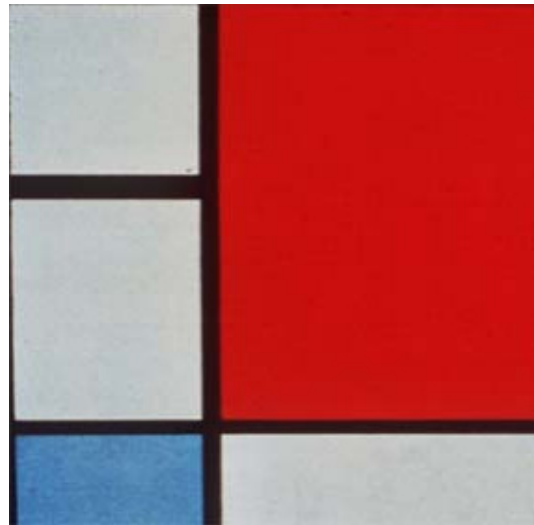


Figure 11. Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Blue and Yellow* (1930)

By that time, how much money was to be spent was no longer important; the involvement of artistic tastes and methods totally changed the meaning of people's lives, in other words, the owners' talents and intelligence take precedence over the material conditions of gardens. 'Possessing materials without being restrained by materials' used to be the expression of the freedom of the mind in the Wei and Jin period, while in the late Ming and Qing periods, requirements for materials were further reduced, while the freedom of the mind, artistic tastes, intelligence, lofty virtues were highly stressed. Gardens were redefined as pieces of artwork.

This shift, primarily with the involvement of the idea of art, accelerated the development of small gardens. Wang Shizhen recorded 15 gardens in Nanjing in the 16th century, among which 12 were owned by the aristocracy (Note 20). However, at the same time, the garden owners' group began to change in other places in Jiangnan: merchants, doctors, painters, low rank officials and commoner (*bu yi*) literati joined in as more people could afford 'gardens' according to the new definition (Note 21). Gui Youguang (1507-1571), a low rank official but an established scholar in the Ming period, composed an essay about his little simple crude old residence: Xiang Ji Pavilion (*Xiang Ji Xuan*) in the Western Garden (*Xi Yuan*) located in Tai Cang (Taicang):

Windows are in the front wall; low walls surround the patio to shelter against the sun. The sun light is reflected, enlightening the room. Osmanthus, bamboos and other trees are irregularly planted in the courtyard. Old banisters help to increase the beauty. Borrowed books fill the shelves, and I sit before them, reading books or singing songs. When I stop, seated there still, I can hear the sound from nature, while the courtyard is quiet and birds occasionally come to peck food, reluctant to leave even in the presence of humans. On the nights of the Mid-Month, the moonlight fills half of the wall, shades of cinnamon are mottled. They move when the wind comes. It's really lovely! (Gui, 1981, p. 429)

In the Qing period, this phenomenon became even more prevalent, for instance, the Mustard Boat Garden (*Jie Zhou Yuan*) in the West Dongting Mountain was constructed by a doctor in the Qian Long and Jia Qin period. The garden only has an area of 0.2 *mu* (Note 22), but has long been celebrated for its elegance. Other cases came to merchants' gardens, such as the 'Quietly Examining Garden' (*Jin Guan Lou*) (Note 23), the 'Left after being Pecked Garden' (*Can Li Yuan*) (constructed in the late Qing period) (Note 24). The affordable 'small' and 'plain' gardens became a fashion, as many garden names explicitly showed off this characteristic. It was, to some extent, a synonym to 'possessing more artistic talents and tastes and much lofty spiritual freedom'. Zheng Banqiao (1693-1765), a low rank official and painter in the Qing period expressed his pride in owning a small garden:

If the room is elegant, it does not need to be a big one; if we enjoy the fragrance of a flower, there is no need to possess a bunch (Note 25).

The qualities of intelligence, wisdom and talent were used to assess the features of a small and plain garden and soon dominated Jiangnan garden culture. Large gardens of opulent families also adhered to this standard. Even the Qing Emperor Qian Long applied this Jiangnan taste he acquired to his imperial gardens, a famous example of which is the Harmonious Interest Garden (*Xie Qu Yuan*) at the Summer Palace, a replica of the Garden of Reposing Pleasures (*Ji Chang Yuan*) in Wuxi. With different life experiences, the new group of garden owners did not respond to the Wei and Jin very much, but told other stories, which in turn influenced the garden culture. At that time, garden view names became more colorful and interesting. Art made gardens in plain style possible.

At the same time, the atmosphere of gardens was also accordingly changed. Although the far-reaching reclusion culture formed in the Wei and Jin period reflected lofty spiritual freedom, it also conveyed a sort of hopelessness and desolation. The majority of the anchorites were forced to leave their official posts or seek shelter from the turbulent world of politics in a certain unhappy political milieu, where complex feelings mingled. Wang Xizhi (321-379) evinced his sorrow at the end of his famous 'Prescript to the Orchid Pavilion' (*Lan Ting Xu*):

I now know it's totally nonsense about life and death (Note 26). It is just an untrue story of the person who enjoyed an unusual longevity in the Qi State in the Warring States period (X. Wang, 1994, p. 1609).

So the seemingly infinite happiness of the scholars in the Wei and Jin period was to a greater extent a sort of 'enjoy the happiness as much as possible' (*ji shi xing le*), reflecting deep worry about an insecure and unstable life (Note 27). A predilection for the Wei and Jin taste in the Ming period was partly born out of a similar political predicament. The complex feeling fraught with helplessness and desolation was obvious in Wen Zhengming's prose for the Wang family's Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician (*Zhuo Zheng Yuan*):

Ancient wise scholar officials of virtue wished to recluse, but they could not set themselves free from official ranks, neither did they develop well in their political career, like Pan Yue (Note 28). Now you have been dismissed and came back home, freely and unfettered. Even the ancient virtuous were inferior to you at this point. High rank posts are all that people expect, but misfortunes are arranged there by God. People

just feel pleased for some time, and then suffer from disasters. So you have to make a decision, which you want: being killed or enjoying your free life a recluse... (Wen, 1987, p. 1257)

Reclusion was still an undesirable choice, so was the garden culture, mixed with sorrow and pain. However, gardens became much happier later due to new meanings given to the garden. One example was Su Tong, who built a garden during the Kang Xi period in the Qing Dynasty. As owning a garden was his grandfather's unfulfilled dream, the garden was named 'Aspiration Garden' (*Zhi Pu*) in honor of his filiality (Note 29) (Wei, 1992). This case suggests gardens in the Qing period were seen as part of a happy life, a symbol of beatitude (*fu*), as Ji Cheng said:

Owning the leisure, you have good fortunes; understanding how to seek pleasure, you become a god (Ji, 1981a, p. 61).

At literati gatherings, scholars did not discuss solemn philosophical theories any more (Note 30), but sought pleasure, for example, they enjoined artworks from each other by exchanging paintings, poems, and calligraphy. This tradition continued in the Qing period and even as recent as the Republican period. The Joyous Garden (*Yi Yuan*) was a case, where Ren Bonian (1840-1896) and other painters regularly gathered for many years. During the Republican period in Shanghai, there were the Yu Garden Painting and Calligraphy Charitable Art Association (*Yu Yuan Shuhua Shanhui*), the Xu Garden Elegant Gathering (*Xu Yuan Yaji*) and others. Tao Yuanming, as a model for recluses in the Jin period, died a miserable beggar. Strictly speaking, the dream of 'aptness' and 'satisfaction' had not been really fulfilled until the late Ming and Qing period. Moreover, this concept was even elevated to a new level of 'pleasure seeking': the middle and lower class families with artistic talents were seeking a sort of refined life with cultural and aesthetic tastes. The idea of art at one level nurtured the 'eyes' that were good at discovering beauties; at another level, enlightened people who sought to beautify their lives. Garden owners were enjoying nature and simultaneously enjoying their own talents. And 'if the owner is talented and refined, the garden will be elegant; if the owner is vulgar (*su*), the garden will appear awkward' (Li, 1991, p. 169).

Admittedly, it was a tradition for educated people to enjoy a poor life (Note 31), but this taste was not fully connected with the concept of 'garden' until the late Ming period, primarily due to 'Romanticism' (Note 32) that spread through the country in the first half of the 17th century. The idea of seeking happiness and freedom became fashionable. Yuan Hongdao asserted 'Five Real Happiness': first, enjoying the most beautiful, euphonic and delicious; second, enjoying the best houses full of visitors, cheerful interactions between men and women and owning enough money and land; third, reading classical and popular literature, then having a discussion with friends; fourth, having a boat floating on the water with concubines inside playing musical instruments, forgetting one's age; fifth, using up all the money in one year, ending up being a beggar in front of a brothel (Yuan, 1595, p. 205). Xia Xianchun pointed out that in the late Ming period people were epicurean, seeking happiness by any means. They loved life, and believed life was meaningless without happiness (Xia, 1994, p. 37). Money, land, women, books, scholarship, Confucian virtue, personal talents, intelligence, wanton imagination and even ridiculous experiences provided happiness. With this background, classical garden books like Ji Cheng's *the Craft of Gardens* were completed, as a reflection of 'Romanticism', showing people how to seek pleasure by owning private gardens. At that time, in addition to a complete pattern, Chinese garden culture also matured with a definite purpose: offering pleasure to more people. The wealthy might achieve this through an excessive aesthetic consumption of gardens as Craig Clunas noted, while the middle and lower class families with talents enjoyed their intelligence and wisdom also through gardens. Arts, as an important media, enabled gardens to encompass various kinds of happiness: sages' classics were not solemn any more, and daily articles were not vaguer any more; anything could be enjoyed in gardens only if the owner had the artistic talents.

5. Conclusion

Scholars in cross culture studies have shifted the focus from explaining non-Western culture with Western concepts to interpreting local meanings (Clarke, 2000), which provoked my question if the method that attempted to explain the garden concept in the Ming and Qing periods with a culture around 2000 years before that period is appropriate any more. In the study from the standpoint of the late Ming cultural context primarily with the 'looking back to the ancient movement' and 'Romanticism' in the historical background, art, in addition to the economic conditions in Jiangnan, emerged as an integral influencing factor in a continuously popularizing process of garden culture (Note 33). As the exclusive right of owning gardens by the aristocracy and the upper class was dissolved, the middle class and commoners joined the line of garden owners under the new definition of garden, which placed much emphasis on artistic tastes and personal talents and then in turn brought new meanings to the concept of the garden, leading to further changes in the garden culture. In this process, the key

element lay in the duality of the features of the new garden culture: being more affordable and much happier.

The 'major shift' in the Jiangnan garden culture was essentially based on a series of changes in garden owners' status and tastes. However, as a turning point in the garden concept, its significance goes far beyond the phenomenon of a large increase in the number of aesthetic gardens in the Jiangnan area. With a complete aesthetic pattern primarily grounded on other art rules that had matured before gardens, garden culture stood out as an independent culture for the first time in Chinese art history. Its influence exceeded the geographical boundaries, reaching North China, and moreover, as a distinctive Chinese cultural form changed European gardens in the 17th and 18th century. By bridging the gulf between material limitations and spiritual freedom, between sages' classics and the happiness of the mortal, art played a crucial role in all these changes.

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Notes

Note 1. The concept of ‘Jiangnan area’ evolves through history: big Jiangnan area and small Jiangnan area refer to different geographic scope. What means by ‘Jiangnan area’ in this article is based on the ‘small Jiangnan area’ concept, originated in the Dongjin era (317-420) and developed into during the Ming and Qing period. The county sovereignty area covers Suzhou, Changzhou, Songjiang, Jiaying, Huzhou and Hangzhou. A location map that illustrates the rough geographic scope can be found in Figure 1.

Note 2. As John Mankeham noted, names of Chinese gardens help to explain garden thoughts. ‘Confucius did not regard names as labels but rather as social and hence political, catalysis, which could bring about new states of affairs’ (Mankwham, 1998, p. 192).

Note 3. Tao Yuanming is a famous poet for his idylls literature in the Jin period

Note 4. The book serves as a corpus of data, including around 1,000 gardens, dating from the Warring States period down to the Republican period. It is recognized as a book with a relatively complete garden data in

Suzhou. Though the statistics based on the book are not rigorous enough, it helps to reveal the general situation (Wei, 1992).

Note 5. Craig Clunas ascribed this phenomenon to the wealth of garden owners: as everybody could build a garden, size was not important any more (Clunas, 1996, p. 91). But this explanation seems to contradict one of his primary viewpoints that aesthetic gardens functioned as ostentation of garden owners' wealth in the Jiangnan area. If that function was important, why did not they prefer big gardens?

Note 6. In the following context, poetry and painting are to be focused as the two primary examples. In reality, many cultures influenced or were closely related to the garden culture in the Ming and Qing period, for example music, which has been studied by Professor Chen Congzhou.

Note 7. Before the 15th century, a school called Tai Ge Style (Tai Ge Ti), marked with political eulogies without personal expression dominated the literary world. And the cultural decadence from the end of the Song period was thought to have lasted more than 100 years.

Note 8. The Former Seven Scholars refer to the seven leading scholars in the Looking Back to the Ancient Movement. At the second climax, seven other scholars who continued the movement were called the Latter Seven Scholars.

Note 9. Painting was important reference for garden designers to represent their ideas in a three dimensional space. Scholars noticed that many painters participated in garden design and construction in the Jiangnan area, a place abound with literati and cultural atmospheres. Chen Congzhou pointed out the majority of garden designers were good at painting at that time (Chen, 1999, p. 209).

Note 10. Many researchers have noticed the importance of the artistic mood (yi jing), ethos and styles (ge diao) in Chinese classic gardens, such as Morris, 1983; Engel, 1986; Keswick, 2003 and etc.

Note 11. Take one poem of Guang Lu (1604-1650) for example: 'the Wine Shop near the Dong Ting Lake', 'the Dong Ting Lake appears after the sun sinks; beside the rosy cloud is the wine shop. The market far away from the bridge is just under the rainbow, while a small boat is floating on the autumn water with the reflection of the moon. White fishes are springing above the waves; wide geese are walking on the yellow sand. Fishermen leave the wine shop, and then disappear in reed catkins.' All the phrases in the poem, such as 'the sinking sun', the 'Dong Ting Lake', the 'rosy cloud' were frequently used in classical Chinese poems to create a certain artistic mood (Yi Jing), but are all piled up here in this poem, regardless of the logic connection (Mao, 2002, p. 234).

Note 12. The influential book: Jie Ziyuan Huapu (the Mustard Seed Garden of Model Paintings) completed in the Ming period is a typical aesthetic standard system based on the analysis and understanding of prior masters. It fully stresses the brush and ink and styles of different schools. Shi Tao in the early Qing period was averse to it. He criticized, 'painters today... always claim their brush and ink (bi mo) belong to a certain school, just as the blind look at the blind, ugly women laugh at ugly women.' (See Shi Tao, the colophon on the painting: Visiting all the strange Peaks for drafts in 1691 in Beijing).

Note 13. John Hay raised the question of how Chinese gardens can represent a big mountain with small rocks; how artificial mountains can be realistically natural (Hay, 1985, p. 54).

Note 14. One of the Seven Former Scholars: Li Mengyang argued, studying the ancient, you should never cast aside the ancient patterns. However if you only follow the ancient without digestion, your writing style will be unnatural with prior writers' vestiges (M. Li, 2009(1531)b, p. 2). Another scholar in the Former Seven Scholars group: Wang Tingxiang said, 'craftsmen cannot do the work without rules and squares (gui ju), Painters should copy the ancient before creating by themselves... Adjusting their paces, regulating the standards, you then understand rules. After practicing for a long time, you will feel more familiar (with writing) and ultimately assimilate principles into your works... Then the ancient is the present: anything in the world, figure or animal, is the subject for writing'(T. Wang, 1976 (1536), p. 6).

Note 15. Both the Former Seven Scholars and the Latter Seven Scholars emphasized that emotion and feeling were the bases for literary creation. Xu Zhenqin argued, 'feeling is the essence of heart...energy (qi) is created by feeling; sound is formed with energy; words are used for sound; rhymes are settled by words. And this is the way poetry comes into being' (Xu, 1991, p. 8). Two examples of poems are as follows: it was pictured as 'the singing sun is left above the ferry with a column of smoke arising from the ruin' in the Tang poem of the sinking sun scene (Wang Wei, 'Live Idly in Wang Chuan Villa and Compose Poems for Pei Di'); while in the Ming poem, it said 'a wild river bend immerses the singing sun in the water', (Zhang Qianzhi, 'Chanting Poems for the Wingceltis Garden') where various scenes were mingled together, especially the personified image of views endowed the landscape with human energy.

Note 16. John Makthan mentioned functions and meanings of garden rules (Makthan, 1998, p. 187).

Note 17. It could be an interesting topic that when European artists were taking efforts to make their landscape paintings look exactly like real nature at a specific moment and place through windows, their Chinese contemporaries in the Jiangnan area were trying to make real nature look like a two-dimensional painting. Furthermore, Li Yu's case even suggests they did not take art as a career with a rigorous and reverent attitude, but casually played with art and nature for pleasure and fun.

Note 18. The idea of shaping house wares to create a certain painting effect was often used in 20th century designs, for example, Van der Rohe, Barcelona Chair (1929) in the style of Mondrian's abstract art. (Figure 10, Figure 11).

Note 19. It was out of an ancient admonition, 'just like entering a room with orchids, if you stay long, the fragrance will disappear.' Villa is a symbol of lofty literati morals. It means people should make friends with the virtuous.

Note 20. Wang Shizhen, the Record of Visiting the Gardens of Jing Ling (You Jinlin Zhu Yuan Ji) (Clunas, 1996, p. 67).

Note 21. This was a remarkable change in garden culture. Imperial and aristocratic gardens emphasized the pleasure derived from materials. A typical example is Shi Cong's Gold Seint Garden (Jin Gu Yuan) in the Jin period. It is recorded, 'Liu Shi visited Shi Cong's house. He went to the toilet, seeing red gauze curtains, extravagant mattress and quilts on a large bed. Two slave girls were carrying sachets. Shi immediately retreated and apologized to Shi Cong for entering his bedroom by mistake. Shi Cong said, "Don't worry. It's just a toilet"' (He, H. Chen & Huang, 1999, p. 1255).

Note 22. 1 mu equates 100 square meters.

Note 23. The name came from the saying: I feel quite at large when quietly examining all the things in the world.

Note 24. All the three gardens are collected in Wei, 1992, p. 232, p252 & p267.

Note 25. Zheng Xie (Banqiao), Inscriptions for the Another Peak Temple (Bie Feng An), in Yangzhou.

Note 26. In Daoism, people believe eternal life could be achieved through certain Daoist trainings. In the Wei and Jin period, influenced by Buddhism, scholars began to question this saying. They found that death was unavoidable.

Note 27. Some scholars in the Wei and Jin period expressed their worries and pain directly. Liu Kun (270-317) said, 'when I was young, admiring a carefree way of living, especially respecting Zhang Zi and Ruan Ji. I felt surprised why there were happiness and sadness...Ever since the turbulence broke out, the country has been destroyed, and my friends and relatives have died or scattered, I can never feel happy any more. When I walk with a stick while composing poems, hundreds of unhappiness reach me; when I sit by myself, then indignity and sorrow gather. Actually I'd like to have a drink with my friends to seek some pleasure, but it's just like somebody is suffering from a deadly illness. How can one tablet of medicine save him?' (K. Liu, 2002, p. 2082)

Note 28. Pan Yue (247-300), a famous writer and scholar in the Jin Dynasty. Wang named the garden 'the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician', by comparing his own political career with that of Pan, believing there were many similarities. Wen Zhengming hence mentioned Pan Yue in this essay.

Note 29. This story was cited in Wei, 1992, p. 217.

Note 30. In the Wei and Jin period, philosophy was a popular topic at scholars' gatherings. One gathering was described as 'Zhi successfully explained the meaning of one point, the attendants all felt satisfied; Xu asked a difficult question, the others were all excited by waving their hands' (Y. Liu, 1991, p. 1265).

Note 31. The admonition was out of Confucian, 'men of virtue should enjoy the life of poverty' and followed by literati in the periods that follow. One famous example is Liu Yuxi's (772-842) 'Prose of My Crude Room' (Lou Shi Ming), bearing the meaning of both morality and literature. It is celebrated through dynasties.

Note 32. 'Romanticism', from the 1590s to the 1640s, was another literary trend following the Looking back to the Ancient Movement.

Note 33. While more middle class and commoners owned gardens, which caused the phenomenal burgeoning of gardens, there were still imperial, aristocratic and upper-class gardens. Craig Clunas noted the late Ming garden was 'a set of contested meanings' between aesthetics and a battery of wealth (Clunas, 1996, p. 102). Joanna, F.Handlin Smith also mentioned the debates over saving and spending, frugality and extravagance (Smith, 1992, p. 56). However, it suggests to me to be that people in various classes sought happiness through gardens according to their own financial situation. To those who were not wealthy, Art made up the deficiency of economic basis.