Aesthetic Appreciation of Chinese Gardens: Between Art and Nature

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Abstract: Gardens include not only art but also nature. According to different relationships between art and nature, this article clarifies five types of gardens: the French-style gardens, the English-style gardens, topiary gardens, Japanese gardens, and Chinese gardens. Based on this clarification, this article argues that Chinese gardens follow the lead of the essential qualities of art instead of the essential qualities of nature. With "borrowing" and "following", the natural elements in Chinese gardens extend to the field of art. The boundaries between art and nature are erased. The aesthetic appreciation of Chinese gardens challenges the "positive aesthetics", which is prevalent in contemporary environmental aesthetics, and endorses a "negative aesthetics", which we can find its supports in traditional Chinese philosophy.

Keywords: Chinese gardens, art, nature, dialectical relationship, harmonious relationship, positive aesthetics, negative aesthetics.

INTRODUCTION

Gardens are not only art but also nature. For this reason, aestheticians tend to consider gardens as situated between art and nature [1, 2]. However, it appears that the "betweenness" of art and nature in gardens hasn't yet been clarified. Does it mean that some parts of a garden, such as their architectural elements, are art, while others, such as the landscape, are nature? Or does it mean that some aspects of a thing, such as growing plants in gardens, are art and other aspects of the same thing, such as the plants' growth, are nature? How can the aesthetic appreciation of art and nature, as parts or aspects of gardens, match each other, if they are different? In this essay, I try to answer these questions, particularly based on the practice and theory of Chinese gardens. The analysis of the theory of Chinese gardens will be related to contemporary environmental aesthetics. Firstly, I will analyze Allen Carlson's model of aesthetic appreciation of nature, and offer a critical interpretation of its relation to Walton's model of artistic appreciation. Secondly, I will distinguish between different types of gardens. Finally, I will set up a dialogue between traditional Chinese garden theory and contemporary environmental aesthetics to see whether the former can answer the questions raised by the latter.

AESTHETIC APPRECIATION OF ART AND NATURE

Inspired by Kendall Walton's model of aesthetic appreciation of art, Allen Carlson has elaborated a unique model of aesthetic appreciation of nature [2]. According to Walton, to appropriately appreciate works of art, we need to perceive them as belonging to their correct categories. The aesthetic appreciation of an artwork can be appropriate or inappropriate, and its aesthetic judgment can be true or false, depending on whether the work has been perceived in correct categories [3]. Carlson insists that the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of natural objects should follow Walton's model, because art has been normally accepted as a paradigmatic aesthetic object, and because there are several similarities between the aesthetic appreciation of works of art and the aesthetic appreciation of natural objects. Carlson writes:

> The analogous account holds that there are different ways to perceive natural objects and landscapes. This is to claim that they, like works of art, can be perceived in different categories—not, of course, in different categories of art, but rather in different 'categories of nature'. Analogous to the way *The Starry Night* might be perceived either as a post-impressionist or as an expressionist painting, a whale might be perceived either as a fish or as mammal…. Further, for natural objects or landscapes some categories are correct and others not. As it is correct to perceive the Van Gogh as a post-impressionist painting, it is likewise correct to perceive the whale as a mammal…. Lastly, analogous to the way certain facts about works and their origins in part determine the correct categories of art for them, certain facts about natural objects or landscapes and their origins in

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> part determine the correct categories of nature for them. As certain facts about the Van Gogh and its history in part determine it to be a post-impressionist painting, so certain facts about the whale and its natural history in part determine it to be a mammal [2].

In addition to these analogues, there are two significant differences, which relevant to "history of production" and "critical judgment", respectively [2].

Firstly, information about the "history of production" is required both in the aesthetic appreciation of art and in the appreciation of nature, but such information is provided by different disciplines. Differently from modernism and postmodernism, which prefer a subject-focused approach to the question of aesthetic relevance, Carlson advocates an object-focused approach, which "is to tie its answer not to the subject of appreciation, but rather…to the object of appreciation" [2]. For the object-focused approach, what determines the categories is not the subjective state, such as a disinterested attitude or other subjective states, but the objective knowledge that Carlson names "history of production", according to which, "The information concerns answers to questions such as what the work is, how it was produced, and why it was produced in the way it was" [2]. Information about the "history of production", Carlson insists, is relevant not only to aesthetic appreciation of art but also to aesthetic appreciation of nature. However, the significant information about art and nature comes from different sources, as Carlson argues:

> The difference is that with nature the relevant information—the story of nature's history of production—is scientific information about the natural world. Thus, as the information provided by art critics and art historians is aesthetically relevant for art, that provided by naturalists, ecologists, geologists, and natural historians is equally so for nature [2].

In short, in art appreciation, the relevant information is provided by "artology", which means the knowledge from or of art theory, history, and criticism, while in nature appreciation, the relevant information is provided by science.

Secondly, "critical judgment" is appropriate for art appreciation but not for nature appreciation. Aesthetic appreciation normally involves critical judgment, which means evaluating the object of appreciation. However, Carlson claims that natural objects are exceptions. They are beyond judgment:

> Critical judgment is appropriate [to art] because the object of appreciation, since it is seen as designed, is seen as something that could have been otherwise. On the other hand, the natural is not seen as designed by an artist whose judgment might have been less than perfect, and thus it is not seen as something that, in the relevant sense, could have been otherwise. Consequently, the mode of aesthetic appreciation appropriate for the natural takes the aesthetic object as given and thus to be, as it were, beyond judgment [2].

Since natural objects are beyond critical judgment, Carlson arrives at a "positive aesthetics" of nature, claiming that all natural things are equally beautiful:

> The natural environment, insofar as it is untouched by man, has mainly positive aesthetic qualities; it is, for example, graceful, delicate, intense, unified, and orderly, rather than bland, dull, insipid, incoherent, and chaotic. All virgin nature, in short, is essentially aesthetically good. The appropriate or correct aesthetic appreciation of the natural world is basically positive and negative aesthetic judgments have little or no place [2].

Although there are many similarities between art appreciation and nature appreciation, the two main distinctions make the two models of aesthetic appreciation incompatible. Works of art cannot be appropriately appreciated in natural categories, nor can natural objects be appropriately appreciated in categories of art. Art appreciation involves the capacity to formulate critical judgments, and some negative judgments will be inevitable, while nature is beyond judgment, and so all virgin nature is appreciated positively. It would be fine if art and nature were treated separately. However, gardens are neither art nor nature, but rather between art and nature, and therefore art and nature in gardens cannot be treated separately. Even if Carlson's models of aesthetic appreciation are appropriate for both art and nature, this does not necessarily ensure that they are, individually or together, appropriate for gardens.

Because of this, Carlson admits that both pristine nature and pure art are relatively easy to aesthetically appreciate, while gardens are likely to cause appreciators appreciative difficulties and confusions [2].

CLASSIFICATION OF GARDENS

Although Carlson realizes that gardens are different from both art and nature, he does not offer a special model for aesthetic appreciation of gardens. Art and nature, at least their extremes—pristine nature and pure art—do not have a purpose or a function [2]. However, gardens do have purposes and functions. In this sense, it seems worthwhile to come up with a new model for the aesthetic appreciation of gardens. Nevertheless, Carlson simply ignores the role of purposes or functions in the aesthetic appreciation of gardens.

According to the weight or relationship of art and nature in gardens, Carlson distinguishes four types of gardens: "French-style" gardens, "English-style" gardens, topiary gardens, and Japanese gardens.

Inspired by Donald Crawford's essay "Nature and Art: Some Dialectical Relationships" [4], Carlson divides the relationships of art and nature in gardens into harmonious relationships and dialectical relationships. Briefly, in their harmonious relationships art and nature neither interact nor conflict with each other, while in their dialectical relationships they have interactions and conflicts that cause appreciative difficulties and confusions.

From Carlson's points of view, "French-style" formal gardens and "English-style" natural gardens are two types of gardens that exemplify harmonious relationships between art and nature:

> Within the Western gardening tradition there are clear examples of such harmonious relationships. On the one hand, in 'French-style' formal gardens, such as some of those at Versailles, harmonious relationships are achieved by art serving as a model for nature. On the other hand, in 'English-style' natural gardens, exemplified by what are sometimes called picturesque or landscape gardens, harmonious relationships are achieved by the opposite means, by nature serving as a model for art [2].

Although both "English-style" natural gardens and "French-style" formal gardens exemplify the harmonious relationships between art and nature, art and nature play different roles in them. In "English-style" natural gardens nature dominates art; on the contrary, in 'French style' formal gardens art dominates nature. In both cases, nature and art can maintain the harmonious relationships, because they are unequal in forces and cannot conflict with one another. This kind of harmonious relationship formed by weakening or hiding the opponent, however, is not a positive harmony but a negative one.

In comparison with "English-style" natural gardens and "French-style" formal gardens, topiary gardens and Japanese gardens illustrate the dialectical relationships between art and nature, as Carlson argues:

> In topiary gardens, nature and art are distinct and in a sense conflicting forces, and the interaction between the natural and the artificial is constitutive of the object of aesthetic appreciation. And…topiary gardens are difficult and confusing objects of aesthetic appreciation [2].

The gardens that exemplify dialectical relationships between art and nature, such as topiary gardens, are difficult and confusing objects of aesthetic appreciation, "because both of the natural and the artificial are independently present, each requires different kinds of appreciation, and thus together they force the appreciator to perform various kinds of appreciative gymnastics" [2]. As pointed out earlier, according to Carlson, there are critical differences between the models of aesthetic appreciation of art and aesthetic appreciation of nature. They require different categories provided by artology and science, respectively. The aesthetic appreciation of art must involve critical judgment, while the aesthetic appreciation of nature has nothing to do with judgment. In the case of gardens, especially topiary gardens, since they have both natural and artistic components, and both components are distinct and independent, hence the appreciators need to switch between the two models of aesthetic appreciation. They need to be equipped with the two kinds of knowledge provided by artology or the humanities on the one hand and by science on the other hand. They need to be as critical as art critics, and simultaneously as tolerant as contemporary environmentalists. According to Stan

Godlovitch, works of art can be good or bad, while all natural things are equally beautiful. Therefore, there is no positive aesthetics of works of art, but there is a positive aesthetics of natural things. A strong positive aesthetics claims that "the things of the natural world are *equal* or *identical* or *incommensurable* in their aesthetic goodness" [5].

The appreciative gymnastics, i.e. switching from one appreciation model to another appreciation model, might by itself contribute to aesthetic experience, as Ernst Gombrich suggests in *Art & Illusion* [6]. Arousing the experience, which is constituted of alternation between seeing the two-dimensional surface and seeing the three-dimensional represented object, is one of the aesthetic merits of paintings [6]. By the same token, especially given that gardens take paintings as a model, arousing the experience of alternation between seeing nature and seeing art, i.e. the appreciative gymnastics, might also be an aesthetic merit to gardens. However, the appreciative gymnastics was considered by Carlson as an aesthetic flaw because it causes appreciative difficulties and confusions [2].

Japanese gardens are similar to topiary gardens and so also exemplify dialectical rather than harmonious relationships between art and nature. However, Japanese gardens are different from topiary gardens in that they should cause appreciative difficulties and confusions, but somehow escape them. Why are Japanese gardens not difficult to aesthetically appreciate? The key is that, according to Carlson, Japanese gardens have a look of natural inevitability [2]. However, this does not mean that Japanese gardens are in fact parts of nature or only copies of nature, such as "English-style" natural gardens. Rather, Japanese gardens are highly artificial. Carlson argues: "Japanese gardens achieve a look of inevitability not by the creation of a simple copy of nature, but rather by the creation of an idealization of nature that attempts to uncover what are taken to be its essential qualities" [2]. In short, Japanese gardens are not only between art and nature but also, somehow, beyond art and nature, since they have uncovered the essential qualities of nature and seem to reach a higher level that neither art nor nature can reach alone.

"Idealization of nature" or "nature with its essential qualities" seems to be an oxymoron because nature cannot be more natural. According to contemporary environmentalism, the more we do to nature, the more damages we are likely to cause, and the more we risk making nature unnatural [7]. However, in the East the term "nature" refers not only to the virgin things, but also to the things that satisfy the philosophy of nature. For example, according to the Five Elements School, the world consists of Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, and Soil [8]. Deserts, swamps, glaciers, etc., which are elements of virgin nature from the perspective of contemporary environmentalists, are likely to be considered unnatural in the East, because they do not satisfy the requirements of the harmony of Five Elements. Therefore, "idealization of nature", or making nature more natural, is understandable in the East.

Now we have four types of gardens: "French-style" formal gardens, "English-style" natural gardens, topiary gardens, and Japanese gardens. "French-style" gardens and "English-style" gardens exemplify the harmonious relationships between art and nature because art and nature are not distinct, independent, equal, or symmetrical. Yet the difference between the two lies in that nature covers art in "English-style" gardens, while art overshadows nature in "French-style" gardens. On the other hand, art and nature play equally important roles in topiary gardens and Japanese gardens and so they exemplify the dialectical relationships. The main difference between topiary gardens and Japanese gardens is that the former maintains a contradiction between art and nature, while the latter seems to have achieved harmony at a higher level. In other words, Japanese gardens have transcended the conflicts between art and nature by following the lead of the essential qualities of nature.

I shall borrow Michael Polanyi's terminology to clarify the four types of gardens. According to Polanyi, our awareness of an object can be distinguished into focal awareness and subsidiary awareness. They are functions of mind and body, respectively. Based on the distinction between focal awareness and subsidiary awareness, Polanyi distinguishes three kinds of paintings: normal representational painting, with focal awareness of the subject and subsidiary awareness of the medium; *trompe l'oeil*, with focal awareness of the subject but without subsidiary awareness of the medium; and abstract painting, with focal awareness of the medium but without subsidiary awareness of the subject [9]. If we treat the two folds of gardens, i.e. art and nature as the two folds of paintings, i.e. the subject and the medium, we might make a clearer distinction between the four types of gardens. The four types of gardens can be illustrated with a diagram as follows:

Table 1: The Four Types of Gardens

Subsidiary awareness of	Focal awareness of	Type of gardens
Art	nature	the English-style gardens
Nature	art	the French-style gardens
Nature	art	topiary gardens
Art	nature	
art and nature	the essential qualities of nature	Japanese gardens

CHINESE GARDENS

In Western eyes, Chinese and Japanese gardens are so alike that they are often considered to be the same type of garden. Indeed, such affinities can be found between China and Japan not only in gardens but also in other art forms. According to Craig Clunas' observation, "Many Japanese achievements depended on the transmission of artistic style to that country from China at a very early period" [10]. Specifically in terms of gardens, both Chinese and Japanese gardens can be seen as "naturalistic in style". Clunas writes: "the proposition that East Asians are invariably and uniformly close to nature hovers behind all descriptions of Chinese and Japanese gardens, now invariably seen as naturalistic in style" [10]. David Cooper observes that Chinese and Japanese gardens share the same principal aim that is rarely found in Western gardening. Cooper writes that "for the Chinese—as, later, for the Japanese—gardening is a 'way', a *Dao*. Gardening may have its aesthetic and practical aims, but it is first and foremost a mode or way of self-cultivation" [11].

Despite these similarities, there are differences between Chinese and Japanese gardens. As Sherman E. Lee indicates, "The garden art of China seems visually extreme and grotesque when compared with the quiet serenity and naturalness of the usual Japanese garden" [12]. Maggie Keswick also finds that Chinese gardens are different from Japanese gardens: the former are grotesque, while the latter are perfect. Keswick makes this comparison: The image of Japanese gardens, according to Keswick, is "with its exquisite arrangements of stone and moss, its manicured pines and dry streams, and above all, its sense of being so perfect in itself that (as Mishima wrote) the visitor feels even the intrusion of his own sense onto the garden constitutes a violation. Chinese gardens are not like this. Confusing and dense, dominated by huge rock-piles and a great number of buildings all squeezed into innumerable, often very small spaces, for many foreigners the characteristic Chinese garden is so unlike anything else as to be incomprehensible and even, in parts, grotesque" [13].

Since there are many different types of gardens in Japan and especially in China, it seems impossible to clarify the similarities and differences between them. What I want to argue is that in addition to the type of Japanese gardens, which Carlson regards as exhibiting "the essential qualities of nature" [2], there is another type of gardens, which exhibits "the essential qualities of art" and which might be called "Chinese gardens".

Like Japanese gardens, Chinese gardens are not only different from the "English-style" gardens and "French-style" gardens, which exemplify the harmonious relationship between art and nature, but also different from topiary gardens, which exemplify the dialectical relationship between art and nature. Both Chinese and Japanese gardens exemplify the dialectical and yet harmonious relationship between art and nature. Nevertheless, Chinese gardens are somehow different from Japanese gardens, because Chinese gardens seem to follow the lead of the essential qualities of art, while Japanese gardens follow the lead of the essential qualities of nature. As Joseph Cho Wang points out:

> Traditionally, a *huayuan* is composed of trees, rockeries, a pond or lake, zigzag footpaths, winding corridors, bridges, and other garden structures for habitation, quiet viewing, and merrymaking. These elements are arranged in such a way that they are often more artistically designed than of nature and considered a landscape painting in three dimensions. The Chinese use the phrase, 'The scenery is like a painting' (*feng jin ru hua*) in praise of a beautiful natural sight, but the phrase has rarely been used in the reverse: 'The painting is like (natural) scenery' (*hua ru feng jing*) [14].

Table 2: The Five Types of Gardens

Subsidiary awareness of	Focal awareness of	Type of gardens
art	nature	the English-style gardens
nature	art	the French-style gardens
nature	art	topiary gardens
art	nature	
art and nature	the essential qualities of nature	Japanese gardens
	the essential qualities of art	Chinese gardens

If this hypothesis, that is that Chinese gardens follow the essential qualities of art, is justifiable, then we can have another type of gardens, i.e. the Chinese Gardens. Now all garden types can be illustrated with a diagram like this:

Chinese gardens are regarded as art rather than nature, even the natural or the spontaneous is regarded as the ideal for art to pursue. For example, Zhang Yanyuan, the painter and painting theorist and historian in the Tang Dynasty, regards *ziran* (spontaneity) as the highest in a nine-fold grading system, which consists of three major grades, that is, upper, middle, and lower, and each major grade is subdivided into three minor grades. Zhang names only the first five grades and dismisses the last four as insignificant: "Now, if one falls short of a natural spontaneity (*ziran*), then next is inspiration (*shen*); if one falls short of inspiration, then next is subtlety (*miao*); if one falls short of subtlety, then next is refinement (*jing*); and when there is fault in refinement, carefulness-and-elaboration (*jinxi*) is produced. The natural spontaneity is highest in the upper grade; the inspiration middle in the upper grade; the subtlety low in the upper grade; the refinement highest in the middle grade; the carefulness-and-elaboration middle in the middle grade" [15].

However, *ziran* has different meanings, including not only "nature" but also "spontaneity". "Nature" and "spontaneity" share similar meanings, but they are somewhat different. "Nature" only refers to natural things, while "spontaneity" can also refer to artificial things. When an artifact functions like a natural thing, or when an action unfolds like a natural process, they are considered "spontaneous". In this sense, the painting in the highest grade, i.e. spontaneity, is somehow similar to Kantian "fine art", which is defined as "an art insofar as it seems at the same time to be nature" [16]. Fine art "is art rather than nature, and yet the purposiveness in its form must seem as free from all constraint of chosen rules as if it were a product of mere nature. …[A]rt only if we are conscious that it is art while yet it looks to us like nature" [16]. By the same token, paintings in the highest grade, i.e. the grade of spontaneity, are paintings free from all constraint of chosen rules. However, it does not mean that paintings in the grade of spontaneity look like natural things. What the Chinese aesthetics values is not the resemblance between a painting and its subject, but the freedom or spontaneity of painting's creation. Traditional Chinese aesthetics is the same as Kantian aesthetics in that they both value the freedom and spontaneity of artistic making. One of the important distinctions between them is that Kantian aesthetics pays more attention to representation than Chinese aesthetics does.

Chinese gardens follow the lead of art, or show the essential qualities of art rather than nature, because they take paintings as a model. Ji Cheng, the well-known garden designer and garden theorist of the Ming Dynasty, admits that he was fascinated by making landscape paintings. According to Ji, when you are moving through a garden, "your thoughts will travel beyond the confines of this world of dust, and you will feel as though were wandering within a painting" [17]. Since painting is regarded as one of the main art forms in China, the garden which takes paintings as its model is, ontologically, more artificial than natural. If this is true, "English-style" gardens should as much follow the lead of the essential qualities of art as Chinese gardens, because "English-style" gardens also take paintings as a model. As Cooper points out, "both Chinese and 18th-century English garden designers looked towards paintings for a model" [11]. However, "English-style" gardens have been identified as the type of gardens different from Chinese gardens. As I mentioned above, "English-style" gardens exemplify the simple harmonious relationship between art and nature, while Chinese gardens exemplify the sophisticated harmonious relationship, i.e. the

dialectical and yet harmonious relationship, between art and nature.

The distinctions between "English-style" gardens and Chinese gardens are probably due to their different conceptions of painting. While British garden designers took landscape painters as "the gardener's best designer" [18], British painters devoted themselves to faithfully representing nature. For example, John Constable, one of the greatest British landscape painters in the early 19th century, asserts that "Painting is a science and should be pursued as an inquiry into the law of nature" [19]. Since English landscape painting is regarded as a faithful representation of nature, the garden designers learning from landscape painters actually means that the garden designers learn from nature by the way of paintings. This is probably one of the reasons why "English-style" gardens exemplify the simple harmonious relationship between art and nature. Both gardens and their model, i.e. the landscape paintings, are representations of nature.

The conception of painting in China is different. A faithful representation of subject-matters is not highly valued in Chinese aesthetics. As Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih point out: "Since the acceptance of painting as an art beyond formal representation was expressed so early, the evolution of Chinese painting theory became inextricably involved with the nonformal and even nontechnical aspects of this art" [15]. What Chinese painters pursue is not the formal representation of nature, but the spontaneous act of painting and the natural spirit, the *dao*, which is shared by all things, including human beings, in the universe. The "true painter" admired by King Yuan of Song, which is recorded in the *Zhuangzi* [20], implies that Chinese painting values natural or spontaneous behaviors rather than a faithful representation of natural objects. Xie He's "Six Laws" [21], the cornerstone of Chinese painting theory, are not only six principles, but also six grades. Formal representation is listed as the third, while spiritual resonance is listed as the first and so is primarily significant. Even if a "definitive interpretation" is impossible to the "Six Laws" [21], especially the first law, which is normally translated as "spiritual resonance", what is certain is that the spiritual resonance has nothing to do with the formal resemblance. The tradition of emphasizing internal expression and neglecting external representation in Chinese painting has continued into modern times. For this, Chiang Yee, a painter and writer dedicated to introducing Chinese painting and "Chinese eyes" to westerners, has a clear explanation:

> After my wanderings all day I felt I had the general structure of Derwentwater in my mind; sitting by the fire in the evening I tried to recollect every detail. Artists can never hope to paint the real Nature, but only one aspect of Nature reflected in their own eyes. Our Chinese artist tries to paint Nature in his mind, not the Nature in Nature, and so his pictures do not search for exact resemblance. Nevertheless, resemblance is inherent in his work for it derives from genuine natural impressions [22].

Since the concepts of painting are different in China and Britain, Chinese gardens and "English-style" gardens have different attitudes towards art even though they both take paintings as a model. For "English-style" gardens, art should be "clandestine" and "hidden with care" [11], while art needs not be hidden in Chinese gardens even though the gardens "will look like something naturally created" [22]. For Chinese aesthetics, naturalness does not mean the similarity in shape to natural things, but rather to be the product of spontaneous behaviors and to partake of the same spiritual resonance. Chinese gardens can be different from the natural environment on the surface, but embody the spirit of nature at a deeper level, just like Chinese mountains-and-waters paintings, which do not look like any real mountains and rivers, but exemplify their spiritual resonance.

By doing so, for Chinese garden designers, the most important thing is not to preserve the virgin nature, but to infuse it with spirit or soul, as Chinese painters do. For example, Wang Wei does not require painting to have practical functions but advocates that the purpose of painting is to infuse form with soul. In *Xu Hua* (Discussion of Painting) Wang writes: "Now those who speak of painting ultimately focus on nothing but appearances and positioning. Still, when the ancients made paintings, it was not in order to plan the boundaries of cities or differentiate the locale of provinces, to make mountains and plateaus or delineate watercourses. What is founded in form is fused with soul, and what activates movement is the mind. If the soul cannot be seen, then that wherein it lodges will not move. If eyesight is limited, then what is seen will not be complete" [15]. Chinese garden designers are not afraid of changing nature; rather, nature must be changed to satisfy the aesthetic of painting and the philosophical idealization of nature. Qi Biaojia, a well-known scholar in the late Ming dynasty,

once summed up the principles of creating his garden *Yushan* (Allegory Mountain) as follows:

> In general, where there is too much space I put in a thing; where it is too crowded I take away a thing; where things cluster together I spread them out; where the arrangement is too diffuse I tighten it a bit; where it is difficult to walk upon I level it; and where it is level I introduce a little unevenness. It is like a doctor curing a patient, using both nourishing and excitative medicines, or like a good general in the field, using both normal and surprise tactics. Again, it is like a master painter at his work, not allowing a single dead stroke, or like a great writer writing essays, not permitting a single unharmonious sentence….[Cf 23]

Since Chinese gardens do not shy away from changing nature, they are considered, especially in the western eyes, to destroy nature rather than protect it. As John C. Loudon writes in *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening*:

> It is our [British] excellence to improve nature; that of a Chinese gardener to conquer her: his aim is to change everything from what he found it. A waste he adorns with trees; a desert he waters with a river or lake; and on a smooth flat are raised hills, hollowed out valleys, and placed all sorts of buildings [Cf 10].

What J. C. Loudon blamed is almost the same as what Qi Biaojia was proud of. What is unnatural to western eyes is probably even more natural than nature itself in Chinese eyes. In short, for Chinese, nature does not mean virgin nature without any artificial elements. Since Chinese gardens take paintings as a model and Chinese paintings are not the formal representations of nature, Chinese gardens do not hide art in nature as "English-style" gardens do. Even compared with Japanese gardens, Chinese gardens seem to be more artificial and much fuller in the atmosphere of everyday life.

FOLLOWING AND BORROWING

According to Chinese aesthetics of gardening, not all natural things are natural, and, of course, even fewer artificial things are natural. When Loudon accuses the Chinese of damaging nature by adorning a waste with trees and watering a desert with a river or lake, he considers wastelands and deserts virgin nature. However, wastelands and deserts are seldom regarded as nature by the Chinese, because they do not satisfy the Chinese philosophy of nature, according to which nature should have the Five Elements and be balanced between *yin* and *yang*. Adorning a waste with trees and watering a desert with a river or lake can transform the waste and desert into what is "more natural than nature". As Keswick says of the West Lake at Hangzhou, the Kunming Lake of the Summer Palace, and the Seven Star Crag Lakes in Guangdong: "[They] were all more or less created out of ancient marsh lands, but so skillfully dredged and so carefully dammed that they look more natural than nature" [13].

However, this does not mean that any artifact can enhance nature. In Chapter 17 of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* Jia Baoyu admits that he does not know what "natural" (*tianren*) really means. Obviously, Jia Baoyu does not understand "natural" as "that which is produced by nature as opposed to that which is produced by human artifice" [24], which reflects the view of ordinary people. Artifacts can also be natural. However, it does not mean that artifacts must represent or replicate natural things. In comparing *Daoxiang Cun* and *Xiaoxiang Guan*, Jia Baoyu argues that the former is artificial and the latter is natural, though both of them are human-made. Jia Baoyu's views sound strange because *Daoxiang Cun* in fact looks much more natural than *Xiaoxiang Guan*. *Daoxiang Cun* is so natural that Jia Zheng, Jia Baoyu's father, was awakened to "desire to get back to the land, to a life of rural simplicity" [24]. However, from Jia Baoyu's point of view, the *Daoxiang Cun*'s look-alike naturalness is so incongruous or abrupt in its surroundings that its superficial naturalness seems to be unnatural. In other words, the incongruousness or abruptness of *Daoxiang Cun*, i.e. the "total isolation from everywhere else" [24], is unnatural, even though the incongruous or abrupt thing looks natural on the surface. Jia Baoyu objects to the forcible interference with the environments in the name of 'natural'. Being natural means being in harmony with the surroundings.

To avoid making the incongruous or abrupt gardens, Ji Cheng emphasizes that designers should be good at "following" (*yin*) and "borrowing" (*jie*). In *The Craft of Gardens* (*yuanye*), Ji writes:

> Skill in landscape design is shown in the ability to 'follow' and 'borrow from' the existing scenery and lie of land, and

> artistry is shown in the feeling of suitability created…. Following the existing lie of the land may mean any of these skills: designing in accordance with the rise and fall of the natural contours, to accentuate their intrinsic form; or lopping branches from trees that block the view and using rocks to direct the flow of a spring, so that each borrows value form the other. There a pavilion would be appropriate, build a pavilion, and where a gazebo, build a gazebo. It does not matter if the paths are hidden away; in fact they should be laid out so that they twist and turn with the land; this is what is meant by artistry through suitability. To borrow from the scenery means that although the interior of a garden is distinct from what lies outside it, as long as there is a good view you need not be concerned whether this is close by or far away, whether clear mountains raise their beauty in the distance or a purple-walled temple rises into the sky nearby. Wherever the view within your sight is vulgar, block it off, but where it is beautiful, take advantage of it; never mind if it is just of empty fields, make use of it all as a misty background. This is what is known as skill in fitting in with the form of the land [17].

By "following" and "borrowing", gardens can be seen as the extension or continuation of natural environment, and "though man-made, they will look like something naturally created" [17]. In the essay "Qu jing zai jie" (capturing a view by borrowing), Li Yu shares his experience of installing fan-shaped windows for capturing views. He describes his reaction on first looking through the window: "As I sat there and watched, the window became a picture instead of a window and the hill a hill in a landscape painting instead of the hill behind my room. I couldn't help bursting into laughter, at which my wife and children came in together and began laughing, too, at the same sight. This is how the Empty Picture or Picture Window came into being" [25, Cf 26]. In this sense, a garden would not be the forcible interference with natural environment in the name of "natural", but "fitting in with the form of the land".

The skills or strategies of "following" and "borrowing" can make gardens not only "look like something naturally created" but also have the capability to make nature more natural. As Ji Cheng said: "There a pavilion would be appropriate, build a pavilion, and where a gazebo, build a gazebo" [17]. An appropriate pavilion or gazebo does not make a land unnatural but improves it to be more natural. By the same token, the Chinese gardener can be free from the charge of conquering nature when he adorns a waste with trees and waters a desert with a river or lake, if the trees and waters are appropriate to the waste and desert, respectively. On the contrary, a waste that should and yet have trees and a desert that should and yet have water are regarded as less natural. Adorning a waste with trees and watering a desert with a river or lake is not to conquer nature but rather to improve it.

With "borrowing" and "following", the natural elements in Chinese gardens extend to the field of art. In other words, since the artistic elements in Chinese gardens find their roots in nature, Chinese gardens are not incongruous or abrupt in their natural surroundings. However, Chinese gardens are, after all, human-made works of art. In this sense, I emphasize that Chinese gardens follow the essential qualities of art that is different from Japanese gardens, which, according to Carlson's observation, follow the essential qualities of nature. However, the essential quality of Chinese art is *ziran*, which means "natural" or spontaneity. When the natural elements of Chinese gardens extend to the field of art, they are by no means entering an alien realism. On the contrary, the natural elements of Chinese gardens are not unnatural, but more natural than nature itself, because they have an awareness of *ziran*, i.e., the "natural" or spontaneity in gardens. In Chinese gardens, finally, one can find neither the so-called pristine nature nor pure art. What we experience in Chinese gardens is the mutual "following" and "borrowing" between nature and art and the harmony achieved in a higher realm. In this higher realm, both nature and art begin to have their self-awareness, that is, the awareness of the "natural" or spontaneity, and they finally reach their reconciliation and mutual identification. In this sense, the aesthetics of Chinese garden disagrees with contemporary environmental aesthetics that advocate the preservation of nature from human interference.

Since Chinese gardens are neither pristine nature nor pure art, both the categories of art supplied by artology and the categories of nature supplied by science seem to be inappropriate for their aesthetic appreciation. The aesthetic appreciation of Chinese gardens challenges Carlson's mode of aesthetic appreciation of nature, which is prevalent in the field of

contemporary environmental aesthetics. We cannot find any categories appropriate for perceiving Chinese gardens. Perhaps the aesthetic appreciation of Chinese gardens requires a perception without categories. The aesthetic appreciation based on the perception without categories can be called negative aesthetics, as opposed to positive aesthetics supposed by Carlson and other contemporary environmentalists who emphasize perceiving natural things in correct categories. We can find this negative aesthetics in *Zhuangzi*'s concept of *damei* (great beauty). *Damei* "is a beauty without categories, not only lacking the categories of beauty and ugliness but also calling into question the other various categories under which we perceive things, such as those in the cognitive aesthetics supported by Walton and Carlson" [27]. To appreciate Chinese gardens, we need to "follow" our perception, which is constantly changing between art and nature. No category is appropriate for such a change.

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