

## Teaching Material Culture and Chinese Gardens at American Colleges

Han Li

**Abstract:** The paper reflects upon the experience of designing and teaching a course on material culture and Chinese gardens. Involving traditional philosophy, ethics, religion, painting, calligraphy, craft, literature, architecture, and horticulture, a classical Chinese garden can be considered a microcosm of Chinese culture. This essay discusses the textbooks and general organization of the course, particularly focusing on how students study the key elements (rocks, water, plants, and architecture) in building a Chinese garden. Some Chinese literature with representations of gardens that can be used for this class is also introduced. In addition, this essay uses two classical Chinese gardens built in the United States (the Astor Court and the Garden of Flowing Fragrance) to discuss the appropriation of “Chinese-ness” in different geographical, physical, and cultural environments. Finally, some available online resources and technologies that have enhanced student understanding of the subject matter are introduced.

**Keywords** Material culture; Classical Chinese gardens; Suzhou; Yangzhou; Classroom

Involving traditional philosophy, ethics, religion, painting, calligraphy, craft, literature, architecture, and horticulture, a classical Chinese garden is a microcosm of Chinese culture. As such, teaching Chinese culture through the lens of traditional Chinese gardens can be highly productive. In addition to being admired as works of art, Chinese gardens are at the same time valuable pieces of real estate. They have economic importance and function socially as status symbols. Therefore, in addition to the aesthetic perspective, this class (“Material Culture and Chinese Gardens”) also adopts a historical approach and examines how the aesthetic meanings of gardens translate into social experience and sensibilities. If we define “environment” broadly to include a wide range of issues dealing with the interactions between humans and the natural world, this course also contributes to Environmental Studies.<sup>1</sup> In the first part of this essay, I discuss the textbooks and general organization of the course, particularly focusing on how students study the key elements (rocks, water, plants, and architecture) used in building a Chinese garden. Then I introduce some Chinese literature that features representations of gardens. After that, I focus on two classical Chinese gardens built in the United States (The Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Garden of Flowing Fragrance at the Huntington Library in California) and discuss the appropriation of “Chinese-ness” in different geographical, physical, and cultural environments. Finally, I introduce some resources and technologies available online that have enhanced student understanding of the subject matter. The discussion here is based on my own experience of designing and teaching this course. This course could

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also be combined with a study abroad program in which students would gain firsthand experience with the gardens; in fact, such a combination would be ideal.

#### TEXTBOOK AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The main readings for this class include Maggie Keswick's *The Chinese Garden: History, Art and Architecture* (3rd edition), Chen Congzhou's *On Chinese Gardens*, excerpts from Hu Dongchu's *The Way of the Virtuous: The Influence of Art and Philosophy on Chinese Garden Design*, and Stewart Johnston's *Scholar Gardens of China: A Study and Analysis of the Spatial Design of the Chinese Private Garden*.<sup>2</sup> Keswick's book, targeting non-specialists, offers straightforward and informative readings that help students understand basic concepts about Chinese gardens. Chen's seminal study comprises five essays – respectively, “implicitness and appropriateness,” “garden composition,” “restoration and renovation,” “the natural and the cultivated,” and “motion and stillness.” Each essay provides a comprehensive overview of the important issues concerning Chinese gardens. Poetic in both content and language, Chen's essays are more scholarly than Keswick's book. One needs to have a solid understanding of Chinese gardens to appreciate the terms, assumptions, allusions, and associations that are integrated into but never explicitly explained in Chen's work. Therefore, his essays provide ideal materials for students to review and reflect upon what they have learned in the latter half of the course. The books by Hu and Johnston, with detailed studies on individual gardens, are especially useful for case studies of specific gardens. While Hu's book is mainly written for generalists, Johnston's systematic examination of the history and form of private gardens is more scholarly in nature and provides greater depth. Therefore, each book complements the others nicely.

The class starts with a comparison of gardens in the East and West (oversimplified but a necessary initial step for the students, especially those who enroll in the class with no background knowledge of Chinese culture), to gain a general overview of the differences between the two. After viewing the pictures of Versailles and the layout of Yuan Ming Yuan (Garden of Perfect Brightness) in Keswick's first chapter, students will immediately notice that while Western gardens are designed according to precise mathematical and geometrical rules, Chinese gardens tend not to involve strict symmetry or artificially trimmed plants and trees. Here the instructor needs to clarify the seeming absence of artificial design in the Chinese gardens – it is not that Chinese gardens are purely “natural,” but rather that the whole endeavor lies in skillfully concealing traces of artificiality.

Following this comparison, students read passages from Keswick's and Hu's books which explain the philosophical, ethical, and religious ideas involved in a Chinese garden, including the Confucian emphasis on *li* (ritual or etiquette), Confucian ethical views of mountains and water (“The wise find pleasure in water; the virtuous find pleasure in hills”),<sup>3</sup> the Daoist idea of the unity of all existing things, the concept of *wuwei* (non-action), the relative value of size and emptiness, as well as Buddhist idea of mountain monastery. A key concept in Chinese culture and also in Chinese gardening is *yin-yang* dualism – the idea that opposing forces are interconnected and interdependent. I find using the Outlook Garden (Zhan Yuan) to elaborate on this idea quite effective. As the residence of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) founding general Xu Da (1332-1385), the Outlook Garden has a relatively simple layout – a principal hall separating the garden into northern and southern sections with each involving a major artificial stone mountain and a pond. The purpose of this case study is to have students understand the *yin-yang* concept and be able to find the ubiquitous *yin-yang* dualism in a Chinese garden. Students will identify many expressions of *yin-yang* dualism, such as rockeries vs. water (hard and soft, passivity and motion); rockeries vs. caves (solid-

ity and emptiness, revealed and concealed, closed and opened); the northern pond vs. the southern pond (big and small, north and south); the Fan Pavilion vs. the Pavilion of Annual Coldness (high and low, warm and cold, function and name); and architecture vs. natural elements (crooked and straight, simple and adorned). Above all, the goal is that students will gradually come to recognize the ultimate *yin* and *yang* – the cohabitation of traditional Confucian literati's concern for worldly success and outward expression and their Daoist pursuit of a pleasant, quiet and secluded lifestyle.

In addition to exploring the ideas from the three schools of thought – Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism – students read selected chapters from Ji Cheng's *The Craft of Gardens* (Yuan Ye) – one of the few primary materials students read for this class. Written between 1631 and 1634, *The Craft of Gardens* is the oldest surviving garden manual in the Chinese tradition and possibly the first general manual on landscape gardening in the world. Students need to understand the historical background of the work in order to understand the work itself. During the late Ming period, with the emergence of a wealthy merchant class longing to join the cultured upper class, there appeared a strong demand for works on self-improvement and advice on what was socially acceptable. Ji Cheng's work fits into this genre of literature. The purpose of reading Ji Cheng's theory is to have students examine some of the most important principles governing Chinese garden designing, which they will repeatedly encounter in the latter half of the course. "Artistry through suitability," for instance, is a fundamental one. Since Ji Cheng hardly provides any step-by-step instructions, as students read the selected chapters, they will find considerable contrasts relative to what modern people would expect from a gardening manual. Instead, Ji insists that a garden should be designed according to the existing nature and features of the landscape; for example, the foundation should be designed "in accordance with the rise and fall of the natural contours to accentuate their intrinsic form," or rocks should be used "to direct the flow of a spring, so that each borrows value from the other."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, according to Ji Cheng, there are only general principles when designing a garden, no hard and fast rules. Everything depends upon what's already there.

#### KEY ELEMENTS AND CASE STUDIES

Following the theoretical introduction, we discuss design techniques and key elements involved in building a garden, namely, the use of rocks, water, plants, and architecture. I usually devote at least one week (three class sessions) to each topic. Students examine the symbolic meanings of each element, the traditional Chinese fascination with them, and various ways of using such elements in Chinese gardens. In addition, I accompany the examination of each element with a case study of the particular garden most well-known for that element.

**Rock:** In addition to related pages in Keswick's book, students also read Claudia Brown's "Where Immortals Dwell: Shared Symbolism in Painting and Scholars' Rocks" and David Sensabaugh's "Fragments of Mountain and Chunks of Stone: The Rock in the Chinese Garden." Claudia Brown is the curator of Asian art at the Phoenix Art Museum and David Sensabaugh is the curator of Asian art at the Yale University Art Gallery. Both articles carefully study the placement and representation of rocks and stone mountains in Chinese paintings and explore how they are associated with the idea of the land of immortals in Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian philosophy. By this time, students will be familiar with the terminology and classification of the rocks often used in Chinese gardens. As for actual appreciation of rocks, students examine the four cardinal characteristics – *shou* (slim), *zhou* (wrinkled), *lou* (leaking), and *tou* (transparent) – through which the *Taihu* (Great Lake)

stones are appreciated.<sup>5</sup> While examining these four features, I use high resolution pictures that I took of the rocks and stone mountains in Chinese gardens for students to analyze.<sup>6</sup> A close look at the photos of the Jade Stone Peak (Yu Linglong) in the Garden of Pleasure (Yu Yuan) in Shanghai and the Cloud-Crowned Peak (Guan Yun Feng) in the Linger Garden (Liu Yuan) in Suzhou, for instance, perfectly illustrate these four features.

The garden used for the case study for rocks is the Lion Grove Garden (Shizi lin) in Suzhou.<sup>7</sup> Nowadays, the tickets to some Suzhou gardens (mainly the World Heritage sites) are foldable maps with both Chinese and English captions. When I visited them during the preparation stage for this course, I collected a few of these special tickets from each garden

for use in classroom discussion. The sections on the Lion Grove Garden from Hu's and Johnston's books serve as good readings for this part of the course. Looking at the pictures of the lion-shaped stones, students will realize that they are not literal likenesses; instead, they lack concrete details such as claws, teeth, or manes. Even perceiving the shape of a lion's body may require the visitors' imagination. In other words, these stones are chosen for the image or spirit they evoke, not for perfect fidelity.<sup>8</sup> This examination will help students understand a unique characteristic often seen in Chinese ink monochrome painting or calligraphy – “*xieyi*” (freehand brushwork). This approach emphasizes the spirit rather than the form, which echoes the discussion regarding “natural” and “artificial” in Chinese and

Western gardens at the beginning of the course.

**Water:** Students study the various symbolic and practical uses of water in classical gardens. Some of these uses are not mentioned in the readings but are illustrated using materials I collected during my preparation trip. For example, there is a *qi*, *qin*, *shu*, *hua* (“Chinese

Figure 1. Plan of the Surging Wave Pavilion (Johnston, 101)

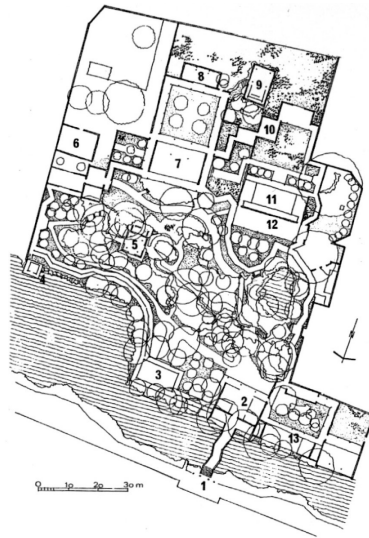


Figure 2. The moat-like pond outside of the Surging Wave Pavilion. (Photo by author.)





chess, zither, calligraphy, painting”) corner in the He Garden (He Yuan) in Yangzhou, where the sound of the running water in a well resembles the music of the zither. The case study for this topic is the Surging Waves Pavilion (Canglang Ting) in Suzhou. In addition to the basic historical background of the garden, we discuss two other key points. First, we reflect on the origin and connotation of the garden’s name (in combination with studying the couplets of poetry inscribed on the Surging Wave Pavilion in the garden). Here, instructors can seize the opportunity to introduce the importance of names in Chinese garden culture. A classical Chinese garden is never considered complete unless it is properly named. The name should reflect the garden’s character and demonstrate a poetic touch. Second, the most distinctive characteristic of this garden is its use of water. For this point I always juxtapose the plan of the Canglang Ting garden with the photos I took onsite, so students can clearly see how water is used in the outside rather than inside this garden to contribute to its sense of seclusion and serenity.

**Plants:** I ask two questions to facilitate students’ understanding of the roles of plants in Chinese gardens. First, considering the astonishing wealth and variety of plant life in China, why are only very limited plant species favored in a Chinese garden? Through answering this question, students will realize that certain plants are preferred not just for their beauty, but primarily because of the ethical values and literary associations they carry. Second, I often select a plant (lotus or bamboo, for example) and ask students what kind of virtues they would associate with the plant. After a discussion, students are often amazed to know that the hollow-ness of the bamboo stem suggests humility in Chinese culture, and the fact that bamboo bends but never breaks in the wind symbolizes the flexibility of a Confucian ideal gentleman. The discrepancy between the students’ answers and the symbolic meanings of bamboo in a Chinese context allows students to reexamine the familiar from another cultural perspective, while simultaneously becoming aware of the culturally-specific nature of these connotations. This is also a good time to revisit the Confucian idea of finding virtues in natural things. We then discuss the botanical symbolism of the long-standing favorites in Chinese gardens, including the lotus, orchid, banana tree, pomegranate, peony, peach blossom, plum blossom, pine, and chrysanthemum. Some of these plants are associated with famous historical figures, such as lotus with the neo-Confucian thinker Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073) and chrysanthemum with the poet Tao Yuanming (365?-427). This is also a good time to have students read related passages such as Zhou’s *Ai lian shuo* (“Love of Lotus”) as well as poems about chrysanthemum from Tao Yuanming’s *Yinjiu* (“Drinking Wine”) series. (These literary aspects are further discussed below.)

The Bamboo Garden (Ge Yuan) in Yangzhou provides a useful case study. Other than studying the different kinds of bamboo and the four-season motif of this garden, we emphasize that this garden built in 1818 by Huang Zhiyun, a salt-merchant-turned-official, is a typical Yangzhou salt merchant garden. As such, it differs from the scholar-officials’ gardens in Suzhou. This prepares students to discuss the difference between Suzhou and Yangzhou gardens.

**Architecture:** This section focuses on the function, organization, and symbolic meanings of various architectural features, such as the pavilion, bridge, covered corridor, undulating wall, gates of various shapes (with various connotations), lattice windows of different patterns, roofs, and eaves. Here I use episodes from the *Romance of the West Chamber* (*Xixiang ji*) and the *Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jin ping mei*) to show students how lovers are forever speaking, listening, and climbing over garden walls in Chinese novels and plays.

I use the Garden of Pleasure to conclude this part. With five major compartments and a series of buildings, the Garden of Pleasure entails a more complicated layout than the other

gardens we have examined. I usually have students engage in a group discussion, imagining they are the owners of this garden and designing a route to guide their guests around the property. Each group then presents its preferred route and the rationale behind their choices. The purposes of this activity are multifold. First, when designing its route, students need to put themselves in the “real life” situation as if they were really living and strolling in the garden. Therefore, they are “experiencing” the garden rather than just reading and talking about it. Second, students get to exchange ideas within the group and facilitate each other’s learning. Most importantly, students become inspired when each group presents its proposed route and realizes that, despite the limited space, there are numerous possibilities to explore in a Chinese garden.

The Garden of Pleasure has been renovated several times over the years. Some of the renovations and additions are controversial among scholars. For example, the dragon heads on the undulating walls have been criticized for being too explicit and vulgar. Consequently, this is a good time to have students read Chen Congzhou’s chapter on “Restoration and Renovation.”

#### THE SUZHOU AND YANGZHOU TRADITIONS

After studying the four key elements, I use the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician (Zhuozheng Yuan) and the Lingering Garden to sum up the Suzhou tradition. In addition to the readings from Hu’s and Johnston’s books, I show a DVD purchased at the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician (in English or with English subtitles, about 10 minutes long). From the video, students gain a vivid experience of the garden and review the elements they have learned up to this point. To accompany the video, I hold a session in the computer lab during which students use Google Earth to experience the gardens first-hand. I will elaborate on this point later in the “Technological Aids” section.

Students will also read selected chapters from Crag Clunas’s *Fruitful Sites* to wrap up the Suzhou tradition. As a prominent scholar on material culture of the Ming era, Clunas has written extensively on Chinese gardens, furniture, paintings, and calligraphy. In addition to studying these specific topics, his scholarship is especially illuminating on the methodology and historiography of art history. His work urges students to take a critical look at the concept of “yuan” and reflect on the aesthetic approaches that some of the previous readings use. Did people from 16th and 17th century China, for instance, look at the gardens the same way? Were those gardens always appreciated in terms of the criteria we have been studying? In addition to aesthetic values, what other practical or social functions did gardens perform in traditional China? Clunas’ work helps students to historicize Chinese gardens and become aware of the pitfall of treating “yuan” statically. In *Fruitful Sites* Clunas points out that in the mid-16th century “yuan” meant “orchard,” a productive place. Over time, however, gardens lost their practical role as centers of horticulture. He convincingly argues that in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, people’s perspectives on gardens shifted from the realm of production to the realm of consumption and excess. Also, Clunas urges a critical view toward the local gazetteers, the main source of our knowledge of gardens. Clunas demonstrates that these gazetteers are by no means unbiased primary sources. Instead, cunning political maneuvering lies behind the records of many of the gardens. Students consider these chapters from Clunas’ book the densest scholarly reading for this class. Therefore, breaking the reading into small questions helps students see how Clunas arrives at his arguments.

In contrast to the Suzhou tradition, I introduce the Yangzhou gardens, which witness the vicissitudes of the salt merchants’ families in this city. Students will recall the Yangzhou

garden – the Bamboo Garden – we considered earlier for its plants. In this part, students carefully examine the He Garden and the Wang Residence (Wangshi xiaoyuan, renovated and opened to the public a few years ago). Through these two sites, students not only see the difference between the Yangzhou residential garden house and the Suzhou garden, but also get a peek at the society of the *Jiangnan* area in the late 19th century.

#### THE LITERATURE COMPONENT

In this course, students read poems, essays, novels, plays, memoirs, and miscellaneous records regarding classical Chinese gardens. Some of the short ones can be integrated with the lecture on the same topic. Zhou Dunyi's "Love of Lotus," for example, can be discussed in the plants section. Longer readings can be discussed in their own right. I usually reserve four class periods to discuss selected chapters from the following three works: *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng*), *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting*), and *Six Records of a Floating Life* (*Fusheng liuji*).

Students are always amazed to know that so many stories from famous Chinese literary works are set in gardens. For *Dream of the Red Chamber*, instead of reading the text students watch parts of episode 8 from the Chinese TV series, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, when the Jia family builds the Grand Perspective Garden (Daguan Yuan) for the visit of the imperial consort, Yuanchun. I ask students to pay special attention to three points: 1) When Jia Zheng and his official friends talk about the design of the garden, their words nicely echo the principles from Ji Cheng's manual; 2) When the construction is almost finished, Jia Zheng explains the importance of names in a Chinese garden; 3) When Jia Zheng visits the garden with his friends and his son, Jia Baoyu, the names that Jia Baoyu contributes for the architectural features in the garden are considered "superior" to those contributed by the bookish scholars. Students often find this clip extremely interesting, particularly because they have read theories on designing and naming a Chinese garden in the earlier part of the class. This episode provides a good opportunity for students to observe the implementation and negotiation of these theories in an actual situation.

For Tang Xianzu's (1550-1616) *The Peony Pavilion*, students read the synopsis of the play and then read only the most renowned scenes – "strolling in the garden" and "the interrupted dream."<sup>9</sup> I ask questions ranging from the meaning of Liu Mengmei's name to the relationship between Du Liniang's visit to the garden to the author's primary theme of *qing* (usually translated "passion"). To help students better understand the significance of this work as well as the Kun opera, the tradition to which *Peony Pavilion* belongs, I play a five-minute video of an interview in English with Kenneth Pai, producer of the Young Lover's edition of the *Peony Pavilion*.<sup>10</sup> Through this interview, students have an opportunity to see what a performance of the Kun opera looks like, as well as to understand the importance of the costumes, especially the long sleeves and the movements of the performers.

From *Six Records of a Floating Life*, students read "The Joys of the Wedding Chamber" and "The Pleasures of Leisure." In this memoir, Shen Fu, a young painter who lived at the beginning of the 19th century, describes in touching detail his everyday life with his beloved wife, Yun. In "The Joys of the Wedding Chamber," students will see that the couple lived in the Surging Wave Pavilion for a while (translated as "Pavilion of the Waves" in the version I use).<sup>11</sup> The portrayal of their family life offers a chance for students to examine how the aesthetic and social function of the garden are integrated into their lives, as well as into gender relationships in the early 19th century. In "The Pleasures of Leisure," Shen Fu describes some of the hobbies that he and his wife share – gardening, flower arranging, interior design, and, most importantly, creating a miniature mountain in a tray. Stephen Owen, a

professor and the leading scholar of classical Chinese literature at Harvard University, draws a compelling allegory between Shen Fu's memoir writing and building a miniature mountain – in both he is eternally unsuccessful in the effort to hide the chasmal marks and create a seamless illusion.<sup>12</sup>

#### CLASSICAL CHINESE GARDENS IN THE US

In addition to exploring the many nuances of Chinese gardens, introducing students to selected classical Chinese gardens in the U.S. is crucial for this course. First, compared to traveling to China to visit these gardens in person, visiting a U.S. garden is feasible for most students. Also, by the time the two classical Chinese gardens in the U.S. are introduced, students will have finished the major part of the course. Examining these two gardens provides an opportunity for the students to reflect on what they have studied. We usually consider two gardens – the Astor Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Garden of Flowing Fragrance (Liufang Yuan) at the Huntington Library. I introduce the Astor Court along with its prototype – the Master of the Nets Garden (Wangshi Yuan) in Suzhou – and its genesis. For this topic, Alfreda Murck and Wen Fong's article "A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at The Metropolitan Museum of Art" is useful. In this lengthy article, Murck and Fong review the tradition of a scholar's garden, analyze architectural details of Astor Court, and document the process of building this garden court in New York. Built during the era of normalization of US-PRC relations, the Astor Court illustrates the first cultural-political exchange between China and the US after China reopened to the US. An award-winning documentary, *Ming Garden*, made by Met commissioned filmmaker Gene Searchinger and communications specialist Thomas Newman, carefully documents the process of installation.<sup>13</sup> Compared with Murck and Fong's article, the teaching set *Nature within Walls: The Chinese Garden at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* is relatively straightforward reading. This set includes a color booklet, two full-size posters of the garden court, and a CD-ROM featuring a 10-minute narrated video tour of the garden.<sup>14</sup> By this time, students are already equipped with the necessary knowledge to appreciate the garden court. Therefore, I often have the students serve as if they were the narrator or curator to navigate the class through the poster or the video. This is an effective way for the students to reflect on how much they have learned about appreciating a Chinese garden.

Compared to the Astor Court, the Garden of Flowing Fragrance is much bigger. Therefore, there is considerably more to talk about in terms of garden design and technique. Brochures I obtained at the garden show the plan of the garden and translate all of the site names as well as the couplets adorning some of the buildings. This, again, makes wonderful study material for the students. In addition to the aesthetic approach, I historicize these two projects so students see how the "Chinese-ness" was transplanted differently in each situation. To ensure authenticity, both projects invited designers and craftsmen from China (especially Suzhou). The majority of the building materials, such as Taihu rocks, roof tiles, and the *nan* timber were shipped from China, and the construction involved a complex and unique Chinese-American cooperation. Both projects had to make compromises to adjust to the on-site situation and the local building codes. As it is located on the second floor of the Met, designers of the Astor Court had to deal with the capability of the floor to bear the weight of the traditional garden wall. The Garden of Flowing Fragrance had to meet California standards for guardrail height, handicap accessibility, and seismic standards. It is interesting to discuss how the Chinese designers negotiated such requirements and reinvented authenticity. In an essay in *ASIANetwork Exchange*, Carol Brash quotes Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims to elaborate on the constructed nature of authenticity in



the classical Chinese gardens in the US. Authenticity is not about objects *per se*, but rather about the social contract between the audience and the museum.<sup>15</sup> While students should have no problem understanding how authenticity is negotiated through specific examples, understanding the discourse of constructing authenticity may be difficult for undergraduates, particularly those students who are non-majors and taking this course simply to satisfy general education requirements. A monograph on creating the Garden of Flowing Fragrance – *Another World Lies Beyond: Creating Liu Fang Yuan, The Huntington's Chinese Garden* edited by June Li, the curator of the Garden of Flowing Fragrance—serves as useful reading for discussion of this garden.

#### TECHNOLOGICAL AIDS

In addition to texts, pictures, videos, maps, plans, and pamphlets, two interactive web tools can greatly enhance students' experience of the gardens. The first, Google Earth, now offers panoramic photos of some Chinese gardens in extremely high resolution.<sup>16</sup> The visitor is given a 360° view of a certain part of a garden where s/he feels like s/he is standing in the middle of the place and can look around on all four sides (by using the mouse to navigate). Also, the resolution is so high that details like a pebble on the ground show up clearly. I had a successful experience using Google Earth in this course. We held the class in the Language Center, where two students worked together on each PC and used Google Earth to take a virtual tour of the gardens. For example, after students located the Lion Grove Garden, they found a panoramic picture of the lion rockeries facing the True Pleasure Pavilion. Although they have seen several pictures of it in various readings, the Google Earth images make them feel as if they are actually in the garden.

The other interactive webpage concerns not a garden, but a house – the Yin Yu Hall (Yin Yu Tang). Built by a Huang merchant in Anhui province around 1800, eight generations of the family had lived in this house compound, until the mid-1990s, when the remaining members of the family sold the house to the Peabody Essex Museum of Salem, Massachusetts (PEM). The entire house was dismantled, shipped and rebuilt at the museum in 2003. PEM has an award winning website<sup>17</sup> where visitors can take a virtual tour of the house with audio narratives, pictures, and videos. Most importantly, visitors can closely observe detailed views of all structural and decorative elements of the house. The traditional Chinese house and classical gardens share cultural principles. By using this online source students have a chance to see how the concepts that they have previously learned are actually implemented and negotiated.<sup>18</sup> Also, the PEM provides a generation-by-generation documentation of the history of the Huang family who occupied Yin Yu Tang. Therefore, by looking into the Huang family's domestic life and their interaction with the larger social, economic, and historical circumstances, students will also see the socio-historical change of Chinese society over the past two hundred years.

In addition to these two main websites, the webpage<sup>19</sup> for the Garden of Flowing Fragrance also has plenty useful information, especially the audio tour narrated by curator June Li. The Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician has its own website,<sup>20</sup> where the introduction is available in both Chinese and English.

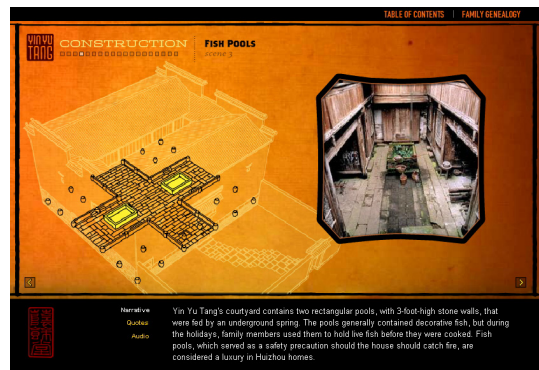


Figure 3. A snapshot from the Yin Yu Tang webpage where it introduces the inward courtyard and the two fishponds. (<http://www.pem.org/sites/yinyutang/house/base.html>)

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

My experience with the “Material Culture and Chinese Gardens” class has been extremely pleasant and rewarding. The advantage of this course is that it enables students to experience many aspects of Chinese culture without going through the conventional survey. One of the main objectives of the course is for students to gain factual knowledge regarding Chinese gardens in particular and Chinese culture in general. Through this course, students learn the fundamental principles involved in designing and appreciating a Chinese garden. They examine the use of the four key elements in classical Chinese gardens as well as their respective symbolic meanings. By the end of the course, students are familiarized with the terminology and classification of Chinese gardens as well as the most well-known extant classical gardens in the lower Yangtze delta. In addition, students are expected to gain a broader understanding and appreciation of cultural activity. As college students they should be able to view the world from more than one cultural perspective and understand how historical forces have shaped human cultures. One thing I remind students throughout this course is that although their own (dis)likes about Chinese gardens are certainly valid, this course is about understanding why Chinese people like or dislike certain elements about the gardens. I have had quite a few students travel to or study abroad in China after taking this course. Each has relayed how his/her knowledge of the gardens enhanced his/her experience of the space, and vice versa. If the course is taught at an institution close to one of the Chinese gardens in the US, a field trip would be invaluable to participating students.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

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Chinese Garden." *Oriental Art*, vol. 44, no. 1, (Spring 1998): 18-27.

#### NOTES

1. This course fulfills two foundational requirements of the Rhodes College liberal arts curriculum: F3 – Understanding How Historical Forces Shape Human Behavior and F9 – Viewing the World from More than One Cultural Perspective, and is listed as an elective course offering in the following interdisciplinary fields of study: Asian Studies, Chinese Studies, Environmental Science, and Environmental Studies.
2. Although not required reading, the course design benefitted tremendously from reviewing "A Visual Sourcebook of Chinese Civilization" prepared by Patricia Buckley Ebrey (URL: <http://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/home/3garintr.htm>)
3. Translation is by James Legge. See *Confucian Analects*, Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004, p.46.
4. Ji Cheng, *The Craft of Gardens*, trans., Alison Hardie. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, p.39.
5. This is also a good opportunity for students to revisit *yin-yang* dualism as each characteristic features an example of *yin-yang* dualism. For example, *shou* – bulk vs. slim; *lou* and *tou* – solid vs. transparent/porous.
6. Growing up in Nanjing, I visited these *Jiangnan* (lower Yangtze delta) gardens many times. While preparing for this course, I spent a summer visiting all the gardens studied in this class again, deliberately collecting teaching materials during this trip. I took most of the photographs used in the class.
7. The Lion Grove Garden in Suzhou was the property of the Bei family before they gave it to the PRC government in 1951. The famous Asian-American architect I.M.Pei lived in this garden for a short time during his childhood. I.M.Pei was invited to design the Suzhou Museum in 2003. He made an innovative use of rocks in the museum courtyard. I always include this in lecture.
8. Hu Dongchu, *The Way of the Virtuous: The Influence of Art and Philosophy on Chinese Garden Design*. Beijing: New World Press, 1991, p. 81.
9. There is a 10-minute clip of "strolling in the garden" with English subtitles, which may be used interchangeably with reading the text of that scene.
10. Lamenting the fact that many of the Kun opera masters are aging while the younger generation is increasingly distanced from this time-honored art, Kenneth Pai invested in producing the Young Lovers' edition of the *Peony Pavilion*. In this production he cast the young Kun opera artists and designed beautiful costumes to revive the Kun opera art and attract young audiences. This interview is available on URL:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4T6Ic84AZI>. Also, the UCLA Center for Chinese Studies has a webpage for the Young Lovers' edition of the *Peony Pavilion* (URL: <http://www.international.ucla.edu/china/mudanting/>). It includes additional texts, pictures, and videos that can help students understand this work.
11. Translation is by Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su-Hui, published by Penguin Books, London, 1983.
12. Stephen Owen, *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, p.103.
13. As far as I know, this is only available in VHS format.
14. The video is also available on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C92bYFQDTzA>.
15. Carol Brash, "Classical Chinese Gardens in Twenty-first Century America: Cultivating the Past," in *ASIANetwork Exchange*, 2011 (fall), Vol.19.1: 18-19.
16. To locate a garden in Google Earth, one simply puts the name of the garden in the search bar. After locating a garden, keep zooming in and you will see a number of blue squares. Each blue square can unfold like a ball and spread out into a view of a section of the garden.
17. URL:<http://www.pem.org/sites/yinyutang/index.html>
18. The main contradiction with the traditional principles in the Yin Yu Hall is that it faces north instead of south. This is related to the geographical situation of Huang village. Hills and flowing water block southern exposure making the northern orientation more desirable for Yin Yu Hall. The members of the family designed and lived in the house as if it faced the auspicious south.
19. URL: <http://www.huntington.org/huntingtonlibrary.aspx?id=490>
20. URL: <http://www.szzzy.cn/>