



**LANDSCAPE MORPHOLOGY**  
**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LANDSCAPE AESTHETICS**

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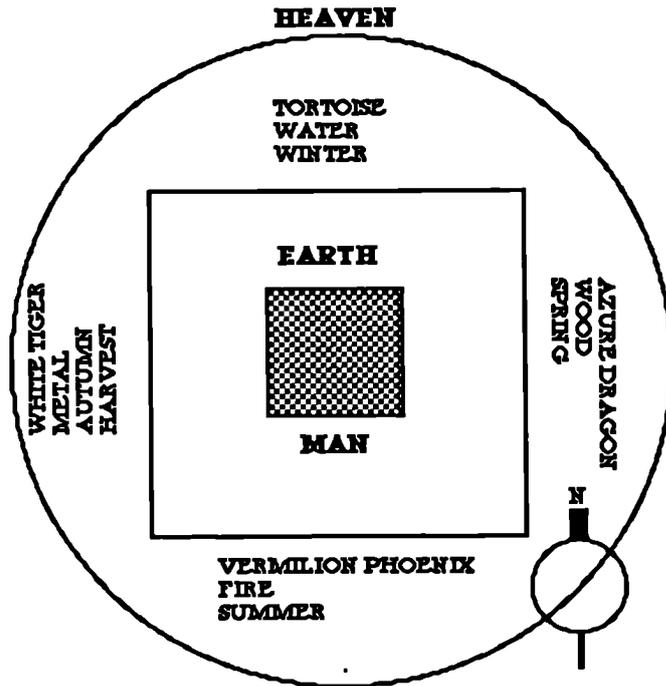
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**PART 3**

# **TAO IN LANDSCAPE**



**CHINESE COSMOS MAP**



## 8

### HEAVEN, EARTH AND MAN

The art of traditional Chinese landscape design is one of the richest landscape design heritage in the world. It is not only a synthesis of the many forms of art such as Shan Shui painting, calligraphy, architecture, sculpture, botany, horticulture, but also a representation of Chinese thoughts. Although landscape painting, Shan Shui theory have achieved a high level of recognition and Chinese landscape design skills are widely known, the theory of Chinese landscape design and its aesthetic base have still not been fully discovered and discussed. The aim of this section is to try to explain the whole activity of Chinese landscape design: its aesthetic and philosophical roots and its methodology.

#### 8.1

#### THE LAND, THE NATION AND THE CULTURE

China is a vast country with 54 nations, almost 1.2 billion population and 9,600,000 square kilometers of land. The huge territory, the varied geomorphologic features and the rich vegetation have created a wide diversity of characteristics in the Chinese landscape. For thousands of years, the country was almost shut off from other parts of the world because of its specific geographical location and social structure. To the north, there is the Mongolian Great Prairie and Siberian Frigid Zone. To



the south-east, there is the Pacific Ocean. To the west, a highland and the deserts which, as a screen and boundary, divide the country from the other side of the world. It was very difficult to reach this early civilization.

Fortunately, the country is big enough to support itself in providing the different resources needed for the nation to survive and develop their own civilization. Particularly in the areas along the Yellow and Yangzi rivers which flow from the west to the east, there is much fertile land from which the culture grew and the heart of this civilization was established. From the south to the north, the climate of China varies from a tropical zone to a temperate and sub-zero one. Warm and moist winds from the south-east coast offset the average temperature which is advantageous for growing a wide range of vegetation. Except for highland areas and some deserts in the north-west, agricultural activities have taken place in most parts of China. The natural conditions of the land along the south-east sea have raised living standards and promoted development and refinement of the culture. From the third century onwards (the period of the Three Kingdoms), the areas along the Yangzi river became the richest parts of China and formed a cultural and economic centre.

From time to time, the iron door of China has been knocked upon by intruders. Despite great suffering, the Chinese cultural tradition still thrives and is beginning to be gradually understood throughout the world. At the same time, foreign cultures have inevitably begun to influence the old traditions of China.



## **8.2**

### **THE DUAL NATURE OF CHINESE CULTURE**

**Chinese culture is the only surviving ancient but developed civilization in the world with an obviously dual nature: original but conservative. For thousands of years, the culture has continued and developed, with little communication with the outside world. By searching, exploring, summarizing from one generation to another, it has developed and improved in a relatively independent way. On the one hand, because of its specific geographical situation and life style, it became possible for this culture to accumulate and develop, while retaining its individuality and originality. On the other hand, its conservative nature now causes great difficulties in the reforming of traditions necessary to meet new needs coming with new ways of living and the incredible size of the population.**

**The dual nature of Chinese culture is reflected in different fields of art such as music, literature, painting, architecture and landscape design. Facing challenges from the outside world, in particular, those from modern Western cultures, Chinese traditional culture has experienced a reformation in coping with the strong impact from an increasing numbers of foreign influences. The conflicts between old and new ideas have raised many questions in Chinese minds. What aspects should the Chinese reject; what essence of our heritage should carry on? These are some the issues facing people in searching for the way to develop and reform the old tradition and design the future of the nation.**

**The landscape, as the most beautiful part of the Chinese living environment, which relates to both the cultural and natural quality of this country, has been changing day by day. The danger is that people make changes in a simple way without knowing why and how, and without any idea about their own cultural identity. This really should not be the case**



for the modern Chinese, since the tradition is still there, the way of traditional thinking is still working.

### **8.3**

## **WAYS OF CHINESE THINKING**

Ideas in any design activity are derived basically from human needs. However, with an activity like landscape, human attitudes towards nature have an especially strong influence. So, when studying the aesthetics of Chinese landscape design, we need to understand the way Chinese think about nature and some basic aspects of Chinese philosophies.

No matter where people live and how different their cultural roots are, human beings have from primitive times onwards been searching for the answers to such basic questions as Who am I? Where am I from? How can I survive? In which way can I improve my life? To answer those questions, to establish an acceptable understanding of the relationship between man and the objective world is a never ending fundamental task. For the Chinese, their specific process of social evolution and geographical differences in living conditions have influenced their behaviour and led the people to accept different patterns of living and different attitudes towards the problems of coping with the natural environment.

The Chinese are known as an agricultural nation with the longest feudal history in the world, replacing slave-based society around the 8th BC. [1] We may reason that the gathering activity as the basic survival behaviour and the primitive form of agriculture was well developed by our

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1 At the time of Western Zhou (c. 11th BC- 771 BC), the Slave Society began to collapse.



ancestors. [2] The primitive agriculture led people to cultivation practices, such as classifying categories of plants, selecting seeds, dividing the land and arranging different kinds of work in different seasons. Methodologically, classification and storing of information came to be the most important characteristic of the society which followed early Gathering Man. In the process of classification, people gradually cultivated their own ways of perceiving the outside world and managing it.

Both hunting and gathering were essential to human survival. The difference between them is that the former may be outward-orientated, the latter inward-orientated, i.e. psychologically, one is characterised by the act of looking for, exploring, conquering; the other by collecting, selecting, accumulating and adapting. The classifying and storing which belong especially to settled agriculture will reinforce the second tendency. Thus, we can suggest that where behaviors such as gathering, selecting, collecting, accumulating, classifying and storing are the basic activities of a nation for thousands of years, it must psychologically influence the people in very particular ways. The people gradually adapt to natural truths without a sense of conquering nature. Common knowledge tells those people that without flowers, there will be no bees and honey; without trees, no fruits; without fertile land, no crops. Therefore in the minds of the early Chinese things on Earth relied on each other, depended on each other, and were dominated by natural forces which are beyond understanding. If 'HEAVEN' smiles upon people, then the climate may be kind to all creatures, their life easier.

Naturally, the worship of natural forces founded a theological base in the minds of early people. The logical attitude might be: we are not

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2 Gathering and hunting were of course the general activities of primitive man anywhere in the world. Since the Chinese started their feudal agricultural economy in 11th century BC. here we may reason that the Gathering activity which promoted the start of agriculture was the most important surviving behaviour of the early Chinese man.



conquerors of nature; we cannot loot from the earth too much; our survival depends on 'HEAVEN' and 'EARTH' together. Therefore, doctrines about the suitable manner of living were formed and passed down from one generation to next, a tradition that has continued down through the ages. As a result, the most reliable knowledge is that learned from the older generations, which is seen as the knowledge tasted by time. To learn from tradition, therefore, became a necessary and effective approach in achieving a balanced life and maintaining a certain quality and rhythm of living. Thus, for the people, the opportunities of exploration were missing from time to time. The tradition of emphasizing relations and inheritance had developed a common sense of coherence; more value came to be attached to integration than to growth and further analysis.

Since it was thought that to adapt was the best way to achieve a balance between contradictory forces, the management of different activities within a greater system of productive processes needed an authorized order which decided the organic relationship of different social groups: from family to clan, from a nation to the whole kingdom. The concepts of order, hierarchy, standardization or justified relationships between people became the focus of understanding the conduct of life and the establishment of social structure.

A change in productive relationships towards feudalism from the 7th BC reinforced this social structure and demanded an even more systematic explanation of the whole, particularly of the relationship between natural and man power.

Based on the foundation of the agricultural economy for so many centuries, the Chinese confined themselves to reaping the land. They repeated the way of sowing in the spring and summer and reaping in the autumn, and storing in the winter; they learned from one generation to another, following the elemental agricultural experience left by their ancestors. They may have been satisfied with this calm way of living and



might, thus, have lacked a bold spirit with which to explore the outside world, placing emphasis on past experience, inherited skills and knowledge, and inductive ways of thoughts. Blood ties between family or social group also had much influence, emphasizing the importance of inter-relationships over individuality. Although the world as an entirety was recognized by the early Chinese, their inward looking, non-exploratory ways of thought, neglected at first, may have prompted large questions such as what is the universe? what is the origin of life? and what does it consist of?

However, while this early nation still lacked enough knowledge and experience of nature, a simple ingenuity eventually became expressed in a view of the diverse objective world as a system of Five Elements [3] which operate following the fundamental law of Yin (--) and Yang (-). [4] This is the beginning of typical Chinese philosophy: initiated by both the experience and imagination of the early Chinese man and now to be expressed with intellectual brilliance. There were many explanations of the origin of the world in ancient China, among them, the thoughts of Laozi [5] were the most influential which had not only influenced Chinese thinking, but also that of the Far Eastern region as a whole.

According to Laozi, the origin of the world is Tao (Way), a difficult concept to explain. "The way (Tao) is forever nameless", [6] yet forever moving and operating, as the eternal root of all the creatures on the earth, the law of universal change, Tao exists, a law of change which does not itself change:

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- 3 The Five elements are: water, fire, wood, metal, and soil.  
4 The symbol of contradiction of all life phenomena. This idea was first mentioned in the book 'Yijing' (about early Zhou Dynasty), in which the concept of Yin (- -), and Yang (-) is used to symbolize the law of the unity of opposites.  
5 Laozi was a thinker in Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC. - 476 BC.) of China. His name is Lire, founder of the Tao School of Chinese philosophy.  
6 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: XXXII, 72, p.91.



**“There is a thing confusedly formed,  
Born before heaven and earth,  
Silent and void,  
It stands alone and does not change,  
Goes around and does not weary.” [7]**

Although “The way conceals itself in being nameless”, [8] it silently creates the physical world:

**“The way begets one;  
one begets two;  
two begets three;  
three begets myriad creatures.”[9]**

-Tao produces the **One** (or the essence of the world: **Chi**), a primitive being; from the movement of the **One** following the law of Tao, the **Two** (Yin and Yang) [10] are produced. Here Laozi inherited an earlier philosophical concept: **Yin** and **Yang** refer to the contradictory factors of all life phenomena, symbolizing the law of the unity of opposites which crystallizes all observations and experiences of the world: an analogue for fundamental contradictory natural forces. As a philosophical term, it serves to symbolize the positive and passive sides of the harmonious balance of the whole universe, such as: female/male, moon/sun, water/mountain, soft/hard, cool/hot, movement/still, broken/continuous, etc.; thus it refers to the basic relationship of all natural beings rather than to concrete objects.

Because of the meeting, combining and balancing of Yin and Yang, the **Three** (Heaven, Earth and Man) emerge as the final outcome of the movement from Tao to Chi, forming the essential elements of the

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7 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: XXV, 56, p.82.  
8 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*, XLII, 92, p.103,  
9 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: XLII, 93, P.103.  
10 Yin and Yang originally means 'sunless' and 'sunny'.



myriad beings. This abstract system is a logical explanation of the whole world. The basic framework is:

**TAO**  
**ONE: (Chi)**  
**TWO: YIN & YANG**  
**THREE: HEAVEN, EARTH & MAN**

Laozi also expressed these relationships in a reverse order:

**“The myriad creatures in the world are born from  
Something , and Something from Nothing.”<sup>[11]</sup>**

The concept of ‘Nothing’ is very mystical, but an extremely important concept for design philosophy, which will be discussed later.

Many arguments and concepts were inspired by Laozi’s brilliant work. One important idea of Yuanji (210-263), concerned the role of nature in the cosmic framework: “Heaven and earth are born from Nature, myriad creatures from heaven and earth” and Nature is a unified body: which is derived from Chi <sup>[12]</sup>, the essence of the world.

Later, in the Northern Song, a philosopher called Zhou Duenyi (1017-1073) put forward his cosmic map, suggesting a sequence of how the world was formed:

**“Taiji /{  }/Tao  
Two : Yin Chi and Yang Chi  
Five Elements: Water, Wood, Fire, Soil, and Metal  
Myriad creatures” <sup>[13]</sup>**

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11 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: XL, 89, p. 101.

12 Here the concept of Chi is not a spiritual being but the material medium to form the myriad beings.

13 Author’s translation. from *A Concise Chinese Philosophy*, Edited by Fa Dayang, Qinhai people’s Publishing House, Xiling, 1988, p.339.



Particular arguments also centered on the relation between Li (reason) and Chi (Essence), i.e. whether Li comes before Chi or Chi before Li. As there is no an agreement in this debate, a typical philosophical compromise was established by Wang Fuzhi's ambiguous theory: "There is neither a Li before Chi, nor a Chi behind Li" [14] in terms of logic and time.

However, human experiences are much richer than anything implied by the above abstract models. As early as the period of Warring States (475 BC - 221 BC) a group of philosophers who studied the theory of the Five Elements combined it with the concept of Yin and Yang and concluded that the Five Elements were the true foundation of the material world, changes on Earth, being related to the rise and fall of the Elements under the law of Yin and Yang. Furthermore, those theorists extended these basic ideas to life, believing that metaphysical phenomena and those of nature influenced each other. Therefore a link between real life and philosophy was established in the sense that "Man and Heaven interacts with each other." [15]

It was a famous philosopher, Dong Zhongshu (179 B.- 104 BC) in the Western Han Dynasty who further emphasised this specific aspect of Chinese philosophy about the relationship between Heaven and Man. He suggested that Heaven can be paralleled with Man, or that man and Heaven is the same thing, and that even man's biological structure can be paralleled with the cosmic structure. Dong Zhongshu finally concluded that the idea and feeling of man follows that of Heaven. Thus, Heaven became the ruler of earthly man and a theological meaning was given to our relationship with it.

For our discussion, there is no need to continue all the arguments which have been carried on for centuries in the area of Chinese

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14 Author's translation from *A Concise Chinese Philosophy*, p.341.

15 Author's translation from *A Concise Chinese Philosophy*, p.140.



philosophy. What is interesting is the general result: an outline of the Chinese idea, the cosmic map summarized as the followings:

**TAO**  
**Chi**  
**(SOMETHING)**  
**YIN (- - ) & YANG (-)**  
**HEAVEN + EARTH + MAN**

1. ELEMENTS/	Wood	Fire	Soil	Metal	Water
2. SEASON/	Spring	longer Summer [16]	Autumn	Winter	
3. COLOURS/	Blue	Red	Yellow	White	Black
4. DIRECTIONS/	East	South	Centre	West	North
5. TASTES/	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Metallic	Salty
6. CLIMATE/	Windy	Hot	Humid	Dry	Cold
7. ORGANS/	Spleen	Lungs	Heart	Liver	Kidney
8. TUNES/	GO	WEI	GONG	SHAN	YU [17]
...	...	...	...	...	...

This structure of the universe is so stable, complete and ordered that it can explain everything on Earth, establishing a perfect harmony between the external and internal world. However the origins of the world are explained, the map summarizes all sorts of relationships: from a human body, from sensation to philosophy. Here, nature, society and men, are understood as a TRINITY.

Does this cosmic model of the universal structure need to be proved? The answer is the same when questioning whether there is any scientific proof for the Chinese traditional medicine which for thousands of years has cured so many, who doubt the facts and experiences, even though the system is so mystical? What is more, the structure of the map is complete, powerful and elastic; it is not only imaginative, but concrete; flexible, and well balanced; somewhat obscure, yet reasonable; vast, but

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16 The longer summer is seen as two seasons long.

17 The five tones described with length of the string of a Chinese ancient instrument.



detailed. It is a refined result from experiences, something between philosophy and theology. For a nation which has grown from agricultural roots and deeply reveres its ancestors back to the early gathering man, such a cosmic map is easily accepted.

From the above discussion we can also find a very positive and important attitude from a modern viewpoint: the proto-ecological ideas which support the way ancient Chinese cope with nature and have cultivated a taste for an appreciation of landscape. This has greatly influenced the development of systematic Chinese landscape aesthetics. However, the 'perfection' of the Chinese cosmic map may have resulted in the thought that it was not necessary to explore, to further the endless searching for understanding the outside world. In this way, tradition may have become an obstacle which slowed down the nation's exploration of new areas of science and philosophy.

Since the influence of a strong tradition has remained for centuries, the Chinese way of thinking have followed a clear path:

- To respect experiences;
- To discern the truth by studying the past;
- To stand between science and theology;
- To combine ethics with aesthetics.



## 9

### **SOME IDEAS OF CHINESE LANDSCAPE DESIGN**

There are three main streams of Chinese thought: Ru, Dao, Chan, i.e. Confucianism, Tao and Zen; Confucianism and Tao derive from philosophical thinking, whereas Zen, an assimilated Buddhism by the Chinese, is thought to be between philosophy and theology. All these thoughts have influenced Chinese landscape ideas decisively although the start of Chinese gardening is a story of fantasy: A Jeweled palace in Elfland's Hill.

#### 9.1

#### **A JEWELLED PALACE IN ELFLAND'S HILLS**

According to the earliest Chinese historical records, the idea of making a place as a designed landscape in our modern sense was derived from a dream of an eternal life. It arose before 4 BC, in the age of the Warring States, from an ancient myth of a specific medicine — the elixir of life made from the sacred plants of fairyland. The idea was to design an artificial environment, with mountains and water to symbolise the magic places of the Gods; and the “magic” plants grown were the favourites of different emperors. The pattern of **A Jeweled Palace in Elfland's Hills** was the prototype of this kind of landscape, that usually contains a



centrally placed pool symbolising the sea of Elfland and in the middle of the water three islands or mountains: Ponglai, Fanzhan and Yinzhou. This composition is the earliest but also the most basic pattern of Chinese garden. Although the story is preposterous, the layout of the early garden was still thoughtful. With this overall arrangement, the flat view of the water was enriched by the different layers of landforms (the mountains), and enhanced by trees. At the same time, varied pictorial scenes were provided from different standpoints and different angles.

Although the idea seems very simple, it derived from a unrealistic desire for eternal life and while eventually the emperors died one after another, this pattern of garden became repeated from generation to generation since an aesthetic aim is the real motive behind the design activities.

## 9.2

### IDEAS FROM CONFUCIANISM

In Chinese philosophy, Confucianism established by Kongzi (confucius) (511 BC - 479 BC) is the orthodox school in most periods of Chinese history. Essentially, Confucianism is a theory about the administration of family or country which seeks to create order and harmony from the chaos of the world, presenting a positive attitude towards real life.

The beliefs of Confucians are that human fate is handled by Heaven, and harmony between Heaven and Earth depends on a perfect order which is paralleled with human social life. Here, Heaven is an ambiguous concept which can be seen as the source of all kinds of power: a natural force which also has an intimate relationship with our real life. According to the hierarchy of the world under the Heaven, a stable social



structure supported by the moral doctrines founded in the Zhou Dynasty (10 BC) was seen as the eternal model of social life. Thus, a reasonable attitude of living is that one should both obey the order of Heaven and embody high moral standards in order to achieve a benevolent government of a family. To achieve this and embody the ideas of humanity, justice and virtue, one should, as a starting point, learn how to behave. According to Confucius, only the learned who has noble moral qualities can solve complicated social problems. To summarise Confucius' philosophy, we can use one word: **Benevolence**; and for his methodology a phrase: **"The Golden Means"** [1], i. e. **Compromise**. This is the core of the Confucian School.

What is the origin of the world? Confucius gave no concrete answer; what he believed in was destiny. For him there was no God and no devil, but only the order set up by the son of Heaven (The Emperor of Zhou, gifted by Heaven). Confucius expressed his attitude towards nature through his famous saying: "The wise man prefers water; the benevolent prefers mountain." Water is dynamic and always moving, which symbolises the process of searching for knowledge; the mountain is steady and sublime, the noble man is composed, calm and serious; hence nature is thought of as an analogue of humanity. As we can see Confucius was not really interested in nature, but in social life. His philosophy is a pragmatic one: the ethics of behaviour. Since his ideas are the most influential in China, there is no doubt that we can easily trace his influence on any kind of design work. His thoughts were indeed the guiding principle of Chinese town-planning, housing design, even interior design. For instance, the spatial order of Beijing and Nanjing, the housing patterns in all Chinese historical cities, the typical interiors in the Forbidden City, even those buildings constructed in the so-called 'Free Style' landscape

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from *A Chinese-English Dictionary* by Beijing Institute of Foreign Languages, Shanwu Publishing House, 1980, p. 573.



designs such as the private gardens in Suzhou and Hangzhou. All these typical Chinese design forms relate to the political and philosophical standards of Confucius. Their powerful influences are inevitably reflected in land use, landscape design and the management of gardens. However, Confucianism made no further contribution to the understanding of nature, aesthetics and garden design; it was the thoughts of Tao and Zen that really exerted subtle influences on Chinese landscape design philosophy.

In fact, most of the Confucians in Chinese history were not skillful politicians but idealists. They might have been scholars or learned men, but had no real understanding about the rulers and ordinary people. Very often they fell into disfavour and were dismissed from office because their abstract political advocacy such as Benevolence was regarded as a ridiculous joke by the cruel and greedy rulers. In most cases they embarked on the road of escapism, eventually trying to find their spiritual refuge in Tao or Zen. However, even though withdrawn from the political stage and living in solitude as hermits, they still dreamed of the chance to carry on their political ideal. Thus, as ordinary gentlemen, the Confucians never gave up the desire to return to everyday life, to carry out their 'historical commission'. Although they might spend their life time as secluded literati, they could not give up the wish that one day they would be understood by the imperial court and looked forward to giving their services again. For them maintaining self-cultivation and excellent moral virtue was necessary for a hopeful future. Activities such as meditation, reading widely, imaginative conversation, entertainment with noble friends, practising musical instruments and Gong Fu (Chinese Boxing), playing board games, etc., became important in their private life. That is why they partly absorbed the so-called negative thoughts of Tao and Zen and occasionally searched for ways of living in natural manner. Yet they are not the original thinkers.



If we wonder why there are so many buildings in the Chinese garden, then the influence of Confucianism is one answer. For the various activities of those gentlemen and their families, highly designed spaces were needed. This kind of design can be found everywhere in China which was not only for appreciating natural beauty, but also for satisfying the passion for social life, resulting in architecture rather than landscape design. As a part of Chinese heritage, this strong architectural orientation in landscape design has characterized the design practice and influenced the design education.[2]

In short, a Confucianism attitude emphasizes a participation into social life; as a social being one should fit into family and society, find a proper position in the hierarchy of the social structure, and behave following a certain moral code. Therefore, designed activities are the result of an understanding of the meaning of social being, of different positions in the hierarchy, and of a moral code conducting ones behaviour. In this sense, Confucianism has provided a totally rational theoretical base for design activities. Thus, it is hard to say that the Confucians who were involved in real life so deeply really had a profound understanding of nature. The fundamental influence of Confucianism on Chinese landscape design is revealed by creating a 'secular atmosphere' in the landscape. How we value the influence of Confucianism may become questionable in the future; since one can argue that landscape is designed for human, must we avoid such secular taste? It is also very hard to draw a line and say that this part of landscape is influenced by Confucianism, that part by another 'ism'. However, when one studies the influences of traditional thoughts on landscape design we must ascertain which kind of life quality is searched for and which kind of order is followed, and how much concern

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<sup>2</sup> Even today the education of Chinese landscape design is part of the education of Chinese classical architecture. There was no independent profession or complete landscape education system in China until the late 1980s.



for natural beauty results from following the order set up by 'Son of Heaven', although designed landscape is made by men for their needs

This does not mean we deny the design heritage which embodied the social order of Confucius' thoughts but, compared with the thinking of Tao, we find in Confucianism less attention given to the order of nature. It is the philosophy of Tao which provides the source for the study of design and nature together. However, while the ideas of Confucianism, Tao and Zen forever working together have influenced the thoughts of Chinese scholars and designers, the state of Chinese thought is very complicated and cannot be defined by taking one-sided approach. It is also doubtful that we can summarize and analyze Chinese landscape aesthetics by reviewing a few famous examples or popular sayings only. Thus, an inter-relationship of different ideas needs to be considered when we research into any Chinese art phenomenon. Although the philosophy of Tao and the ideas of Zen have more significant influence on the cultivating process of Chinese landscape preference and distinguished Chinese design philosophy than Confucianism, the ideas contained in landscape design are subtle, relating to nature and human participation together and requiring continuous and synthetic exploration with broad analysis of different approaches in order to achieve a proper understanding.'

### 9.3

## THE INFLUENCES OF ZEN

The Chinese are not a religious people (or never take any religion seriously) in general, even though there are many religions in China and they have played different roles in history. The belief of Buddhism in China still seems popular, but it is an assimilated way of Chinese thinking rather than the original religion from India. Because of a strong cultural



tradition, once the foreign religion was introduced into China, it was assimilated very quickly by the people. The birth of the Zen school of Buddhism in China is a typical example of special importance here.

In the view of the Buddhist, life is a kind of transmigration. The concept of **Kong** (or Nothingness) means an absolutely pure, calm and clean mental state through which ways of seeing and living are simple and peaceful. **Kong** is the key idea to conduct behaviour which insists on a negative attitude towards reality, i.e. today is painful but the day after death is hopeful. Thus, do not be too greedy or struggle too hard for sensory enjoyments which are worth nothing but a penalty in the next life. Only the liberation of spirit is worth aiming for, and the path to it is to behave well and with severe restraint. For the good next life, it is worth thinking about **KARMA — CAUSALITY** (consequences): doing good for good results. Thus, to practice Buddhism according to the full-elaborate procedures of the rite is necessary. Nevertheless, this pure state is difficult to achieve for ordinary people, particularly for those influenced by Confucianism and inseparably involved in everyday life. Therefore, a religious compromise is needed.

**Huinen** (638-713, Tang Dynasty), who it is said received no education, established the **Chan** school, (the English translation is **Zen**), a clever combination of Buddhism and Chinese thinking. The key to **Zen** is an understanding of the allegorical Buddhist symbols through intensive contemplation rather than conventional religious ceremonies that is thought of as much less important. A wonderful idea of **Zen** is that the nature of a humans is that of Buddha. Which means that anybody can achieve the highest spiritual level in their hearts through sudden enlightenment so long as one can keep the belief in mind and meditate beyond egoism. Contrary to the taboos of original Buddhism, the **Zen** school is much more flexible and never ignored real life. What is important is not an obsessive purity but the true quality of meditation: the



understanding of the truth of Buddhism in the heart. Following this idea, it does not matter whether you enjoy real life so long as you keep Buddha in your heart.

Therefore, the manner of real life can be as expressed in Wangwei's poem:

“Sitting among bamboo alone,  
I play my flute and sing freely.  
In the deep woods where I'm unknown,  
Only the bright moon peeps at me.” [3]

There is nothing wrong with someone who places himself in real life to enjoy closeness with natural beauty; it is rightly the realm of Zen, in which the true meaning of Buddhism is most clearly discerned. The concept of Zen seems specifically designed for those who desired to enjoy real life and the next life as well. Therefore Zen became very popular as the most important branch of Buddhism promoted in China and the Far East as a whole.

For the followers of the ideas of Zen, self-cultivation through writing poetry, painting, playing music and experiencing beauty in landscape is a healthy practice which helps to discern the truth of life and comes close to the spiritual realm of Kong. This form of Buddhism with its freedom from taboos and ritual was gladly accepted by intellectuals who wished to achieve peace of mind and find a refuge from an unsuccessful career. It was designed so perfectly that one can follow it and lose nothing from everyday life.

The Zen School of Buddhism provided a pragmatic combination of Buddhism with a casual life style. Thus, a natural manner becomes the key to the aesthetic demands of the intellectuals, and that is the right

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<sup>3</sup> Wangwei (701-761, a poet of Zen): 'Hut Among the Bamboo', Edited by Xu Yuanchong: *300 TANG POEMS*, Hong Kong Branch of Shanwu Publishing house, 1987, p. 86.



channel connecting Zen with Tao. With a landscape idea, Zen is as important as Tao. Since they are influenced by each other, these ideas cannot be discussed totally separately. Interestingly, the ideas of Zen have become more popular in Japan than in China, since they were introduced from China to Japan by the missionaries of the Tang Dynasty and who influenced traditional Japanese philosophy, painting and garden design. Also, the ideas of Zen are often studied by Western theorists and landscape designers. The reason may be that through Zen the most outstanding Chinese wisdom of Tao operates.

#### **9.4 THE MISUNDERSTANDING OF TAO**

In recent years, Tao has become a popular term, a symbol used to identify or sum up the essence of Chinese thinking, and even that of Eastern philosophy. However, there may be a confusion in the understanding of Tao, even for the Chinese themselves, because Tao is such a common philosophical term in Chinese classical philosophy. In the mind of Confucius, Tao referred to the order of society, the law of human conduct; in that of Laozi, it was the origin and great law of the universe. Later, based on the ideas of Laozi, a religion called Taoism incorporated the philosophy of Tao in the theory of existing native religions in order to balance the influence of Buddhism in China. The religious Tao is a distorted theological concept, but it has spread over most parts of the East. With reference to terminology, there is also a confusion in the use of Tao, Tao+ism and Taoist, both in the East and the West.

Meanwhile, there is also Tao in medicine, Tao in architecture, Tao in painting, even Tao in physics, and so on. In landscape design, when mentioning that of the Chinese, some scholars think it is a kind of Free



**Style, and some theorists very easily find Tao in the Chinese garden by its style or “natural taste”. In the same way, when mentioning Western landscape design, some scholars claim without hesitation that is a kind of geometrical or Formal Style. Whoever holds such points of view has forgotten the English School in the West and lacks a proper understanding of the aesthetic influences of Tao on Chinese landscape design.**

**Although ideas can certainly be transferred between philosophy and aesthetics, aesthetics and design philosophy, must be careful what we say; the use of such vague terms as Style and descriptions such as Formal or Free to define the qualities of these landscape designs, are very far off the mark. We should recognize that most freely growing natural things may take geometrical forms, as the human body or leaves of plants demonstrate. With a relatively primitive environmental design, some vernacular housing complexes and temples with their relevant outdoor spaces, often have an axis and very ‘formal’ layout. We cannot make aesthetic judgments of landscape design only from the study of superficial form or style without concerning the context and philosophical root. Design ideas come from aesthetic thoughts and the thoughts arise from deeper out-look on the world, the philosophy. Thus, when we try to discover the essence of any kind of landscape culture, we must go back to a study of the most basic questions: why people perceive and enjoy landscape, and then design it in one way rather than another.**

**So here we will choose the most typical Chinese philosophy of Tao as a stepping stone into Chinese designed landscape, and try to see through the mystical screen of Chinese thinking, to sort out fundamental aesthetic influences of Tao on the traditional landscape approaches.**



## 10

### AESTHETIC PRINCIPLES OF TAO

Any theory of landscape aesthetics must explain true aesthetic ideals as expressed in appreciate and design of landscape. Without exception, the aesthetic ideas derived from Tao cover these basic aspects. To find a sound basis for further discussion, we should start understanding Tao itself.

There are two important philosophical categories: Tao (way) and Te (Virtue) which together influence people's basic attitudes towards nature and life, and further influence Chinese landscape art and design.

#### 10.1.

#### NATURALLY SO

#### THE AIM OF LANDSCAPE ART & DESIGN

On the basic issue of a world outlook, Laozi stated:

“Man models himself on earth,  
Earth on heaven,  
Heaven on the way,  
And the way on that which is naturally so.” [1]

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<sup>1</sup> *Tao Te Ching*: XXV, 58, P.82.



**Naturally So**, what a wonderful conclusion, by which we can understand how the world is structured logically through the movement of Tao, and also establish a bridge between nature and Tao. Here, Laozi's concept of nature not only refers to outside beings, but implies the developing law of the whole universe. Laozi distinguished his concept of nature from theology (the world is created naturally so), and an extreme veneration of nature is emphasised by the philosophy. This is a crucial point of Laozi's thinking, since this idea of nature and its relationship with man has decisively influenced the Chinese attitude towards landscape and aesthetics.

Te (Virtue) is an another important concept in the philosophy: an embodiment of Tao and so a universal law. For the relationship between Tao and Te, they are conditioned by each other, combined as a whole and cannot be understood separately. In the context of Laozi, the functions of Tao and Te are:

**"The way (Tao) gives them (myriad creatures) life;  
Virtue (Te) rears them," [2]**

And the quality of Te should be:

**"It gives life yet claims no possession;  
It benefits yet exacts no gratitude;  
It is the steward yet exercises no authority.  
Such is called the mysterious virtue." [3]**

Here, Virtue is beyond the ordinary concept of morality, but a high form of life which follows the law of Tao, embodies the principle of 'Naturally So' and displays itself in different ways. Therefore, the life principles such as: "no action", "preferring stillness", "not meddlesome",

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<sup>2</sup> *Tao Te Ching*: LI, 114, P.112.

<sup>3</sup> *Tao Te Ching*: LI, 116, P.112.



“free from desire”, [4] etc. are seen as the proper manners with which to cope with life. The concept of Te links the idea of Tao to the aim of human life. Thus, it also has great potential aesthetic meaning in artistic activities, particularly for the manner in which people deal with landscape.

The principle of ‘Naturally So’ is the core of Laozi’s philosophy by which the truth is revealed, the way of thinking is formed. This general logic can be applied to aesthetic thinking, to establishing the aims of art, and an understanding of Te further clarifies the right manner of coping with the world and life. The highest aim of art, following the principle ‘Naturally So’, is to place all feelings into the rational kingdom, then eventually to achieve a total spiritual liberation, to enjoy life at a level beyond the secular. In this sense, for Chinese intellectuals beauty is an outcome of a harmonious balance between the subjective and objective; sensation and reason following natural law. This aesthetic stance reflects the light of Tao, respects natural beings, forms a realistic basis for art, and establishes the aim of Chinese landscape art and design.

Since the principle ‘Naturally So’ has such profound philosophical complications, simply to imitate natural things is also not the way to carry out any artistic creation. That is why Chinese landscape painting has developed from the depiction of factual scenery to that of the quality of nature, Yi. Moreover, the principle of ‘Naturally So’ implies a strong intuitive sense rather than pure reasoning; here the importance of experience is also emphasized.

However, the methodology of philosophy cannot be that of art and design. A way of transferring from philosophy to artistic creation is needed.

All features of a designed landscape are actual. They are man-made, but can appear natural or artificial in character; judgment depends on which way they are constructed, displayed, and managed. Although

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<sup>4</sup> *Tao Te Ching* LVII, 133, P.118.



elements such as mountains, water and vegetation are usually seen as natural in a designed place, they may unfortunately be treated unnaturally; conversely those that are purely artificial, buildings for instance, can also be placed in a landscape in the manner of 'Naturally So'.

In a traditional Chinese garden, we can easily find the four basic elements: mountain (rock), plant (tree), water and building [Fig. 10-1].

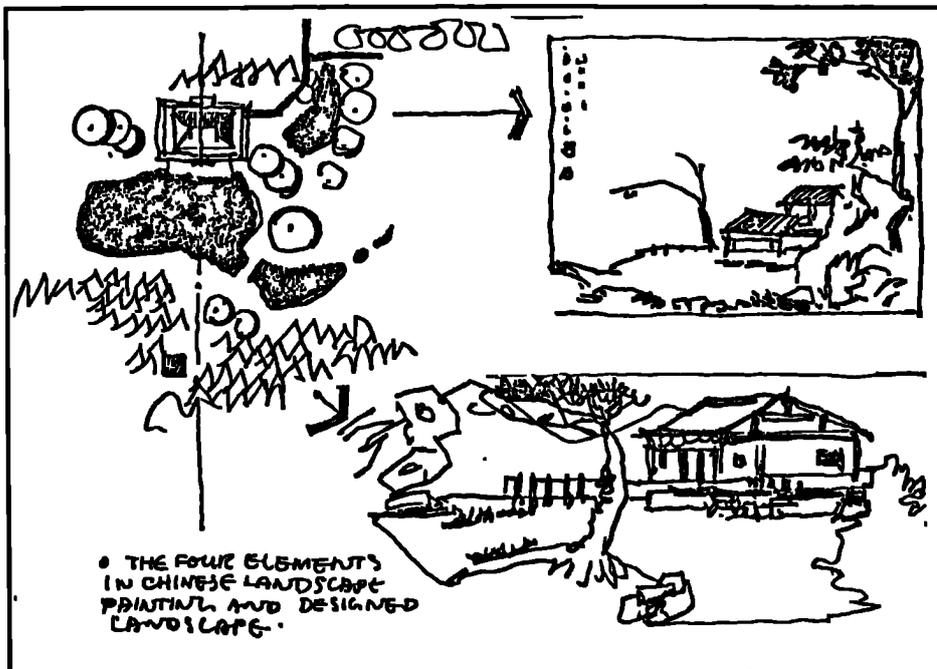


Fig. 10-1: THE FOUR ELEMENTS: Mountain, Water, Plant and Building.

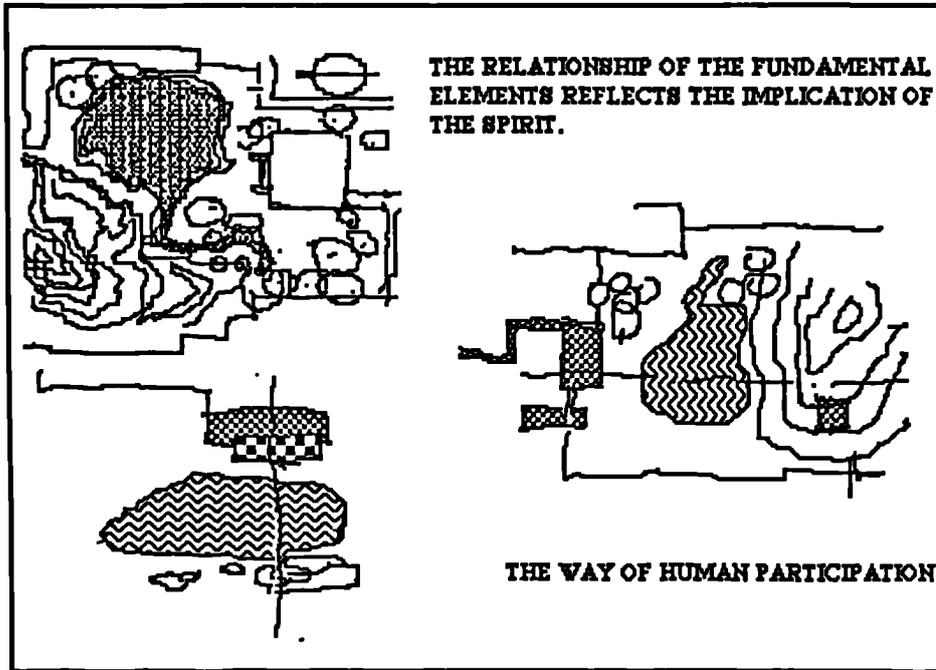


Fig. 10-2: The interrelationship of the basic elements.

Aesthetic judgment of the design results depends very much on the way of managing the interrelationship between these elements, and the general atmosphere created by them in a particular site, rather than on the quantity of natural things put in it [Fig. 10-2]. 'Naturally So' here depends more on the relationship between objects, the way of structuring the complex, than about objects themselves. The principle relates also to a designer's awareness of the site, people and surroundings. A built place including artificial mountain, lake, path, or any other landmarks are of course the human places in which there must be an order related to human activities and logic of building construction. But they can be 'Naturally So' by displaying a suitable function, logical structure, modest proportion, right location, thoughtful features, and correct material, colour and texture as well [Fig. 10-3].

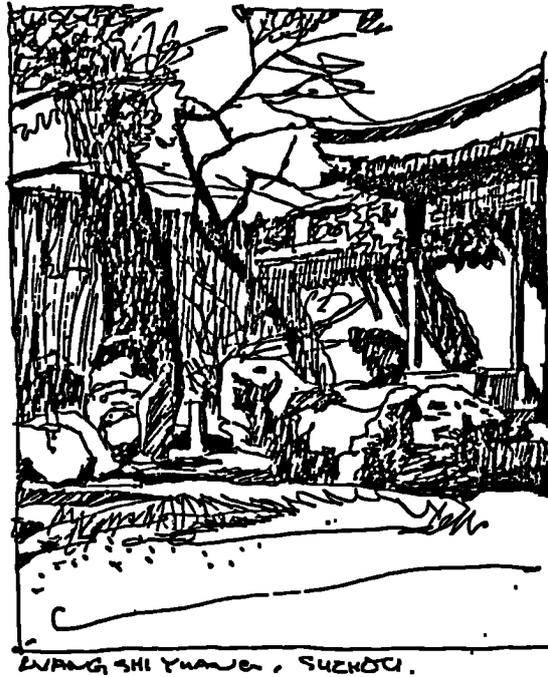


Fig. 10-3: Artificial thing can be made 'Naturally So'.

On the other hand, human as an important natural factor has never been ignored by the philosophy of Tao. Within this realm, there are three great things: Tao, Heaven and Earth, and Man counts as one more.

“Tao is great;  
heaven is great;  
earth is great;  
man is also great.  
Among these four great beings,  
Man is one of them.” [5]

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<sup>5</sup> Author's translation with reference to Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: XXV, 57, P.82, translated by D. C. Lau, Penguin Books, England. 1976.



It is human participation which eventually completes the whole natural process. Human beings combine themselves with the objective beings of water, stone and plants and express their feelings and wisdom in an improvement (design) of place. Thus, a complete understanding of the principle 'Naturally So' must include the human effort.

The way of using stone in Chinese landscape design is a typical example to explain this. Stone is a natural raw material, it is motionless, hard, and lifeless. However to the Chinese it is thought of as personalized. The spiritual expression and the functional roles of a stone are seen as symbols of its life. If without Chi (breath), a man will lose his life, the same goes for a stone in landscape. Stone (mountain) in Shan Shui theory is described as the root of clouds, the link between heaven and earth. If it does not express this Chi or spirit, it is a dead stone which destroy the whole concept of the painting. It is the same in a garden, where a stone shaped as if grown from earth, may be placed in front of a building, outside a window, beside a bank of water or made like a cliff or a mountain in a specific spot. It serves as a connecting medium between artificial and natural things, with a spatial role also; thus, as a vertical element it leads the vision upwards to heaven, invites the clouds into a garden or enriches the effect of light and shadow; as a screen it encloses or divides spaces; as an independent object, it is an abstract sculpture, displaying form, texture and variation to attract the eye; as a symbol of virtue, it expresses the enduring quality of a noble man [Fig. 10-4].

A piece of stone has much to say in a garden or specific place, evoking such sentiments as in the following lines: "A mountain in spring appears as gorgeous as laughter; A mountain in summer is so vivid that the dew sparkles green over all; A mountain in autumn looks light and clean as if being made up; A mountain in winter seems as gloomy as though everything slept." [6] [Fig. 10-5]

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<sup>6</sup> Author's translation from Goxi, Ling Quan Gao Zhi, Song Dynasty.



Here the stone functions as a communication between man and nature, helping to complete the transition from ordered human space to natural space. In abstract and symbolic terms, it completes the transition from man to earth, from earth to heaven. The aesthetic aim to integrate all elements and to place man and his feelings in between earth and heaven, is eventually achieved.

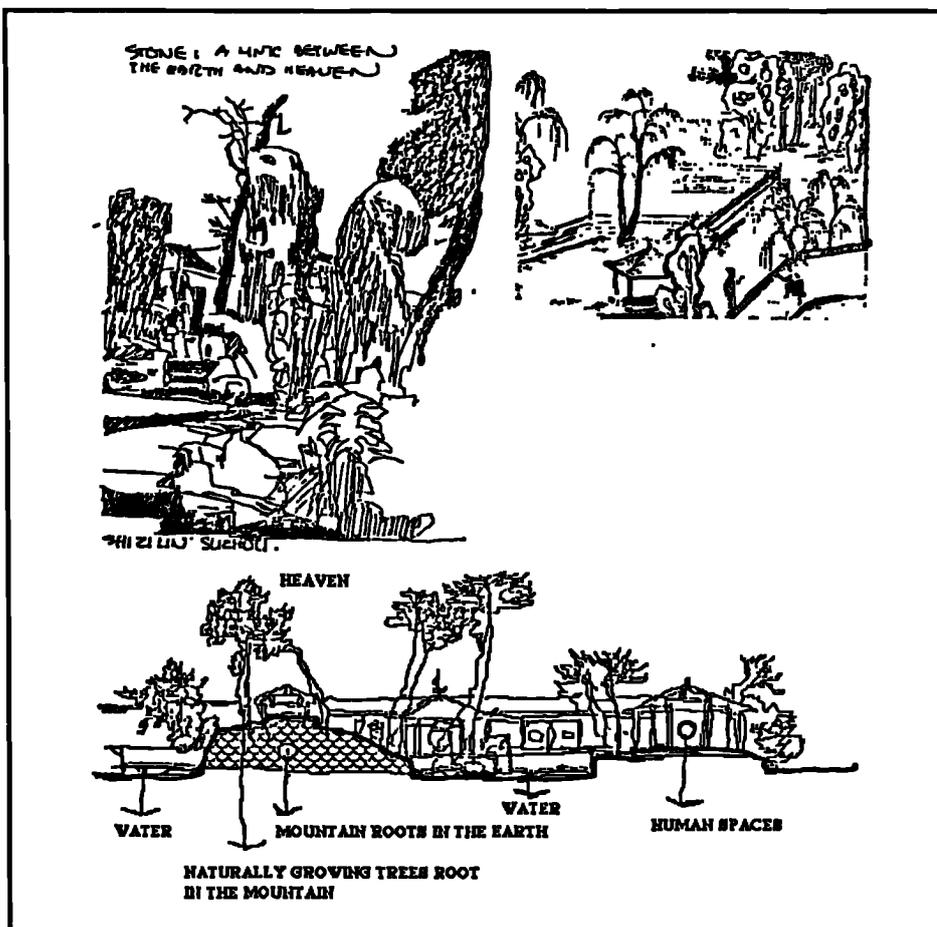


Fig. 10-4: MOUNTAIN: A vertical element which links EARTH and HEAVEN.

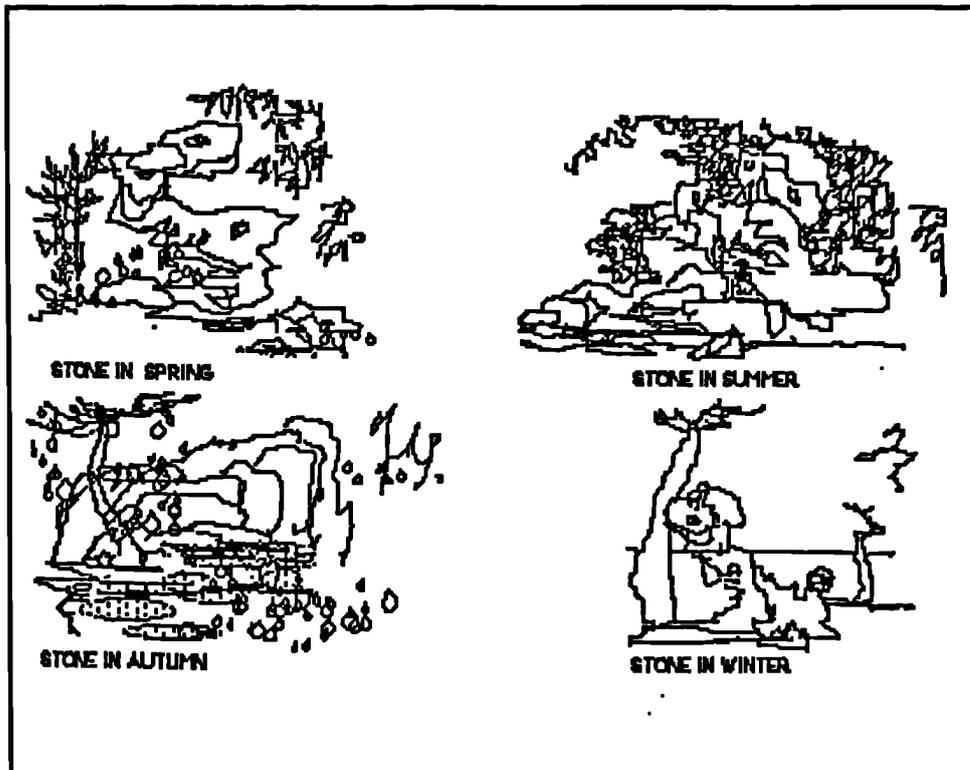


Fig. 10-5: A stone in four seasons.

Following the same principle; all sorts of natural things such as the movement of water, the joyful life of fish, the growing of trees, the blooming of flowers, the varying qualities and rich patterns of different surfaces have been repeated ingredients in Chinese garden and landscape design for centuries. A logical relationship between heaven, earth and man embodying natural laws of constant change and the interdependent relationship of myriad creatures has guided Chinese landscape design; the artistic forms do not merely follow functions, but a way of appreciating and understanding nature, the spirit, the general principle: 'Naturally So'.

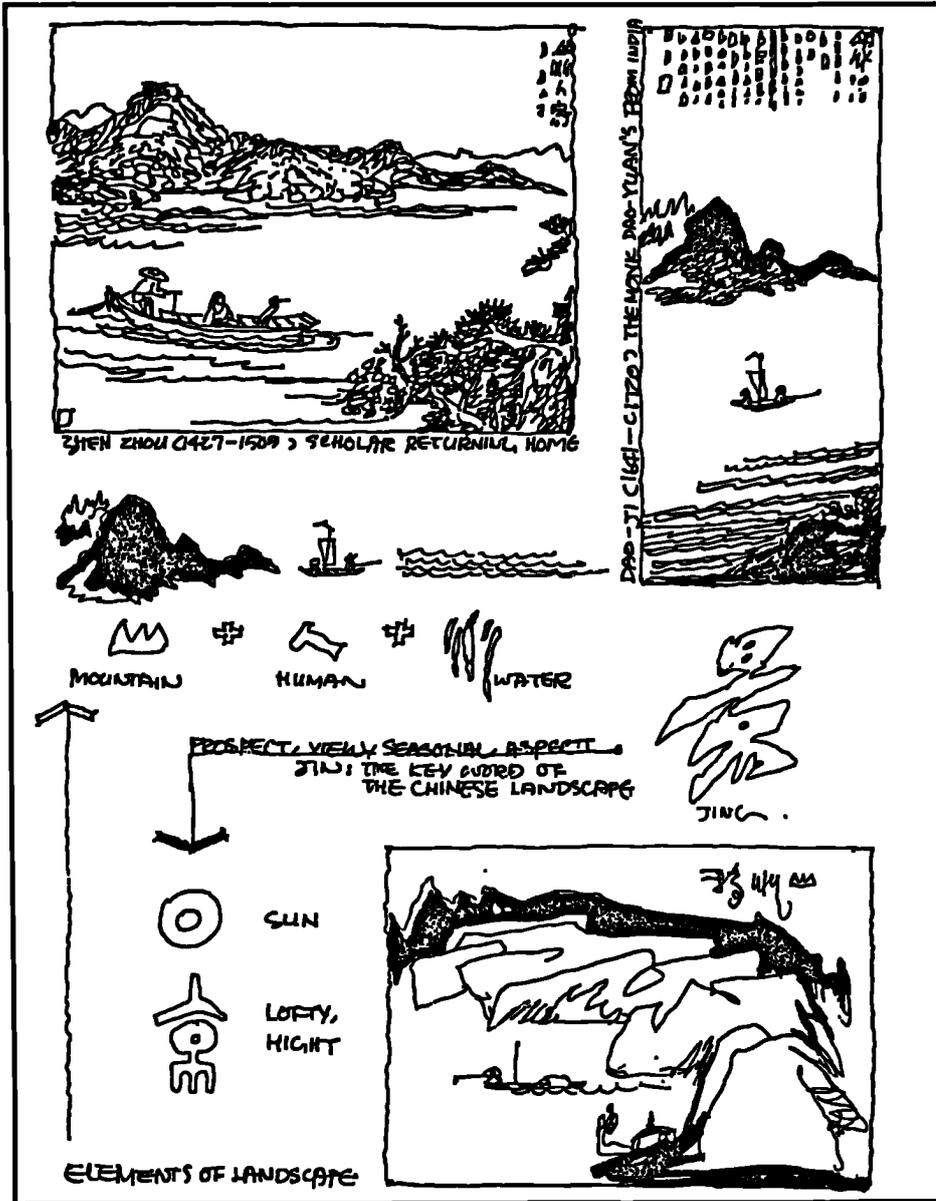


Fig. 10-6: Concept of Jing.



**10.2.**  
**HOME OF FEELING**  
**AN EXPLORATION OF ARTISTIC CONCEPTS**

Life is limited and everything is changing and temporary, but the universe is eternal. If discernment of Tao, and embodiment of Te are the aims of life, then the task of art is to voice the truth and express it honestly. Hence, to reveal the inner life of natural creations and grasp the meaning of life beyond secular events seems a more crucial task for the artists and designers than to record the “facts” seen or touched superficially.

-What is more, the real life experience of Chinese intellectuals especially in the Yuan, later Ming and Qing Dynasties were far from their aesthetic ideal as we have mentioned previously. For them, to locate feelings in nature and search for the inner link between man and mountain and water is to approach the greatest pleasure or consolation in life. To this end, painting Shan Shui and designing landscape were an intellectual action to find a spiritual refuge, a Home of Feeling, which involve the basic aesthetic ideas: **Liyi, Sense of Coherence and Yijing.**

Compared with philosophy, art is a concrete act in which all thoughts and passions interact; reason and feeling combine with each other. Since landscape design is an even more down to earth practice, the establishment of a concrete framework needs an even clearer visual concept, although searching for an artistic image needs a guiding principle from philosophy, such as ‘Naturally So’. In a Chinese term the search for an artistic concept is called **Liyi**. Such a concept need not involve ‘Naturalism’, which for Chinese intellectuals is thought of as poor taste. Similarly, the Chinese landscape is seen as a home of feeling, rather than a place to be shown off; and art is not for communication in the secular world, but a communication with that more pure and original world:



nature. Thus, an exploration of the way to express Yi (ideas) and Chi (spirit) has become the important task for both Chinese artists and designers, and the sense of coherence becomes a necessary base to develop their artistic concept.

The sense of coherence is the way to combine personal destiny with general natural phenomena and locate personal feeling in a general understanding of Tao. By so doing, one may achieve a psychological balance, discern the meaning of life, and taste the beauty of the universe: in short, find life itself and embody the meaning of being human. Thus, we may also reason that this is a kind of 'ecological' idea, another important point of view in Chinese landscape aesthetics which helps to justify the relationship between different landscape elements and man. Human feeling and natural beauty are not isolated or fragmented, but an aesthetically integrated phenomenon. A Jing (scenery), is not a still, framed image, but a refined picture related to seasonal changes and spiritual moods [Fig. 10-6]. Thus, a landscape can never be considered only in terms of visual aspects or limited by pictorial likeness.

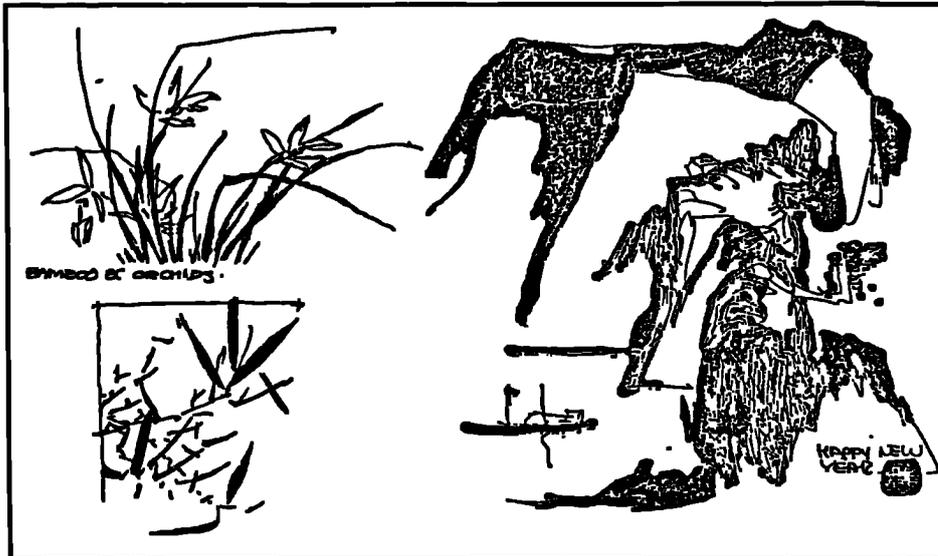
The concept of coherence means also the same truth of Tao, the myriad beautiful creatures, and the aloof guiding Te are unity. In other words, human feeling must associate with objective being to form the Chi (spirit) and rhyme in an artistic realm. To appreciate landscape is to seek not only pictorial forms, but the complete realm of universal coherence through the use of an expressive, even abstract artistic language. A formal likeness therefore is of secondary importance. A firm motivation to depict unexpected relationships and forms of all things emotionally such as different clouds, mists, lights, the fantastic structure and texture of peaks and rocks is thought of as the approach which will help to open one's 'inner eye', to observe and express landscape delights and human wisdom.

Attention to combining human feeling with the objective world has a decisive influence over the concept of landscape art. The concept of



**Yijing** therefore occupies a distinguished position in the mind of Chinese artists and landscape designers.

**Yijing**, a more concrete concept of Chinese aesthetics, is very difficult to translate into English and cannot be simply seen as a combination of Yi (idea) with Jing (realm or scenery), since a rich accumulation of human moods, feelings, emotions and philosophical views is behind the word. But it is because of the inclusive meaning of this term, that **Yijing** has become an extremely important category in Chinese aesthetics.



**Fig. 10-7:** Yijing: for the Chinese scenery without human sentiment has no value of existence.

With landscape, **Yijing** may result from observation of scenery, but this observation must have a strong spiritual sustenance. To the Chinese, scenery without human sentiment has no value of existence, since **Yijing**, as a primary goal of landscape art, is conditioned by both scenes and emotions [Fig. 10-7]. All beautiful things in the objective world such as



the colour of flowers, the purity of snow and the subtlety of moonlight are like beautiful words in the mind of a poet, awaiting to be ingeniously composed; only after such composing, “there is a picture in poetry and poetry in a picture”, will it be possible for the composer to set off the aesthetic charm of his art. Here, the high quality of the poet and an intense emotion are important prerequisites in the process of composition.

Similarly, landscape design is not merely a matter of setting up buildings, planting trees and flowers, or constructing an artificial mountain, but a means of revealing one’s attitude of life by displaying landscape aesthetically.

Although landscape design, painting and poetry may share common creative principles, design, as three dimensional work aiming at creating a place to meet the needs of appreciating scenery or carrying on certain activities and to meet particular restraints, is a very demanding job. Within a limited space, the designer has to use every possible means to stimulate the aesthetic associations of users [Fig. 10-8]. Therefore, such ideas as “the meaning beyond the words”, “the picture outside a picture”, or “few can surpass many” have especial value in helping to reach the qualities of richness and infinity in landscape.

In a limited space such traditional design skills as ‘borrowing scenery’ play an important role in spatial layout; so does the subtle use of invisible elements such as the fragrance of flowers, the bird-song, the sound of falling or running water as complementary spatial media. This reminds us of Laozi’s understanding of ‘Empty’.

“The way is empty, yet use will not drain it.  
Deep, it is the like the ancestor of the myriad creatures.” [7]

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<sup>7</sup> *Tao Te Ching*: IV, 11, P.60.



A parallel is that landscape design is not to make the place full but to create spaces which look “empty”, “yet use will not drain”; to be used as a source to promote association, to leave room to locate their feelings. This is not only an approach for overcoming the limitations of space, but also an important aesthetic standard for assessing the creative capability of a designer.

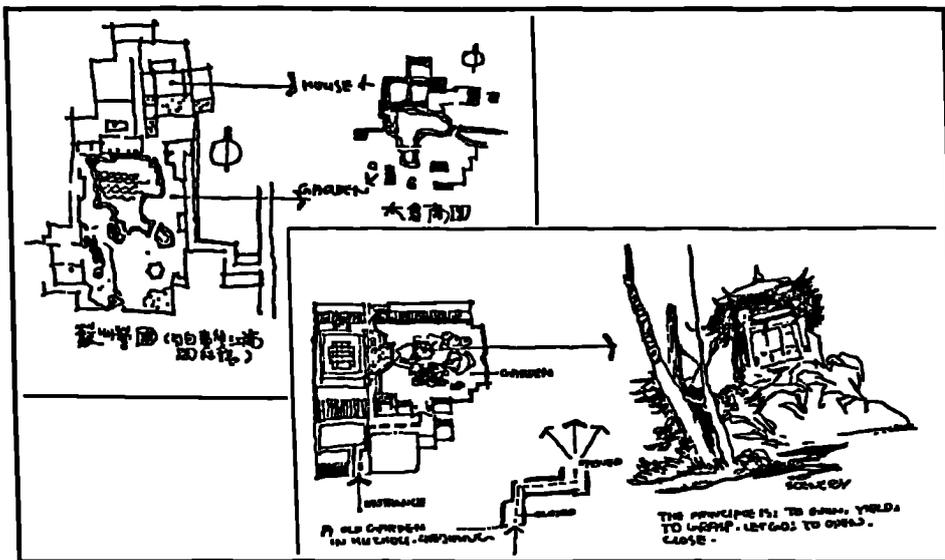


Fig. 10-8: A private garden in Huzhou (Project by Jiahua Wu, 1986). Within a limited space, the designer has to use every possible means to stimulate the aesthetic associations of users

A dialectical thinking and its landscape expression are the important part of Yijing which reflect the light of Tao, and play a major role in composing the symphony of poetic feeling and imaginative picture. We can therefore conclude that Yijing, as a sum of experiences, feelings and thoughts, is the highest realm of Chinese landscape art, which also reflects a profound philosophical connotation of Tao. It may be in the state of ‘Few’ or ‘Empty’, but also huge, spatial, and infinite. Still more important is that there is profound understanding of the world and life.



Thus, we can say that the search for Yijing related a knowing of the philosophical realm of Tao is a search for Home of Feeling.

### 10.3. THE TASTE OF HEAVEN

The Taste of Heaven is a characteristic category of Chinese aesthetics. Here we have two difficult words which need to be defined: Taste and Heaven. The word, Taste is not taken to mean the expression of a fashionable artistic trend, but as a continuous indication of profound artistic aspirations; the word Heaven, as a philosophical term, has a similar implication to the principle: 'Naturally So'. Both of them relate to the process of knowing and representing the essence of nature.

As the scholar Gaolian once declared in the Ming dynasty: "The taste of heaven is the spirit; the taste of man is livelihood; the taste of an object is a resemblance of the form of things." [8] Here, taste is ranked into three levels; the taste at highest level is a spirit in nature beyond that of things and human. In other words, Taste of Heaven is based on an understanding of the truth, reaching the essence rather than merely sensational perception; the cultivation of this taste relates not only to feeling but also to learning and discerning the truth of life. Thus, for achieving Taste of Heaven, a high intellectual discernment is needed:

"I do my utmost to attain emptiness;  
I hold firmly to stillness.  
The myriad creatures all rise together  
And I watch their return." [9]

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8 Author's translation, from Fun Zhongpin: *Chinese Landscape Architecture*, The Publishing House of Qinghua University, 1985. p.34.

9 *Tao Te Ching*: XV, 37, P.72.



Here “to attain emptiness” can be understood as the aim of learning, a highest state of knowing, i.e. to achieve vast and inclusive intellectual state rather than search for trivial knowledge; “I hold firmly to stillness”, as a peaceful manner of searching; “I watch their return”, as an intuitive and calm yet profound observation; all are the prerequisites of real learning. Why is it so? The answer is that in Laozi’s mind true knowledge may be the simplest but profound one: to know how “the Way (Tao) moves”. [10] The movement following the law of Tao is the essential natural phenomenon, the basic process of any kind of life.

Another essential problem related to cultivation of the Taste is the understanding of the concept of Nature. Like that in English, the word ‘nature’ for the Chinese is also a very difficult and somehow confusing.

Nature in Chinese is Ziran: Zi (beginning; self; certainly), Ran (yes; certainly), which means ‘certainly’, ‘self-existent’ or the beginning of the world is in the gesture with a certainty. In this sense, the word implies that the world has its own independent law of change in the way of ‘Naturally So’. Therefore, any kind of art reveals the Taste of Heaven, relates to the concept of Ziran and reflects the quality of the certainty. Conversely, things supposedly made without respecting the basic logic of “Man models himself on earth, Earth on heaven, Heaven on the way, and the way on that which is naturally so” are seen as something of extremely low taste; and there is no place for works done only for personal benefit or for flattering the small “god” in the realm of real art.

The Taste of Heaven requires artists to search for the expression of the profound outcome: what is experienced and discerned in their observations and meditations. The ideas of “Turning back to how the way moves” can be understood as to return to original purity and simplicity, to come close to the original feature of things; these qualities and artistic

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10 *Tao Te Ching*: XL, 88, p.101



manner are seen as an embodiment of the high Taste, for which there is no need to pretend.

Taking the theme in the poem by Cuihao for example:

“Tell me where you are from?  
On the river-bank is my home.  
Let us rowing no further,  
May be we're from the same town?” [11]

This is almost a conversation, but it is full of Yi, the poetic sense which is intimately depicted; there is a moving boat, flowing water, live figures. Here we can find that the simpler the words are, the stronger the feeling is; the simpler the image, the deeper the sympathy will be.

On landscape design, Tonjung, the author of a book called *A Record of the Chinese Gardens of South-River* once remarked: a great comfort and pleasure can be given by the moss-covered paths, the hillocks and ponds that resemble the natural landscape with faded colours.

As a complement to the principle of ‘Naturally So’, the idea to return to original purity and simplicity becomes a concrete approach for artists and designers seeking a realm of Quietness and Emptiness in order to escape from the chaos of secular life, to find their individuality, to discern the truth of Tao, to reveal their emotions in nature.

Taste relates also to manner of life. The life style was described by Tao Qen (Eastern Jin Dynasty, 317-420, one of the most disturbing ages in Chinese history) in his poem as:

“Planting the chrysanthemum under the eastern fence,  
The southern mountain is before my eyes

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11 Cuihao: *A Riverside Song*, Edited by Xu Yuanchong: *300 Tang Poems*, Hong Kong Branch of Shangwu Publishing house, 1987, p. 139.



As I raise my head.” [12]

This poetical scene reminds us of Virgil in the West in which the life manner is so calm that there is no burden from secular life. However, the Chinese intellectuals were not such happy men, but mostly escapists. In this sense, the Taste of Heaven has its inevitable inner linkage with realistic life, since by searching for and expressing this taste, intellectuals could voice their feelings and attitudes to life, even their political views. Meanwhile, by understanding that:

“If your mind is as deep as a ravine,  
The contentment of Te (virtue) will be forever with you.  
And you will return again to your Childhood.” [13]

A great solace could therefore be achieved through this “pure” mental state. Comparing this with the limited experience and short moments of happiness in the daily struggle, those idyllic scenes designed according to the Taste of Heaven can provide enormous comfort both physically and psychologically, since they reflect the great law, the essence of real life. That is why rustic, simple things are valued so highly in Chinese landscape art. Hence we may reason that great beauty can be revealed by a great simplicity, by which an infinite association may be evoked, a tremendous emotion can be contained.

To translate an abstract concept from the metaphysical realm to a concrete artistic means of conveying concrete aesthetic contents for achieving simplicity and roughness is certainly the most difficult task in a creative process. There is a Chinese phrase: Pin Dan Tain Zhen (plain + light or faded + innocent) which serves as a vehicle for linking theory with practice embodying the taste of heaven. It makes no sense if we simply

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12 Author's translation, Tao Qen (Eastern Jin Dynasty, 317-420) .

13 Author's translation, Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: XXVIII, 63.



translate this phrase from Chinese to English literally. What we can do is to demonstrate its meaning in several ways. Firstly, 'plain' or 'faded' here does not mean that things look dull, but refers to a refined simplicity and rusticity. Secondly, if we can appreciate the ordinary with innocent eyes; that is, an honest way of seeing the world, in which there is no preoccupation with distracting ideas but only with the object itself. This is not only the realm of art or landscape, but also of philosophy: a study of the pure essence of world itself. According to these standards, the practice of landscape art is a search for the truth, for refined expression, a rejection of any possible falseness. In a true work of art everything is delicately designed but 'Naturally So', modestly displayed, but rich in feelings and thoughts [Fig. 10-9]. Its manner is that of:

"One who knows does not speak;" [14]

Thus, in a garden, the path is covered by moss; the wooden structure is without paint; the rocky-hill hidden by trees; the plants against the white walls or windows ... Although it looks casual, everything is in its right place, nothing can be more or less, the whole thing is carefully managed as if made by 'Heaven'. There is no necessity of gorgeous pretense; everything should be 'Naturally So', enabling men to find themselves, find the real value and meaning of living.

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14 *Tao Te Ching*: LVI, 128, P.117.

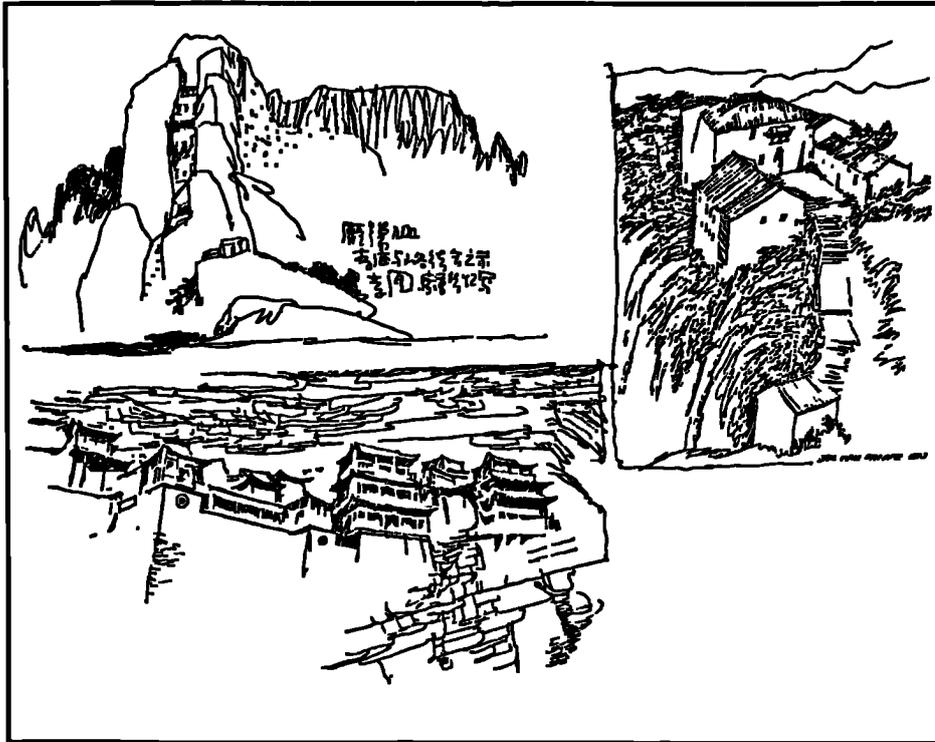


Fig. 10-9: 'Taste of Heaven' revealed in Chinese religious environmental designs.

## 10.4 METHODOLOGY OF TAO

"Straightforward words  
Seem paradoxical." [15]

The methodology is the most valuable part of Laozi's thoughts linking philosophy to practice.

Laozi discovered that things reverse and adjust to each other:

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15 *Tao Te Ching* LXXVIII, 189, P.140,



**“It is on disaster that good fortune perches;  
It is beneath good fortune that disaster crouches.” [16]**

**Thus, the beauty and the good are not absolute concepts, and also:**

**“The whole world recognizes the beautiful as the beautiful,  
yet this is only the ugly;  
The whole world recognises the good as the good,  
yet this is only the bad.**

**The relationships of interdependence and contradiction are  
fundamental:**

**Thus Something and Nothing produce each other;  
The difficult and the easy complement each other;  
The long and the short off-set each other;  
The high and the low incline towards each other;  
Note and sound harmonize with each other.” [17]**

**Perpetual change is a constant law and the completion of desirable  
change is through a progression from quantity to quality:**

**“A tree that can fill the span of a man's arms  
Grows from a silky bud;  
A terrace nine stores high  
Rises from hodfuls of earth;  
A journey of a thousand miles  
Starts from beneath one's feet.” [18]**

**This is not only essential for coping with life, but also for the  
search for ‘beauty’ and rejection of the ‘ugly’. Therefore, a logical grasp  
of the sense of coherence is crucial, since an integrated view will help**

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**16** *Tao Te Ching*: LVIII, 135, p.119.

**17** *Tao Te Ching*: XXI, 49, P.78.

**18** *Tao Te Ching*: II, 5, p.58.



artist and designer to observe, analyze and design a landscape in a complicated context.

In terms of strategy of observation, the first task is to understand the way things fit in the world. Here the idea of the harmonious balance of Yin and Yang is still crucial. As Laozi said:

**“Know the male but keep to the role of female.”**

which indicates the essential inner relationship between all creatures. For instance, Shan as the symbol of hard landscape cannot exist without the co-existence of the symbol of soft landscape, Shui. Between human beings living, a peaceful life very much depends on this balance. That is why the theme: ‘Between mountain and water’ has steadfastly remained in Shan Shui art and has been a basic pattern for centuries in Chinese gardens.

The way of observation suggested by Laozi means seeing between concepts such as Something and Nothing, beauty and ugliness, shrinking and stretching, weakened and strengthen ... which pays more attention to the invisible structure and the inter-relationship of objective beings.

Also Laozi always links the observation of phenomena to the basis of his philosophy, such as:

**“The myriad creatures all rise together  
And I watch their return.  
The teaming creatures,  
All return to their separate roots.  
Returning to one’s roots is known as stillness.  
This is what is meant by returning to one’s destiny.” [19]**

Along with the action of observation, a conscious knowing process is developed at same time. Since things “all rise together”, the diversity of

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19 *Tao Te Ching: XVI, 37, p.72.*



forms of life is an important fact. Thus, a careful and intimate observation is needed; yet keeping “still”, being always aware of the roots of the myriad creatures, is also necessary for seeing through the diverse natural phenomena to understanding the essence of the world “by returning to one’s destiny”, to perform a true observation and understand the law of constant change, then to refine his forms from the raw materials.

Therefore we can reason that to see through superficial forms in seeking the inner invisible structures and essential relationships behind all phenomena; to approach the core of landscape itself; to discover the spatial relationships of design elements; all this becomes the main task of professional landscape analysis.

- Remembering this, the search for natural beauty becomes a synthetic mental activity, and a great deal of effort must be put into the process. So, in the minds of Chinese artists and designers, there is something between likeness and unlikeness, similar and dissimilar which is right for the artistic image. Hence, in spite of limitations of all sorts, in Shan Shui art or landscape design a piece of strange stone can be used to suggest a real peak; a naturally flowing stream, a torrential river; an artificial pond, a surging ocean; a old tree trunk, a towering tree; a few pieces of withered and yellow leaves, autumn or a sign of sadness, since the most important thing in the artistic process is to express and evoke the understanding and associations.

Art in Chinese minds is neither a simple record of objective impressions, nor a collage made at will. Art, as the outcome of observation, analysis of the inner world and external beings, and the discernment of natural law, is the expression of the essence of nature. With help of this integrated view, the nature observed by designers is diverse, ordered and interlinked with the whole.

Also as previously mentioned , Chinese art is neither conceptual nor naturalistic. The beauty of nature in the mind of the designer lies in

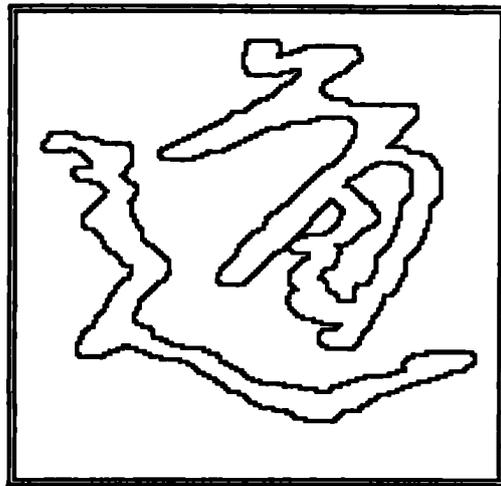


subtle relationships of all sorts of contradictory factors (Yin and Yang) and the general atmosphere of Chi (vital spirit) and rhyme. Naturally Shan Shui art can provide systematic references for landscape design; all the achievements of the study of the Six Principles or the Six Necessities can also help the designer to sort out the issues of design methodology. [20] In fact, many outstanding landscape practitioners were famous Shan Shui painters, as referred to Chapter 6: Mifu, Yizan, and Wen Zhenming. It was Shan Shui artists and many anonymous designers and craftsmen who inherited the thoughts of ancient Chinese philosophy and transferred the abstract aesthetic ideas to design practice.

In short, the principle, 'Naturally So', defines the general approach to landscape art and design; Yijing concerns the harmonious relationship between sentiment and scenery setting the approach to the home of feeling; the Taste of Heaven has suggested an 'innocent' manner for observing, appreciating and designing landscape. All these aesthetic ideas derived from Tao at the core of expressing the quality of nature and have manifested the relationship between Tao and design methods and decisively influenced the design methods of the Chinese school of landscape design.

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20 See Chapter 6 on Shan Shui





# 11

## TAO & DESIGN METHODS

What we focus on here is a study of Chinese design methodology. According to the general design process, the development of our discussion is from layout of a landscape to the final touch of a complete design, from site study to decorative details. As a complete design system, all aesthetic standards have been embodied in concrete design skills, i.e. the Chinese way of organizing space, defining size and justifying position. The topics are as follows:

Layout and Yi  
Beyond the Boundary  
The ZIGZAG Way  
CHI: A Communication Medium  
Something from Nothing  
Scattering  
Chinese Pictorial Flavour

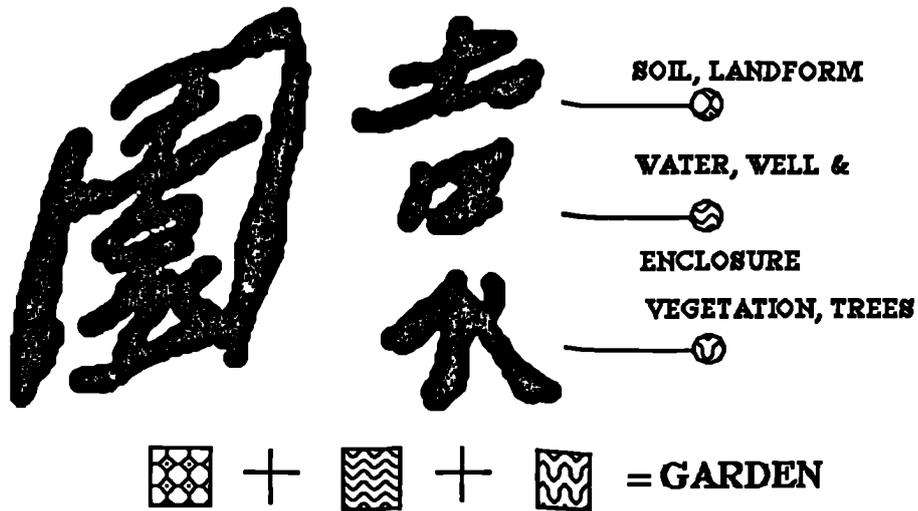


Fig. 11-1: The Chinese Word 'Yuan': GARDEN

## 11.1 THE LAYOUT AND YI

In the creation of a work of art, one selects the forms to express certain feelings or meanings. Artistic forms are transferred from real images to that of artistic concepts conditioned by a specific time and place. In the search for concrete artistic images, the establishment of a concept can be seen as an abstract stage in which the ideas of Tao exert subtle influence.

On Shan Shui theory, Zhan Yianyuan once suggested: "To have an idea must come before moving the brush." As a starting point and leading stage of landscape design, the concept of Yi (idea, motivation) again is the key. Although Yi may vary with different designers and



places, the general aim of the art and design is never change aiming at embodying the understanding of life and nature.

On the design itself, its three dimensional character distinguishes it from painting; the spaces need to be described by a totally different design language. The requirement to meet the needs of human activities, to co-ordinate natural conditions and surroundings, etc., will raise many spatial problems about both design thinking and practice. Thus, Yi of a landscape design has its own special complexities.

The Chinese traditionally call a garden Yuan [Fig. 11-1], a man-made place for recreation. According to Tongjun (1984), Yuan includes three elements: I. flowers, trees and a fish pond; II. buildings; III. an artificial mountain [1]. The first are natural things; the second, human-made; the third, between nature and human, since the mountain must be in a natural form but made following man's construction technique. A general Yi can be deduced from these essential elements: a desire to combine 'Heaven, Earth and Man'. In the end, design thinking cannot be understood instead by general principles. Here, the basic aesthetic standards for the design practice are needed. Generally, they are:

- I. Fitness
- II. Meandering
- III. Richness.

Reviewing Xehe's 'Six Principles', [2] the fifth principle was "Management of position". However in landscape design it becomes the first principle, because spatial relationships are the most basic and decisive factors to fit things in a place. The concept of Fitness can be both abstract

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1 Tongjun (1984): *A Record of the Gardens of the South of the River*, The Publishing House of Chinese Building Industry. p.16, p.23, p.47.  
2 See chapter 6.



and concrete. At the broadest level, there are spatial proportional and atmospheric problems which, when related to layout of landscape, are crucial and directly influence the general response to a designed place.

On the other hand, spacing and justifying interrelationships is a very practical procedure in order to achieve the Fitness. For instance, if there are too many built things in a designed landscape, the intense secular atmosphere will destroy the restrained quality of the Taste of Heaven; If there is a lack of facilities such as corridors, furniture, or a pavilion, people may feel uncomfortable, and then wonder why they do not go somewhere else instead. Equally important is the relationship between design elements such as the spatial sequence, distance between focal elements, visual linkage of spaces, proportion of enclosures and openings, contrast of light and shadow, provision for circulation, variation of hard and soft materials. In short, to create appropriate spatial effect, a clear system which relates to such basic Chinese landscape design ideas such as Beyond the Boundary, Chi, A Communication Medium, Scattering, Pictorial Flavour, etc. and provides for movement and association is essential.

The term Meandering may simply mean serpentine, zigzagging, but in Chinese landscape design, it tends to mean the indirect way of design expression, an issue of communication which relates to important design concept described as The ZIGZAG Way.

Richness is of course a general and desirable quality of any designed place, but the Chinese approach to it is very subtle in its relation to the opposite extremes of 'Emptiness' and 'Simplicity'. These approaches all have their methodological base in Laozi's thoughts:

"Hence some things lead and some follow;  
Some breathe gently and some breathe hard;  
Some are strong and some are weak;



some destroy and some are destroyed.” [3]

## 11.2 BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

Boundaries of used land are inevitable, since the land is limited. This is much the situation in China, particularly in the south-east part and urban areas, where landscape layout strategies may be conditioned by existing boundaries. Confronting this limitation of land, the sense of Beyond the Boundary becomes important as an approach to the wider spatial context, which may influence the design quality generally. The idea of Beyond the Boundary means to design a place with a sense of breaking through site limits. It is a very practical way of enhancing the relationship between the designed environment and its surroundings.

When we lay out a garden, our concern about spatial arrangements cannot be limited to one-sided thinking about the inner spaces only; the influence of the inner spaces and outer or related spaces on each other is the key issue coped with at this design stage. This is not a simple composition problem, but one related to the whole quality of the environment; even a private garden which acts as an extension of daily living space must be seen as an integral part of the whole housing complex. Usually the boundaries are already made by the layout of a building complex which is drawn in very novel ways to meet the spatial needs, or may be very rigid, dull and lacking in a ‘green sense’. The site ready-made boundaries are sometimes sorry against the principle of “Taste of Heaven”. The idea of Beyond the Boundary is to overcome this problem leading to the development of high design skills in screening or modifying existing boundaries by means of basic landscape design

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3 *Tao Te Ching: XXIX, 67, p.87.*



elements such as plants, artificial mountains, or small, carefully proportioned constructions. By use of these devices, working between outside and inside spaces, designers have both manipulated the features of a city and enriched the 'pictures' within an enclosed garden. The boundary itself can be designed by plants or other features of 'neutral' quality to make it a part of scenery, beautifying the inner and external space at the same time [Fig. 11-2].

A typical example in Chinese landscape design is a garden called 'Chang Lang Pavilion' in Suzhou. There, the boundary between the city and the designed landscape is made by a winding canal, zigzagging extended corridors and scattered pavilions and trees along the canal. This combination of different objects divides the garden space from the city, also provides a piece of beautiful townscape for people passing by. Therefore, the spaces enter each other, the boundary between the garden and the city seems to disappear. This is wonderful for those having to live in the urban environment [Fig. 11-3].

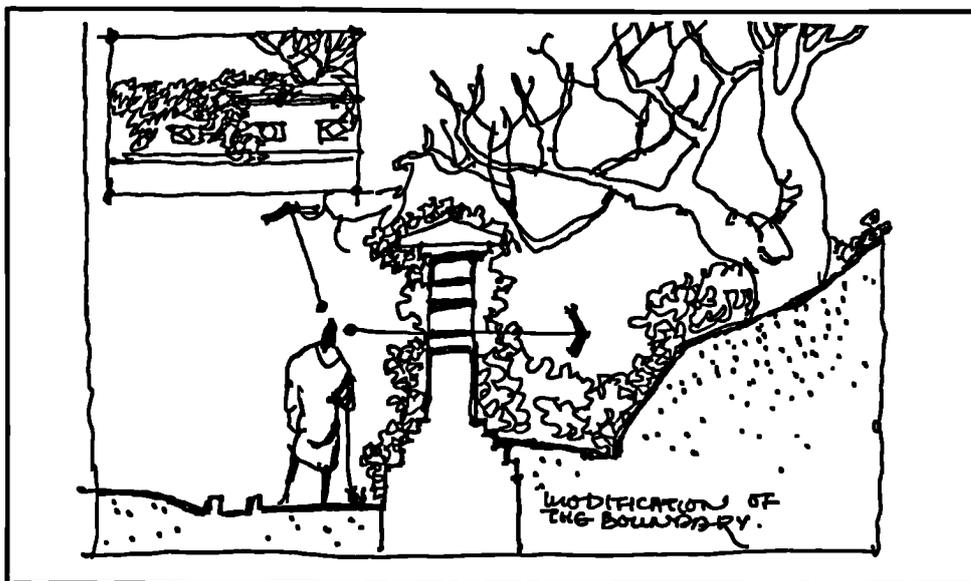


Fig. 11-2: Modification of the boundary.

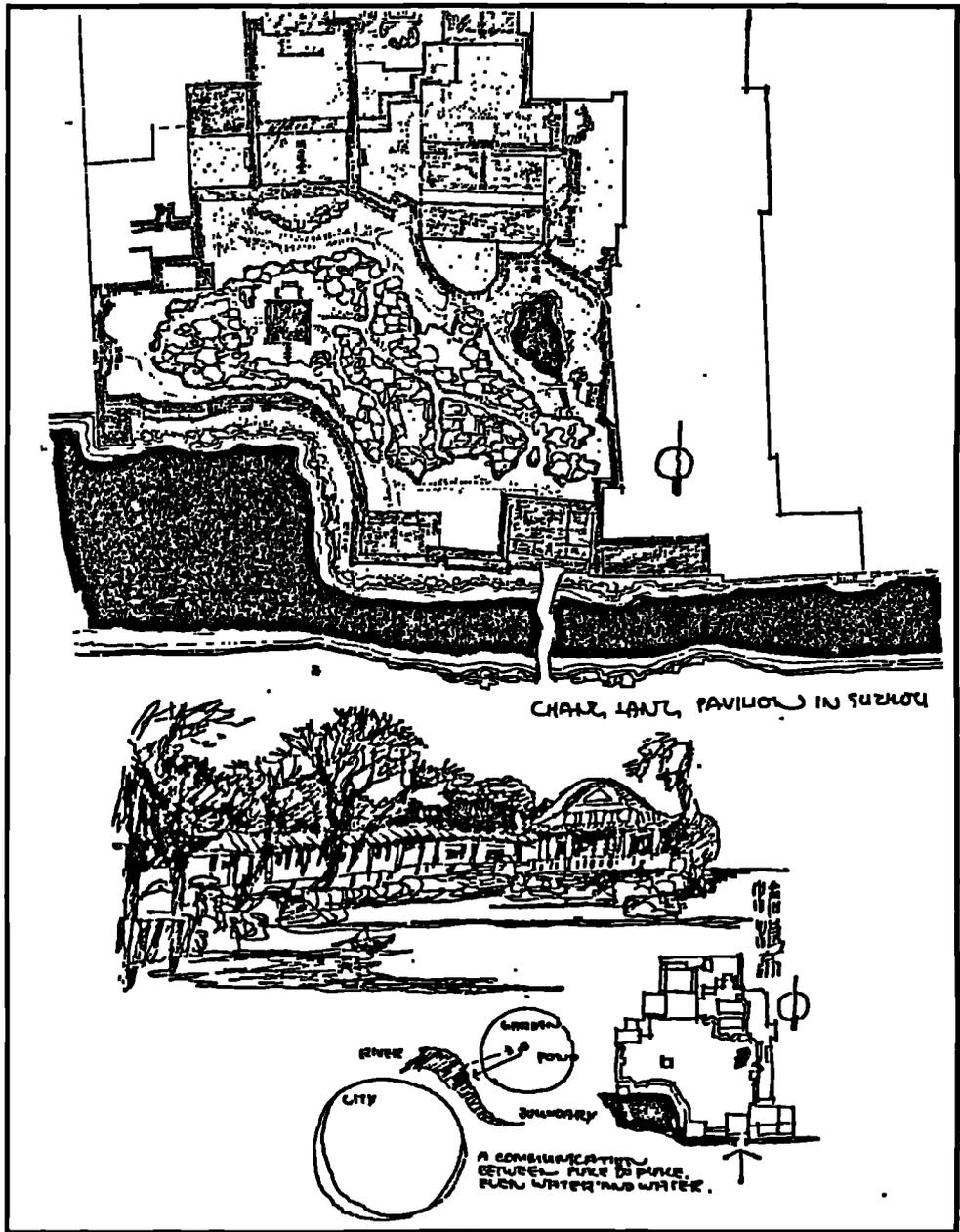


Fig. 11-3: Lanchan Garden, Suzhou, China

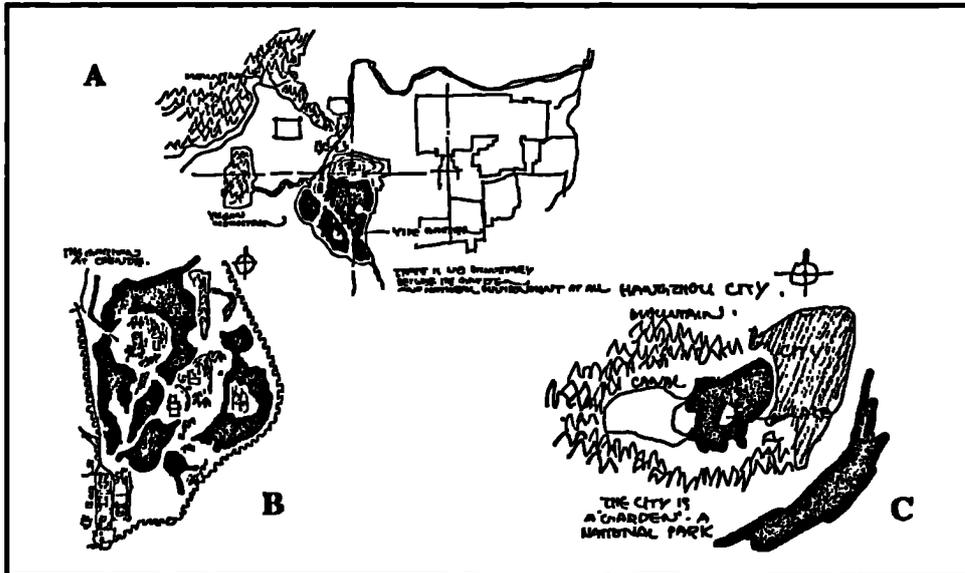


Fig. 11-4: A: Yihe Garden, B: The Summer Palace, C: The Layout of Hangzhou City.

The boundary on a large-scale designed landscape is less structured than that of a private garden, since this kind of landscape is usually in a rural area and occupies a large amount of land. But the sense of Beyond the Boundary is still important for controlling the general relationship between the designed place and its surroundings. The key is to make different parts echo each other by means of framing, borrowing from the scenery around and displaying beautiful man-made landmarks or symbolic features effectively in relation to it. Chinese emperors' gardens such as Yihe Yuan in Beijing and the Summer Palace in Chende are typical. In the largest of designed landscapes, remote mountains are seen as a part or background of the whole scenery; the water in the designed place is connected with a canals or rivers beyond; different land forms are used as an extension of the natural structure. There is almost no break between the designed space and the natural one. In the old capital of the Southern Song Dynasty Lingan (now Hangzhou), the whole city was built around



the West lake and surrounded by the mountains. In the western part of Hangzhou in particular, there is natural landscape within the townscape, city within landscape, providing an excellent demonstration of traditional ideas of Chinese landscape and urban design. So, the idea 'Beyond the Boundary' is not only an idea for landscape design, but also for town-planning and site planning, etc.; it is admired as the highest ideal in all such design profession [Fig. 11-4].

Meanwhile the idea of Beyond the Boundary is also an efficient means for managing inner spaces. The inner spaces of a garden or large landscape are functionally divided and linked. They contain spatial layers, screens, necessary built features; they are characterised by water, stone, soil, plants, sound, light, and even smell. If these identify a place properly, the boundaries left can be clear or ambiguous. Yet principally they should work with the space, manipulated by the way of Beyond the Boundary. When designing a small landscape this is particularly crucial to achieve spatial richness and meet the needs of organizing activities. To do so, a high skill, imagination and sensitivity 'using' the boundaries are essential. For instance, in a place called 'Small Flying Rainbow' in Zhozhen garden (Suzhou), a roofed corridor over the pond divides a water area into two parts. Seen from the relatively large water area, the corridor displays itself as a half transparent screen, invites views and half hides the place behind, increasing the spatial layers, creating a sense of depth. Within the smaller area of the water, there is an enclosed, relatively quiet, private and furnished place where people can stop, rest, gossip, think or meditate. The function of 'Small Flying Rainbow' is simple, only a bridge for passing through; but the design is extremely skilled, since here a rich aesthetic experience is given by a simple wooden structure [Fig. 11-5].

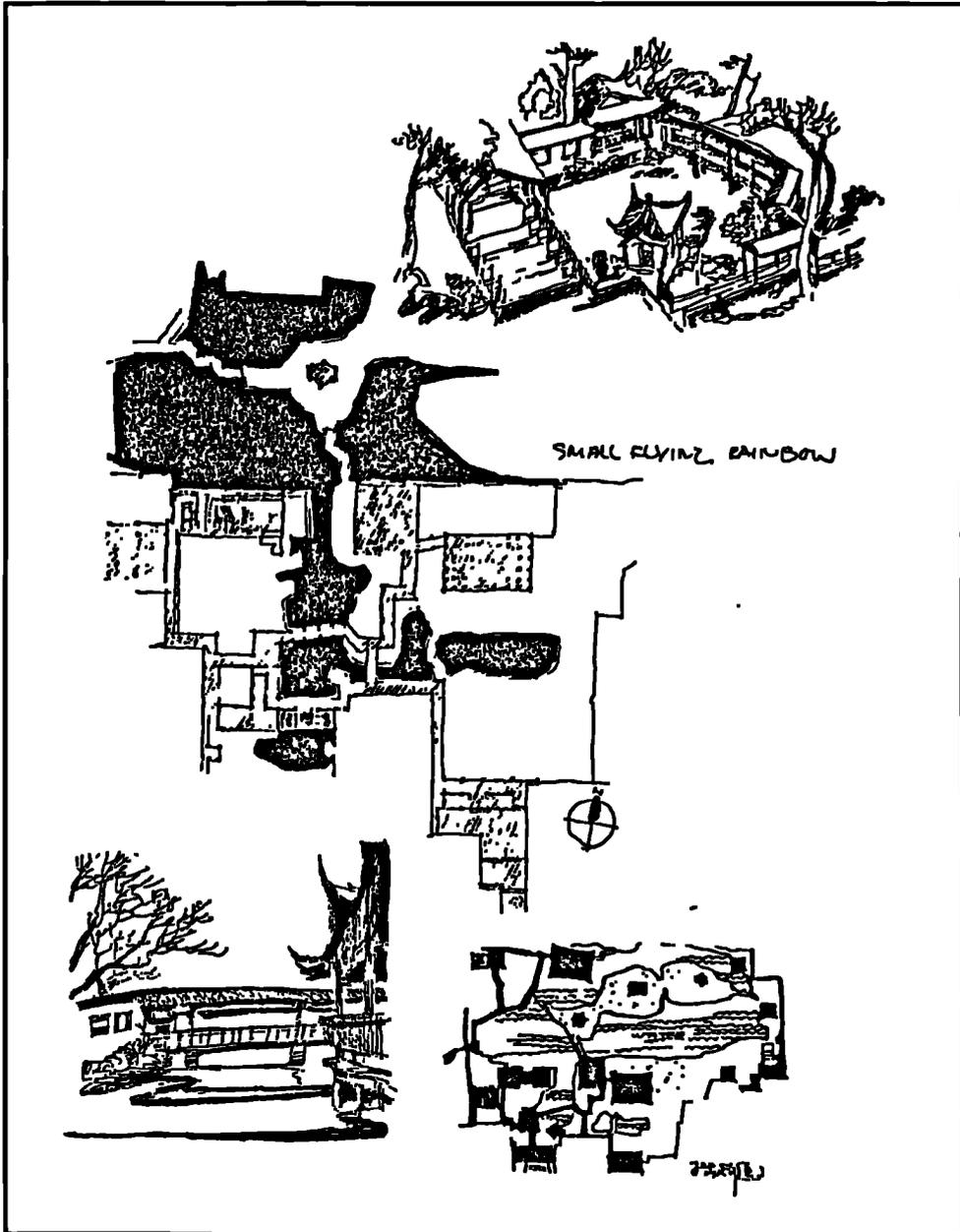


Fig. 11-5: 'Small Flying Rainbow', Zhozhen Garden, Suzhou, China.



We cannot deny boundaries, since we need them and make them; we try to go beyond the boundaries because we are too aware of their existence and the problems they cause. This is why the concept of 'Beyond the Boundary' is not simply a kind of design skill, but a part of design philosophy. Associating with Laozi's thinking, it is:

**"The way of heaven  
Excels in overcoming though it does not contend." [4]**

It is true that the way to achieve a successful inner spatial effect is not to contend with the surroundings or even destroy them; an agreeable consensus between the two sides, and profound skills to convert disadvantage into advantage are needed. Giving more concern to the outside may have benefits inside; by working beyond the boundary, one may gain richness inside. Again as Laozi said:

**"The more one gives to others, the richer one will be." [5]**

### **11.3 THE ZIGZAG WAY**



Bearing in mind the limitations and thinking 'Beyond the Boundary', the general relationship between the designed place and its

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<sup>4</sup> *Tao Te Ching*: LXXIII, 179, p.135

<sup>5</sup> Author's translation referring to Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: LXXXI, 195, p.142, translated by D. C. Lau, (Penguin Books, England. 1976.).



surroundings forms an important base for taking the design concept further. The next question is how to fit things into a place and how to determine the position of different elements. Here, Chinese artists and designers prefer the way of expressing their ideas indirectly, i.e. ‘the Zigzag way’, which is an implicit manner displaying things and leaves room for people to form their own associations.

An outstanding painter, Hang Binhong once said: “The more zigzag the way is, the deeper the scenery looks.” Sharing the same principle, those well known ideas such as “The winding path approaches the secluded and peaceful place.” and “The scenery is changing, when the foot is moving.” have been practiced often by Chinese landscape designers and have become the law in landscape design.

It must be understood that “The Zigzag Way” refers not just to a line of movement but to the ever charming relation of objects arising from this approach. For instance, Shan and Shui, the symbols of hard and soft landscape, are formed or embraced each other in an inter-folding manner. In a designed landscape not only the paths may zigzag, but the bridge, the banks, the falling water, the corridors, the vines, the tree trunks — almost everything shares the same posture. The landscape features differ from each other, changing along with different seasons, angles of views, shadows and lights. Being aware of this, constant change has also become a law for Chinese designers. Hard features such as steps, corridors, buildings, artificial mountains or groups of rockeries and the soft features such as waters, plants and green surfaces are designed following both the zigzag way and the law of constant change. They all look free, but depend on each other, exist because of each other, display themselves through their relations with each other [Fig. 11-6 and Fig. 11-7].

Functionally, by using the zigzag way, views are invited to various designed spots, and so scenes are gradually discovered in the process of moving, and thereby the dynamic quality of nature is suggested



everywhere. Meanwhile, the zigzag way can also help to create different layers of the spaces, prolong the path, guide behavior by suggesting directions or stopping for a moment to contemplate. It evokes a sense of spaciousness and infiniteness by breaking through the limitations of space. At the same time, it can encourage the subjective, aesthetic response of visitors and allow them to participate in an exploratory intellectual activity, achieving high aesthetic enjoyment.

Although there is no formula or pattern which a designer can apply, coping from one place to another, the guiding principle of the Zigzag Way remains fundamental, testing the designer's capacity for observation, thought, and application regarding specific sites, land form, vegetation, and human needs. Thus, the so-called Free Style of Chinese landscape design is actually very rational, and not so free as the title suggests. In fact, nothing is designed freely. In an indirect expression of any art, particularly that of landscape design, there is a refined, delicately organized artistic image.

'The Zigzag Way' increases the possible levels of appreciation, making the beauty of the landscape into something dynamic, yet not easily touched. This is what Laozi meant by:

"Bowed down then preserved;  
Bent then straight."



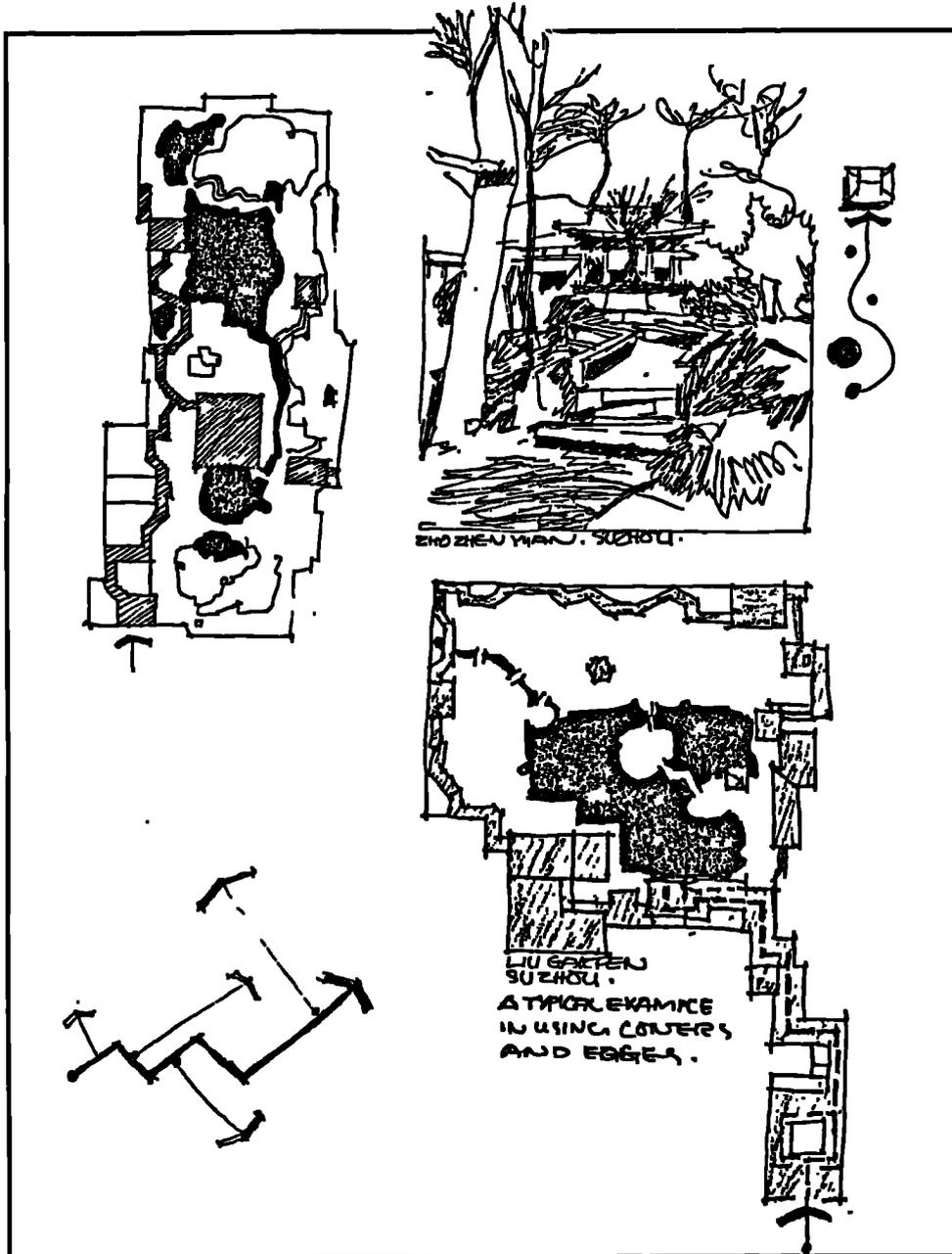


Fig. 11-7: 'The Zigzag Way' in designed landscape.



**11.4.**  
**CHI [6]:**  
**A COMMUNICATION MEDIUM**



As referred to in the section of 'Ideas and Art', in the theory of Shan Shui painting, the first of the Six Principles is a concern with Chi, referring to the breath or air of a painting. But in the area of traditional Chinese philosophy, Chi refers to the essence of the whole world, which can be both spiritual and substantial. There were many historical arguments about the understanding of Chi.

According to Laozi:

"The myriad creatures carry on their back the Yin and embrace in their arms the Yang, and are the blending of the generative force (Chi) of the two." [7]

Here, Chi in the original writing of Laozi has been translated as a "generative force", which has far less meaning than the original word. Fortunately, nowadays Chi has become a very popular word in the West, due to its association with Chinese medicine and Kungfu which are widely practiced. Thus, we can use the original word directly in our discussion of landscape design. Based on a brief but clear understanding that Chi, as

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6 Chi, according to the Chinese Pinyin System, is Qi.  
7 *Tao Te Ching*: XLII, 93, 94.



both breath of things and a force 'Blending' Yin and Yang, serves to be a medium to embody Tao.

When standing on a level surrounded by the thoughts of this great Chinese thinker, we may feel so excited by the revelation of the meaning of Chi, we immediately seem to have found another key to open the mystical door of Chinese art, in particular that of Chinese landscape. Following Laozi, the universal way to approach Yin Yang balance is through the channel from Tao to Chi and then Chi functions as the medium for constructing the balance; and through this balance we can see the harmony of the world.

As mentioned before, the stone used by Chinese designers is half artificial and half natural, serving as the medium in landscape design for embodying certain functions of Chi.

To demonstrate this, the way the Chinese use water in design is even more characteristic. Water in a Chinese landscape, particularly in the traditional garden, is an absolutely essential element. First, it is the symbol of the stream, river, even the ocean. Then it can be used to create places made full of movement and happiness by its rippling and falling and the rhythms of its sound; and by the movements of fish, foliage and so on. At the same time, designers may attempt to create tranquil corners for resting, thinking and playing by use of shadowed water under trees, pavilions, or the water around islands. The use of water for such functions is easily understood. However, in terms of methodology, such features in the landscape are not so simple.

The most profound meaning of water in the landscape is as a spatial medium with a crucial role in promoting communication between one place and another. It can occur in varied locations throughout a garden or wider landscape on different scales. The link between these different areas of water can be established by bridges or suggested by certain land forms such as the extension of banks, islands in different size



but echoing each other from different spots or even through artificial wells. [8] People can easily reach different parts of a garden or park by boat or by walking along the banks. They enjoy the landscape by establishing associations about the whole landscape through the suggestions of one body of water relating to another, enabling a complete sense of coherence of a landscape to be built up in their minds. This way of emphasizing the linkage, coherence, and interdependent relationships of the various parts and landscape features honours the vital spirit of nature, and is guided by principles derived from an understanding of the concept of Chi [Fig. 11-8].

In order to achieve this aim, to gain the right spirit in a designed landscape, the overall consideration is that of the vital “breath”. Just like the human body, a place has its breath, blood and veins which connect the different parts, to maintain its life and full function. Here, Chi is a crucial medium that can unite different parts of the “body” of a designed place both visually and physically. For instance, in Wanshi garden, the Chi (the “vein”) goes through the whole central part by a substantial visual link between the delicately arranged pavilions, corridors and shelters. In Zhozhen garden, the water defines the layout of the whole garden and is the primary medium used to unify the “tone” of whole complex; the water circulating inside the spaces is like blood flowing in a body, keeping every corner alive. In the same way, the corridors in these gardens “flowing” along the designed circulation, and serve as a transferring element to organize the inner spaces, providing viewing points and establishing communication between people and scenery .

To some extent, to design a landscape is similar to composing a play on stage. The plot should be interestingly composed and reasonably complicated (the whole story may be developed in ‘The Zigzag Way’), but the characters must register their typical individualities. The assurance for

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8      A well in Chinese garden can be both a functional and symbolic element.



achieving these artistic effects and promoting a desirable empathy between the play and its audience, depends mostly on clear and understandable communication between actors through their “colourful” and meaningful dialogue and body language. As a comparable way, the so-called communication between different landscape elements involves a ‘Resonance’ between different parts or objects which in effect makes the landscape “speak” to its visitors. To have a dialogue with nature, to promote communication between people and designed places is a difficult task facing those in design. Here, the manner of arranging mountain and water discussed above indicates that the layout of a clear sequence from the prologue to the end, the control of the general outline, the variation of different parts, the delicately designed dramatic climax in the whole scene, the caring for necessary details, all need a sense of Chi: a sense of coherence, continuity of vital spirit and an unpretentious, modest manner.

Communication between different landscape elements is the deeper structure of Chinese landscape design. Based on this understanding, basic landscape elements function not only simply as the objects needed for making up a scenery, but a living thing talking to people. The value of scenery in any kind of landscape design cannot be revealed in isolation, but by its harmonious communication with others and with people. This is the very special aesthetic contribution by traditional Chinese landscape design to the design philosophy of the world, through which a designer can make spatial relationships alive; it brings out the vital spirit in the ordinary; in short, it performs the process from Tao to Chi, Chi to substantial aesthetic feelings, in achieving the harmonious balance between Ying and Yang with a sense of coherence in the way of Naturally So [Fig. 9- and Fig. 11-10].

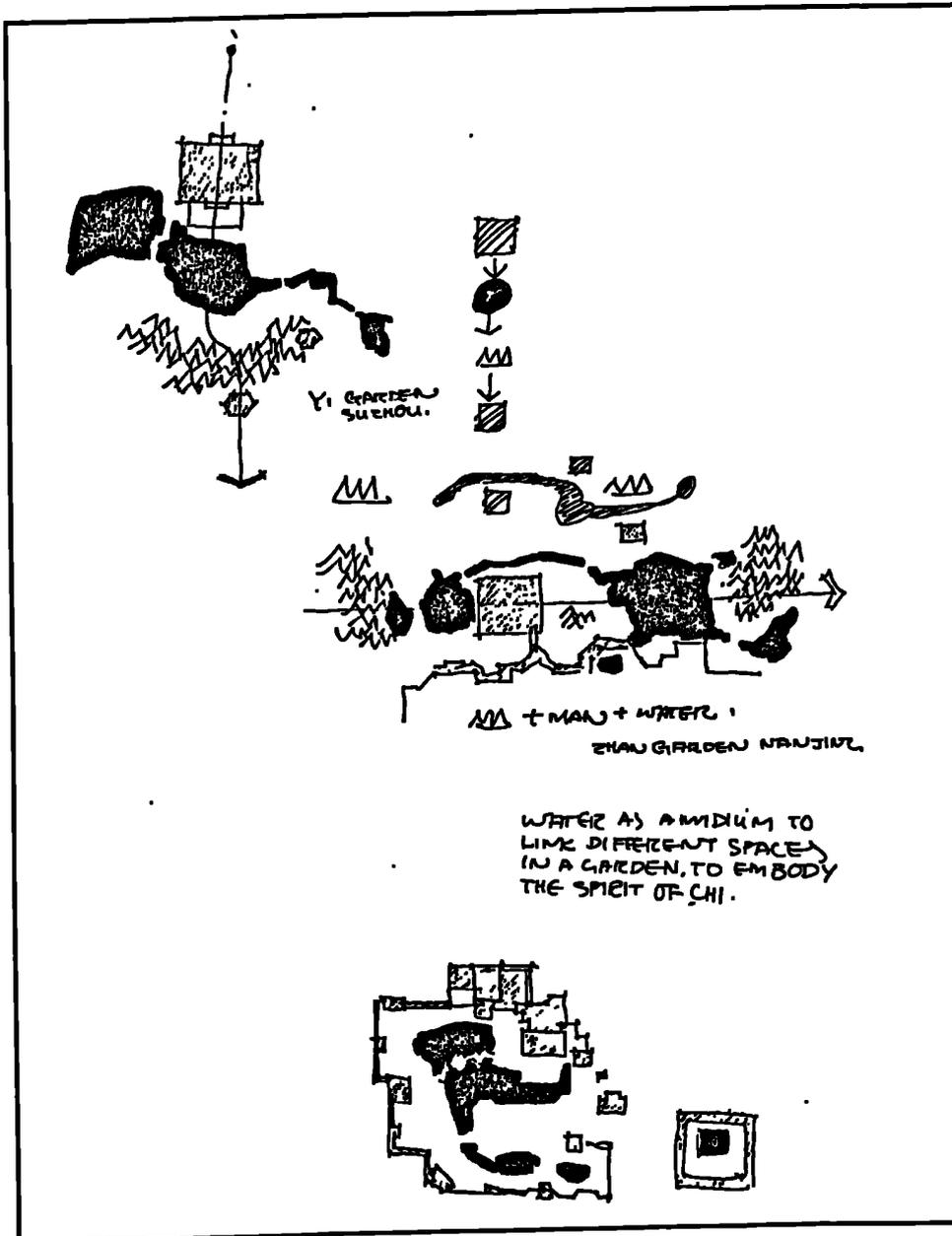


Fig. 11-8: WATER as a design medium may link the so-called Chi; emphasize 'Sense of Coherence' and interdependent relationships of various parts in a designed landscape.

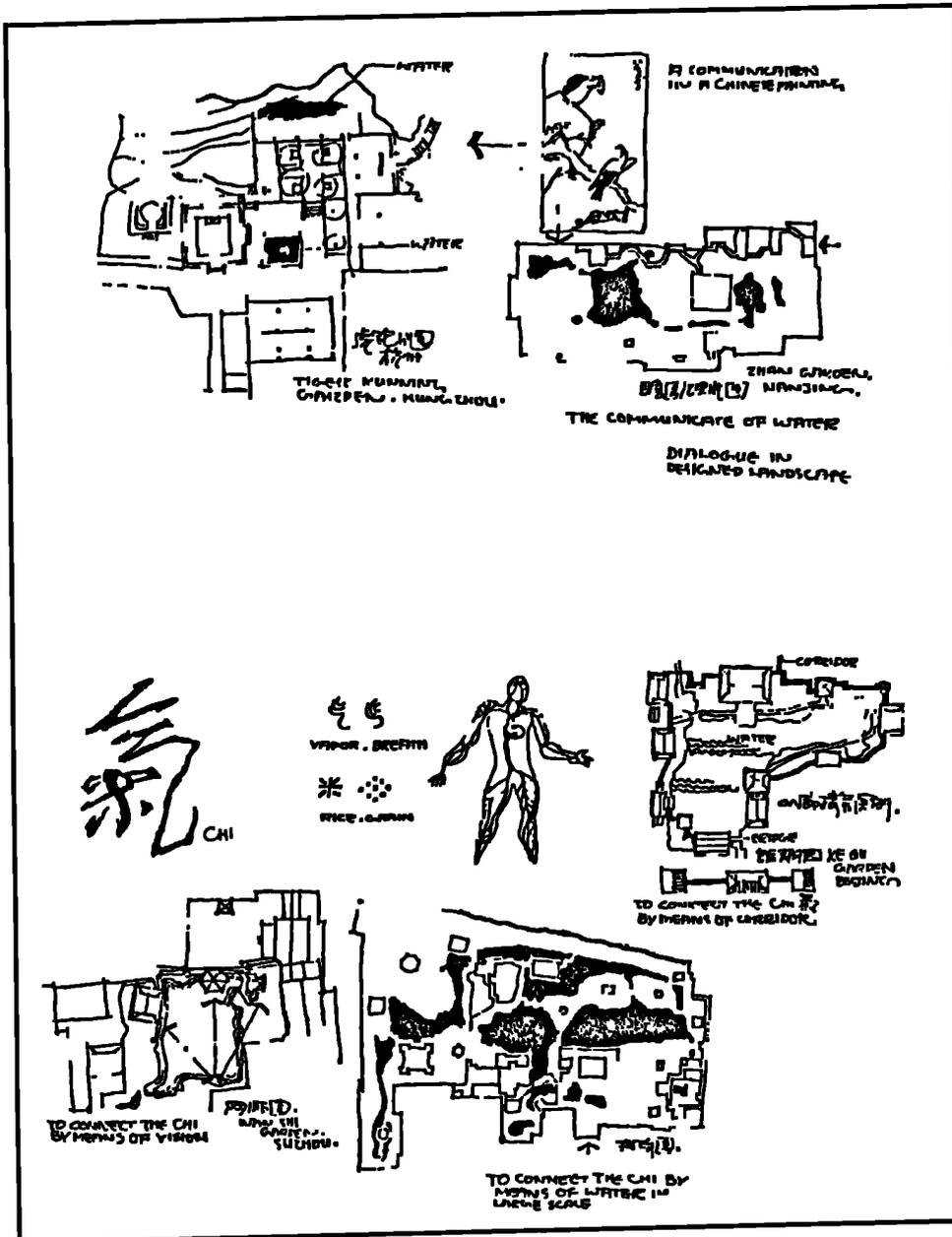


Fig. 11-9: The concept of Chi.

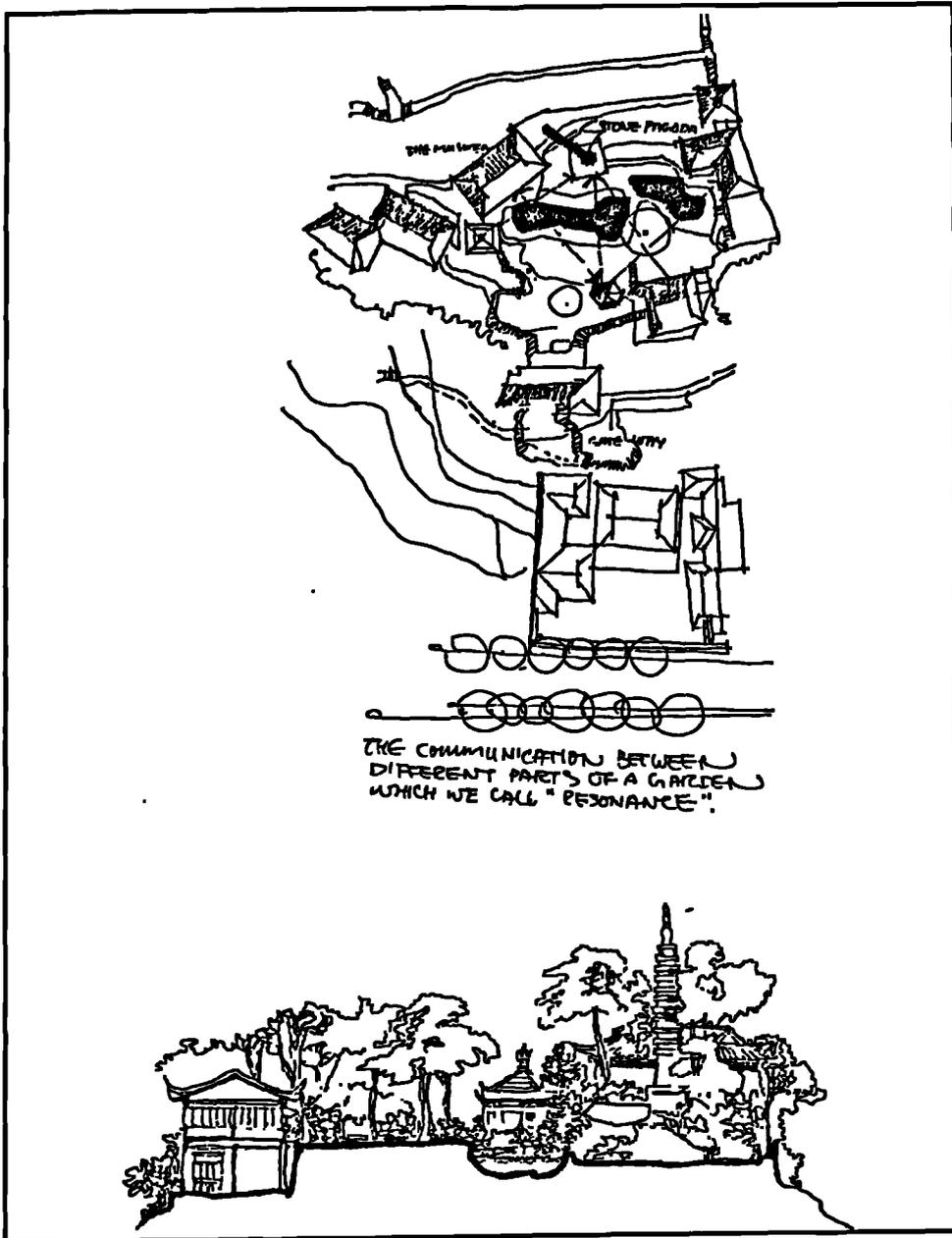


Fig. 11-10: A 'Resonance' between different parts or objects which in effect makes a landscape "speak" to its visitors.



## 11.5 SOMETHING FROM NOTHING

Laozi said:

“Hollow then full;” [9]

and

“Thirty spokes

Share one hub

Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand,  
and you will have the use of the cart.

Knead clay in order to make a vessel.

Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand,  
and you will have the use of the vessel.

Cut out the doors and windows in order to make a room.

Adapt nothing to the purpose in hand,  
and you will have the use of the room.

Thus what we gain is Something, Yet it is by virtue of Nothing  
that this could be put to use.” [10]

What a wise dialectic thinking! The logic concerning the concept of Nothing is that Nothing is (made) from Something or promotes Something happening. Here, the concept of Nothing means a spatial Emptiness (Room) which is functional and meaningful, related to what we call Spaciousness in a design sense. According to Laozi, the space, the room is made by certain things: door, window and the enclosure, i.e. the Something. Actually, the so-called Nothing is full of things and conveys quite positive meanings: functions, activities, and possible aesthetic ideas as well. In Chinese landscape design such concepts may relate especially to the aesthetic principle Emptiness with Richness.

For landscape design, what a designer works for is the right kind ‘Nothing’, the ‘Hollow’, the space between things, which are the “Full” formed by the so-called hard and soft landscape features such as

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<sup>9</sup> *Tao Te Ching*: XXII, 50, p.93.

<sup>10</sup> *Tao Te Ching*: XI, 27, p.67, ‘



boundaries, artificial mountains, buildings, sculptures, paths, water, plants, etc. Again, in a designed landscape, it is the space which provides a certain kind of place, meets the function, creates “room” for people to play, think and relax. Therefore the idea of ‘SOMETHING FROM NOTHING’ can be transferred from a concept of philosophy to one of designing spatial richness, which is the source of a sense of spaciousness providing a freedom for human activities.

From this point of view, we can say that the concepts of Emptiness and Nothingness have similar philosophical implications and aesthetic values, related to the basic concept of the concept of Buddhism, Kong (nothing or void). For instance, in a piece of Shan Shui, qualities such as spatial depth, boundlessness, infinity in terms of the physical environment and sadness, hopelessness, tranquillity, spiritual seclusion in terms of the feelings, are suggested mostly in the form of Kong or Emptiness (Nothingness). The same is true of landscape design. Once the concepts of Emptiness and Nothingness are transferred from a philosophical idea into a design philosophy and embodied in compositions of place, an opposite effect of Richness may grow. Then, the users may find their own “room” in which to place their feelings and emotions, since the most difficult part of a landscape design is not to produce something in a given site, but to provide mental comfort and freedom to people who are not at ease in their daily life through certain spatial arrangements.

As most of Shan Shui painters recognized, “When drawing black, one must also think about white” i.e. to search for Richness, one should be concerned of the effect, since the features and spaces surrounded are created by each other, rooted in each other. Aesthetically, such opposites as more and less, dynamic and still, strong and weak, clumsy and skillful are the result and reason for each other. Methodologically, as Laozi thought:

“Know the male



But keep to the role of female,  
Know the white  
But keep to the role of black.” [11]

This must not be taken literally but as revelation of the true relationship of “myriad things”, it help us to balance our design activities through a dynamic thinking method. This reminds us of Mies van der Rohe. His phrase, “less is more” and the concept of “Total Space” guided Western modern architecture for several decades, and has had profound philosophical connotations, although we now feel his “less is more” has become “less is bore”. He and his followers pushed the theory to an extreme and went too far, concentrating on too much architecture, with little concern for the environment.

However, by reviewing history, we can see that we are always suffering from what we have done. We feel the lack of subtle aesthetic experiences because our town, village, park, garden, even in our homes are usually over-designed. The task of a landscape designer is not always to try to add something considered “beautiful” to the earth . The one-sided pursuit of so-called richness or amenity in the case of landscape design is not always a positive way of thinking, since any great landscape ‘picture’ must be well balanced, following the principle of “keeping to the role” of the Restraint, Gentleness, and Understatement. Following the ancient ecological idea, we should further recognize:

“The most submissive thing in the world can ride rough-shod over the hardest in the world — that which is without substance entering that which has no crevices.” [12]

“Know the white, But keep to the role of black.” To keep it plain, rather than “skillfully” showing off; a willingness to be modest rather

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11 *Tao Te Ching*: XXVIII, 63, p.85.

12 *Tao Te Ching*: XLIII, 98, p.104.



than ostentatious and showy provide a valuable aesthetic standard, even a kind of professional moral code for the landscape design profession.

Moreover, it would be too simple if one were to only use extreme contradictory concepts such as opaque and transparent, white and black, soft and hard, mass and vacuum, inward and outward, broken and continued, etc., to cope with design practice; something in between, for instance a “grey” (between white and black), as a necessary transitional tone will be missing in the sense of coherence. As we discussed before, the richness of landscape images created out of limited spaces through such as ‘Beyond the Boundary’, ‘The Zigzag Way’ and Chi, and thoughtful design skills and artistic concepts exemplified by such phrases as: “to move the mountain, to reduce the water”, “simplicity surpasses complexity”, “few surpass more”, “to see big in small”, all these need an opportunity and concrete transitional means to fulfill their roles.

To search for richness and to create “scenery out of the scenery”, to evoke rich associations in people, the concept of Emptiness then conveys quite a positive meaning.

In design, the concept of emptiness is directly related to that of spaciousness. It is similar to the painting principle, that to gain the richness of artistic images depends on “managing the white” (drawing black, thinking white). For instance, the white space in Shan Shui can suggest water, skies, clouds and gives the painting breadth, room for thinking, association of movement and so on, in short, it can be everything. Thus, we see the white, the emptiness as the source of richness. It is the same in designed landscape. Taking private gardens as an example, usually along the enclosures or boundaries, there are buildings, corridors, entrances, artificial mountains, and dense planting, but inside this area, these things usually occupy less space than one might expect because everything is properly scaled. There may be only a few curved paths across the small undulating hills, while simple bridges link



the flat islands, or small shelters standing beside the water, a few stones scattered the banks. In most Chinese gardens, the water itself is the main part of the scenery, while those delicately constructed rockeries, balustrades, pavilions, or plants are organized around the water and along the banks. The water occupies a large proportion of the small space which signifies the emptiness, but reflects everything. It is the centre of the garden, the “stage” of the “drama”, the medium that transfers emptiness to richness. So, where does the concrete sense of Richness come from? The answer is the design of emptiness [Fig. 11-11, Fig. 11-12 and Fig. 11-13].

A example to explain this principle is the game of Chinese Chess in which the aim of occupation is achieved by wisely encircling space with as few pieces as possible. The parallel is that one should be cautious about placing anything in the central part of the space, preferring to leave empty as much as possible. As in a well known Chinese saying of the board game: “Gold is the corner; silver, the edges; rubbish, the middle.” This explains the principle of how to manage limited space with the concept of Emptiness. The corner is a really good place for setting up a focus, having a good view point and providing privacy as well. It can be an important node which connects circulation and provides the longest distance in a diagonal direction, leaving greater room for the whole complex to satisfy the needs of different kinds of activities. Edges can also be treated according to the same principle. Therefore to contrast by means of ‘holding’ to the ‘empty part’ is to create a real sense of Richness. As Laozi said:

“If you would have a thing aside,  
You must set it up;  
If you would take from a thing,  
You must first give to it.” [13]

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13 *Tao Te Ching: XXXV, 79, p.95*

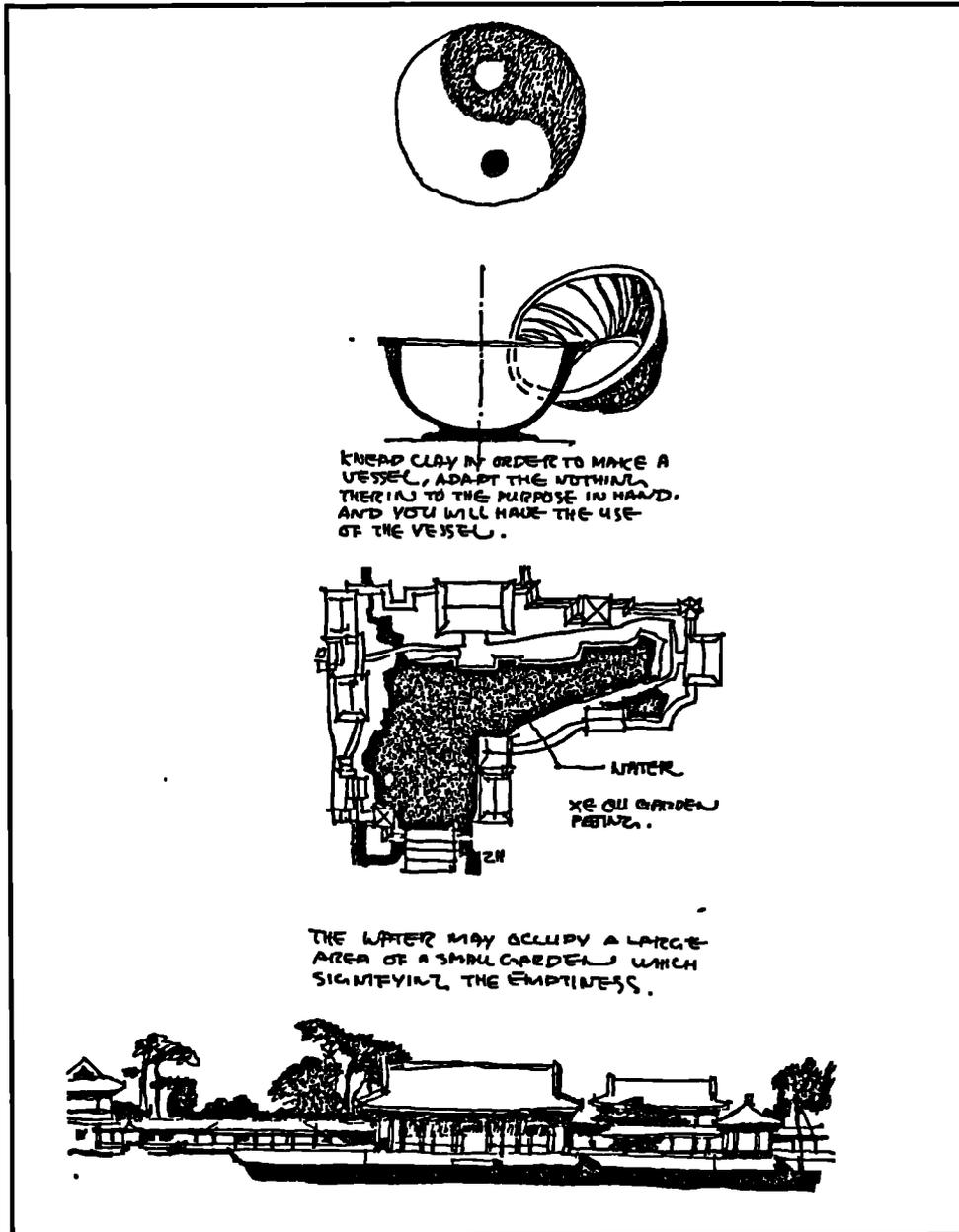


Fig. 11-11: The concept of 'Nothingness', 'Emptiness' and 'Kong'.

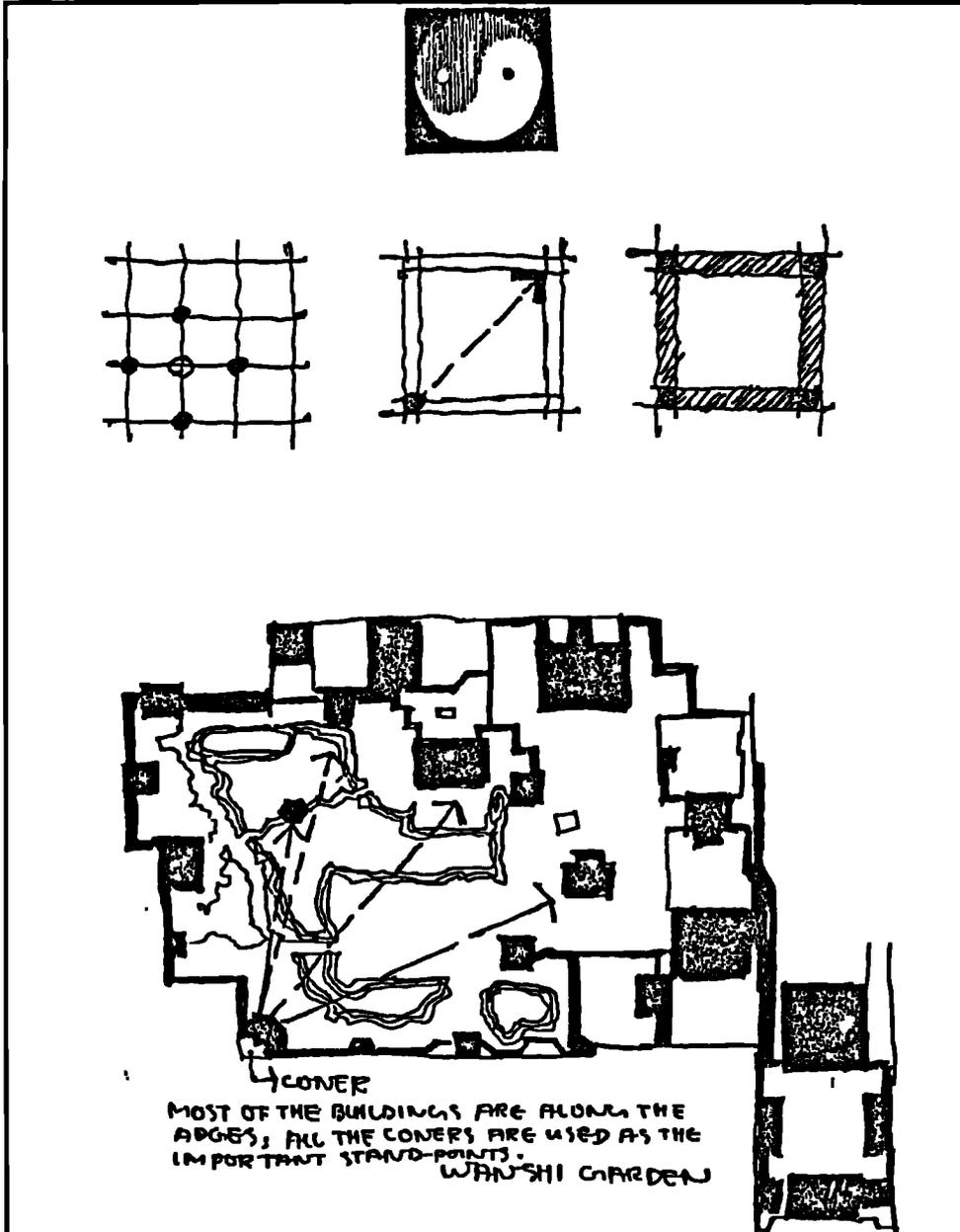


Fig. 11-12: The use of corner and edges.

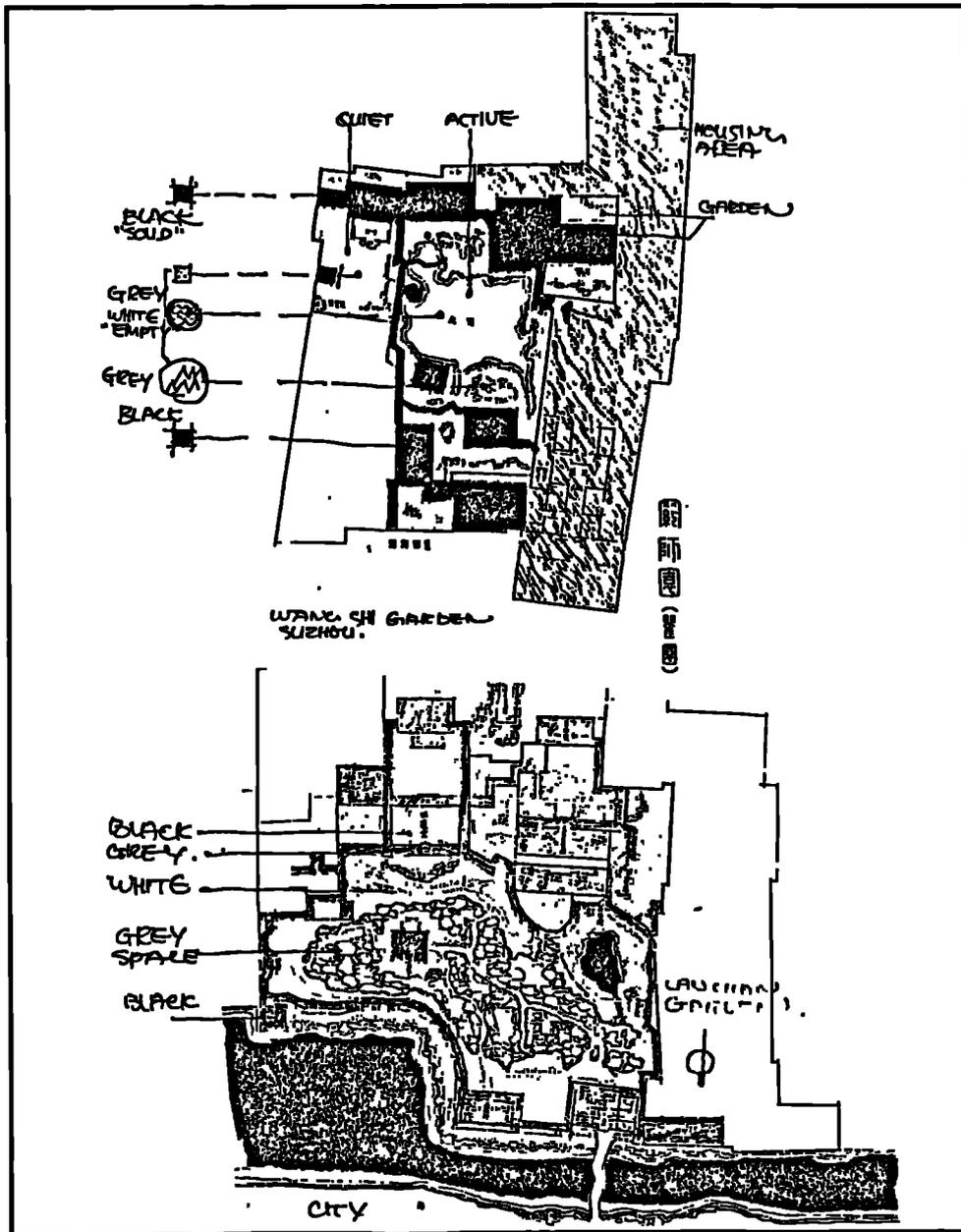


Fig. 11-13: The Concept of 'Grey'.



## 11.6 SCATTERING

If effects of richness in a designed place are related to the designer's understanding of the concept of emptiness, the design methods for scattering things in their right places are crucial. The basic aspect which concern us is to meet the needs with a suitable manner.

Landscape design differs from other visual arts and architecture in that it is spatially on a relatively large scale. It may relate to a range of mountains, huge expanses of water and forests, the sources of human life. Obviously the needs of people should be re-examined or limited and the manner of coping with nature should also be one of caution. Although we may hold to a great aesthetic ideal, the basic ecological way must be followed:

**“Hence the superior must have the inferior as root;  
the high must have the low as base.”**

That is to say when we make something 'hard' and artificial, we should also pay great attention to the things 'soft' and natural in manner and quality, which may be much more crucial than the desire for simply building monuments. Thus, “to keep in a soft state” may incorporate a more essential and profound aesthetic sense than the skills of elaborate construction. Bearing in mind the idea of spaciousness and richness rooted in each other, created by each other, a designer will scatter his necessary objects in a landscape rather than design for the objects' sake.

The way of using land involves a great deal of work in analyzing the inner structure [14] such as the relationships of contours, circulation, basic functions and patterns of activities. In order to fit necessary man-

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14      Also refer to chapter 10.



made things into a landscape, a sequence must follow based on analysis, which will influence the whole layout and character of a site. Scattering means of dividing large volumes into smaller ones; to leave natural features as they are as far as possible, to place functional elements only where they must go, even simply to hide them in order to conserve and enrich the natural landscape with the possibility of its enrichment. The larger the site, the more this applies.

Another well known Chinese saying suggested, "The old temple is hidden by a deep mountain." The subtlety here is the meaning of the word, **Hide**. This demonstrates a typical Chinese approach to managing artifice in the natural place. What can usually be seen in large size Chinese landscapes is that of a lengthy drawn-out approach up a mountain, or over a river to a particular spot. There may be a few, small pavilions built beside a winding path or behind the trees, revealing themselves in modest discreet features, which serve as places for people to stop. Bridges over streams usually are very small and almost vanish in the greenery. The main building such as the temple, tea house or inn serve both as functional facilities and as landmarks for guiding the directions, but are not emphasised. It is rare indeed that we see any Chinese pagoda dominating the top of a mountain like the Roman castles in Britain; even while the tower is a focal point in the landscape, it is merely sits beside or half way up the mountain or hill, perhaps drawing attention to a summit so as to guide direction and movement.

The way of Scattering reminds us of our previous discussion about 'Taste of Heaven'. To disperse human shelter in the landscape places people within nature, reflecting a desire to seek harmonious relationships between man and nature. Moreover, this kind of subtle, indirect placing makes for more fun and happiness through the process of exploration, allowing freedom to enjoy the landscape adventurously or meditatively. Once the designer understands how to hide modestly hide rather than to

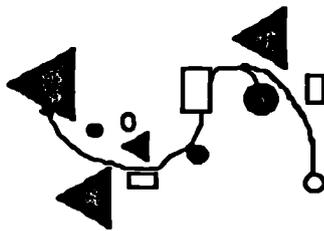


boldly dominate, a more intimate experience with feelings of spatial richness and sense of people fitting into a natural environment will be presented evoking the passions of life and nature [Fig. 11-14, Fig. 11-15 and Fig. 11-16]. The way of Scattering in the landscape design can be described as:

"A little then benefited;  
A lot then perplexed." [15]

Also,

"This is called subtle discernment:  
The submissive and weak will overcome the hard and strong."



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15 *Tao Te Ching* XXII, 50, p.93.

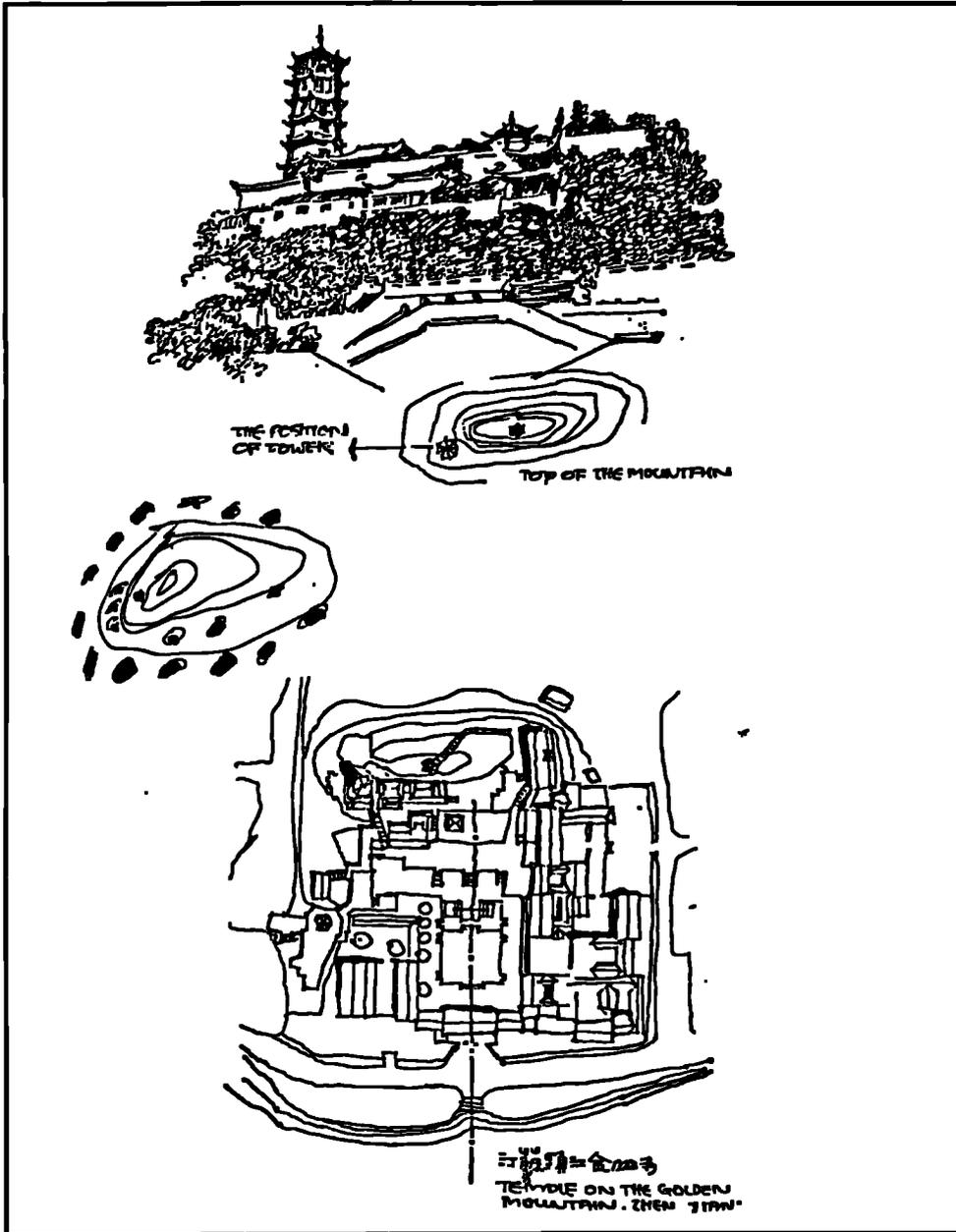


Fig. 11-14: 'Temple on the Golden Mountain', a typical example to explain the Chinese manner to place artifice in landscape.

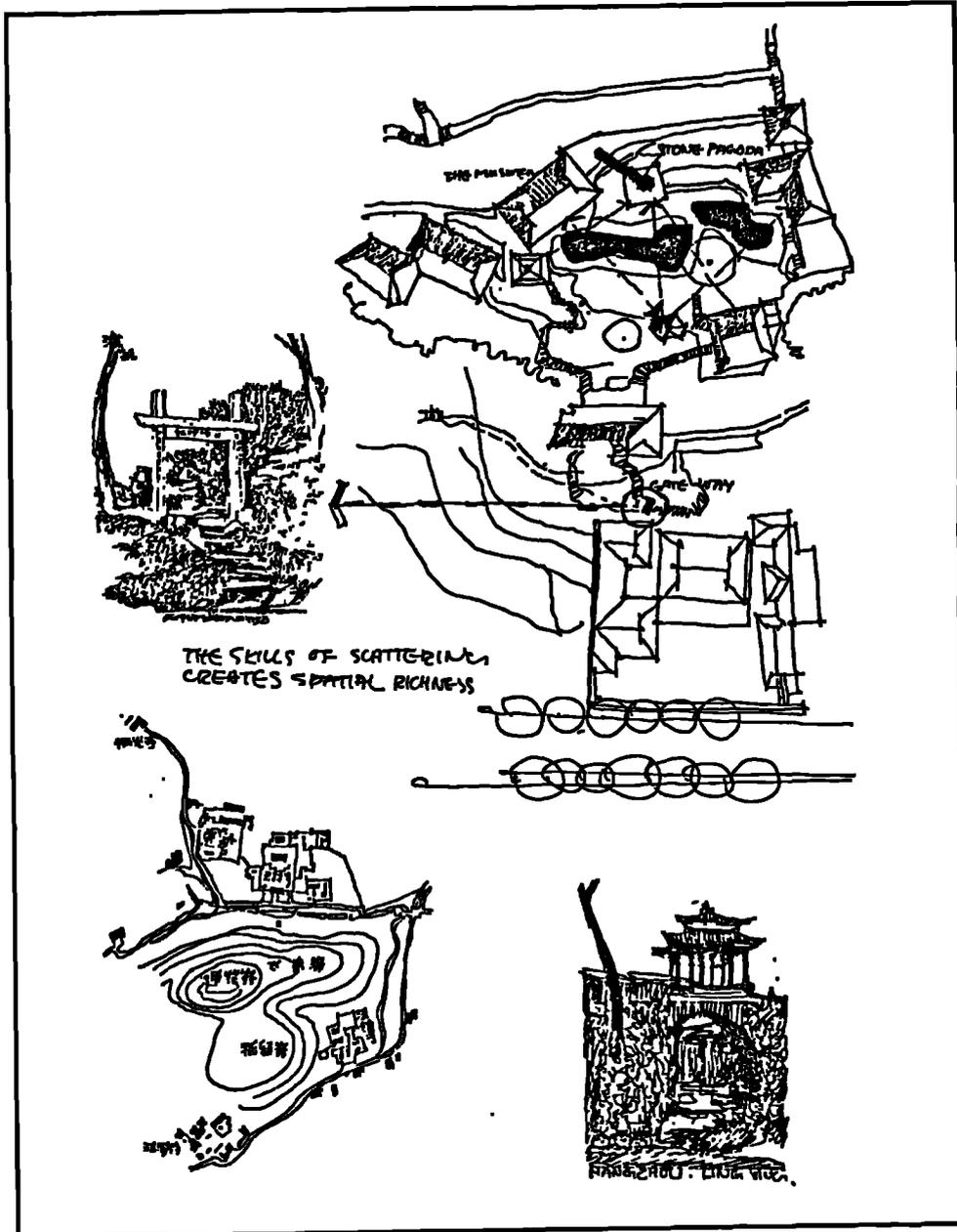


Fig. 11-15: Concept of Scattering.

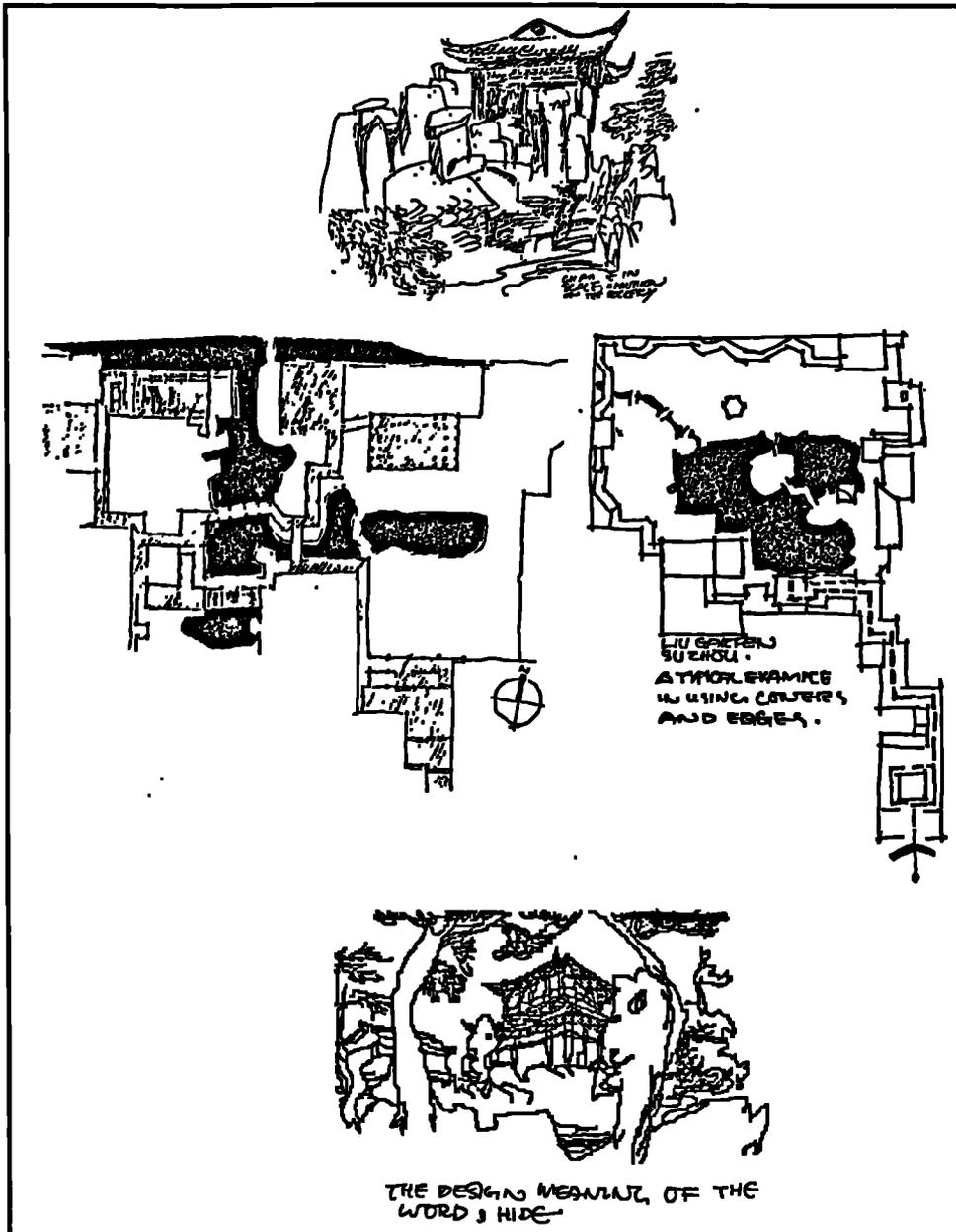


Fig. 11-16: The design meaning of the word, 'Hide'.



## 11.7 PICTORIAL FLAVOUR

For the Chinese, “Scenery is as if a picture” reveals the Chinese Pictorial Flavour. However, it does not mean that to design a landscape is to copy pictures. When designing a landscape, the designer can neither copy natural scenery in size, nor details, but must construct a refined, proportional image in a place. The idea, “scenery is as if a picture” implies more about the complexities of the design method than the pictorial images themselves, i.e., the designed images must be refined as depicted in a work of Shan Shui: a typified, refined, intensive and concentrated landscape image felt by the designer. As we discussed before, the design principle of ‘Naturally So’ has little to say about the mere imitation of natural images or pictorial likeness since this exact presentation of natural phenomena is far from the depiction of the essence of natural beauty.

For instance, in any good traditional landscape design, the mountain is not a scaled down copy, but a depiction of its power and of the atmosphere through a reconstruction of the range, the type of structure, texture, and important details such spring and water falls. The most important is to represent the inner relationship between Shan and Shui: the mountain and water perpetually overcoming one another.

The same is true when a designer manages plants. Plants are first used for constructing “green space” but there is another higher aesthetic demand of the pictorial flavour. Chinese designers place more emphasis on the “habit” of plants as opposed to their other characteristics. There seems to be no particular demand for specific qualities of flower or foliage; the “gestures” of plants are more important than colour in the mind of the designers. Usually the plants are local, which grow faster and



are healthier, and the cost of maintenance is relatively low. However, they must be very delicate in their postures and have the quality of being able “to come into the picture” to achieve a satisfactory three-dimensional composition. Sometimes, for reasons of the Pictorial Flavour, even an old or dead tree trunk may be carefully kept in a particular place for years as a symbol of the scene, providing a focus, a signature or final touch to a finished design work. Plants in the picture can be either a functional means providing shadows in hot weather, enriching the scenery of a designed place, or a symbol of the owner’s cultural background or personal qualities. Interestingly, the walls of the gardens are usually thought of like a piece of white paper or window as the frame around the “paper”. Within the “frame” the trunks and leaves seem to be the “marks” made by the painter’s “brush”. As Goxi once said: “The water is the vein of the mountain, the grass the hair, the clouds an expression of spirit.” In the minds of Chinese artists, the life of nature is the parallel with humans. Thus, the landscape painted or designed may have specific symbolic meanings. .

Generally, there are two levels at which symbolic meanings are revealed by the design medium. At the first level, the designer may frame a picture for functional needs such as making a screen or providing pure visual pleasure. At the second level, people’s attitudes towards nature and life are expressed symbolically in the manner of making the “pictures” by a whole landscape image, such as the patterns symbolizing the ‘Jeweled Palace in Elfland’s Hills’, and by the functional arrangement for satisfying the life style of Confucianists and the wealthy; by the simplicity which satisfies the beliefs of Zen and the profound philosophy of Tao, etc.. These essential ideas of landscape design are concerned about the symbolic depiction of design philosophies. Although the values and meanings of the landscape are expressed by artistic forms, they also symbolize the understanding of the relationships between Heaven, Earth and Man. This



is a concrete symbolic system of 'Chinese Pictorial Flavour'. For instance, by means of a horizontally developed landscape structure, a sense of infinity, the roots of life and the essential relationship between man and land are expressed both visually and functionally. Conversely, the vertical development of design elements serves to connect Heaven and Earth by symbolically depicting the relationship between them, and the meaning of the universe. This is a more conceptual representation. The most typical examples are the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, in which the Chinese belief, "round is Heaven, square is the earth" is embodied in the whole complex. Serving the same symbolic design function were the towers of the Temple on the Golden Mountain in Zhenjiang and the Liohe Pagoda in Hangzhou.

Therefore, I consider that the Chinese Pictorial Flavour is an aesthetic category for studying design forms, which relates to the interpretation of the designer's inner feelings and personal understanding of a traditional way of thinking and capacity of performing the design language. . Meanwhile, the flavour is conditioned by an aesthetic standpoint, functional needs and material possibilities. The key to practicing the picturesque idea is to overcome the barriers of limited space through a concern for an inner relationship; to find meaningful forms and achieve an intense, symbolic landscape expression through simple "pictures". Since such rich feelings and aesthetic content must be conveyed in a three dimensional work, to practice the Pictorial Flavour needs both a reflective mind and practical skills such as those of a Shan Shui painter — calligraphy, architecture, planting and so on [Fig. 11-17 and Fig. 11-18].

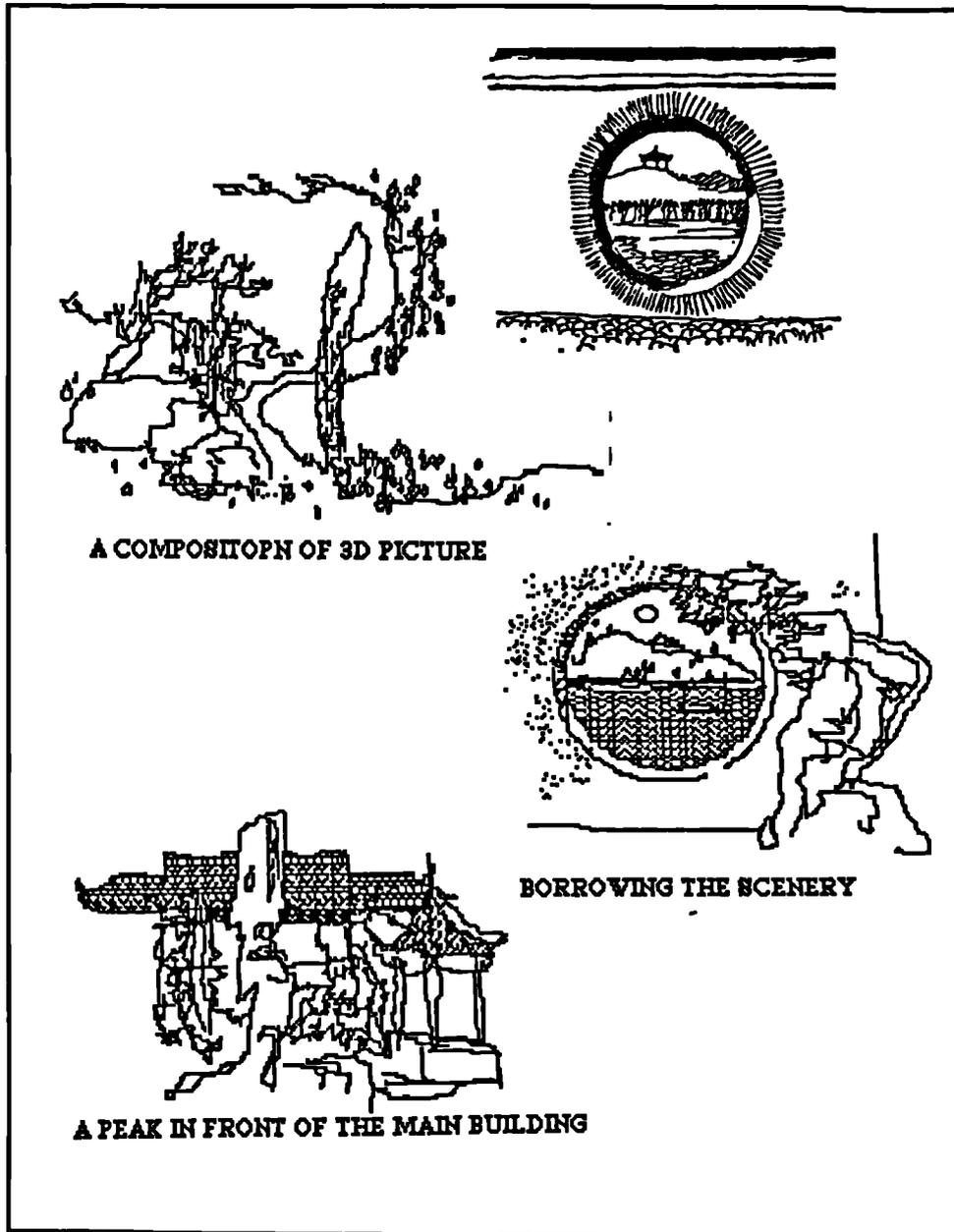


Fig. 11-17: Chinese Pictorial Flavour, A Symbolic Expression of Landscape Ideas.

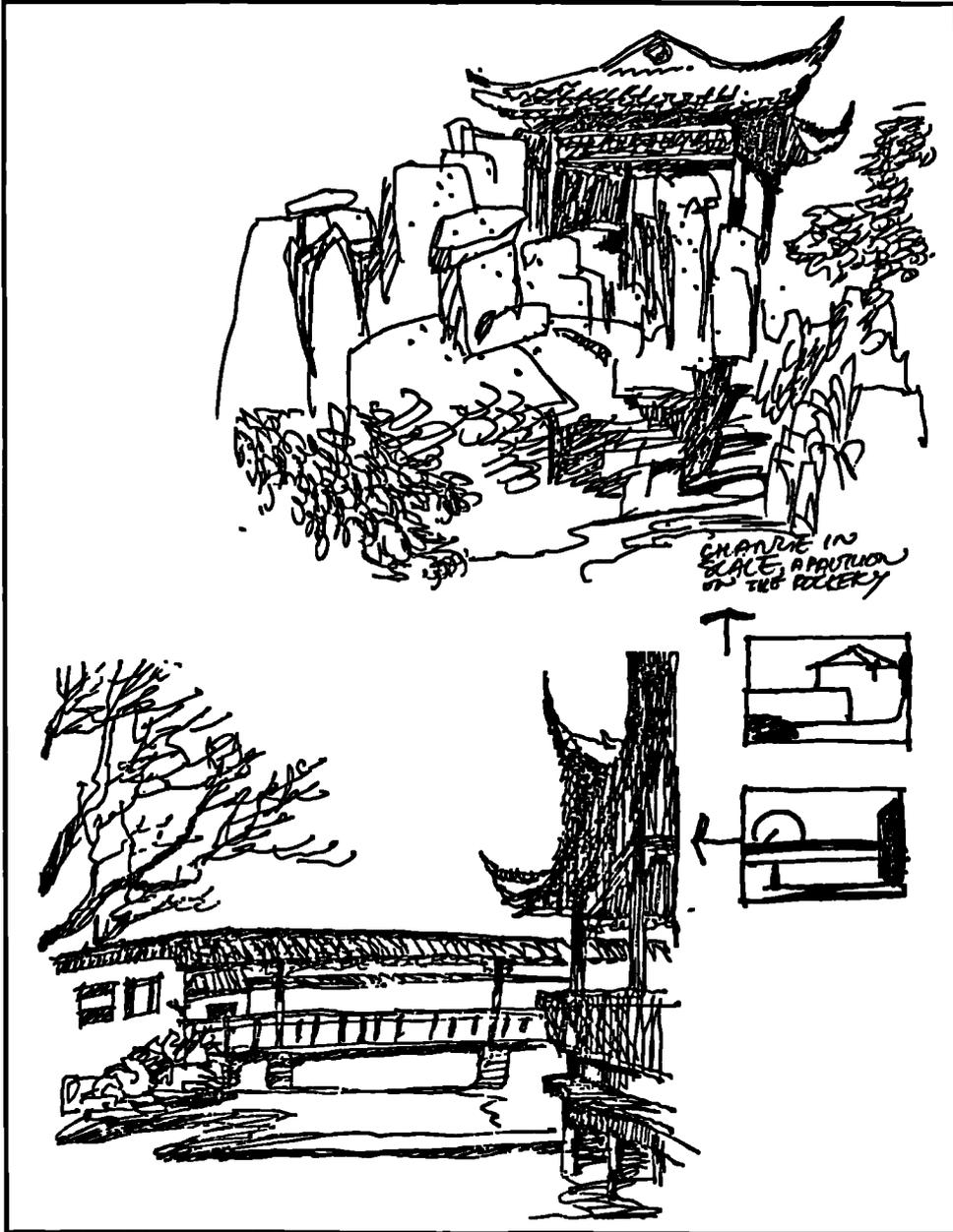
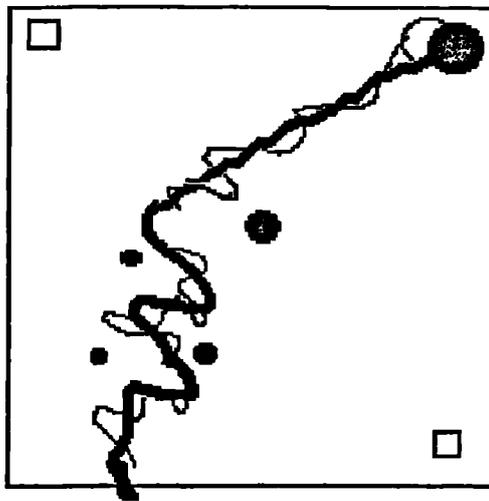


Fig. 11-18: A Spatial Preference of Chinese Landscape Design.





**PART 4**

# **THE ENGLISH SCHOOL**





## **12**

### **AN INEVITABLE CHANGING**

Although the English School of landscape design is a part of Western European culture, it has a special position in this area. The study developed here is concerned with the evolutionary process and individuality of English landscape aesthetics.

#### **12.1**

##### **THE CHANGES OF LAND USE**

Through the ages the land of Britain has always been touched by the people, for both land and climate were sympathetic with their basic desires. Great effort was expended by this nation to improve their landscape, alongside the establishment of a systematic aesthetic theory established through their experience of landscape and practice of design.

The beginning of English landscape design activity can be traced back to the ways of early man in Britain, from at least C. 3000 BC - 500 AD. Unlike the Chinese, livestock husbandry was an important activity for the early man's livelihood in Britain. Fortunately, the weather and water supply could keep it "green", avoiding the unbalanced results of land use in the deserts in some parts of north-west China and the Sahara in Africa.



**Fig. 12-1:** Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain, a unique temple of c. 1800-1400 BC

In any civilization, the size, speed and qualities of shaped landscape has been limited by tools and manpower. When the techniques of using bronze and iron were mastered, it became possible to cope with the dark woods, to move from upland to low-land, to control the expansion of forest, to drain land for developing agriculture. By using heavy ploughs and harnessing the power of oxen, the pattern of land use was changed from small rectangles to long strips on a large scale. The remains of hill camps, terraces and structures such as Stonehenge tell us the story of how the people coped with their immediate environments and shaped the landscape.

According to F. E. Halliday (1967), the remains of the earliest work of art in Britain found at Creswell Crag in Derbyshire, are a few engravings on bone. Comparing these works with that of the artists of Lascaux in southern France and Altemira in northern Spain they were not very impressive, but they did demonstrate the birth of art in this country



some fifteen thousand years ago. More mature works of art which relate to the environment are the monumental works of the New Stone Age before 2000 BC. followed by the greatest of all: Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain, a unique temple of c. 1800-1400 BC. [Fig. 12-1]. The iron users, the La Tène Celts, came into Britain in the 5th century BC, and their linear decorative style of art characterized early British culture. However, this abstract style was later influenced by the artistic realism of the Romans who occupied France in first century BC, and the migration of Belgic tribes from the south-east [1].

Further development of landscape in Britain was considerably influenced by changes in social structure, the mixture of different racial groups, and foreign cultures. Invaders might have disturbed or destroyed some achievements of native cultures; on the other hand, they played a role as the disseminators of new ideas from relatively more developed civilizations, which was assimilated into local culture to develop a new, healthy system of land use.

The Romans were the military invaders in Britain. In almost 400 years of occupation, from 50 AD to 410 AD they spent much of their time quelling the uprisings of local tribes, controlling mainly England rather than all of Britain. During this period, agriculture was well developed, and England was seen as a place from which to export grain to the continent. The Romans were city people, establishing London's importance as a commercial centre. The Roman walled city, solid building style and glorious mosaic interiors signaled the journey of the First International Architectural Style from Rome to Britain. For the purpose of military action and transportation, straight roads were constructed in the Roman method from east to west and north to south,

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<sup>1</sup> See F. E. Halliday: *Cultural History of England*, p.9, 10, 11, 14,15. Thames and Hudson, London, 1967.



which had little concern for the contours of the land and strongly contrasted with winding tracks which reflected local topography.

Following the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons came and settled in Britain (C. 450 - 1066) destroying the "Roman-British civilization". The Anglo-Saxons soon accepted Christianity, and they differed from the Romans in being an agriculture people. They mastered the skills of using heavy ploughs, and their communal system and land use pattern promoted the return of civilization to the South and Midlands. "Their log-houses clustered around a church, and the arable land surrounding these was divided into three years rotation (first, wheat or rye; second, barley or oats; third, fallow). Beyond the fields were areas of rough pasture where grazing animals kept down the scrub and gave the arable land protection from the encroachment of forest." [2]

The Anglo-Saxon farming pattern provided a basic model for the later development of the English rural landscape. The typical Celtic settlements surviving in the western and northern parts of Britain were in strong contrast to the compact villages in the south and Midland. Without worrying about water supply, the Celts continued their traditions on the uplands, indulging their taste for individualism, never strongly influenced by the Anglo-Saxons.

In short, fragments of the managed environment left by Anglo-Saxons in southern and middle England and by Celts in northern and western Britain show us a controlled manner of coping with nature and a slow development of agricultural landscape patterns. Further development came with a new intruder, the Latinized Northman.

The Normans (1066 - 1200) were both colonists and disseminators. They took over the forest, established 'Forest Law' for controlling land use and imposed the manorial system. At the beginning, they destroyed many agricultural areas and caused much land to revert

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<sup>2</sup> Brenda Colvin: *Land and Landscape*, p.33, John Murray, London, 1948.



back to forest. As stability returned, the population increased and farming land was extended. “The statute of Merton in 1235, which first permitted the enclosure of forest by the feudal landlord — providing they left enough common land for the need of their villagers — was ostensibly meant to preserve the essential balance between forest, pasture and arable, and to ensure adequate timber reserves.” [3] To satisfy the aristocratic pastime of hunting, well protected woods were needed, which limited the use of timber, and house building methods underwent a gradual change from heavier to lighter timber construction. The “preservation” of natural sources increased to maintain a supply of useful wood, although with the so-called Romanesque architecture, which combined the flavour of the Romans with local building style, monasteries and castles of stone was developed as a expression of belief and control or expanding power [Fig. 12-2].

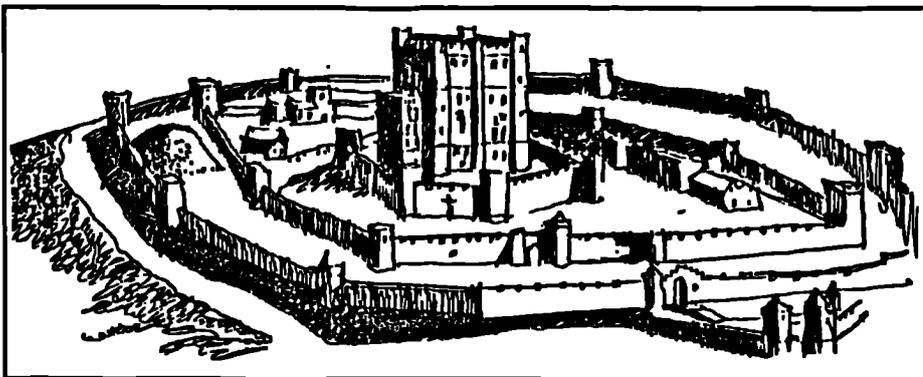


Fig. 12-2: Norman Castle, drawing base on *The English Garden* by Laurence Fleming and Alan Gore, p.17.

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Brenda Colvin: *Land and Landscape*, p.40, John Murray, London, 1948.



With the Norman conquerors, the church as landowner and controller of wealth and power fundamentally influenced the development of landscape in Britain, particularly the garden design tradition.

## 12.2 THE GARDENS

Interestingly, the primitive idea of making a garden in Britain is similar to the idea of the Chinese: The Jeweled Place in Elfland's Hills. "The old Celtic legends are haunted by dreams of a garden island peopled by gods, lying far out in the western ocean, and this half-possible paradise has many names: the Land of the Young, the Plain of Happiness, The Island of Avalon where King Arthur went to heal his wounds." [4] But we hardly find any remains of the gardens made by the early British, even those of the powerful builders such as the Romans and Normans in Britain.

Although we know little about the Middle Ages, from the early drawings, plans, and some remains of the medieval garden, we have found that the early British garden was an totally enclosed part of human space. In the latter Medieval garden shown in the picture from 'The Romance of the Rose' about 1475 [5] people sit in an unroofed place reading, relaxing with the companionship of flowers, birds, leaves tidily organized in the tiny, safe, private space. From the plans of the monasteries, we can also find that the garden was closely related to the built environment of the monastery and abbey. It was similar to the spatial patterns of the medieval church in Italy and France, or the religious complex in China where the

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4 Nan Fairbrother: *Men and Gardens*, The Hogarth Press, London 1956. p.78.

5 Laurence Fleming and Alan Gore (1979): *The English Garden*, Michael Joseph, London. p.33.



courtyard system functioned as the spatial medium to link or organize the buildings [Fig. 12-3].

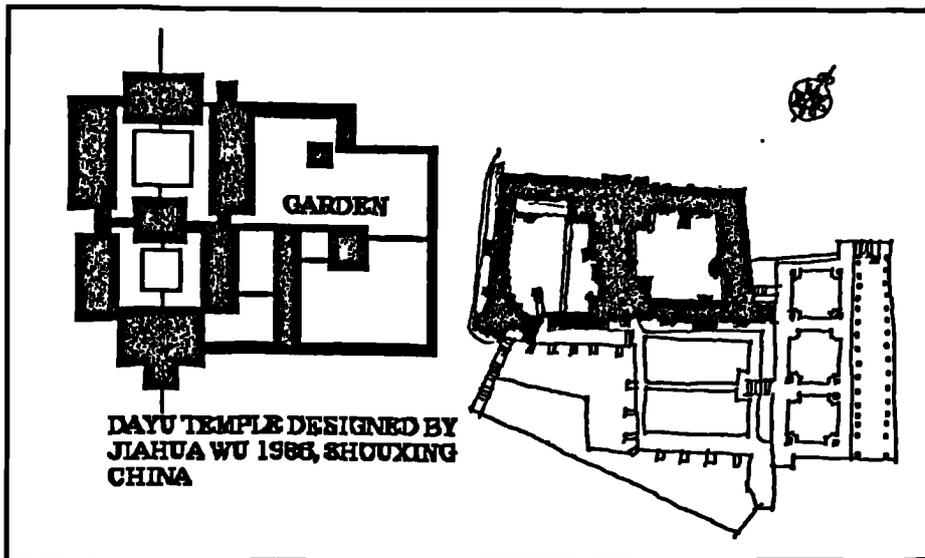


Fig. 12-3: Similar courtyard system in religious complexes both China and Britain: a Comparison between Haddon Hall, Derbyshire and Dayu temple, Shauxin, China.

The monastery was a place for God rather than for people. The courtyard within the cloisters was a kind of transition space in the complex, and functionally served as one of the gardens to meet the needs of a secluded way of living. Also, it was a necessary place for the monks to contemplate and rest. For this reason, places such as the hospital, the physician's houses, Abbot's houses, school rooms, guest rooms and so on, each opened onto the courtyard sharing the same enclosed open space. The other essential elements of fish-ponds, wells, etc. were functional facilities for this way of living, but later became the prototypes of ornamental objects in secular gardens.



There were no private secular gardens built in the Middle Ages which survived after the Wars of the Roses, and from the remaining illustrations, we can only get a rough impression about vegetable or herb gardens. They were usually walled, or surrounded by a moat, and were designed for very practical purposes of supplying home produce for kitchens, medicines, cosmetics, scent and disinfectants; in addition, there might be an ice-house used for food preservation. The water features such as fish-ponds and wells of the monasteries were repeated in the secular gardens. Water and pools, as they were treated in other countries, were also an important focus in private garden design. According to B. Colvin (1948), the use of water may first have been learnt from the sunnier lands in the East; the use of the fountain and pond may have more ornamental meaning. Gradually, places for pure leisure also developed; exercise grounds such as the tilting yard (a turf area) and archery butts (a kind of narrow terrace) were found in the gardens of manor houses.

The gardens in the Middle Age were basically place for utility, whose designs were much influenced by the needs of Christian worship. They were enclosed places imitating the garden of God, the space devoted to the Holy Spirit. Compared with the dramatic architecture in the same era, the imagination shown in garden design seemed limited.

During the time of the Tudors (early Tudor, 1485-1558; Elizabethan, 1558-1603), the social and economic order changed. Monasteries were abandoned, and the old feudal aristocracy was replaced by new upper classes made wealthy from commerce. Vast estates were taken over from the church. "It was a secular age, in which medieval unity and cooperation gave way to individualism and competition; ..." [6] However, at the beginning of Tudor times, the garden was still enclosed. "There is no hard and fast line between the medieval and the Tudor

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<sup>6</sup> F. E. Halliday: *Cultural History of England*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1967. p.95.



garden, but the trend of history after the end of War of the Roses had produced by Elizabethan times, a garden very different from the sheltered enclave of the Middle Ages.” [7]

After the end of the War, the economy began to recover. With a growing population, the development of a wool industry, trade and more contact with Europe, wealth began to increase. Craftsmen and garden design, particularly the fashionable style of the Italian Renaissance, began to cross the Channel and influence landscape design in England. Although Renaissance attitudes and ideas traveled relatively quickly, landscape design, an activity which arose not only from the intellectual idea but also from native ways of living, farming and craftsmanship could not follow as fast. The Tudor garden was a symbol of this transitional period from the medieval to English Renaissance, was influenced from Italy as “something rich and strange”. [8] Unlike the magnificent and original Italian garden, the surroundings of the Renaissance villa, there is a more domestic and intimate atmosphere in the Tudor garden. An important change of the feature of Tudor garden is the loosening of the enclosure; the gardens were not simply thought as a refuge against danger and wildness, but a place for companionship of nature, and enjoyment of life. After the War of the Roses came a change in the sense of defensiveness, and people were ready to see the world outside. Therefore, the boundaries between the outside and inside space became an obstacle. One response was the important element of the ‘Mount’, which can be seen as a kind of artificial mountain used in gardens to provide an elevated view of the scenery beyond. Meanwhile the inner spaces of the garden also became intricate, and many decorative factors were added. The decorative two-dimensional elements such as Knots and Mazes were widely used for creating an enjoyable and intimate atmosphere [Fig. 12-4].

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7 Silvia Crowe: *Garden Design*, p.41.

8 Nan Fairbrother: *Men and Gardens*, The Hogarth Press, London 1956. p.78.

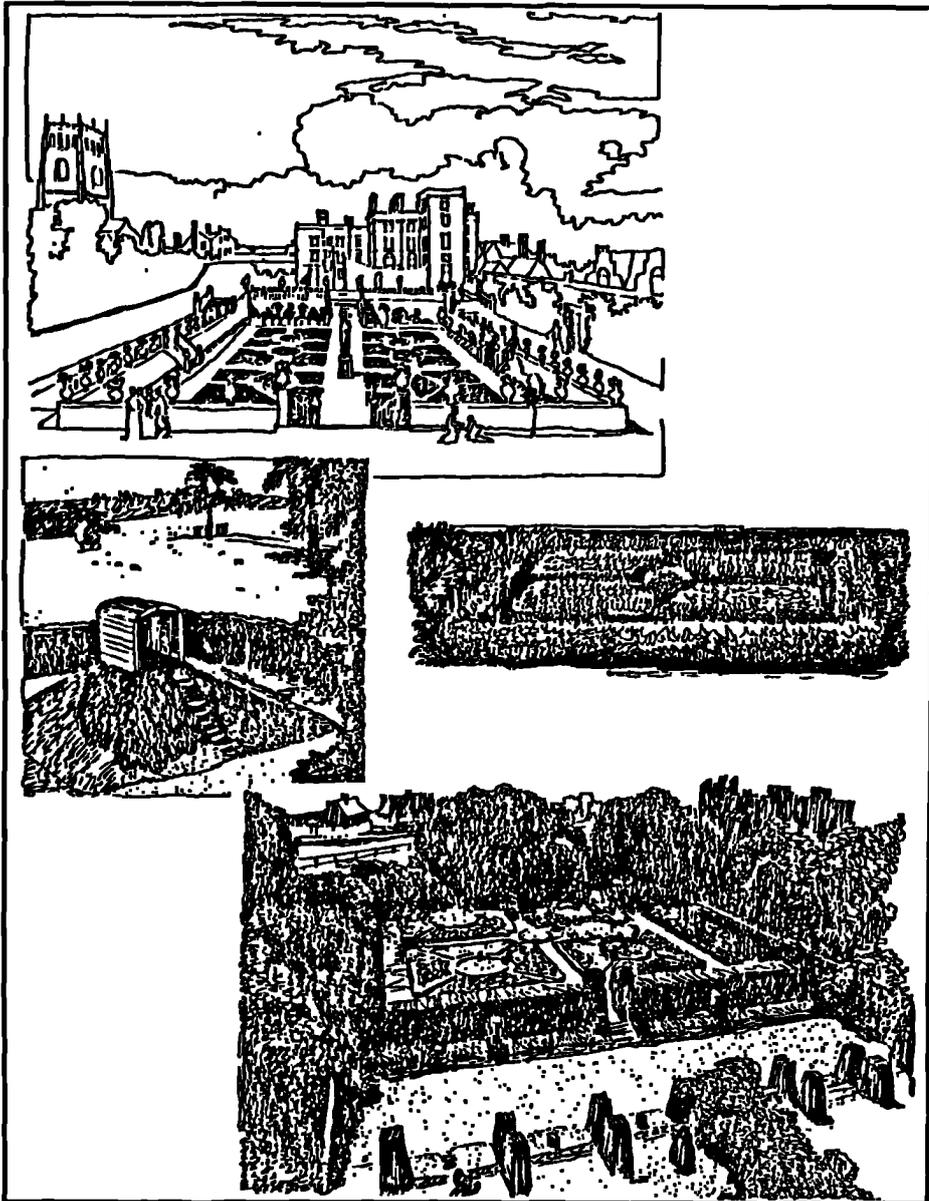


Fig 12-4: The decorative elements in Tudor Garden, drawing based on the photos from T. Turner: *English Garden Design*, p.45-51.



The scale of Tudor gardens were still modest, but carefully organized, as open-air extensions of the manor house or hall. The loosening of the sense of defensiveness and ease of coping with the natural environment meant that secular life was respected and the best gardens enabled one to comfortably appreciate the great beauty of nature. This was somehow a kind of spiritual liberation, a great return to the ideas of humanism from restricted Christianity. In this sense, the Renaissance had begun in Britain. For landscape design style, the features of Tudor gardens were not as strictly formal as those of the Italian. The English garden seemed more secular, more close to ordinary life, far away from the rational classical formula. The modest scale and decorative taste of the garden created a place for fun, happiness and enjoyment which acted to link the house to gardens, and the garden to the countryside.

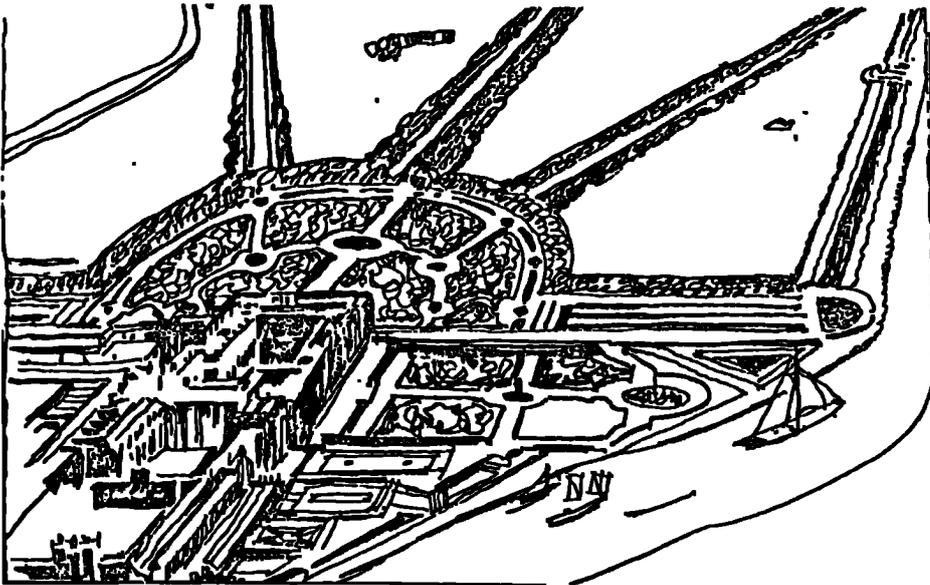


Fig. 12-5: Hampton Court, laid out by Wren about 1699, the garden by London and Wise, drawing based on Laurence Fleming and Alan Gore, *The English Garden*, p.49.



The high Renaissance came later; according to historians, it was in the second half of the 17th century that the English Renaissance came to its climax. [9] At this time foreign influences were very strong and, to some extent, they dominated the trend of English landscape design. Hampton Court and Bushy Park by Wise and Castle Howard by John Vanbrugh (1664-1711) [Fig. 12-5] were typical examples which show the English application of European formal principles, while the Dutch decorative elements such as topiary were also very fashionable.

Meanwhile the traditional Anglo-Saxon landscape was changing under new agricultural trends and ownership patterns. More and more enclosed private land invited re-planning and gardening that encouraged the development of landscape design.

High Renaissance formality of the British garden was very much due to the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. "Charles was half French and had lived half his thirty years in exile, in either France or Holland." [10] Before the royal family came back to England, they lived in France, at a place call Le Jardin de Palace, Mollet. The French fashion of landscape design must influenced the tastes of the Court, and at this time Wren, the most have influential British royal architect, studied architecture in Paris. After 'The Fire of London' (1666), the re-planning and reconstruction of London provided an important opportunity for practicing the new understanding of environmental design gained from experiences of French city planning and landscape design. When Charles II came to the throne, British garden design received new impetus and strong influences from the continent while the simple and intimate atmosphere of the Tudor Garden was almost ignored. The scale of the garden enlarged, and parterres replaced the knot, the formal geometrical

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9 William A. Mann: *Space and Time in Landscape History*, landscape Architecture Foundation, Inc. 1981, p.37.

10 F. E. Halliday: *Cultural History of England*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1967. p.165.



pool and elaborate water-works replaced the dipping well and the simple fountain; in short, it was time to make the garden 'Formal', big and comparable with those of continent.

The famous French garden designer Le Nôtre was invited to design Greenwich Park for Charles II. But the British nurserymen and gardeners London and Wise were the designers who contributed most to introducing 'the grand style' into Britain, and completed the most representative works: Hampton Court (1699 ), Longleat (1685- 1711 ), and Chatsworth (1680-1690). Reviewing these examples, it is obvious that the undulating land of Britain was not "happy" with French formality, and the differences both of vegetation and of surroundings were almost always ignored. The matured technique of French garden design indeed provided a ready-made system of design language for the development of British landscape design on a large scale, although in general it was poorly imitated.

In short, the garden was originally walled in from the inhospitable outside world. As an exterior living space, it was the first cautious step in trying to get close to the natural world and appreciate its beauty. The deer parks and the fish-ponds developed outside the enclosures were the potential extensions of the garden. At the beginning, functions were more important than the sensational satisfaction. By the early 17th century, walks were extended through the garden gate to take in the fish-ponds and orchards and they began to assume an ornamental as well as a profitable use. To the end of the 17th century, landscape design was influenced by France and Holland. Geometrical parterres, canals and labyrinths near mansions became the typical elements of English gardens. However, these exotic influences could not dominate the native creative ideas for long; in the late 17th century and the early 18th century when the classical tradition had reached its high perfection, so-called English High Renaissance and the genius of the English had to find its own place.



Thus, before the 18th century, landscape design in Britain experienced a long learning and developmental period, in which a sound base of design and gardening was manifested. But there was still a long way to go to work out an indigenous approach to native landscape design. As soon as the horizons of the English became broadened still further, the imitations of continental landscape forms were found to be unsatisfactory. In the great age when men were aware of their own value and power, they thought rationally. “When Newton sat in a garden he thought, not about the law of classical proportion, but about the law of gravity.”<sup>[11]</sup> What the British landscape designers had begun thinking about was their own ideas of landscape design — the aesthetic idea from their own experiences.

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<sup>11</sup> Nan Fairbrother: *Men and Gardens*, p.160.



## 13

### TOWARDS THE ENGLISH SCHOOL

The dictionary definition of school is a group of writers, thinkers, etc., sharing the same principles or methods, or artists having a similar style. Thus, in terms of landscape design, the term 'English School' refers to an indigenous English approach to landscape design which responds to its own characteristics of land, climate and social life, just as the Chinese School, and the Renaissance style in Italy, and the grand development of landscape design in France.

#### 13.1

##### THE CHANGE OF LANDSCAPE IDEAS

Horace Walpole summarized the development of English landscape design of the 17th-18th century as following main phases of: I. The ornamental farm, II. The forest or savage garden, III. The garden which connects a park. [1] These are very different from the features of designed landscape in China and those in some parts of Europe. The reason that we highly value the English School is not only because of its individual artistic phases but also because of its suitable scale, and its specific manner of connecting the artificial scenes with countryside and

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe: *The Landscape of Man*, Thames and Hudson, 1987, London, p.223.



natural scenery. From this point of view, English ideas initiated in the 18th century are still valuable for our modern environmental design. This heritage is worth reviewing. In particular, the aesthetic ideas which guided the design principle of this School should be sorted out for a deep understanding.

Before going further, it will be helpful to review the various influences, and the crucial reasons for the change of English aesthetic attitudes towards the landscape.

Intellectuals were the pioneers in the process of exploring indigenous ideas, and added their influence to a growing sense of national pride, countering French and Dutch influences and searching for an English way of laying out landscapes. The needs of agricultural development and improvement of estates; a growing understanding of natural beauty rather than absurd repetition of endless geometry; the identification of cultural roots and direct learning from classical arts, particularly from 17th landscape paintings of Italian countryside. Possibly in addition, some information about Chinese landscape design reaching Britain during this period might have found a response in the changing mood and ideas of the English.<sup>[2]</sup> Nevertheless, the change of landscape ideas was an inevitable result of the new awareness of native integrity and discovery of the value of local natural beauty. The slow growth to perfection of the new school of design was the most important phase in the life of English aesthetics.

The first half of the 18th century was a crucial period in which the understanding of the Renaissance in England deepened, and the scope of designers and patrons broadened. With a better grasp of classical culture and increasing self-awareness gained on the 'Grand Tour' to Italy together

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<sup>2</sup> This is a debated problem in this area. We shall further the discussion in chapter 15.



with the observation of British landscape, their confidence in searching for their own landscape approach was stronger than ever before.

The second half of the 18th century was a developing and maturing period for the English School. Theoretical study was colourful and strongly supported by the practice of landscape design. Many writers contributed to landscape aesthetics: *The Analysis of Beauty* by Hogarth, *Dissertation On The Oriental Garden* by Chambers, *On the Picturesque* by U. Price, and so on, reflecting and exploring the diversity of aesthetic learning. The most substantial and crucial contribution was the practice of outstanding landscape designers typified by **Kent, Brown and Repton**.

The whole 18th century was a fruitful time characterised by a new awareness of the Englishness of landscape design — in sympathy with the land, nation and social life through a Romantic approach of the kind analysed in an earlier chapter. A much closer look at some of the contributing ideas and influences follows.

## 13.2 ESCAPISM:

“Ye Field and Woods, my refuge from the toilsome World of Business, receive me in your quiet Sanctuaries, and favour my Retreat and thoughtful Solitude.”

**Shaftesbury: THE MORALISTS (1709)**

Usually, when facing a disturbed living environment there are two choices: to struggle for an improvement of the situation or to escape from it and search for a kind of peaceful seclusion. The former is a positive attitude, but the future remains uncertain; the latter may be thought of as passive, but safe. The quiet sanctuary, retreat and solitude are international themes of landscape design which, on the one hand, satisfy



the immediate needs, and on the another hand promotes a more general profound aesthetic sense. Escapism has historical favour, because by holding this idea people can more easily achieve a psychological balance in uncertain circumstances. Escaping from real life is usually considered as irresponsible behavior in terms of morality, however, it may provide a chance to meditate upon the original meaning of life, leading one back to a rustic and simple life style in which alternative sources of satisfaction are found, especially in the beauty of nature.

Political conflicts and the chaos of society often led to an attitude of escapism among the upper classes (usually the estate owners) of England in the 17th century. Particularly at the suffering from the Civil War (1642 - 1649) and the continuing political struggle, the countryside and gardens became refuges for the disturbed minds of the Royalists or in turn the Parliamentarians. The need for political safety and psychological peace were the most important motives for politicians to retreat to the country where the meaningful activity for them was to re-plan their estates and make lovely gardens. Thus, the idea of rural retirement was occasionally borrowed and advocated by the gentleman class. William Temple (1628 - 1699) in his essay 'Upon the Garden of Epicurus' (1685) wrote: "Epicurus passed his life wholly in his garden: there he studied, there he exercised, there he taught his philosophy ... (because) the sweetness of air, the pleasantness of smell, the verdure of plants, the cleanness and lightness of food, the exercises of working and walking; but above all, the exemption from cares and solicitude, seem equally to favour and improve both contemplation and health." [3]. Sharing the same idea, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper also believed that a garden should induce peacefulness and spirituality: "There walk at leisure and in peace; contemplate, regulate, dispose: and for this, a bare

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<sup>3</sup> T. H. D. Turner: *English Garden Design: History and Style since 1650*, the Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., 1986 England, p.14.



field or common walk will serve full as well, and to say truth, much better.” [4] In other words, the garden should be a place far away from busy secular life where one can achieve mental peace and physical health. In Matthew Prior’s words (1700):

“Great mother, let me once be able  
To have a Garden, house, and stable;  
That I may read, and Ride, and Plant,  
Superior to desire, or want;  
And as Health fails, and Years increase,  
Sit down, and think, and die in Peace.” [5]

With design theory, the emergence of related design idea was influenced by thoughts from literature and visual art. Rural ways of life in general were admired by the English gentry, and descriptions of the villas of Rome and the healthy rural life they embodied came to be an important reference for the escapists. Although the gardens were described as an ideal place for living where people were satisfied both physically and psychologically, man was still thought of as the centre of those places. Thus aesthetically all surroundings should be ordered in the best way to meet the desires of peacefulness and spirituality. This life style, the Classic flavour of rural life needs substantial material support, hence the necessary profits and effectiveness of land use cannot be ignored.

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4 T. H. D. Turner: *English Garden Design*, p.14.

5 John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis: *The Genius of Place*, London, 1975, p.11.



### 13.3 PLEASURE WITH PROFIT

Ultimately, the designed landscape is a materialized place in which people live and stay. Pleasure can not totally separate from profit. Even in the garden described in the Bible, both the pleasure of sight and the profit of food supply are emphasised. According to 'the Book of Genesis', the garden created by God in Eden is "made to grow out of the ground every tree desirable to one's sight and good for food and also the tree of life in the middle of garden and the tree of knowledge of good and bad." [6]. Man, created by God, was put there to dress it and keep it, and the highest ideal of Christianity is to live in the place made by God where one can enjoy life with both pleasure and profit offered by the highly designed place. As we have already mentioned, gardens in the Middle Ages illustrated in religious pictures were not only a refuge from inhospitable natural environments, but also sources of food and herbs. Even today, this idea is still an important motive of gardening for the modern British.

However, along with the walks extended over the enclosure and wider traveling, the people gradually learned to appreciate and accept natural forms of wild landscape. Combined with estate management, the scale of gardening was enlarged, and the idea of landscape design became compositional. Thus, the English way of extending the view by hiding the boundary for "calling in the country" (Pope's term): a practical design device, HA HA [Fig. 13-1] [7], a kind of sunken ditch was developed,

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6 *Holy Scriptures* p. 8-9.

7 According to Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe (*The Landscape of Man*, Thames and Hudson 1987 London, p.223), it was William Kent, painter and architect, jointly with Charles Bridgeman (d. 1738) who invented the Ha Ha or sunk ditch, and thus "leaped the fence and saw that all nature was garden."



which reminds us the similar Chinese design principle of extending the scope of enjoyable landscape: **BEYOND THE BOUNDARY.**

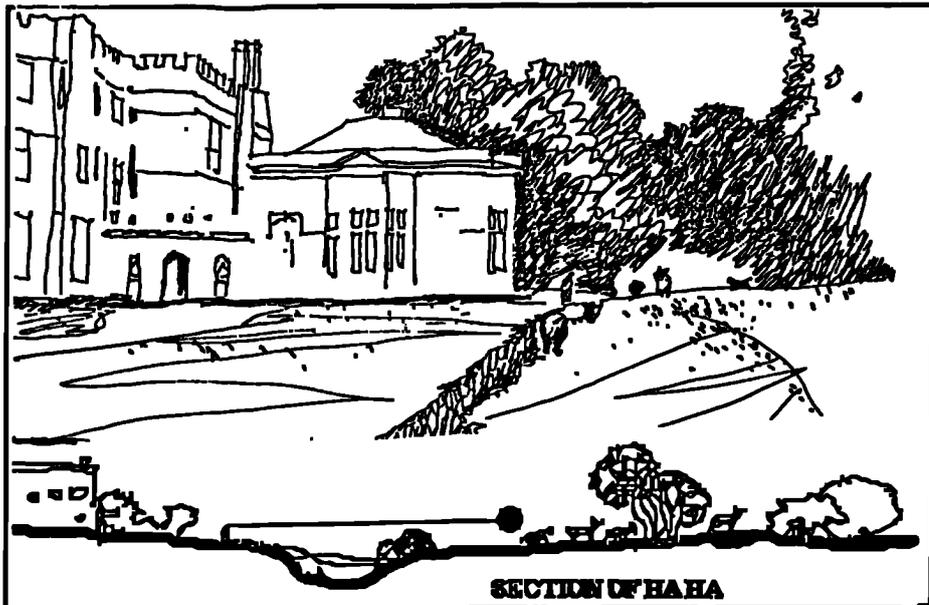


Fig. 13-1: HA HA, at Rousham in Oxfordshire [illustration with reference to Christopher Thacker (1979), *The History of Gardens*, Croom Helm, London.].

An important figure at the beginning of the indigenous English school of landscape design was Joseph Addison (1672-1719). He put forward the idea: “A field of corn can make a pleasant prospect” to bring farming and gardening together [8]. The idea of uniting farming, husbandry and pleasure brings a profound aesthetic meaning to the managing of landscape and provides an opportunity to bridge the gap between beauty and utility. It is the Beautiful plus the Good — in the meanings discussed in Chapter 2 — which made it possible to realize the comprehensive aesthetic aim of landscape design. Bearing in mind this,



the so-called **ORNAMENTAL FARM** mentioned by Horace Walpole can also be thought of as an embodiment of this principle [Fig. 13-2].

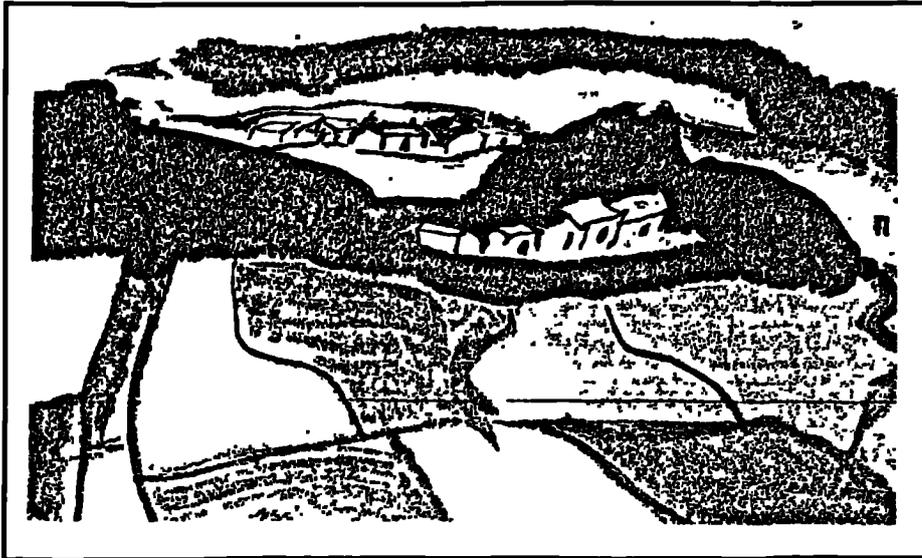


Fig. 13-2: “A field of corn can make a pleasant prospect.”

Another influential figure who instilled the notion the idea of ‘Pleasure with Profit’ was Stephen Switzer (?1682-1745), a pupil of commercial gardeners London and Wise and a design collaborator with Vanbrugh and Bridgeman. He spoke of “‘Rural and Extensive Gardening’: allowing the ‘Beauties of Nature’ to remain ‘uncorrupted by Art’ — not straightening serpentine lines of path or river and directing that ‘all the adjacent Country should be laid open to View, and the Eye should not be bounded with High Wall, Woods misplac’d, and several Obstructions, that one sees in too many places, by which the eye is as it were imprisoned.’” [9] Also, he considered that the place near the house

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<sup>9</sup> John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis: *The Genius of the Place*, Paul Elek, London, 1975, p.151- p.152.



where 'a little Regularity is allowed', should include a 'rural and extensive garden' beyond it, where the design 'ought to be purely Nature'. Switzer seemed advised getting rid of the enclosing wall, to unite the adjacent country with the garden as a whole. This is the underlying motive behind the use of Ha Ha to connect the garden with farming land or forest, thus, conveying the landscape aesthetic idea: **Pleasure with Profit**. The idea of the 'Rural garden' made it possible to transform the man-made regular forms into the freely-developed natural forms, therefore achieving a desirable living environment on a large scale.

Following the above thoughts, there is no difficulty for us to understand another aesthetic principle: the **Serpentine Line**, which became one of the most favorable features of the English landscape park, [10] a medium-making linkage between garden and countryside. By the use of the **Serpentine Line**, the formal central axis of English Classical buildings contrasted with paths in the woods or alongside water in a manner similar with Chinese landscape principle of **The Zigzag Way**. In practice, this manner of using a natural line appeared as early as 1718 at **Shotover**, near Oxford. It was **Alexander Pope (1688-1744)** who put forward ideas of "variety, surprise and concealment of the bounds" (an another similar idea with the Chinese!) [11], further enriching the real consequences of such an approach. Even today the idea of 'calling in the countryside' and its relevant landscape principles provide a reliable approach to many modern landscape designs. It combines the enjoyment of natural scenery with profits (of agriculture or industrial forest), to achieve an aesthetic integration — the essence of landscape design.

Practical considerations arising out of advances in botany, horticulture, and agricultural development were other important influences on the change of attitude towards landscape design. As **Hunt and Willis**

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10 The issues about **Serpentine Line** will be discussed in coming chapters.  
11 **Mavis Batey (1982): *The Evolution of the English Landscape Park*, p.2.**



summarized (1975), “The English landowner had constantly looked abroad” — to Holland especially — for trees, flowers and shrubs, to France for the operations of French wine-growers, to Italy for the pattern of the Roman villa-farm. But he also benefited from a much increased local awareness of botany and horticulture, and realized the “desire to enhance his land without sacrificing too much of its space for a pleasure garden *per se*.”

Meanwhile, relating to the idea of Pleasure with Profit, the fear of a shortage in timber supply was also an important motive for planting woodlands and perimeter belts. John Evelyn (1620-1706), who “is seen as a second Virgil on account of his grasp of the technical and philosophical aspects of country life” [12], had noticed that after the Civil War there was a danger from the depletion of the timber supply, and advocated that landowners should re-plant their deer parks and link the idea of amenity with utility in woodland management. Evelyn, who practiced design and applied his own principles, urged the planting of forest trees not only to gain timber but also for their beauty, and his advice about tree planting had considerable influence. According to Mavis Batey (1982), Evelyn’s concept of ‘forest gardening’ as an aesthetic setting for the house developed into an extension of the formal garden with prolonged vistas, geometric groves and vast avenues standing across the countryside like a giant goose foot. No matter what visual artistic taste he held, undoubtedly Evelyn was the pioneer promoting the design principle of ‘Pleasure With Profit’.

Hunting, again, was also a factor in the planting of woods or forests. Although the motive of hunting was for spending the surplus energy of the leisure classes, forests as the most necessary setting for the

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12 T. H. D. Turner: *English Garden Design: History and Style since 1650*, the Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., 1986 England, p.14.



killing of game were also valuable capital and source of timber supply and natural scenery.

There is also no doubt that the costs of making and maintaining gardens and parks concerned the landowners and directly effect the profit in any design style. Obviously, the costs of the formal French garden or copies of it were relatively higher than those of 'natural' gardens because of their high content of materials, building and craft-work, and high-maintenance features such as topiary. For most of the landowners a designed landscape is not like an antique kept only for looking at; it is a place for inhabiting or visiting whose character is forever changing along with natural processes. It is difficult and unreasonable to shape landscape entirely according to the principles of fine arts, since a site is not like a piece of raw stone for sculpturing or a sheet of drawing-paper; its contents grow according to natural laws. Thus, a compromise between the wild and the tamed open space is needed to maintain lower or reasonable costs without sacrificing pleasure.

In short, if there is a God, his garden provides both pleasure and profit. Admiring the life style of the happy man such as Virgil, one should be able to enjoy the 'field of corn' as much as the garden for a life of leisure needs material support. Without forest or woods, avenues and green belts cannot be formed; without enhanced land forms and grazing grass, the mansion will be surrounded by a dull geometrical chessboard, even though it may look green. For the English who enjoyed both good taste and an estate, the idea of Pleasure With Profit — beautiful scenery plus efficient land use (to gain capital, grain, and timber supply) — was very acceptable and worthy. For aesthetics, 'Pleasure With Profit' is simply an idea of the Beautiful and the Good, and very practical for the landscape.



## 13.4 IDEAL FORMS

Why had the English so easily accepted the so-called Formal Garden to start with and ignored their irregular landscape of woods, meadows and river? Are there any reasons that come from aesthetic influences rather than a simple change of taste. Possible answers may be found in the influence of classical philosophies, concerning ways of understanding nature.

Since we live in an imperfect world, naturally we dream about some sort of perfection from time to time. If there is such an idea, then a question follows: what are the perfect forms of the world and how can we follow them? The answer in English minds must at first relate to the main stream of European philosophy, particularly that of the Greek, the thoughts of Plato.

The real world is composed by myriad individuals which are undergoing an endless change. There is difference, unbalance, or disorder. The world and life experienced are imperfect or even sometimes "ugly". Thus, perfection exists only in an ideal realm, the kingdom of universals and in terms of form which results in arbitrary, irregular and uncertain features. In contrast to geometrical forms such as the sphere, equilateral triangle or square which follow an accurate mathematical order, these states of all natural beings are difficult to control by limited human power. As a result of this understanding, a purely subjective way of thinking may provide a direct solution to meet the basic human desire of improving the living environment. Therefore, when ideal forms parallel other human ideals such as beauty, truth and justice, they become a kind embodiment of the thought, a philosophical explanation of the world and guide human activities, although existing only in a spiritual world.



Bearing this in mind , the aim of art is to search for perfect expression for the perfect state of life. Thus, mathematical axioms and geometrical forms: provable, ordered, and easily learned, handled, controlled and composed to human desires are imposed on all sorts of art practices, even though they are abstract.

Once the theory of ideal forms plays its role in art practice, it will lead to a centralized humanist attitude to the world, and ideal forms will become the highest aesthetic realm, a symbolic depicting of beauty: The conclusion is that desirable perfection must be achieved by human will. With landscape, no other natural kind of beauty can exist without human help because the forms of the natural world are so imperfect, unstable and far away from the ideal order.

According to Platonic thinking the word 'nature' means the essence of the world rather than the abundance of what nature actually is. So aesthetically, what art should express is an idealized nature rather than an experienced imperfect world around us. Logically, what should be imitated from nature are not those real parts but the superior forms which reflect a universal quality. Although the habit of rural retirement allowed a chance for the wealthy to become close to and enjoy the beauty of the natural world, what was being searched for was in fact an ordered, rational systematic world: an idealized environment which expressed the Platonic concept of nature, rather than the ordinary world which is full of mischance and imperfection.

Meanwhile the basic Christian belief of the British told those cultivated minds that life does not originate by chance, but by heavenly creation. There is an amazing logic in God's design structure which puts the right things in the right place according to a hierarchical system, so it is also very clear that the world created by Mighty God should have nothing wrong within it. Man-made things ought to follow the principle of God's creation precisely; designed landscape without exception must



follow the hierarchical order, the holy law of God. Here the ideal world is again thought of as superior to real natural world, which is hostile, and where even its charming visual aspects are full of sin.

The rationalism of the 17th century might have shaken the rule of theology to its very foundation; on the another hand, it placed too much emphasis on human will and power, and that led to a dangerous uncertainty as to what rightful position in the world human beings should occupy. Therefore, even at the time of the Renaissance, when the power of God was questioned and the real secular life became more highly valued, more emphasis was placed on a safer kind of rational thinking rather than on acceptance of the whole world. Thus, ideal form and the harmonious proportion found in the circle, the square, the golden section and the constancy of geometrical forms were easily accepted and used as the main media for making their living environment.

Thus, to design is to search for an expression of the highest ideal of life: a world which is absolutely safe, beautiful, and ordered, operated by the perfect formal design language. The Romans did this, the Italian Renaissance reviled this, the French developed this, the Dutch enjoyed this, and the resulting landscapes are ideal, powerful and impressive [Fig. 13-3, Fig. 13-4 and Fig. 13-5]. The English had no reason to choose differently from other Europeans. Thus, at the suitable moment, the time of the High Renaissance, when Charles II came back from France, the formal garden became popular by an inevitable process.

Take the architecture of Alberti and Palladio for instance. Although the architects were enlightened by humanism and classical tradition, their aesthetic principles were essentially rational, Platonic. This fashion with its call for surroundings came to England and Scotland without any obstacle during the English High Renaissance. The change of taste reflected those British patrons psyche. The same philosophical roots had grown similar branches. Temporarily, the differences of natural



condition does not matter. There was still long way to go to achieve a profound understanding of the genius of the place, a compromise between classical philosophy, Christianity and sense of locality. It took the British time to achieve a harmonious realm in which a relationship between man and nature can be demonstrated in a more natural way and allow objective beauty fully appreciated.

The tendency to impose ideal forms on the landscape derived from Platonic thought and had wide acceptance in England before the 18th century. The theory of Alberti, the pattern of Palladio mansions, the gardens of Le Nôtre, the philosophy of Descartes, all had a life in England, and when combined with the medieval cultural heritage, was an orthodox and influential body of ideas.

This aesthetic understanding had a psychological base in the desire to express power with the driving force coming from the increasingly wealthy through their developing world trade. To impose ideal forms on the land was to demonstrate that man could change the world to his own satisfaction; the features of such places were read as symbols of the power, status and knowledge of those who made them, and consequentially nothing must appear out of control. Men proved themselves as great improvers and conquerors of the outside world, leaving no doubt that the right relationship between man and nature was to embody the ideal order and realize this landscape concept subjectively by a precise and formal design language. The essential relationship between man and nature, inner and outer worlds is simply man and his possessions: the ruler and his slaves.

Reviewing the history of landscape design, ideas of this kind were usually popular at a time when human powers were presumably to be strong. That is why the so called formal style was founded and so strongly developed in the powerful French court and formed such favour among British upper classes.



While the mood and natural experiences of the British were instinctively different from those in the continent, their land-forms are mostly unsuitable to the formal garden approach, As soon as they become fully aware of these differences, aesthetics inevitably changed and the experiences gained from the native landscape became a crucial theme to be studied.

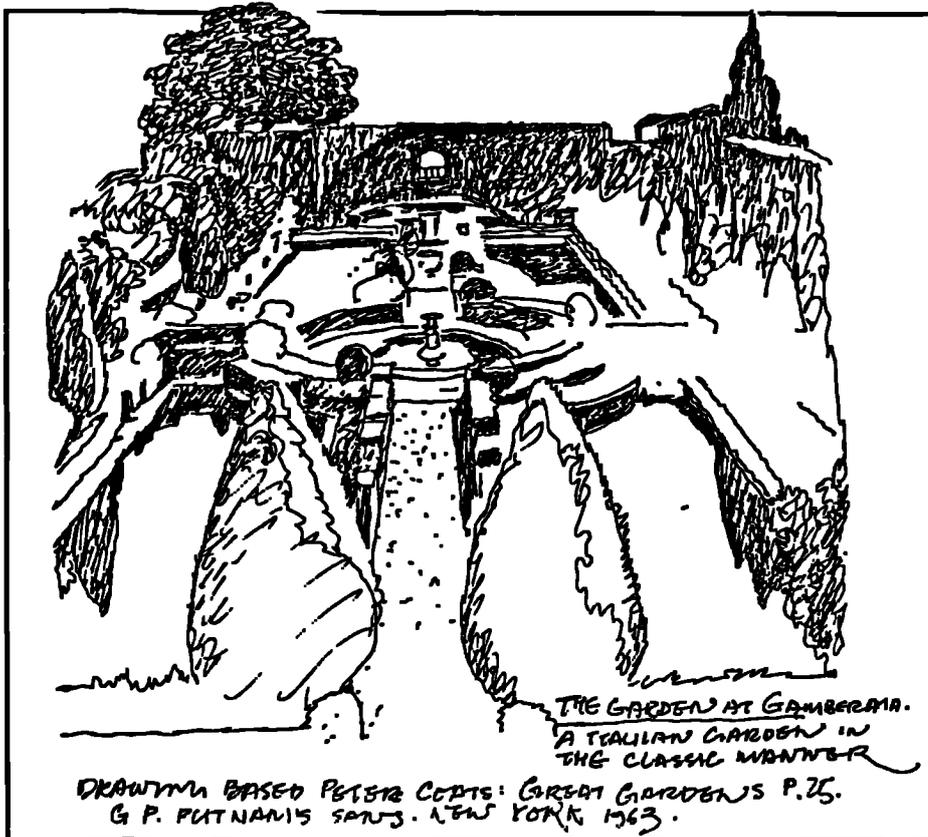


Fig. 13-3: Geometrical Theme in Italian Renaissance Garden: Villa Lante (1564-1580) [illustration with reference to John Michael Hunter (1985), *Land into Landscape*, George Godwin, London and New York, p.83-84].

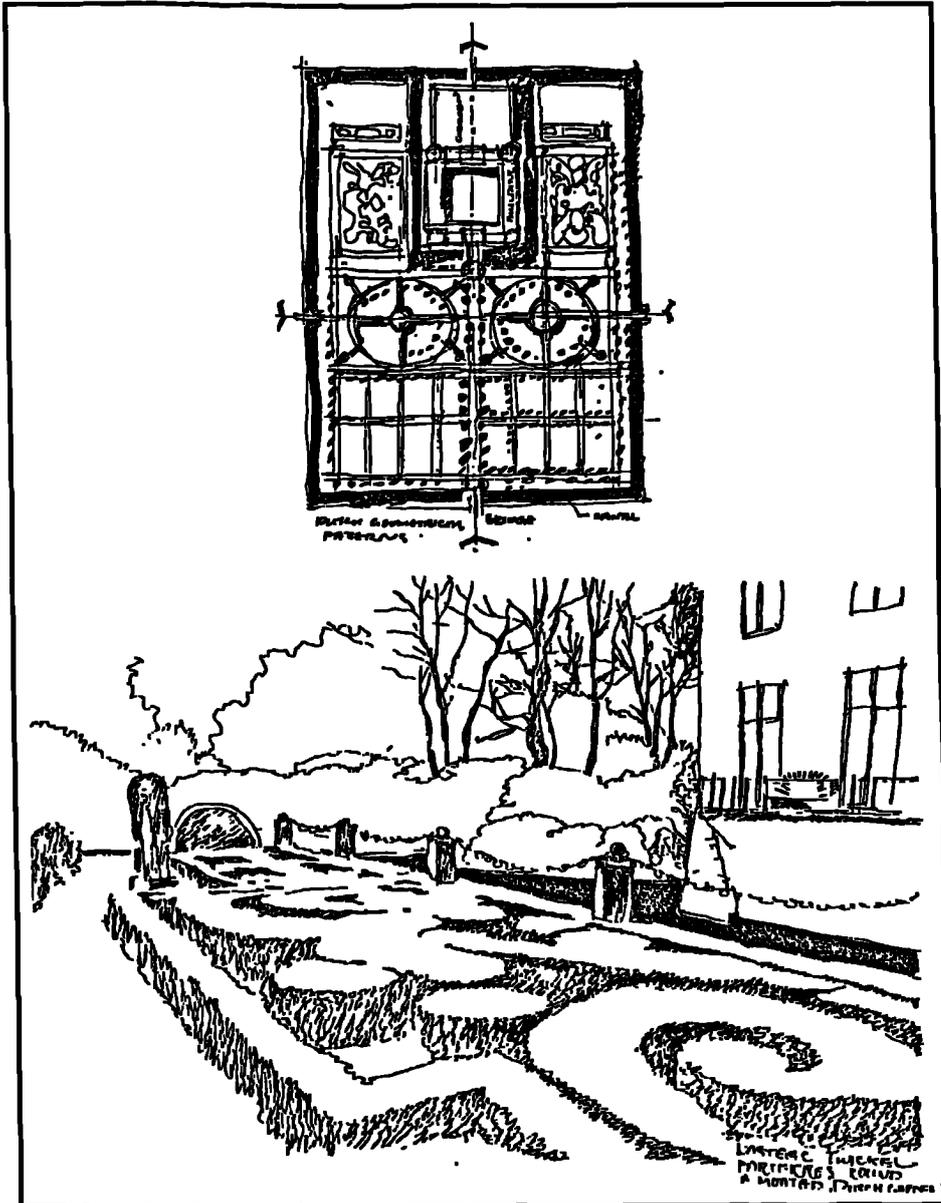
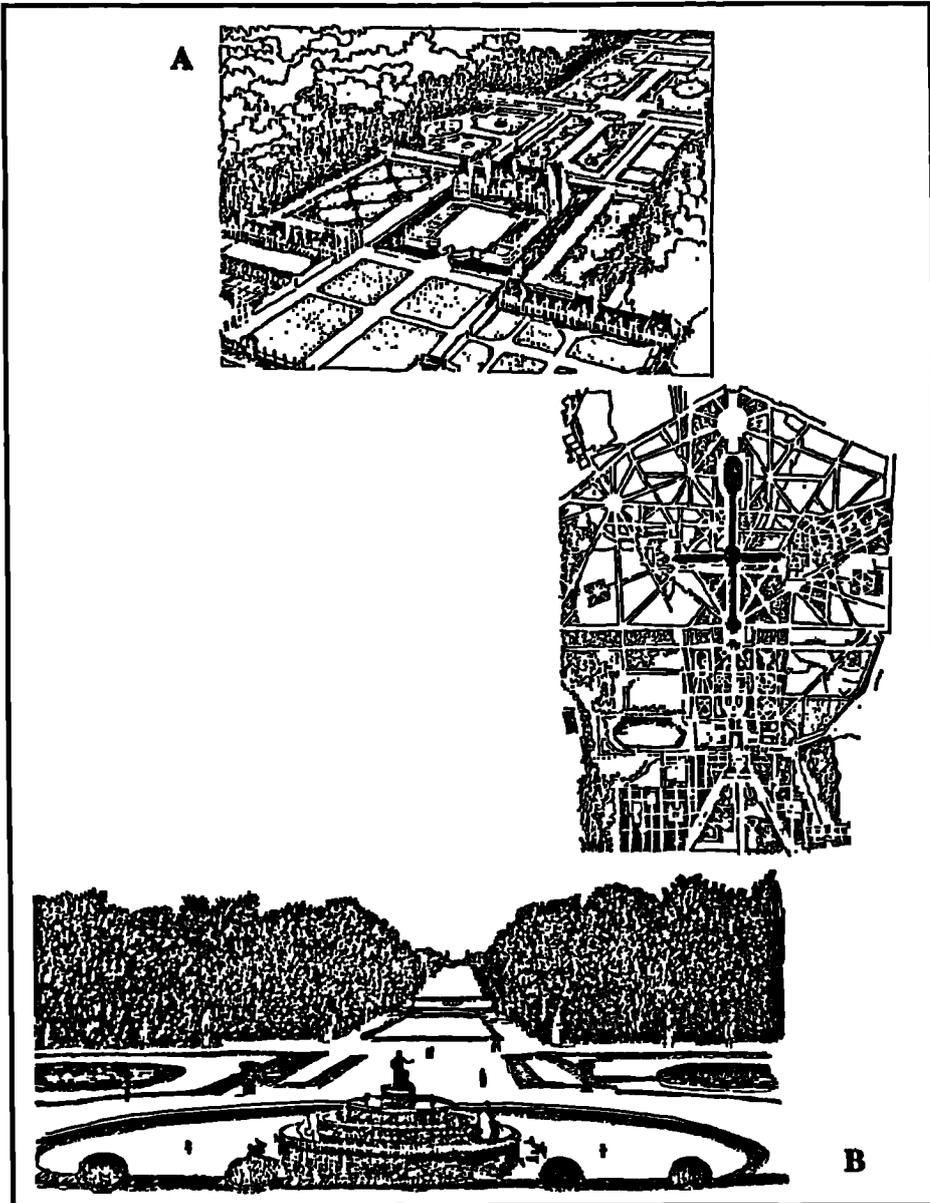


Fig. 13-4: The geometrical patterns in Dutch garden. Although the Dutch also use geometrical patterns to create gardens, the scale is relatively small, and the atmosphere more intimate with daily life compared with that of the French.



**Fig. 13-5: French Formal Garden: A: VAUX-LE-VICOMTE (1661); B: VERSAILLES, The symbol of French grand landscape style and the culmination of Le Nôtre's design career [illustrations with reference to Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe (1987), *The Landscape of Man*, Thames and Hudson London, p.182, p.187 and p.188].**



## 14

### THE ROMANTIC AESTHETIC IDEAS

When researching into landscape aesthetics, philosophers are usually limited by a lack of practical experience, artists are conditioned by their preoccupation with visual conventions, landscape designers are mostly engaged in the process of exploring design technique. Thus, it is necessary to go beyond certain limitations and insist upon an objective and comprehensive attitude towards this issue, particularly when we study the aesthetics of the English School with its origins ranging from Gothic to classical Renaissance traditions and even taking in the influence of Eastern landscape ideas.

#### 14.1

#### EMPIRICISM & AESTHETICS

We can hardly define what exactly Romanticism is, nor is it easy to achieve a proper understanding of the English School by means of ambiguous concepts such as style, taste, etc.. The better choice may be to dig out its philosophical roots, to find the basis of its story of leaning towards nature and experiencing natural beauty, its characteristics of landscape design practice.

According to John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis (1975), a major influence in the rejection of French formality was the new scientific outlook of the Royal Society (founded in 1660). It opposed the dominant



Cartesian philosophy an empirical regard for local observation, patient investigation and what the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society called 'histories' as opposed to 'system'. An approach now considered and rigidly systematic was replaced by the freer English mode of thought. Thinkers, writers and artists influenced by this new 'Empiricism' such as William Temple (1628 - 1699) John Locke (1632-1704), Anthony Ashley Cooper, Lord Shaftesbury (1671-1713), Joseph Addison (1672-1718), William Hogarth (1697-1764), Edmund Burke (1729-1797), Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), Sir Uvedale Price (1724-1829) and so on, became representative figures in an initiation of the essentially English School of aesthetics, and exercised a crucial influence on landscape art. The key problem for them was to understand nature and its beauty through an English approach.

Although Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was hardly an aesthetician, he did write an essay about gardens in 1625 in which he suggested that one-third of the garden might be treated in a "wild" manner to embody his desire for "health or wilderness". [1] For us, the change of the attitude towards Wilderness is a turning point of the evolution of English landscape aesthetics.

It was John Locke (1632-1704), an important British empiricist, in his essay "Concerning Human Understanding" (1690) who suggested that without sensory experiences there is nothing in mind. This attitude brought a new epistemology and a new attitude towards the human aesthetic experience of natural beauty. Once empiricism was accepted by landscape thinkers and designers it soon functioned as a leading theory for establishing fresh landscape ideas. Locke's basic arguments were firstly to deny 'innate ideas': all ideas must derive from concrete experiences rather than prior concerns. Secondly, however complicated the idea is it

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<sup>1</sup> Brenda Colivin, *Land and Landscape*, p.67.



must be a outcome of collective associations which relate to individuals associated with the experience received or image being seen (information received through the action of seeing).

In contrast to the earlier Platonic doctrine, his ideas have an obviously anti-classical orientation. Breaking though the ideal kingdom conjured up by Plato, he did open a wonderful sensuous world in which all excellent feeling can be experienced without the burden of preoccupation. This was a great leap from classical philosophy towards modern thinking, and another liberation of human thoughts.

Although Locke had no direct influence on landscape design, his thought was a powerful philosophical contribution to landscape aesthetics. We are not sure whether Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) was influenced by Locke. Beauty, in Shaftesbury's mind, still remained as a sort of Platonic concept. He considered that "What is beautiful is harmonious and proportionable; what is harmonious and proportionable is true; and what is at once both beautiful and true is of consequence agreeable and good." Here he actually tried to unite truth, goodness and beauty as a whole concept. For him, taste and morals can be harmonized to make the perfect man; and taste was the product of correct feelings or "the polite imagination". But his stance was slightly different from those advocates of pure classicism, since even nature in his mind has a 'genuine order' and even a wild place can encourage contemplation and feelings of high moral value. Writing in 'The Moralists' (1709), he enthusiastically admired wildness: "The Wildness pleases. We seem to live along with nature. We view her in her innermost Recesses, and contemplate her with more delight in this original wildness, than in the artificial Labyrinths and feigned wildness of the Palace." [2] He drew attention to the experiential world and contributed to the understanding of

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2 John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, *The Genius of The Place*, Paul Elek, London, 1975, P.123.



the beauty of wildness, although his sense of natural beauty was still of a moralist.

According to Hunt and Willis (1975), Joseph Addison (1672-1718) adapted Locke's theory of mental activity, illustrating it with his visions of how a designed landscape works upon its visitors. On the quality of wildness, the effects of Locke's theory can be found more clearly in Addison's papers: on 'the Pleasure of the Imagination', where he wrote: "in the wild Fields of Nature, the Sight wanders up and down without Confinement, and is fed with an infinite variety of images, without any certain Stint or Number. For this Reason we always find the Poet in love with a Country-Life, where Nature appears in the great Perfection, and furnishes out all those Scenes that are most apt to delight the Imagination." [3] Here it must be emphasised that for Addison a kind of Perfection is found in real nature; the whole world can be experienced in the field and wildness of the countryside. This is an essential difference from the idea of the Ideal Form we discussed before.

On sense of beauty, he wrote: "I shall first consider those pleasures of imagination, which arise from the actual view and survey of outward objects; and these, I think, all proceed from the sight of what is great, uncommon, or beautiful." [4] For him, greatness means "the agreeableness of a whole view, considered as one entire piece", such as the 'Prospects' of an open champagne country, a vast uncultivated desert, of huge heap of mountains, high rocks and precipices, or a wide expanse of water, where we are not struck with the novelty or beauty of sight, but with that rude kind of Magnificence which appears in many of these stupendous works of nature." [5] His greatness might have inspired one of the most important categories in English aesthetics: the Sublime,

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3 John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, *The Genius of The Place*, 1975, p.141.

4 E. F. Carriv, *Philosophies of Beauty*, 1931, p.66.

5 E. F. Carriv, *Philosophies of Beauty*, 1931, p.66.



discussed by the excellent aesthetician, Edmund Burke (1728 - 1797). [6] Addison thought that new or uncommon things raise 'a pleasure in the Imagination' since they can gratify human curiosity with an 'agreeable surprise'. Meanwhile he did not forget that "there is a second kind of beauty that we find in the several products of art and nature. This consists either in the gaiety or variety of colours, in the symmetry and proportion of parts, in the arrangement and disposition of the bodies, or in a just mixture and concurrence of all together." [7] While he emphasizes that beauty is something that can be experienced in pure natural scenery and defined by experiences which have certain qualities such as Greatness, Agreeable and Surprise, he did not forget the central aesthetic role of man, as the beholder and creator of art and designed landscape. To Addison, abstract beauty does still exist, but must be refined through the observation of objects which are the products not of an 'ideal' but of art activities and natural experiences. However, he attached more importance generally to natural beauty itself than to that made by art. He said: "There is something more bold and masterly in the rough careless strokes of nature, than the nice touches and embellishments of art. Yet we find the works of nature still more pleasant." [8] Obviously both Addison and Shaftesbury were able to appreciate natural beauty, and particularly the beauty of wildness. However, as it is clear that Addison went far deeper than Shaftesbury in searching for the aesthetic source and the quality of the beauty, his search took him along very much an English philosophical path.

With garden design, Addison held parallel views: "Gardens are works of art, therefore they rise in value according to the degree of their

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6 This is a key issue we shall discuss in following paragraphs.  
7 E. F. Carriu, *Philosophies of Beauty*, 1931, p.67.  
8 E. F. Carriu, *Philosophies of Beauty*, 1931, p.67.



resemblance to nature.” [9] Again, on English garden features by way of comparison, in his essay in ‘The Spectator’ No. 414: “There is generally in nature something more grand and august, than what we meet with in the curiosity of art ... On this account our English gardens are not so entertaining to the fancy as those of France and Italy, where we see a large extent of ground covered over with an agreeable mixture of garden and forest, which present everywhere an artificial rudeness, much more charming than the neatness and elegance we meet with in those of our own country.” [10] Here, Addison had distinguished some difference between English gardens and those of the continent, and hinted at the future English landscape approach and aesthetic principles.

On the methods of balancing artificial and natural creation, he wrote clearly: “If the products of nature rise in Value, accordingly as they more or less resemble those of art, we may be sure that artificial works receive a great Advantage from their Resemblance to such as are natural; because here the similitude is not only pleasant, but the pattern more perfect.”[11] This opinion, even today is still acceptable.

We think Addison’s ideas are important for several reasons. First, he recognized the objective attributes of beauty; second, he clearly defined the qualities of natural beauty in concrete terms which relate to general experiences such as curiosity, variety, and particularly the wildness that is so highly valued in his writings; third, his idea about the relationship between works of nature and of art is of high value which conveys a methodological meaning conducting the way of appreciating and designing landscape. This probably played an important role in the change of manner of English designers, since Addison had explored landscape beauty systematically within the horizon of human experiences,

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9 Brenda Colivin, *Land and Landscape*, p.67.

10 F. R. Cowell, *The Garden As A Fine Art*, P.170.

11 John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, *The Genius of The Place*, p.141-142.



and was concerned landscape design at a new aesthetic level, his theory predicted the theoretical trend of English aesthetic ideas. From this point of view, he should be seen as not only a pioneer in the revolt against predominant French formality in garden design, but one of the founders of the landscape aesthetics of the English School, an outstanding figure who transferred a new spirit from pure philosophy to the theory of landscape design.

Following Addison, Stephen Switzer (1682-1745) in his 'Ichnographia Rustica' in 1718 and 1742 stated: "those who were most capable of art were always most fond of nature." [12] Switzer believed that "gardening required 'so noble and sublime a taste' and it is a 'collective body of arts'. [13] The awareness of this natural taste gave landscape practitioners confidence to express the beauty they experienced in nature, and to break away from geometrical formality. Meanwhile Switzer did try to bring 'a little gentle disorder' into the formal garden, as in his plan of Paston Manor [Fig. 14-1]. This can be seen as a starting point which indicates a substantial change of the English landscape activity. According to Walpole, before 1720 Bridgeman introduced 'a little gentle disorder into the plantations of his tree and bushes' at Stowe and 'banished verdant sculpture though he retained green architecture'. It was **Themath Bridgeman** who used Ha Ha when he helped Queen Caroline to re-plan the Royal Gardens at Richmond and Kensington. He concealed the boundary and opened up the view beyond, by ditches supported by a brick or stone wall that kept cattle to the wider area of grass away from the vicinity of the house. [14] Yet, though the change was only beginning, here, it is clear that the scope both of theorist and of

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12 F. R. Cowell, *The Garden As A Fine Art*, P.170.

13 F. R. Cowell, *The Garden As A Fine Art*, P.170.

14 F. R. Cowell, *The Garden As A Fine Art*, P.170.



designer was broadened, and the confidence to practice their own landscape ideas was stronger.

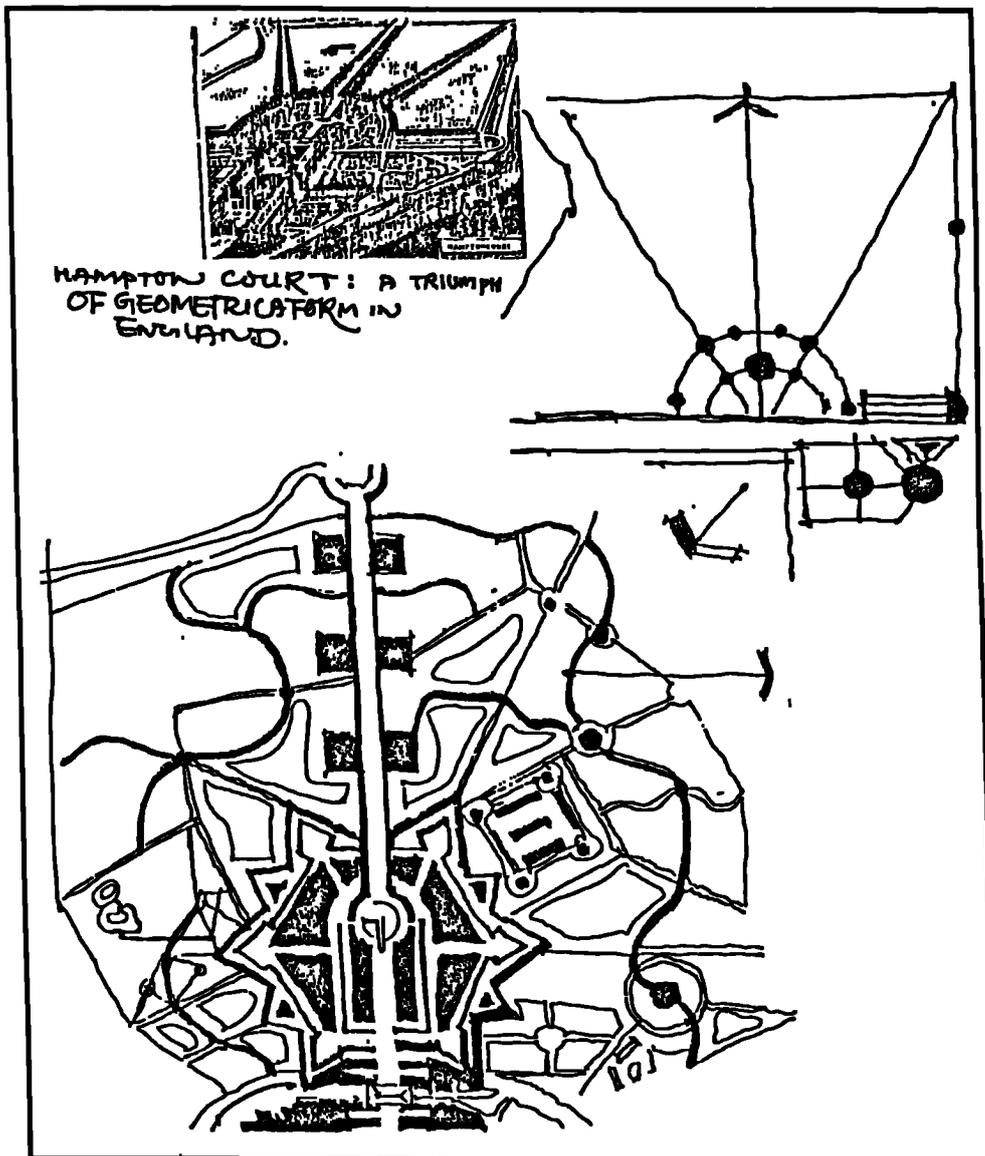


Fig. 14-1: Switzer's plan of Paston Manor in which 'a little gentle disorder' into a formal garden was allowed.[graphic analysis with reference to John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis (Ed. 1975), *The Genius of the Place, The English Landscape Garden, 1620-1820*, p.157].



On artistic forms, as we mentioned in chapter 5, **William Hogarth** (1697-1764) was the first English artist who spoke most of his own understanding of art. He declared his aesthetic opinions in writing 'The Analysis of Beauty' (1753) in which he advocated: "The first element in beauty is fitness, the second variety, and the third regularity, but of regularity only so much as fitness". Quality of line especially concerned him: "Though all sort of waving lines are ornamental when properly applied; yet, strictly speaking, there is but one precise line properly to be called the line of beauty. So there is only one precise serpentine line that I call the line of grace." Although Hogarth's concept seemed have no direct relation to landscape design, his advocacy of the 'Line of Beauty' and "Line of Grace", particularly the 'Serpentine Line', must have influenced the landscape taste. Jay Appleton (1975) noticed: "But in an age when Kent and Capability Brown had already banished the straight line from the park and replaced it with curvilinear features, it was inevitable that some significance for the aesthetics of landscape should be sought in Hogarth's lines." Here we have no intention to link Hogarth with landscape design directly, but what is interesting is that the line of beauty and grace supports the rejection of geometrical formality which was part of the change of the whole English aesthetic opinion. One of the most impressive characteristics of the English School of landscape design is its free, relaxed manner in the use of lines, which is sharply in contrast to the geometrical linear structure of the so-called Ideal Forms.

**Edmund Burke** (1729-1797) was one of the most important aestheticians of the 18th century. His thesis: "Inquire into the Origin of our ideas of Sublime and Beautiful" (1756, revised in 1765) was mainly on the two aesthetic categories associated with 'passion' and indicated a typical empirical aesthetic approach.



Passion was thought of as a kind of emotional outcome from perception. By the substitution of emotion for reason, Burke formed an objective basis for his whole aesthetic theory. To him, astonishment (resembling Addison's 'agreeable surprise') is the most overwhelming emotional product of the Sublime — a most lofty state of soul. According to Burke, the attributes of the Sublime are: obscurity, power, privation (vacuity, darkness, solitude, silence), infinity, succession, uniformity. The attributes of Beauty were smallness, smoothness, gradual variation, and delicacy of form and colour. There is no difficulty in finding some common ground in the theories of Burke, Shaftesbury and Hogarth although Shaftesbury saw Sublimity as solely a 'moral emblem', whereas in Hogarth's mind the art forms related to certain visual sensibilities. The difference is in their individual concerns: Shaftesbury with morality; Hogarth, with art forms; Burke with experience.

Although the aesthetic discussion developed by Burke was academically oriented, for us it seems to provide notes in advance for the designed landscapes of Brown or the paintings of Turner. For instance, the basic features of Kent's and Brown's landscape design such as the serpentine lines, the gradual changing levels, the smooth green lawns and the association of infiniteness, the openness of land and water, the connection with natural woods, all sorts of designed images seem an embodiment of the aesthetic ideas of Burke. Even more, the greatly opened scope of scenery, the loftiness of the mountains, the infiniteness of water, the darkness of storm, the sadness of sunset, the painful and tragic images of natural catastrophes depicted by Turner are also a pictorial explanation of Burke's aesthetic thoughts. That is why Hussey remarked (1927): "Burke opened the way to Romanticism." [15]

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15 Christopher Hussey (1927 & 1967), *Picturesque*, Thomas Nelson, London and Edinburgh, p.57.



Hussey also considered that Burke broke away from a moral concept of beauty, but got only as far as sensuous concepts. If the Sublime depended for its effect on surprise, “beauty was equally instantaneous in its effect, relaxing the nerves and fibres, and thus inducing a degree of bodily languor.” [16] If Beauty was wholly sensuous the most beautiful of experiences might be something like ‘a hot bath’, a pure biological response to stimulation. But the value cannot be denied that Burke showed many ways of linking emotion with objective and real experiences. By sponsoring passion and emotion as a certain kind of aesthetic perception, Burke “loosed emotion from the corsets of the intellect.” [17] He objectively elevated the qualities of the Sublime and the Beautiful, and revealed the great value of earthly experiences. However, on the another hand, since he lacked a practical artistic experience, he might omit some subtle attributes of beauty which only could be experienced through deeper and careful observation. Moreover, a complete aesthetic experience needs a subjective learning process involving the positive activities of creation or appreciation, for instance, in those of the savage and grandiose scenes presented in the paintings of El Salvador, the luxuriant natural details in Rubens and his ‘rough manner of penciling’, the tranquil serenity of Ruysdael, the rusticity of Constable, the extraordinary atmosphere in Turner. [18]

## 14.2

### FROM CLASSICISM TO ROMANTICISM

Before the ideas of those empirical thinkers exercised their substantial influences on the practice of English landscape design,

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- 16 Christopher Hussey (1927 & 1967), *Picturesque*, p.57.  
17 Christopher Hussey (1927 & 1967), *Picturesque*, p.57.  
18 Also see Chapter 4 and 5.



information from Italy very soon influenced the minds of designers and their patrons. According to T. Turner (1986), there were five main ways to get this information: the Grand Tour to see the Roman ruins; purchasing Italian landscape paintings; reading accounts of the ancient villas; copying the settings of Italian buildings; by transposing the technique of Italian stage design. Among these, the most influential approach was to get information from classical landscape paintings, particularly those by Claude Lorraine (1600-1682) and Nicolas Poussin (1593/4-1665) whose pictorial images combined natural scenery with classical buildings and ruins and depicted a model of rustic life. [19]

Because of their deeper aesthetic connotations, these paintings made in Italy were not seen by the English as purely pictorial exercises. For the English, particularly for the landed aristocracy who applied some knowledge of classical art directly or indirectly when considering the needs of improving their own estates, a search for the ideal mode of living through study of those landscape paintings from Italy was, to some extent, inevitable. It can be seen as a sort of exploration of life philosophy. In this way the British identified their own cultural linkage with the classical tradition.

With their atmosphere of pastoral beauty, the ideal landscapes of those painters provided English designers with a new landscape pattern, which embodied a desirable quality of life rather than a merely pictorial reference of fine art. The images of Italian landscape paintings gave an inspiration to thinkers about the English landscape, and courage to reject the dominance of French formality and improve England according to their own principles.

As discussed in chapter 4, Claude's art profited from his outdoor observation. He found his own landscape vocabulary, idealized the

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19      Also see chapter 4.



scenery, and optimistically depicted the lofty classical past and rural life manner. For the English, it provided just what was needed to satisfy the English taste in re-designing or improving their estates around Gothic ruins or newly established classical buildings.

“What Claude knew, Poussin proved.” [20] as discussed earlier, Nicolas Poussin following the rationalism and ‘designed’ his painting by intellectually re-ordering the irregularity of the objective world. [21] In his later landscape paintings, he developed the full potential of this rational landscape language through the use of a central perspective and a calm manner of depicting his idealized places. His paintings are a designed world in which the right things were put in the right places. The entire atmosphere of these landscapes was one of balance, calmness, freedom, relaxed but totally rational. The logical relationship of landscape forms, the stability of structured scenery, the horizontally developed picture invented by Poussin was provided as clearly as a written handbook, a rational expression of what had been sought by the English gentry for years: a balance between their charmingly irregular features of estates, undulating surroundings and general qualities of a desirable place in which to live. In terms of practical landscape design, features formed in Claude’s and Poussin’s paintings such as vertical rounded trees, buildings and ruins, winding streams or paths, horizontal masses of vegetation, green slopes and bridges over water linking small islands, gentle distant mountains and so on, closely resembled the potential of many English estates. Except for the climate, what Claude and Poussin undoubtedly provided what might be seen as an ideal design pattern which suited the characteristics of the topography of England, satisfied the building styles of past and present, and echoed harmoniously both the English nostalgic mood and the Classical cultural flavour.

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20 Bo Jeffares, *Landscape Painting*, p.29.

21 See chapter 4.

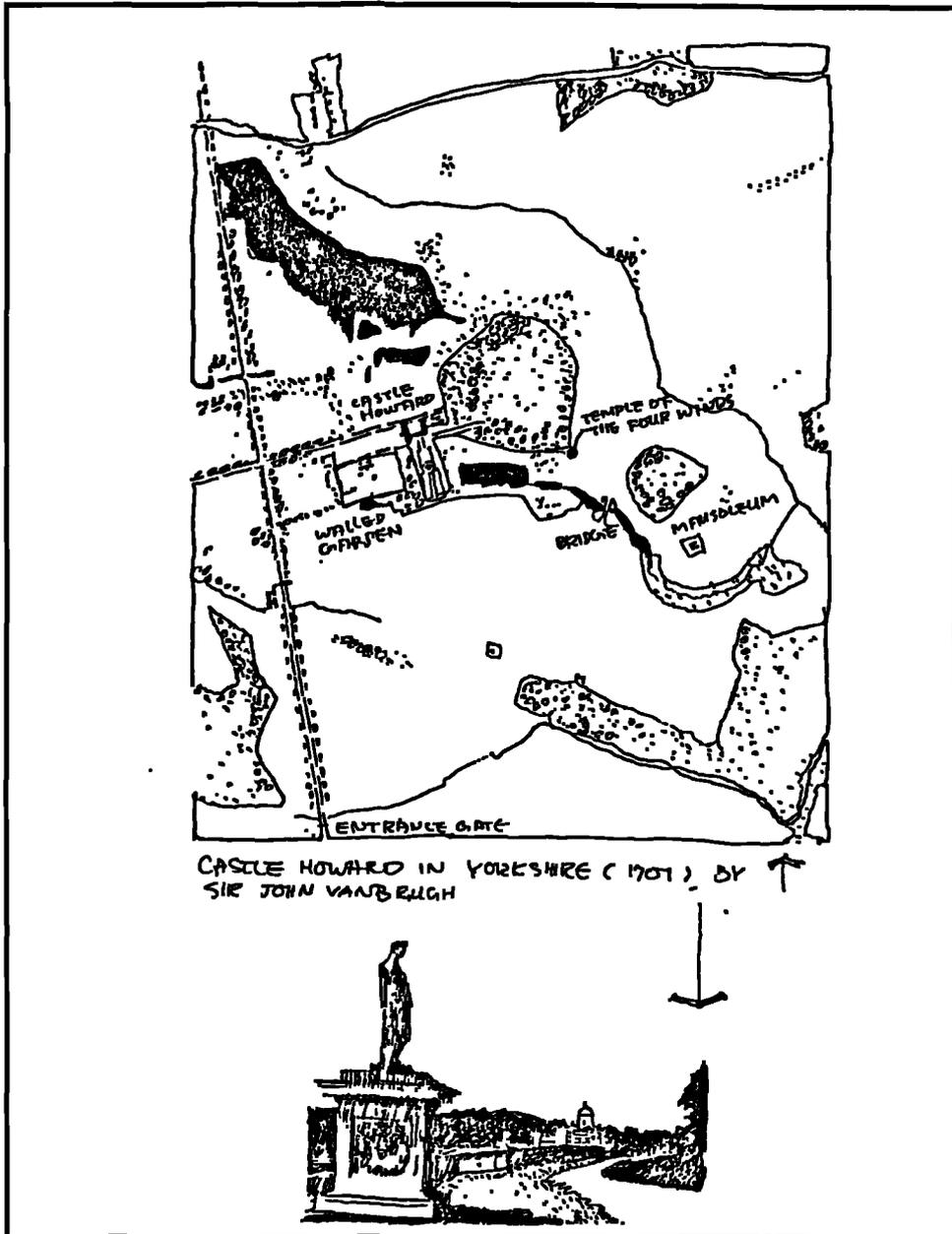


Fig. 14-2: Castle Howard, Yorkshire (1701) by Sir John Vanbrugh [illustration with reference to Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe (1987), *The Landscape of Man*, Thames and Hudson London, p.234].

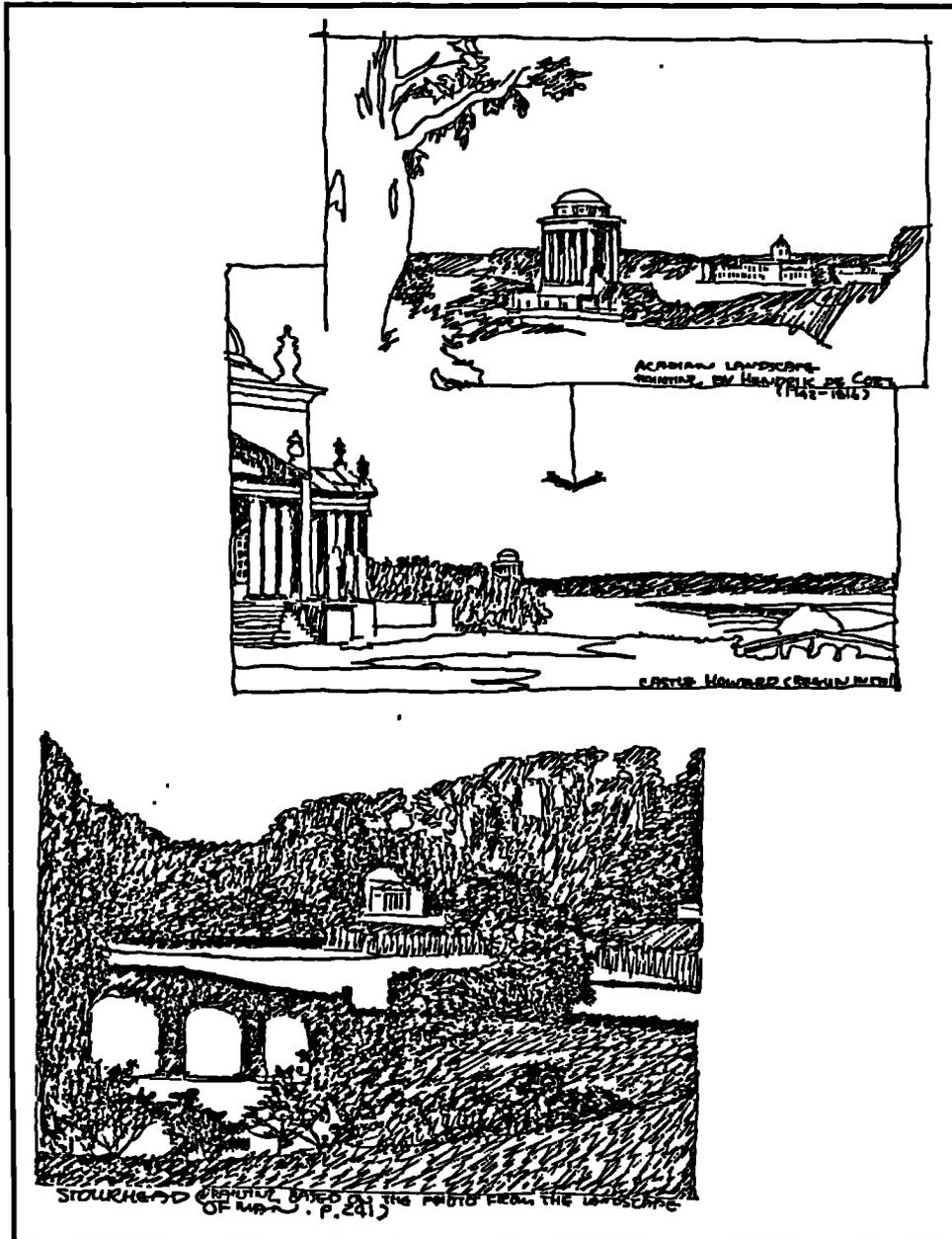


Fig. 14-3: In Castle Howard and Stourhead (1740-60), some pictorial scenes seem the copies of Acadian Landscape painting [illustration with reference to Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe (1987), *The Landscape of Man*, Thames and Hudson London, p.235, p.240 and p.241].



As we can see in Castle Howard, Yorkshire, (1701) by Sir John Vanbrugh and Stourhead (1740-60) by Henry Hoare (1607-1769). The layout of the whole site and some pictorial scenes seem very close to the pictures of classical masters [Fig. 14-2 and Fig. 14-3]. This had the effect of taking the mansion out of the dominant axis. Still more crucial is that they were a witness to the inevitable process of English understanding and possession of classical art. As a kind of cultural identification, they expressed not only pure learning but a physical embodiment of this cultural understanding on English soil, i.e. a way to make the classical landscape speak proper English. It is, of course, not an isolated art phenomenon in English history. In the areas of painting, architecture and stage design of this age, there also emerged the same tendency reflecting the same kind of cultural possessiveness. This is very clear if comparing the Villa of Lord Burlington and Garden (Chiswick House, 1726-27, Extedra by Kent 1727-1730, London) with Villa Almerico-Capra La Rotunda (1570, Vicenza) [Fig. 14-4].

As already described, a strong Romantic accent is both an indigenous and influential English artistic trend. Concepts such as superiority, grandeur, and nobility are expressed in a poetic manner which meets the needs of imaginative minds with high aesthetic enjoyment and a sense of escapism. The idea of Romanticism is hard to express by the use of languages such as architecture, and other design approaches because these media are so concrete and solid. However landscape design is an exception, and interestingly it was the English landscape that first stepped into the realm of Romanticism. The practice of William Kent (1684-1748) can be considered as the true beginning.

Kent has been called the father of landscape gardening who initiated the poetic landscape ideas of the age. Trained as a historical painter, architect, stage and landscape designer in Italy, he brought the classical design style to England. He was not only a scholar or cultural



disseminator, but also an explorer in searching for Englishness in landscape design.

According to Horace Walpole, "He leaped the fence and saw that all nature was a garden." Rousham in Oxfordshire [Fig. 14-5] is seen as typical of Kent's experiment and 'the most Characteristic and charming' of Kent's garden. [22] Studying in Italy, he mastered the principles of classical art and had been impressed by the dramatic effects of Italian gardens, such as the sharp contrast of light and shadow, the green background and dramatic gesture of trees surrounding the Palladian buildings. However strong the influences from Italy were, the classical landscape could not speak 'Latin' in England, so change was inevitable. For instance, in England the contrast of light and shadow is much softer than that found in Italy, so that the atmosphere of Claude's and Poussin's paintings could not be fully copied. Thus tall trees were used as the medium for the creation of dramatic effects of light and shadow around the English Palladian mansion or other classical buildings; the Gothic ruins were re-designed with a pictorial sense arise from the surroundings landform. Unfortunately almost none of original features of Kent's gardens remain. We learn his name and achievements as 'the father of modern gardening' mostly from literature rather than designed landscape. According to historians, Kent also influenced his successors in the way of using pictorial thinking in garden design. Brown was the most important figure among them.

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22      Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe, *The Landscape of Man*, p.237.

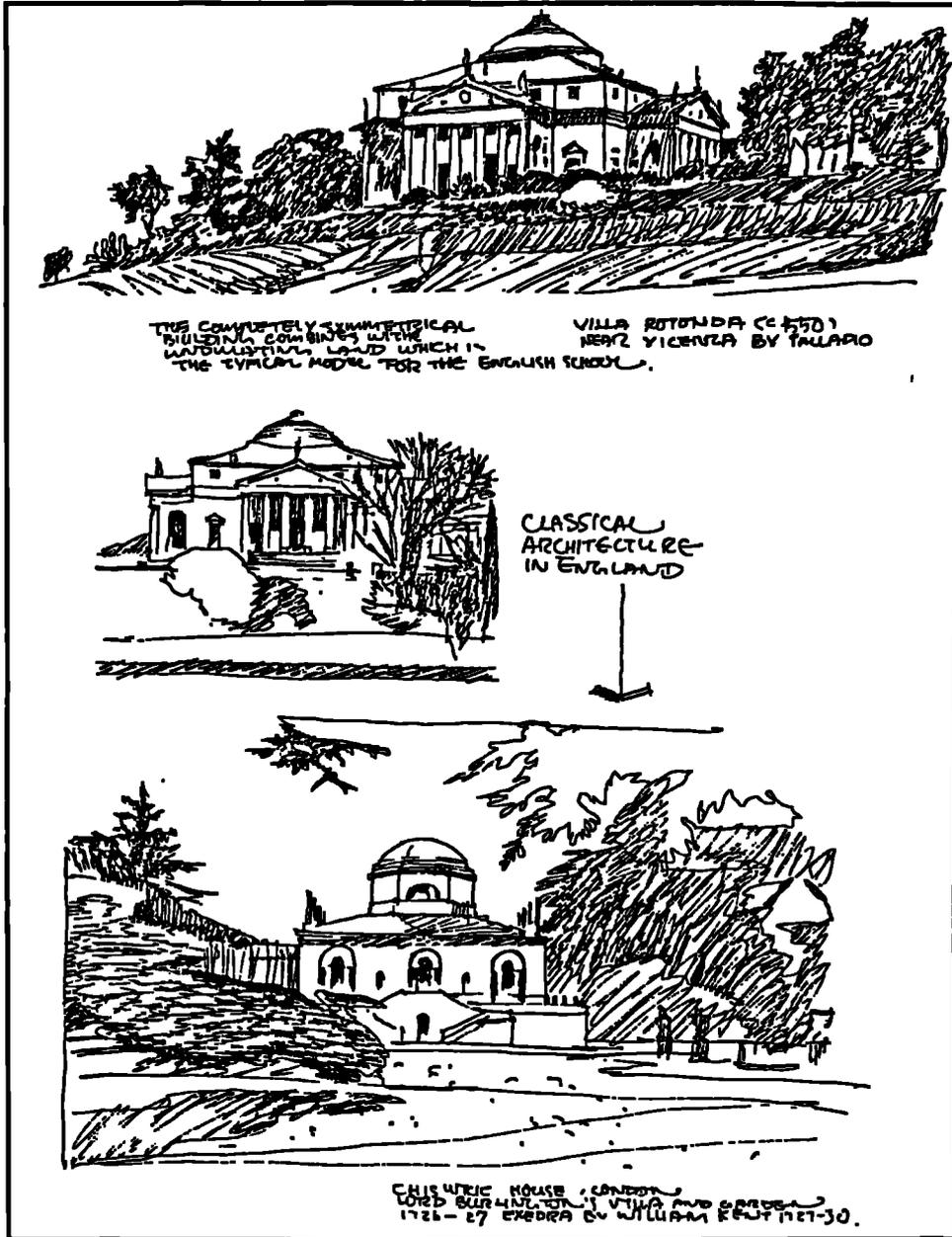


Fig. 14-4: A comparison between the Villa of Lord Burlington and Garden (Chiswick House, 1726-27), Extedra by Kent (1727-1730, London) with Villa Almerico-Capra La Rotunda (1570, Vicenza) [illustrations with reference to T. Turner (1986), *English Garden Design, History and style since 1650*, p.19].

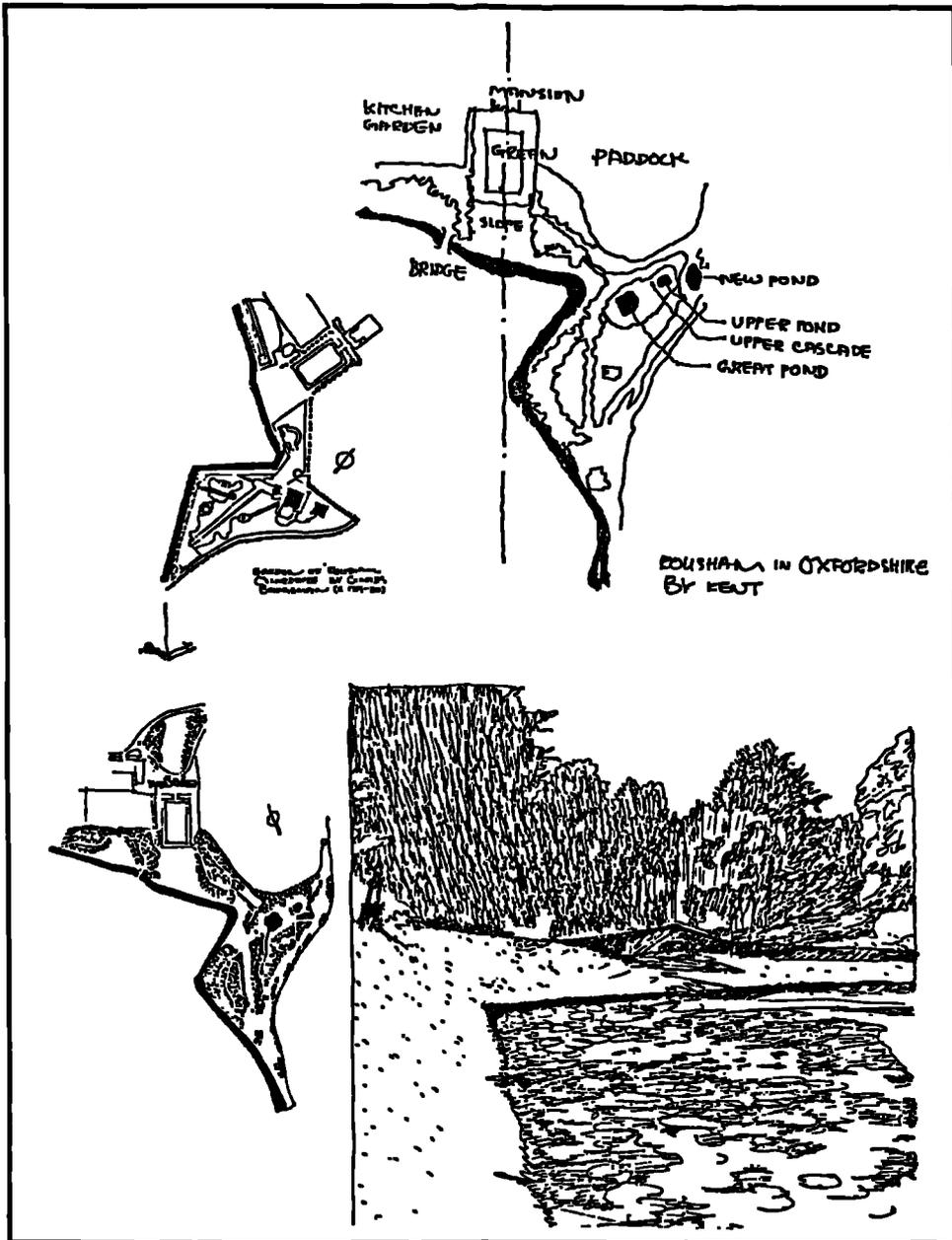


Fig. 14-5: Rousham in Oxfordshire is 'the most Characteristic and charming' of Kent's garden [illustrations with reference to Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe (1987), *The Landscape of Man*, Thames and Hudson London, p.234].



**Lancelot (Capability) Brown (1716-1783)**, was a professional gardener from 1749 (Kent's death) to 1783 who developed his own landscape model: a simple, strong, dynamic, pure landscape approach. The nickname for him refers to his use of site potential, since he always said: "My Lord, I observe that your park has great capabilities." According to *British Gardeners: A Biographical Dictionary* (1980), [23] Brown started his career as a boy in Northumberland, where he joined the garden staff at Stowe in 1740 as a kitchen gardener and remained at Stowe for eleven years which provided an opportunities for him to work with Bridgeman and Kent "as a executant under the influence of the innovators of the English landscape movement." The valuable experience he obtained there gave him the ability to think of landscape on a large scale, at first to improve estates and then to reform the English countryside. His name began to be noticed after he had become head gardener to the third Duke of Grafton at Euston Hall, Suffolk, where he had been allowed to put some of his ideas into practice. Leaving the Duke, he went to Blenheim where the innovations to the garden laid out by Henry Wise in 1705 made him famous [Fig. 14-6 and Fig. 14-7]. In July 1764 Brown became royal gardener at Hampton Court, achieving his highest point of professional success. He obtained many design opportunities, and many existing parks, fields and woods were transformed into his idea of a 'landscape park' for 'the English nobility and gentry'.

Brown's design vocabularies mainly are: I, winding water and bridge; II, undulating grass or meadow; III, clumps or belts of trees (also preferred by Kent). The affects of his composition is that the water flows over the undulating green, the shadows and lights of the clumps play on the grass or meadows composing a pleasant but controlled picture which

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23 Miles Hadfield, Robert Harling and Leinci Highton (1980), *British Gardeners: A Biographical Dictionary*, A. Zwemmer Ltd. London, p. 47.



attracts the eyes from different angles within the irregular green belt both linking and dividing the garden and country; It is either private or sweeping.

The ideas of Brown's landscape design are partly influenced by the contemporary concept of Idealized Nature where natural beauty should be imitated, and 'false accidents' eliminated. But, the most important part of his landscape idea was a sympathy with Hogarth's lines and the aesthetic concepts of Burke.

In sympathy with Hogarth's 'Waving Lines', he formed all his walks, lakesides and green belts in the serpentine manner and gave a smoothness to those undulating surfaces which was obviously an embodiment of what Burke thought of as 'the Beautiful'. According to Edward Malins (1966), much of Brown's work had qualities directly attributable to Burke's definition of beauty: smoothness and gentleness in lawns, slopes and plantations; a gradual variation in serpentine linear patterns, and a brightness, openness, and clarity throughout. Smoothness, round forms and gradual variations were the accepted forms of beauty, as well as the qualities of elegance which were also interpreted in Brown's works. Brown's sense of Classicism was not as strong as the works of Kent; native natural conditions, people's desires and indigenous English aesthetic ideas became the main issues in landscape practice. Brown left the classical track and founded his own way, a English romantic approach to design. This romantic trend of landscape design may be regarded as an expression of the national sense, a reflection of love of the homeland, an admiration of local natural land-forms, ecological balance and a concern for local economic and social life. As an expression of these ideas, this kind of Romanticism "is not necessarily sentimental, although the sentimental in the visual arts tends to arise out of a Romantic vision." [24]

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24 Harold Osborne, *The Oxford Companion To Art*, Oxford, 1970, p.1009.



Thus, the Romantic trend in these landscape designs was not characterised by sentimental factors or pictorial fantasy, but by a manner of paying attention to locality and the English mood. It was just like those landscape paintings by Gainsborough and Constable in which intense emotions lie behind the artistic images and a true sense of Englishness is revealed. Although there was an evident influence from the classical tradition, the product of these arts have a strong local accent.

As soon as Brown's ideas became appreciated and accepted by the public, his design approaches were imitated and formulated by his followers. Therefore, his basic landscape vocabulary such as the clearing of slopes, the exposing of undulating land-forms, the planting of clumps of trees and perimeter belts, the damming of streams for making water features in accordance with the Serpentine Line was repeated again and again and became fashionable features of all landscape parks. This indigenous form of landscape design achieved its highest level, but also invited a danger — a new mannerism.

Meanwhile, according to F. R. Cowell (1978), Brown's approach was still unacceptable to some minds who held a very pragmatic attitude towards their estate and "had grown fond of an old familiar garden of grass, flowers, arbours, trees all set somewhat haphazard". To such owners, Capability Brown was a "disaster". [25] His landscape effects were achieved at the cost of the destruction of much of the old familiar charm and beauty around houses, even of the gardens immediately around the mansions of his employers. It is partly true that Brown lacked concern for the immediate living environment, which was "distinctly marked by the absence of everything having the appearance of a terrace, or of architectural forms, or lines, immediately adjoining the house." The buildings, "rose abruptly from the lawn; and the general surface of the

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25 F. R. Cowell, *The Garden As A Fine Art*, p.175.



ground was characterized by smoothness and bareness. How barren were the sites on which they were placed.” [26] Even the pastures were condemned by William Chambers as insipid. After Brown’s death in 1783, there was increasing criticism of this ‘bare and bald’ type, where great houses sprang out of the turf, banks of river were left naked, and all vestiges of habitation were removed from the park. A more incisive criticism was made by Owen Cambridge: “I wish I may die before you Mr. Brown,” because “I should like to see heaven before you have improved it.” [27]

The evaluation of Brown’s landscape career is a disputed problem in English landscape history. Christopher Hussey wrote (1927): “He was, in fact, that most dangerous phenomenon, a practical man inspired by a theory. By a theory, moreover, that, although derived from visual qualities, had become intellectualised and standardized.” Yet, on the another hand, Brown’s contribution to the English School, particularly, his Romantic manner in landscape practice cannot be underestimated. Once Horace Walpole wrote: “We have discovered the point of perfection, we have given the model of gardening to the world.” [28] Obviously, this achievement could not exist without Brown’s contributions, although he did failed to link the old houses or mansions to the landscape parks properly. As the most important designer in English landscape history, he had taken a substantial step in developing the English School. When he died, “Walpole lamented the loss of ‘Lady Nature’s second husband and second monarch of landscape.” [29]

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- 26 F. R. Cowell, *The Garden As A Fine Art*, p.175.  
27 Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque*, p.139.  
28 F. R. Cowell, *The Garden As A Fine Art*, p.175.  
29 F. R. Cowell, *The Garden As A Fine Art*, p.175.

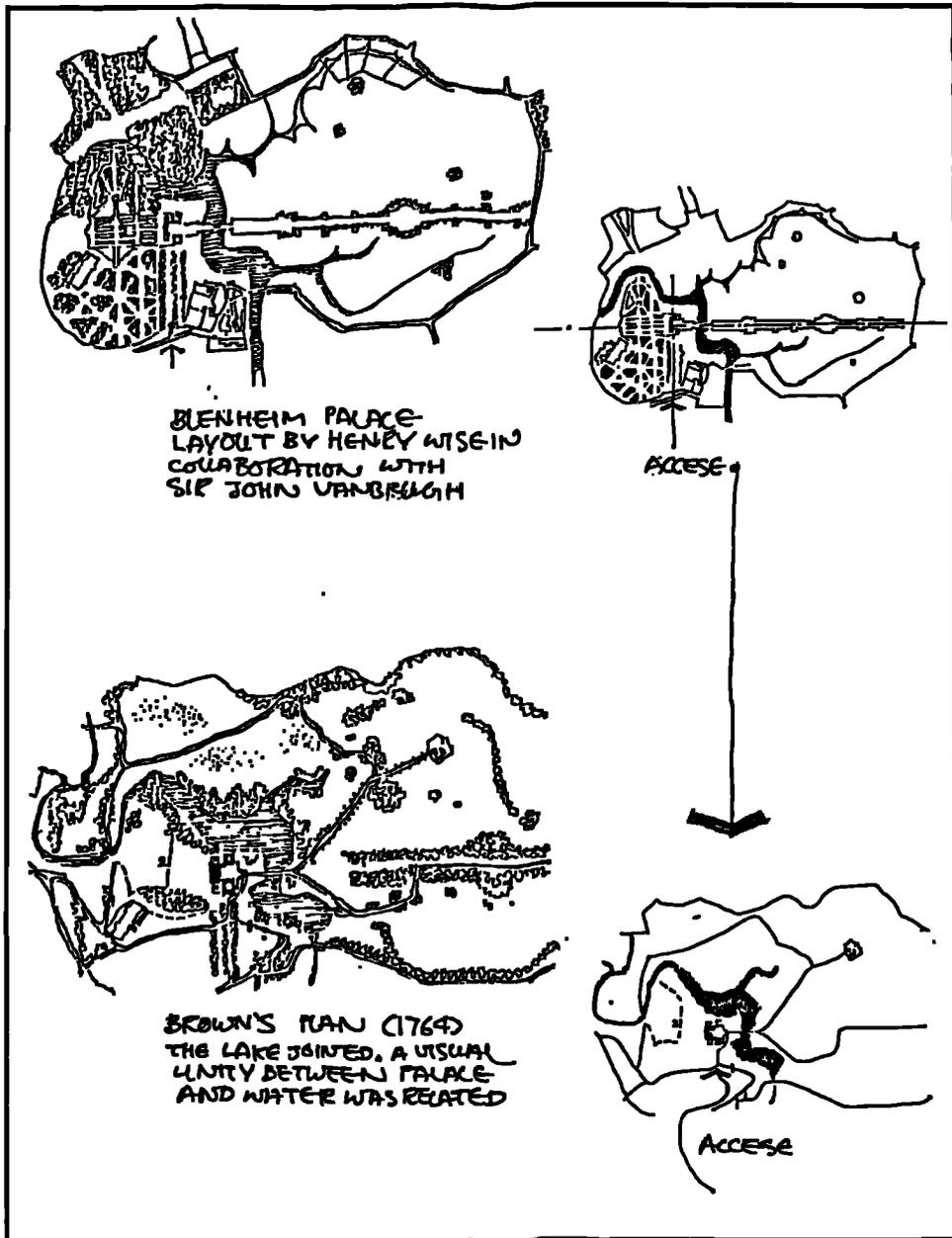
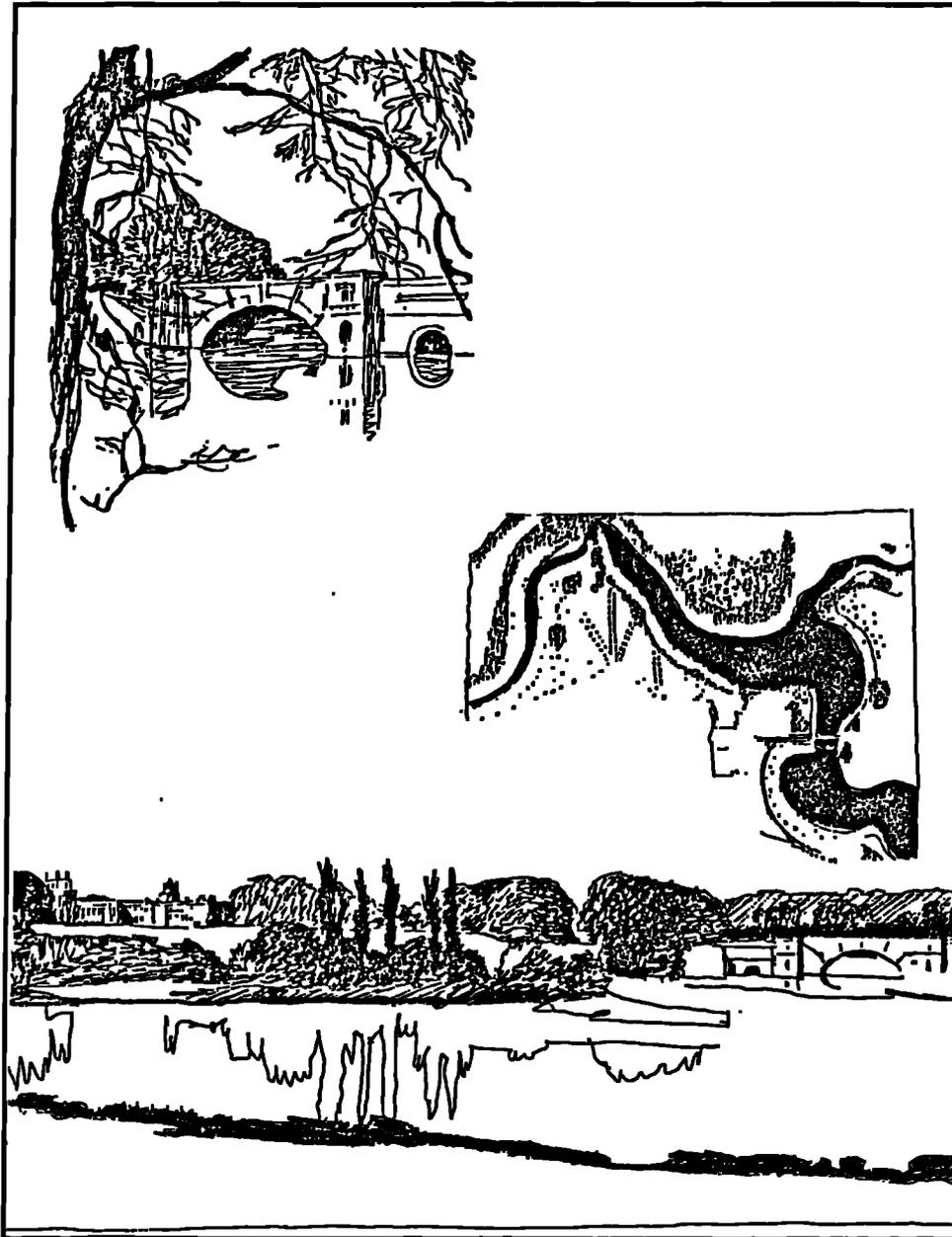


Fig. 14-6: Brown's Design for Blenheim, where he improved the garden laid out by Henry Wise in 1705 [graphic analysis with reference to Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe (1987), *The Landscape of Man*, Thames and Hudson London, p.244].



**Fig. 14-7: Brown's innovations at Blenheim made him famous [illustrations with reference to Laurence Fleming and Alan Gore (1979), *The English Garden*, p.122 and p.124].**



His work and his embodiment of empirical aesthetic theory stimulated later development, particularly Repton's landscape career. It was his work that systematically revealed images of an indigenous school of landscape design which is still one of the most appreciable characteristics of English landscape.

### 14.3 THE PICTURESQUE

An unexpected result of Brown's dominance was the counter movement known as Picturesque, one of the most important aesthetic categories of the English school. What is the concept of the Picturesque? Does it mean 'what is a worthy picture'?

The actual meaning of the word Picturesque is very confusing and almost without a satisfactory explanation. The conventional understanding is that the Picturesque is a way of seeing and designing a landscape by expressing a charming natural beauty which is striking but not as dramatic as the early Romantic approach. Reviewing its history, the Picturesque was also slow to mature as a design idea, and its meaning in relation to the English school is a matter of dispute. Here, we will take the concept of Picturesque to refer to deeper levels of thinking and an aesthetic attitude towards landscape and its design, than those of a mere pictorial study.

The Picturesque as an aesthetic category was discussed intensively in the second half of the 18th century. In that period, the understanding of Picturesque was quite different from the ideas developed by Kent and Brown, and even in conflict with them. Important figures who contributed to theory on the Picturesque, and who successfully further developed the design theory of the English school, include William Chambers (1723-1796), William Gilpin (1724-1804), Sir Uvedale P. Price (1747-1829) and



Richard Payne Knight (1747-1824), Humphry Repton (1752-1818). Among them only Chambers and Repton were professional designers, the other were amateurs who exerted their influence mainly through their writings.

Here, the crucial argument was still concentrated on understanding the beauty of nature. It was Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) who from another angle, promoted the development of this aesthetic approach. In Reynolds' mind, "There are excellences in painting beyond what is commonly called the imitation of nature." [30] For him nature is the sum of visible phenomena not made by artifice. Also, nature is not what she actually produces, but that which is agreeable to the affection and predisposition of the mind. Although the ideas of Reynolds were very classical, they were not Platonic. His key word 'Agreeable' means that the experience is not a passive response to what is produced by nature, but a positive reaction to whatever pleases the mind in nature. If Burke opened the way to Romanticism' in searching for the harmony of the inward and outward, the movement from mind to nature, from individual feeling to objective beings; then, again as Hussey (1927 & 1967) remarked, Reynolds on the other hand opened the way to the beauty of the Picturesque: a natural beauty perceived rationally.

Being a clergyman of the Church of England, William Gilpin traveled up and down England and Wales and described the striking scenery with his sketches and writings, which called attention to a natural beauty almost untouched by human hands or not previously appreciated.

According to John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis (1975), his first use of the term 'picturesque' occurs in *The Essay on Prints* (1768), where he gave a definition of the Picturesque as "that kind of beauty which would look well in a picture." With landscape design, he did

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30 Christopher Hussey, *Picturesque*, Thoms Nelson, London and Edinburgh, 1927 & 1967, p.60.



attempt to provide principles in his '*Remarks on Forest Scenery*' in which he advocated that "A noble park therefore is the natural appendage of an ancient mansion" and "We expect to see its lawns, and their appendages, contrasted with each other, in shape, size, and disposition." He seemed very cautious in using artificial things, as he mentioned: "In the park-scene we wish for no expensive ornament. Temples, Chinese bridges, obelisks, and all the laboured works of art, suggest inharmonious ideas." The kind of ornament he was inclined to allow was only a 'handsome gate'. As to other elements, he suggested: "Let the road wind, all the boundaries be secret" and was cautious in advising the creation of lake and folly. For a pictorial flavour, he even suggested that sheep could be seen as an alive decorative element, because the "flakiness of their wool is rich, and picturesque."

In terms of the appreciation of natural beauty and surface treatment, Gilpin partly agreed with the principles of Brown. He wrote: "The many improvements of the ingenious Mr. Brown, in various parts of England, bear witness to truth of these observations. The beauty of park scenery is undoubtedly best displayed on a varied surface — where the ground swells, and falls — where hanging lawns, screened with wood, are connected with valleys — and where one part is continually laying in contrast with another." Thus he thought: "From scenes of art, let us hasten to the chief object of our pursuit, the wild scenes of nature — the wood — the copse — the glen — and open grove." Here more emphasis was placed on the qualities of the 'Surface'. Also, in his essays 'On Picturesque Beauty', 'On Picturesque Travel' and 'On Sketching Landscape', he declared that "the more refined our taste grows from the study of nature, the more insipid are the works of art." On the richness of the pictorial scene, he noticed problems in the works of his predecessors. "How flat and insipid is often the garden scene!" and "How puerile and



absurd! the bank of the river how smooth, and parallel! the lawn, and its boundaries, how unlike nature!” [31]

Unlike Gilpin, **Richard Payne Knight** (1750-1824) found Brown’s design did not satisfy his mind. In his poetry ‘The landscape, A Didactic Poem (1794), he complained: Brown’s garden is “a dull, vapid, smooth, and tranquil scene.” [32] In his mind, “The sensual pleasure arising from viewing objects and compositions, which we call picturesque, may be felt equally by all mankind in proportion to correctness and sensibility of their organs of sight; for it is wholly independent of their being picturesque, or after the manner of painters.” [33] Obviously the starting point of Knight’s argument was still an inspiration of visual art. The key words used by Knight were ‘Association’ and ‘Contrast’: the former is a subjective response to pictorial images, the latter serves as a method of enhancing the richness of the ‘picture’. Here the subjective was emphasised in the process of searching for the beauty of the Picturesque.

Sharing the same Picturesque flavour as Knight, **Uvedale Price** (1747-1829) wrote ‘An Essay on Picturesque’ (1794). He suggested that the most fruitful source of human pleasure is first the quality of **VARIETY**, second, that of **INTRICACY**. These are connected and blended with each other and one can hardly exist without the other. Taking this idea further, Price said: “intricacy in landscape might be defined, that disposition of objects which, by a partial and uncertain concealment, excites and nourishes curiosity. Variety can hardly require a definition, though, from the practice of many layers-out of ground, one might suppose it did. Upon the whole, it appears to me, that as intricacy in the disposition, and variety in the forms, the tints, and the lights and

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31 F. R. Cowell, *The Garden As A Fine Art*, p.184.

32 John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, *The Genius of The Place*, 1975, London, p.344.

33 John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, *The Genius of The Place*, P.349).



shadows of objects, are the great characteristics of picturesque scenery; so monotony and baldness are the greatest defects of improved places..." [34]

Again, Price used two key words to discuss the qualities of picturesque: **VARIETY AND INTRICACY**, by which he described the objective concrete attributes of his concept. For him, the Picturesque "appears to hold a station between beauty and sublimity." He argued that the Picturesque was a kind of quality of landscape which should be equally distinct from the Beautiful and the Sublime. It seemed that qualities such as variety, intricacy, partial concealment, and curiosity which amuse the mind are essential aspects of the Picturesque. Bearing this in mind, he must, of course, disliked what had been done by Brown and Brown's followers. The fact was that he made a sustained attack upon their design ideas, and called them "universally and professedly smoothers, shavers, cleaners, levelers and dealers in distinct serpentine lines and edges." [35]

Facing the tendency of mannerism derived from Brown, Gilpin focused on the quality of Surface, Knight on subjective responses and Price on objective qualities of the Picturesque. All these thinkers attempted to find a new approach to design by researching into the essence of the Picturesque. Unfortunately, they were not all practitioners. Because of the gaps between literary study and design practice, their ideas were still without a necessary supporting practice. As Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe (1975) noticed, the forest or savage garden was "the domain of painter, scholar and dilettante." It "depended on personal taste, took a long time to mature." [36] There was also a danger similar to that which Brown and his imitators faced — handling landscape design with a

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34 John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, *The Genius of The Place*, 1975, London, p.354.

35 F. R. Cowell, *The Garden As A Fine Art*, 1978, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, p.184.

36 Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe: *The Landscape of Man*, p 223.



formulated systematic design language but losing individuality. It is doubtful whether limited pictorial patterns can represent the whole of beautiful nature, and what is more, what were considered as beautiful by those theorists of the Picturesque may be far away from the images represented by painters. As a matter of fact, so called 'false accidents' as Salvador Rosa had demonstrated in his paintings, cannot be represented in a stylized or formulated manner. An industrious effort is still needed to discover the most subtle natural beauty from place to place and from time to time, even from person to person. A 'picture' is not simply a framed image, but a result of an action combining visual refinement with feeling, emotion and a particular mood. This is made very clear in the previous discussion in part 2, ART AND IDEAS. However, Knight's idea of strengthening the role of association, and the objective qualities of variety and intricacy emphasised by Price cannot be underestimated, and are still very important topics for modern aesthetic study [Fig. 14-8].

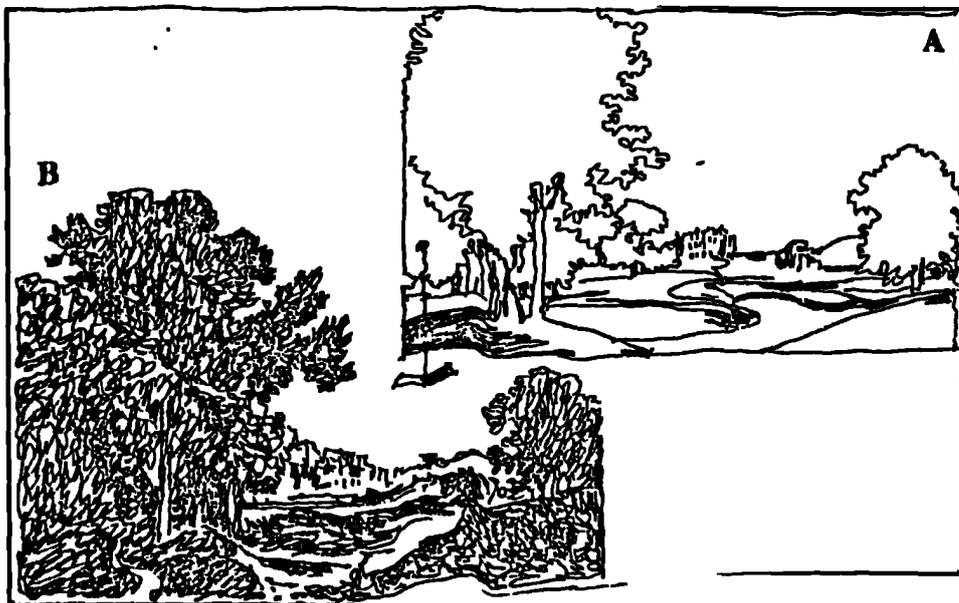


Fig. 14-8: PICTURESQUE



It was Humphry Repton (1725-1818) continuing Brown's Romantic ideas, absorbing the delicate Picturesque flavour, and employing compromise, who gave a 'final touch' to the completion of the design theory of the School. He achieved the other higher level of English landscape design at the end of the 18th century .

#### 14.4 'TENDER HANDS' — REPTON

Generally, what was pursued by the Romantic landscape approach was somehow distanced from daily life, and the Picturesque placed too much emphasis on the effects of visual art. Landscape design is a very practical business which involves real life, relates to the context and history of place, and financial constraints, and takes time to achieve matured situations, since it is inevitably conditioned by natural and social processes.. 'Any kind of one-sided pursuit may cause problems in the future. Thus, an approach by which to gain a 'compromise' between ideal or pictorial taste and real life is forever necessary.

The radical change in taste to a search for the so-called natural style practiced by Kent and Brown was praised and recognized by historians a uniquely English approach to landscape. On the another hand, its limitations and the reliance of the imitators or formula were soon noticed by landscape aestheticians and practitioners. To those who held picturesque ideas or were intimately connected with real life, it was inevitable that Brown's ideas would be re-examined and improvements to these places "improved" by Browns were needed.

Against this historical background, Repton started his landscape career. Above all, Repton as a professional designer was "not as confident of his theoretical abilities as of his design skill" and for him, the "whole



art of landscape gardening may properly be defined (as) the pleasing combination of art and nature adapted to the use of man.” [37] Historians such as Hunt and Willis evaluated Repton’s approach highly and even deny Brown’s influences on Repton: “Repton chose, in fact, an intelligent, thoughtful and independent course, which spurned the effects that would appear well in a picture in favour of utility and social convenience.”

According to F. R. Cowell (1978), when Repton was a boy of fourteen he was sent to school in Holland for two years. It is possible that the intimate atmosphere of small Dutch formal gardens made a certain impression in his mind, yet in the early stages of his career, Brown’s work inevitably influenced his design ideas. Because he had an ability to learn from experience, he was soon able to improve some places by providing them with ‘agreeable surroundings’.

There is no doubt that Repton did draw lessons from Brown and his successors. His hands were more tender than those of Browns and he was more caring for people. He played a role in the English landscape movement which was extremely similar to that of Alva Alto in the modern architectural movement. Both of them were concerned to improve their contemporary design practice with caring for people’s needs both psychologically and physically rather than one-sided design innovations or styles, although they were not the founders of the School and did not fundamentally change to the whole developing course. The design philosophy of Repton was that the garden is “not a landscape but a work of art using the materials of nature” for the use of man.

If Brown’s ‘place-making’ was for “the comforts which Mankind wants in the countryside,” the aspects of comforts here, as he confessed, “be exactly for the owner, the poet and the painter.” [38] Whereas for

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37 T. Turner, *English Garden design, History and Stile Since 1650*, p.34.

38 T. Turner, *English Garden Design, History and Stile Since 1650*, p.33.



Repton, improvements were made to a place for people to live in, whose owner (or in our modern term the user) should be satisfied in as many ways as possible.

This changing attitude was reflected in Repton's design and also recorded in his *Red Books*. For instance, in the *Red Book for Blaise Castle* (1795-1796), there is some very interesting writing on walks and drives: "for however interesting the walks in hilly countries may be, they can only be enjoyed by great labour and exertion; they require health of body and vigour of limbs to enjoy their romantic wonders, while the aged and infirm have been excluded from the beauties of the place by the danger or difficulty of exploring them. I must therefore assume to myself the merit of shewing this situation in a manner before unthought of, and while I reserve some scenes for those who can walk to them, and who can climb steps or creep thro' caverns, I must endeavour to display others from windows of a carriage with all the interest of surprise and novelty." Here, there are almost no exaggerated words about the landscape, but only a care for people's appreciation of it. Holding the same attitude, when commenting about the house, he said: "the aspect or exposure should be the first object of consideration," because "no landscape however delightful can compensate for the want of sunshine in this climate". Meanwhile, he always kept financial limits in mind, as for example the comparison of land prices and costs of scenic transformation through the years in his 'Report Concerning a Villa at Streatham' (1816). The design principles developed by Repton were above all sympathetic to the users understanding of their own land and the actual benefits they could gain from the newly proposed project. For instance, in the introduction of the *Red Book for Blaise Castle* (1795-1796) he wrote again: "I am obliged to conceive in my own mind such a plan as I afterwards render visible to others; and endeavour to fix on my memory the several leading features of each place by making sketches, without which from the multiplicity of



various situations it would be impossible for me to pursue any regular system of improvement.” [39] With great concern for context, utilitarian potential and integration of the newly designed place with older gardens, Repton achieved a compromise between function and art, man and nature, new and old. The old garden elements such as terraces, raised flowerbeds, geometrical planning, trellis-covered walls and conservatories were carefully preserved or re-used and given by Repton a new meaning of function and a Picturesque account.

We may generally say that the way Repton coped with landscape design was by considering people’s needs and their demands for a picturesque flavour, and was never involved in an extreme of any design tendency. The compromise between ‘agreeable surprise’ and the comforts of the user gave his landscape a comprehensive aesthetic value and meaning related tightly to the principle of ‘Pleasure with Profit’. For instance, instead of temples and ruins as landscape buildings, as depicted in Constable’s painting, Repton skillfully used existing local cottages, dairies and lodges, to add a pictorially cheerful note to the park. Here the designed landscape became part of real life. There were reasonable changes and improvements which coincided with the psychological and physical satisfaction of the users.

Consequentially he ended by developing and improving Brown’s ideas. He disagreed with ‘baldness and nakedness round the house’ because ‘a large lawn like a large room, when unfurnished, displeases more than a small one’. [40] Thus, some artificiality and necessary decoration once again clothed and enriched the body of the garden in the places he improved.

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39 John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, *The Genius of Place*, 1975, London, p. 358 - P.367.

40 F. R. Cowell, *Garden As A Fine Art*, p.185.



Repton's achievement was based on learning from the past, absorbing new ideas such as that of the Picturesque, and what he really cared about was to combine people's benefit and interest with the aloof quality of beauty. This made him the most important practitioner of post-Brownian landscape. He was more flexible than Brown and made more concessions to the particular character of place and the comfort of users, but also revived an interest in horticulture at the end of the 18th century and beginning of the Nineteenth century. We cannot list his name either as a follower of Brown or of the Picturesque, but as a landscape designer of the English school.

As a matter of fact, the career of any landscape designer is definitely conditioned by socio-economic situations and certain historical tendencies in aesthetic thought. No designer alone can be the hero of great revolutionary change, or more than a modest improver of some parts of real living environment. Therefore, for designers the idea of compromise between ideal and reality, or theoretical principle and practice obviously has a positive meaning. Repton's contribution lay directly in filling this gap between ideal and real life. The famous *Red Book* made by his tender hands fully expressed his wonderful professional discipline, and his philosophy of keeping people in mind. Repton, as a typical figure of landscape design in his attitude towards nature and man, and his disciplined approach to landscape design still enlightens us in our own landscape education and practice [Fig. 14-9].

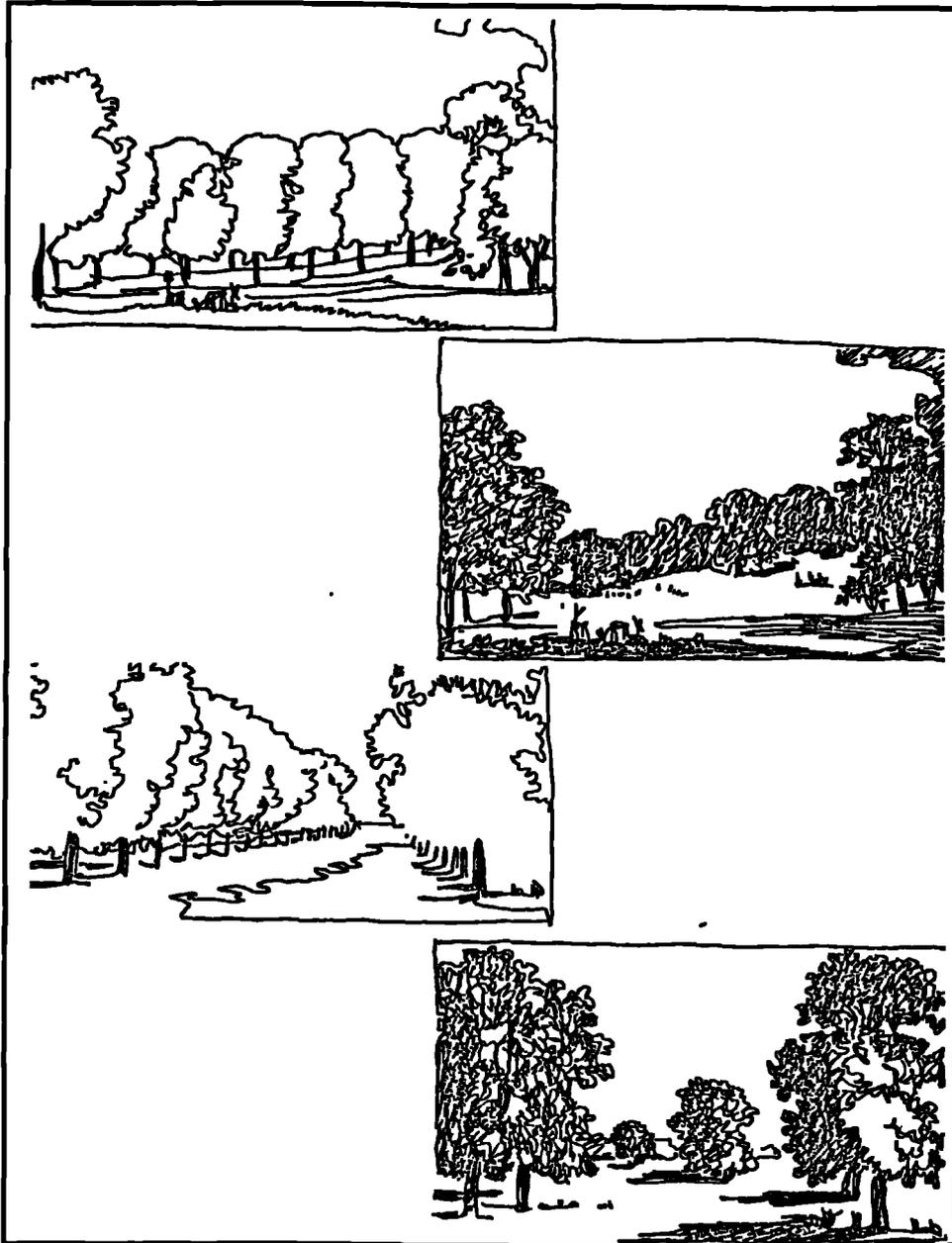


Fig. 14-9: TENDER HANDS' REPTON [illustrations with reference to Miles Hadfield, Robert Harling, Leonie Highton (1980), *British Gardeners*, p.238].



## 14.5 THE HERITAGE OF THE SCHOOL

On English art, there is a very brief and sound opinion in *The Oxford Companion to Art* (1970): "The history of English Art is full of surprises, at times the quality has been very low and the output a provincial rendering of continental styles. More often continental styles have been used by English artists, who added something new of their own. Occasionally, though very rarely, English art is to be found in the van of new movement, and her artists have themselves influenced continental developments." The English School of landscape design was one of these exceptions, for it went in advance of the design and art movement of the continent and contributed a systematic landscape design theory to European civilization.

The changing landscape of Britain left the marks of racial mixture, while its complex history also promoted the cross-fertilization of landscape design.

Generally, the heritage of English landscape design is part of the European cultural tradition, and the design ideas were once dominated by the mainstream of Classical aesthetics and its variations from Roman times to the Renaissance. It was the art of 18th century Britain which reflected the greatest variety of taste, particularly since the art of landscape design predicted the Romantic attitude which, as an indigenous English idea, influenced the later developments of continental art in general as well as in landscape aesthetics and practice.

The empirical aesthetic approach led landscape ideas from pure rationalism to a reliance on experience, which to some extent avoids the danger of exaggerating human power. Thus the classical tradition was reformed in Britain; a compromise between rational thinking (forms) and experience of the landscape at homeland was achieved; emotion and



scenery were linked; the role of emotion in scenic appreciation was established; the meaning of 'natural' and 'Picturesque' were objectively explored. A way of designing landscape through awareness of the charming and distinctive scenic effects of farmland, woodland or even wild countryside was combined with a care for human profit. As well as ideas and new ways of seeing the world, new methods of shaping the landscape was developed: the vocabulary of landscape design was transformed and expanded through the practice of outstanding designers such as Kent, Brown and Repton, and one in which the aesthetic ideas of the English School of landscape design achieved a maturity which has further enlightened the development of landscape design in all fields in Britain and in other parts of the world [Fig. 14-10].

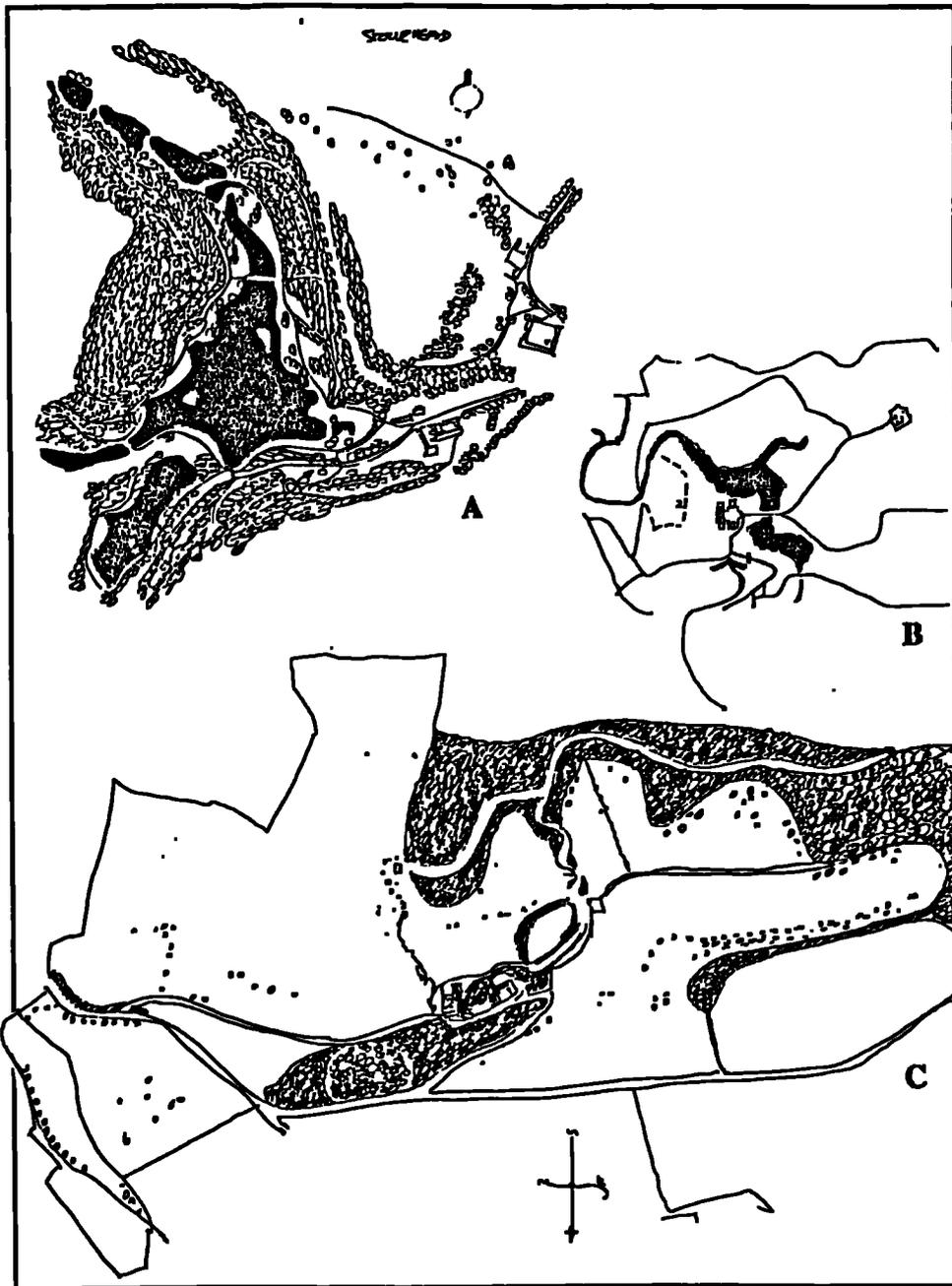


Fig. 14-10: The English School: to understand the School we should be able to appreciate the above three plans: A: Stourhead by Henry Hoare; B: Brown's Design for Blenheim; C: Repton's plan for a park at Luscombe.



## 15

### **THE UNCERTAINTY OF CHINESE INFLUENCE**

Compared with the Chinese School, the English School matured relatively late, but its progress was substantial. After the fundamental changes between the 17th and 18th century, the aesthetic approach of British landscape design became quite individual and distinctive. No doubt this development owed something to foreign influences, most obviously, those from Italy, France and Holland. However, there is still uncertainty as to possible influences from China, although the Chinese story had been mentioned in Britain as early as the 17th century.

#### 15.1

#### **SHARADWADGI?**

Reviewing the history, we can find some facts that suggest an English interest in the ideas of Chinese landscape design. On the other hand, we doubt whether English writers or designers could fully understand and accept the subtle Chinese landscape philosophy without having lived among the Chinese or deeply studied their culture.

The features of Chinese traditional gardening had been introduced in a fragmentary way by Westerners. The writings of Sir William Temple were most influential at that time. According to Geoffrey and



Susan Jellicoe (1987), the English School “seems first to have been fired to take physical form by Sir William Temple’s description of the Chinese School, to which it was clearly sympathetic.” Sir William Temple wrote in his essay ‘On The Gardens of Epicurus’ (1685): “What I have said of the best forms of gardening, is meant only of such as are in some sort regular; for there may be other forms wholly irregular that may, for aught I know, have more beauty than any of the others; but they must own it to some extraordinary dispositions of nature in the seat, or some great race of fancy or judgment in the contrivance, which may reduce many disagreeing parts into some figure, which shall yet, upon the whole, be very agreeable. Something of this I have seen in some places, but heard more of it from others-who have lived among the Chinese; a people, whose way of thinking seems to lie as wide of ours in Europe as their country does.... Among us, the beauty of building and planting is placed chiefly in some certain proportions, symmetries or uniformities; our walks and our trees ranged so as to answer one another, and at exact distances. The Chinese scorn this way of planting, and say, a boy, that can tell a hundred, may plant a walk of trees in straight lines, and over-against one another, and to what length and extent he pleases. But their greatest reach of imagination is employed in contriving figures, where the beauty shall be great, and strike the eyes, but without any order or disposition of parts that shall be commonly or easily observed: and, though we have hardly any notion of this sort of beauty, yet they have particular word to express it, and, where they find it hit their eye at first sight, they say the Sharawadgi is fine, or is admirable, or any such expression of esteem. And whatever observes the work on best India gowns, or the paintings on their best screens or porcelains, will find their beauty is all of this kind (that is) without order. ... But I hardly advise any of these attempts in the figure of gardens among us; and though they are adventures of too hard achievement for any common hands; and though there may be more honour if they



succeed well, yet there is more dishonour if they fail, and it is twenty to one they will; whereas, in regular figures, it is hard to make any great and remarkable faults.” [1]

With great interest, Temple did his best to introduce the Chinese garden. He even used a very strange word *Sharadwadgi* to characterize the Chinese style. Of course, the term is definitely not Chinese but sounds from Japanese. According to Miles Hadfield, Temple might have heard it in Holland. In fact, Temple did not visit China, thus, what he enthusiastically advocated were rough and vigorous impressions from different sources and secondhand knowledge. Objectively, he could not do more than this.

The contribution of his writing was to provide clues and suggestions to help English designers develop their own ideas for enhancing the character of their landscape, rather than to rely on copying a French fashion of landscape design which was wrongly imposed on the irregular British land. The same paragraph was quoted by Brenda Colvin in her book *Land And Landscape* (p.58-p.59), particularly the term *Sharawadgi* used to describe the landscape “where they find it hits their eye at first sight.”

On the understanding of the term *Sharadwadgi*, Addison also wrote in 1712: “Writers who have given us an account of China, tell us the inhabitants of that country laugh at the plantations of our Europeans, which are laid out by the rule and line; because, they say, anyone may place trees in equal rows and uniforming figures. They choose rather to show a genius in works of this nature, and therefore always conceal the art by which they direct themselves. They have a word, it seems, in their language, by which they express the particular beauty of a plantation that strikes the imagination at first sight, without discovering what it is that has

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<sup>1</sup> Miles Hadfield, *A History of British Garden*, Spring Books, London, 1960, 1969, p.176 - 177.).



so agreeable an effect. Our British gardeners, on the contrary, instead of harmonious nature, love to deviate from it as much as possible. Our trees rise in cones, globes and pyramids. We see the marks of the scissors upon every plant and bush. I do not know whether I am singular in my opinion, but for my own part, I would rather look upon a tree in all its luxuriance, than when it is thus cut and trimmed into an mathematical figure ...” [2]

Obviously, the irregular, non-geometrical Chinese style, the effects of ‘agreeable surprise’ provided by Chinese gardens was like a breath of fresh air which met the needs of the English for exploring and establishing their own approach to establish the English landscape theory, identifying their own landscape approach. The taste of the English was very tolerant, as Addison once expressed: “I think there are many kinds of gardening as of poetry.” [3] However, this irregular or non-geometrical form, like other superficial landscape phenomena of the Chinese garden, should not be seen as the essence of Chinese landscape tradition. As a matter of fact, from the 17th century (the early Qing Dynasty) to the late 18th century (the later Qing Dynasty) there was a great deal of artificiality in Chinese gardens, though the results still looked ‘natural’ and irregular. In addition, the so-called free style is not a unique feature of the Chinese designed landscape, since regular forms or the design language of the ‘Formal Garden’ were also used quite often. It seemed that as long as the design could meet the needs of the Chinese life style and embody their philosophy, then the exact form of design did not matter. In Chinese design history there was no particular interest in arguing about which kind of landscape forms should be preferred, and this problem never reached the importance it had in Western design theory. For the Chinese, if ideas served the function well, any form could be acceptable. There was no word in Chinese design history to exactly define ‘style’ in terms of form.

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2 Miles Hadfield, *A History of British Garden*, p.178.

3 Miles Hadfield, *A History of British Garden*, p.178.



In any design, which part should be free or geometrical only followed a general principle and possibilities of physical environment.

However, when the Europeans visited China or received information from different sources about Chinese landscape, it was when comparing the freer landscape patterns of this Eastern design with French fashion and imitations by the British around the 17th century, that a selective view of a Chinese garden design might have greatly satisfied those who were keen to replace the dominance of the 'Formal Garden' and discover a more convincing approach to their own landscape. The Eastern style was simply introduced, with differences between French fashion and that of the Chinese emphasised, while the similarities between them — such as the formal design patterns in Chinese designed landscape — ignored.

The popularity of the story of Chinese landscape in England during that period influenced the evolution of indigenous British landscape thinking. As already discussed, the factors were indeed the increasing of national pride, the growing desire for an English way of laying out landscapes with less artificiality and cost than foreign fashion; agricultural development highlighting a belief in the virtues of a home-grown environment; the growing view of nature as an alternative to an over-ordered society, not as a threat but as desirable accompaniment to daily life; the intellectual attacks on the absurdity of endless geometry. [4] It is, of course, that the attitude and achievements of the Far-East could have be a fantastic discovery and basis for the rebellion of the dominance of French fashion. However, in terms of cultural influences, the variation of landscape impressions and knowledge gained from the 'The Grand Tour' — particularly the Archadian landscapes of French-Italian painters of 17th century, the wild images of Alpine journeys and Northern art, the Italian landscapes so different from the fashion imitated in England at that

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4 O. D. Manning, "Lecture Notes", 1991, at Sheffield University.



time — all would have had deeper influences than any story of strange and unfamiliar Chinese landscapes. The particularly English taste for nostalgic revival, the appreciation of picturesque beauty, the understanding of the intricacies of a new-found sense, all worked together to breed the indigenous landscape design ideas.

An important idea which echoed from England to China was the aesthetic thought established by Addison: “Nature is not at variance with art, nor art with nature.” Addison did not visit China, yet he shared almost the same landscape sense with the Chinese. His profound aesthetic stance reminds us some essential Chinese artistic concepts such as Yi and Yijing, etc..

-Due to the cultural differences, hardly any English writer or designer went further into researching the essence of Chinese landscape design. According to Miles Hadfield (1960), more detailed information came from the French members of the Society of Jesus, Pere Nicholas d’Incarvill (1706-1757) who stayed in Beijing from 1740-56 and was probably the first trained botanist to work in China. He sent plant seeds to Paris and London along the caravan routes through St. Petersburg. In 1752, *A Particular Account of the Emperor of China’s Gardens Near Peking* was published which was a translation from the French by Rev. Joseph Spence (1699-1768). The author was another Jesuit, Jean-Denis Attiret (1702-1768), who spent much of his life in China, sending home ‘the Account’ in 1749.

But, by this time the English School was nearly in its mature period the descriptions of the Chinese garden still remained a kind of simplified phenomenological account only. Indeed, it is very difficult to trace any direct connection between the Chinese garden and the actual landscapes made in England. There was a possibility that at the time designers and patrons were influenced by their desire to establish a balance between rational thinking and irregular surroundings, and might



have supported and inspired in their own search for a new approach by information from China .

However, there was an exception in British landscape design history: the design career of Sir William Chambers, which had a indissoluble bond with the Chinese.

## 15.2

### SIR WILLIAM CHAMBERS

Sir William Chambers (1726-1796) had visited China before he set up as an architect. In 1757 he brought out *Designs of Chinese Buildings*, and then designed his famous Chinese pagoda at Kew Garden in London. In 1772, he wrote about Chinese style in 'A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening', an attack, it was said on Capability Brown. However, his knowledge and design experiences about Chinese style, the specific practice at Kew in particular, established his name in the history of British architecture and landscape design

He had a real understanding about Chinese designers: "Their gardeners are not only botanists, but also painters and philosophers, having thorough knowledge of the human mind, and the arts by which its strongest feelings are excited ... In China, gardening is a distinct profession, requiring an extensive study; to the perfection of which few arrive. The gardener then, far from being either ignorant or illiterate, are men of high abilities, who join to good natural parts, most ornaments that study, traveling, and long experience can supply them with: it is in consideration of these accomplishments only that they are permitted to exercise their profession, for which the Chinese the taste of ornamental gardening is an object of legislative attention, it being supposed to have an influence upon the general observe, that mistakes committed in this art, are



too important to be tolerated, being much exposed to view, and in a great measure irreparable; as it often requires the space of a century, to redress the blunder of an hour.” [5]. Here, the attitude of Chinese landscape designers was very much appreciated by Chambers, which he used to give the followers of Brown a lesson.

The first obvious reason for the occurrence of ‘Chambers phenomenon’ was no doubt that he was really interested in oriental culture and had an understanding of Chinese landscape ideas and architectural approaches. Another reason might be that he was trying to erode Brown's fashion by a sophisticated technique: using Chinese ideas to attack what he despised.

For professional eyes from China, in terms of Chinese architecture and its construction technique, his own work was still questionable. For instance, the detail of wooden structure and the outline of that famous pagoda are not so correct (we should emphasize that the Chinese system of wooden structure is the key factor in studying the tradition); even so, these were still incredibly good works by a Western designer, and better than we have seen in the modern ‘China Town’ outside of China. However, while such copies of landscape patterns or architecture may give people some sort of fresh impression, basically they were very expensive cultural “games” or even “jokes”. Landscape design includes a wide range of features such as a single building, bridge, pavilion, artificial mountain and water feature and plants with some symbolic details far less important than a true understanding of the coherent sense of making real places for people. Just as we are not entirely satisfied with a Chinese translation of a Shakespearean drama or an English translation of Tang Poems, we can not fill the cultural gap easily by simply copying each other, even though we think we can understand and appreciate the originals.

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<sup>5</sup> Miles Hadfield, *A History of British Garden*, p.220.



Therefore, I can hardly say how deeply Chambers was really influenced by the Chinese in the sense of design philosophy. When we see the Chinese Pagoda at Kew in conjunction with the Ha-Ha we may be excited at a clever way to synthesize foreign art with native landscape principles, yet we are left wondering whether this expensive adventure was really so necessary [Fig. 15-1]. Chambers should be recognized and respected as an outstanding figure with a rich knowledge of Chinese architecture and landscape design, yet we may question whether his interest was not stronger than his real understanding.

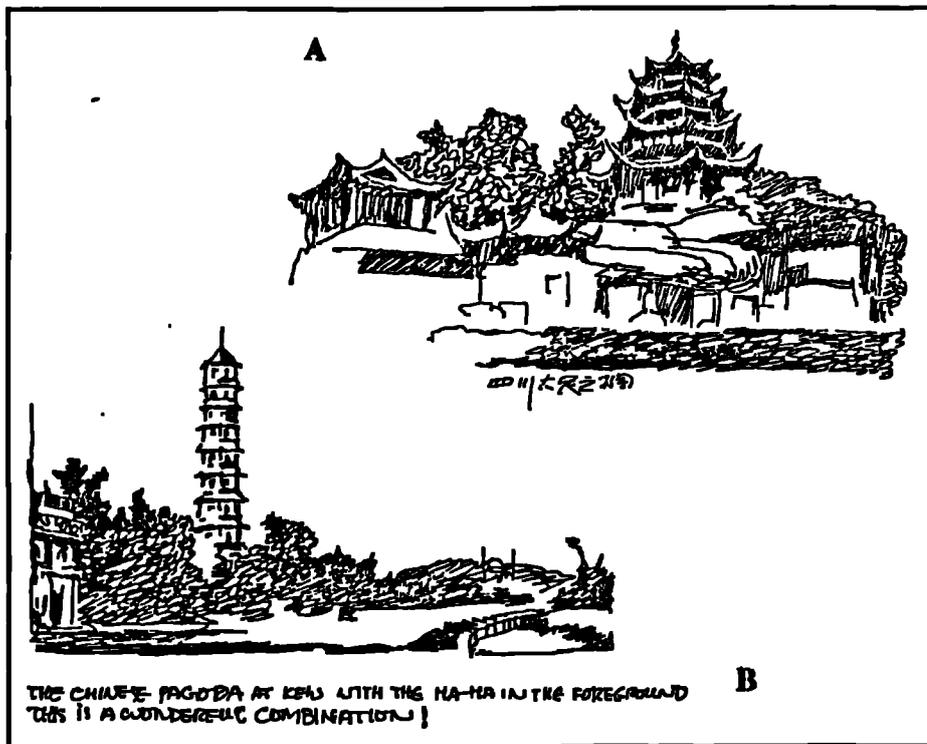


Fig. 15-1: A: The Chinese pagoda at Kew by Chambers [illustration with reference to John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis (Ed. 1975): *The Genius of the Place, The English Landscape Garden, 1620-1820*, p.287]; B: The pagoda in Dazu, Sichuan, China.



### 15.3 ON THE INFLUENCE

On 'influence', we can discuss the topic at two different levels. At the first level, influence is embodied through receiving information as certain references, or as a personal interest for a particular purpose; at the second level, the influence may produce a result which comprehensively and consciously combines the alien ideas with the native.

To introduce new ideas as Temple did may have had some effect on the minds of those wanting to replace objectionable imitation of the French. But to re-use Eastern cultural forms as Chambers did at Kew seems only an expression of personal interest or that of a small group of people. This kind of cultural transfer was essentially different from that from France or Holland, because there was no cultural linkage and continuity to justify it. In terms of quantity and quality none of it influenced British minds; therefore there was no fundamental influence on landscape at a higher level. For us, the way Chambers expressed his ideas was a little eccentric. If he wanted to attack or remove the dominance of so-called 'bald' Brown's fashion he chose the wrong approach, as a comparison with the practice of Repton will show.

Therefore, compared with the known influence from Italy, France, and Holland, notwithstanding the contribution of Temple and Chambers, we can with certainty say there has been no fundamental influence from China upon English landscape. A view of earlier chapters, 'On Shan Shui' in part 2 and part 3 and 'Tao in Landscape' will make this particularly clear. Such differences indeed help us explain why the taste for 'Chinoiserie' remained limited in Europe.



**PART 5**

# **A COMPARATIVE STUDY AND CRITICISM**

**Without comparison, there is no complete understanding,  
Without criticism, no real improvement.**





## 16

### **SYSTEMS THE CLOSED VERSUS THE OPEN**

The differences in ways of searching for natural beauty, valuing human power and the attitudes towards profit, tradition and individuality have distinguished the closed system from the open one in landscape thought and design. To be aware of these differences is a priority for identifying and improving our landscape design approach.

#### 16.1

##### **DIFFERENT EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS**

Traditional Chinese landscape design is a closed aesthetic system which is characterised by independent, self-established and slowly changing design theories and methods. Obviously its natural condition, geographical situation, ways of thinking and living, and state of long isolation are the main reasons for this kingdom's powerful and centralized control system and continuation of its tradition without substantial alien influence. The manner of Chinese thought is regulated by a mainstream of philosophy, while the sense of individuality has played a less important role than that of unity. Even today these invisible influences are still strong, although great changes have happened in recent years.

Such extreme stability and continuity has had a much more powerful influence on China's cultural evolution than that of any other



civilization. The unfolding of its art and landscape design are characterized by a dual nature [1] which is so “pure”, complete and delicate that it is unique in the world; but, on the another hand, it is rooted in a tradition too deep to be able to cope with rapid changes in modern life.

In terms of landscape design the same patterns of gardening such as he artificial mountain, lotus pond and cherished pavilion are still repeated endlessly and everywhere. People have still kept a tradition which once characterised their early matured civilization. However, the trouble is that while in the glorious past the Chinese deliberately managed small places with grand ideas, some are now managing those large places with a small idea or no idea at all. Even worse is that some have taken a “new” line by totally copying modern Western fashion, repeating the same stories (in fact, incurable mistakes) such as the imposition of Formal Gardens on the irregular land of 17th century Britain, the “idealistic” environmental planning of Soviet Russia, the “modernization” of Japanese cities after the Second War and the colonial taste of Hong Kong. The reasons for this are, of course, very complicated, but the confusion caused by the duel nature of Chinese culture should be considered as basic. The key issue for the Chinese is how to open their closed system properly for the future.

Britain, unlike China, is a country surrounded by sea, linked closely with the European continent. The boundaries are open, and collisions between foreign and native cultures have often happened in its history; British art and landscape are rooted in its native land but influenced by various cultural traditions. As we discussed in parts 2 and 4, many eccentric ideas and tastes including their fascination for Eastern art in both landscape painting and design and a long period of learning,

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to chapter 8, paragraph 8.2.: the dual nature of Chinese culture: original but conservative.



discovery, and creation have promoted the development of this culture and identified the English School. Thus we can reason that the English have gained great advantage from their open cultural development process in which cross-fertilization may provide a healthy stimulus in the right social conditions. Of course there may inevitably be some mistakes in the process of learning, but eventually the genius of the people and land will not allow merely a short-sighted vision to dominate the whole cultural process. It is also very clear, as discussed in chapter 14, that the success of the English School should be attributed to the efforts made by designers and theorists over several generations in the process by the continuing exploration and improvement of their own land.

In contrast with the Chinese School, the English School of landscape design is an open aesthetic system. Its development process was dynamic, and characterized by the collision or exchange of ideas and absorption of exotic influences, progressing by way of constant exploring and rejection of ready-made fashions, even though dramatic changes occasionally arose. Individuality and personal effort played more important roles in the evolutionary progress [Fig. 16-1].

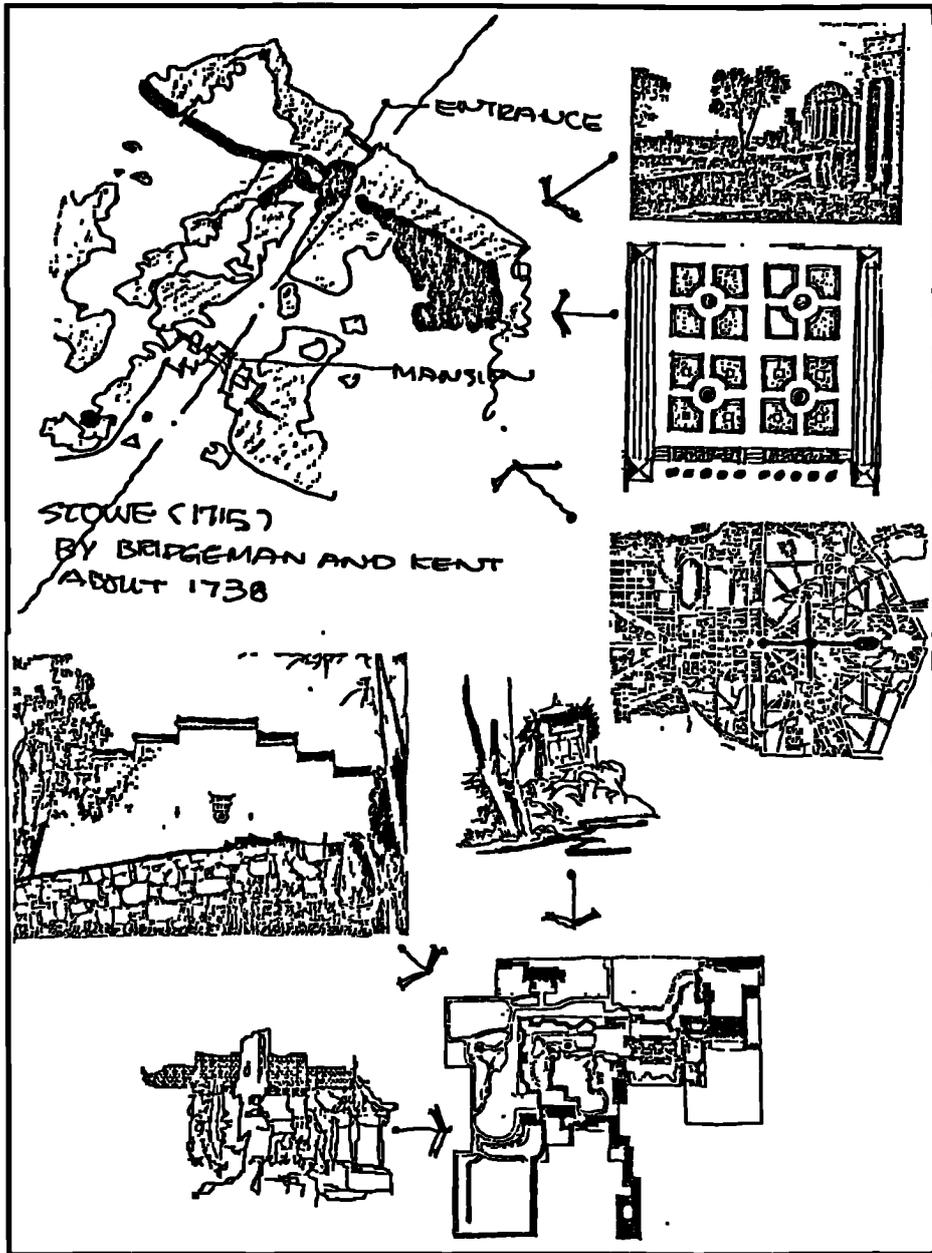


Fig. 16-1: Different evolutionary process.



## 16.2 ON THE SEARCHING FOR NATURAL BEAUTY

This is the key issue in this comparative study.

As we mentioned in chapter 10, the word Nature (Ziran) in Chinese means the beginning of the world, implying a meaning of Certainty. In other words, it can be understood as having the same meaning as the principle, Naturally So, and relates to the concept of Taste of Heaven. It was Laozi who provided a systematic explanation of this issue:

“Man models himself on earth,  
Earth on heaven, Heaven on the way.  
And the way on that which is naturally so.” [2]

This is the logical relationship between human and nature. Nature, in the Chinese mind, includes both external and internal worlds, according to the structured Chinese cosmic map and the theory of Yin Yang. Natural beauty only exists in the harmonious balance between subjective being and objective being. It was Laozi who pointed out that all life on earth and under heaven has common cosmic roots and is created according to a constant law; therefore, to become close to nature, to observe, learn and appreciate natural creation is the way to understand Tao, the meaning of life. Thus, the Chinese way to search for the beauty of nature is to search for the certainty through intense observation and meditation, i. e. to see in between, to find the relationships between things, to know the law of ‘Naturally So’, with the sense of coherence, to place themselves in the

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2 Author's translation with reference to Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: XXV, 57, P.82, translated by D. C. Lau, Penguin Books, England. 1976.



nature, to find the 'Home of Feelings'. [3] The principle, 'Naturally So' is both an aesthetic stance and a way for the Chinese to search and appreciate natural beauty and then design landscape. For instance, for the Chinese there is less fear of the 'inhospitality' of nature as in the Western sense. As we have already discussed in Part 3, Heaven, Earth and Man are seen in unity, with no boundary between man and nature; nature is always respected by the people, and thoughts always go between science and theology.

The word nature in English is very difficult both in terms of semantics and of philosophy. There is usually a confusion in its use and understanding. To some extent, we may think that all British landscape history is the history of this understanding.

Generally, the word Nature refers to an external system. However, according to Platonic thinking nature may mean the essence of the world rather than what nature is physically. [4] Since the real world is full of 'mistakes', an ideal world beyond reality has been conjured often. Thus, aesthetically ideal forms are thought of as representing the beauty of nature, since they are stable, perfect and easy to cope with as well.

In the Christian minds real nature was once rejected as sinful, since the darkness of forests, the wildness of a bare mountain, the dark mysterious water and so on are unsafe and different from the ideal garden of Eden where God created peace and harmony. Therefore the outside world is thought inhospitable; the beauty of nature is found not in the disordered world but in the walled place constructed according to the Christian manner of living.

Even after the Renaissance, real nature was still somehow distanced from the Western minds. The only progress was that the world made by God gradually became that made by man. Rational thinking as

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3 See Chapter 10.

4 See chapter 14.



the mainstream of Western aesthetics led a tendency to divide the inner world from that of the external. As a result, sensation depended on reason and natural beauty conditioned by ideal order; therefore to impose Ideal Forms on the land to “shape” or “improve” the natural landscape became the most important characteristic of European designed landscape, which the British repeated.

The significant change in British attitude towards nature and its beauty was due to the philosophical thinking of empiricism. John Locke almost totally rejected idealism and placed more attention on the experienced world. Empiricism eventually led even to an acceptance of wildness. It was Addison who provided a clear link between empiricism and the developing landscape aesthetics of the English School: “I shall first consider those pleasures of imagination, which arise from the actual view and survey of outward objects; And these, I think, all proceed from the sight of what is great, uncommon, or beautiful.” [5] On design, he pointed out: “Gardens are works of art, therefore they rise in value according to the degree of their resemblance to nature.” [6]

Interestingly, regarding the emotions of human and beauty of nature, we can find Edmund Burke’s (1729-1797) ideas of Sublime and Beautiful, which associated natural beauty with human emotion, is in essence similar to Chinese ideas that combine natural phenomena, social relationships and human senses as a TRINITY based on the Chinese understanding of the Cosmos. [7]

From Locke and Addison to Burke, Shaftesbury and Hogarth, we can find clues to the system of British aesthetic thought. The most important being that the beauty of Nature in British minds is based on experiences of the real world and aesthetic theory was derived from

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5 E. F. Carrill, *Philosophies of Beauty*, 1931, p. 66)  
6 Brenda Colivin, *Land and Landscape*, p.67.  
7 See Chapter 8.



experiences of this kind, rather than from Platonic ideal. In this sense the British are an exception amongst European nations. We can reason that one common link between the British and Chinese is that both have paid great attention to intuition or practical experience when appreciating and reasoning, even though British aesthetics is derived from Western classical and Christian philosophies, obviously rationally oriented, whereas the Chinese traditional system of thought goes between philosophy and theology. [Fig. 16-2]

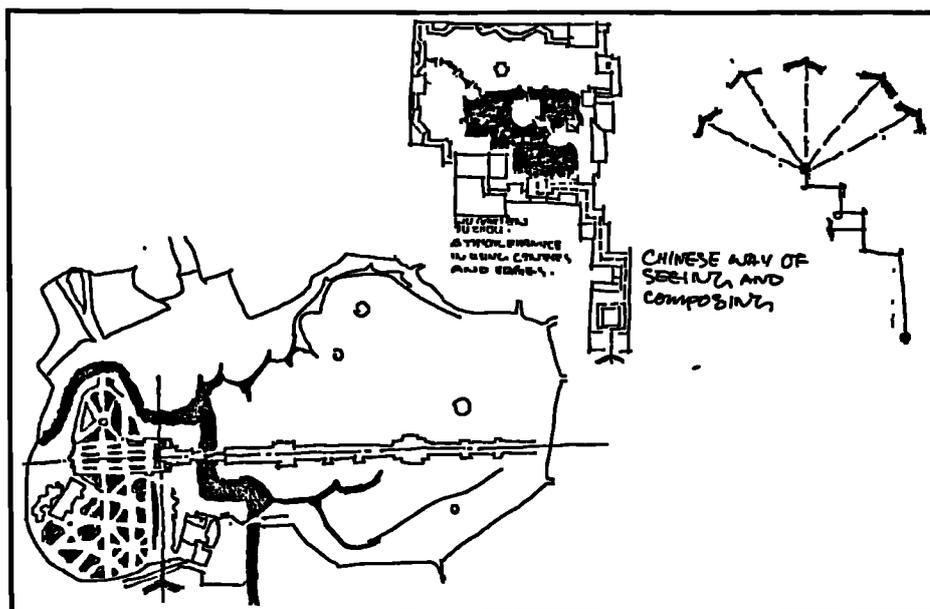


Fig. 16-2: The Search for Natural Beauty.



### 16.3 UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN POWER

Logically, the way people cope with nature is greatly influenced by their understanding of human power. This is another important difference between the Chinese and the British. Although all of us know that we are living in an imperfect world. For the Chinese one should obey the fate decreed by Heaven. According to the concepts of Yin and Yang, and of the relationship between Heaven, Earth and man, man is never thought of as the ruler of the world, but only a part of it, a component of unity. According to Laozi, human power is limited and the manner of using it suggested by him is very modest, even negative:

“Do that which consists in taking no action; pursue that which is not meddlesome; savour that which has no flavour.” [8]

and

“Bowed down then preserved;  
Bent then straight;  
Hollow then full;  
Worn then new;  
A little then benefited;  
A lot then perplexed.” [9]

This basic understanding has essentially influenced the aesthetic ideas and methodology of landscape practice. Therefore, special aesthetic categories such as Nothingness, Emptiness, Softness, Flexibility may function as leading principles in landscape thinking and design, whose

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8 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: LXIII, 147, P.124  
9 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: XXII, 50, p.79.



human aspects were understood as part of the natural law, whose manner must be natural and reveal a 'Taste of Heaven'. Through the use of refined landscape design skills such as 'Beyond the Boundary', 'the Zigzag Way', 'Scattering' ( of features while keeping a sense of coherence) and connection between different designed parts by the medium of Chi, the Chinese finally completed their landscape aesthetic system.

When forming a waterside, shaping rockeries, arranging the postures of trees or features of plants, any kind of pretentiousness is seen as poor taste. Buildings are designed as places from which to appreciate scenery rather than to command the site. All kinds of forms should be naturally refined. Behind the casual postures of different elements there is deliberate control of the relationship between one and another. The whole Yin Yang theory is embodied in the practical design, i.e. the harmonious relationship between human and natural objects carefully managed in the way of 'Naturally So', which indicates that the Chinese understanding of human power follows the general understanding of the relationships of Heaven, Earth and Man. A great deal of human power has been exerted on behalf of the subtle landscape preferences guided by these Chinese thoughts.

Moreover, in Chinese history no special 'ideal' or religious concept could forever control the spiritual life of the people. For the Chinese, real life comes before anything else. Although temples were established everywhere, religion in China has still remained something complementary to daily life rather than fundamental to it. The religious ideas of the Chinese are so obscure that as long as there is no real problem, no-one cares! Thus, it is rare that in the whole of Chinese history people have been totally controlled by a kind of religion as happened in Western or other civilizations, even though religions such as Buddhism, Taoism,



Islam and Christianity sometimes seems “popular” in certain period of history or in some part of this country.

Realizing the limitations of human power and lacking extreme religious enthusiasm, it might be easier for the Chinese to accept the forms of nature, have less fear of wildness, and learn to appreciate the thing originally called ‘Naturally So’ which reveals a kind of respect for nature and of proper self-knowing. Holding this attitude, the people fit themselves into a natural world more easily. Yet this does not mean a lessening of the creative capacity of man.

Unlike the Chinese, in the West there are two extreme tendencies of thinking: either total belief in the Creator, ignoring any positive meaning of real life, or on the contrary a full belief in and development of human power by which to explore, even “conquer” the world. As a result of this, ways of thinking in the West have been constantly changing, and in particular, after the Renaissance, became more “positive” than that of the Chinese. Unlike the Chinese who always go in between to search for a compromise, the Westerner always asks: “Yes or No?”, which constitutes a totally different logic for developing their landscape design language system. If rejecting the outside world, then the desired landscape must be made according to a certain model such as a place for ‘the Virgin and Child’, separated from undesirable nature, a walled in and controlled copy of ‘Paradise’. If fully realizing the human power, then there will be less fear of the wildness; and, as long as the hands can stretch, the land can be conquered, cleaned or improved, according to the desires of ideal aspects of living. In the search for a perfection beyond reality, either the Platonic or the theological were widely accepted.

When divine power was doubted by the rationalists, the power of the human was further recognized, and thus the whole world was measured by human dimensions. The formal garden tradition as the rational symbol of human power and achievement has been generally



accepted in the West. Logically human is seen as the conqueror or sort of improver of nature, and the endless explorations are seen as essential human activity for achieving desirable life. Beauty was thought of as the form of a rational being and ideal forms were symbols of the essence of nature which coincided with these aesthetic preferences. This was the convention promoted by the French High Renaissance and was adopted by the English up to the 18th century. [Fig. 16-3]

On the matter of ideal forms, there is a paradox in Chinese landscape design history in the use of very rigid geometrical forms in some designed places, particularly the Emperor's gardens. To explain this phenomenon we should firstly be aware that all those geometrical forms have a very special meaning in Chinese minds, not in fact as symbols of human power but as symbols of respect for natural forces, related to the Chinese understanding of the cosmos. For instance, the Chinese world outlook includes the doctrine of "Round is the Heaven; Square the Earth". Those forms therefore embody respect for Heaven and Earth. There is nothing about improvement of the land, no sense of using so-called ideal forms to "modify" imperfection of nature or conquer wilderness, etc. Even a ruler of the Chinese Kingdom, the 'Son of Heaven', would not venture to do so. In the face of natural forces, the human is forever a humble creature and receiver or beggar of the kindness of Heaven. Secondly it is very rare in Chinese design history to place geometrical forms on hilly land as we have often seen in Italy and France, and when the French fashion was popular in the Court of England. Therefore we may draw a conclusion: there are cultural and philosophical differences of motive in Chinese and Western minds when they use the same geometrical forms, and that the understanding of human power in between the East and the West is generally different [Fig. 16-4 and Fig. 16-5].

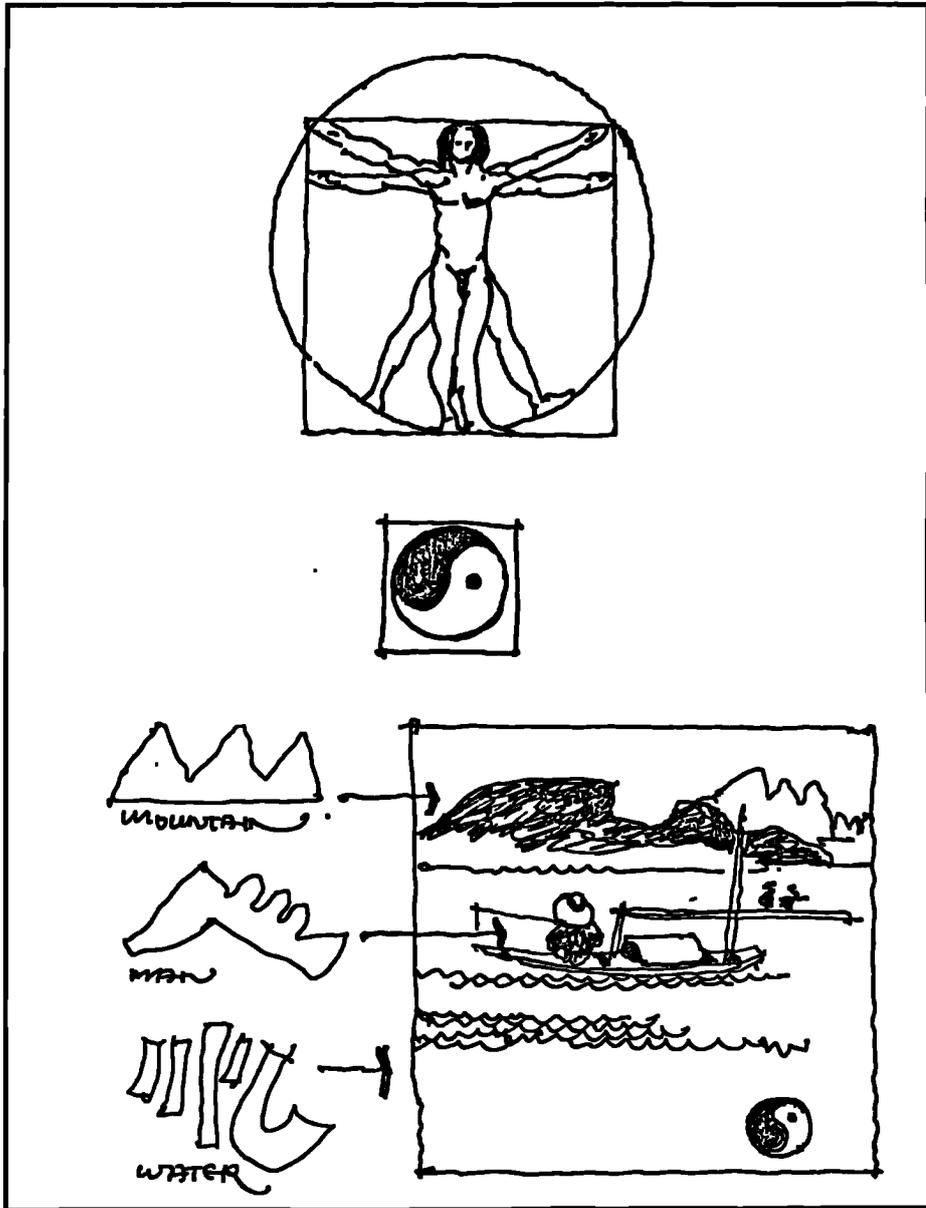


Fig. 16-3: Different Understanding of Human Power.



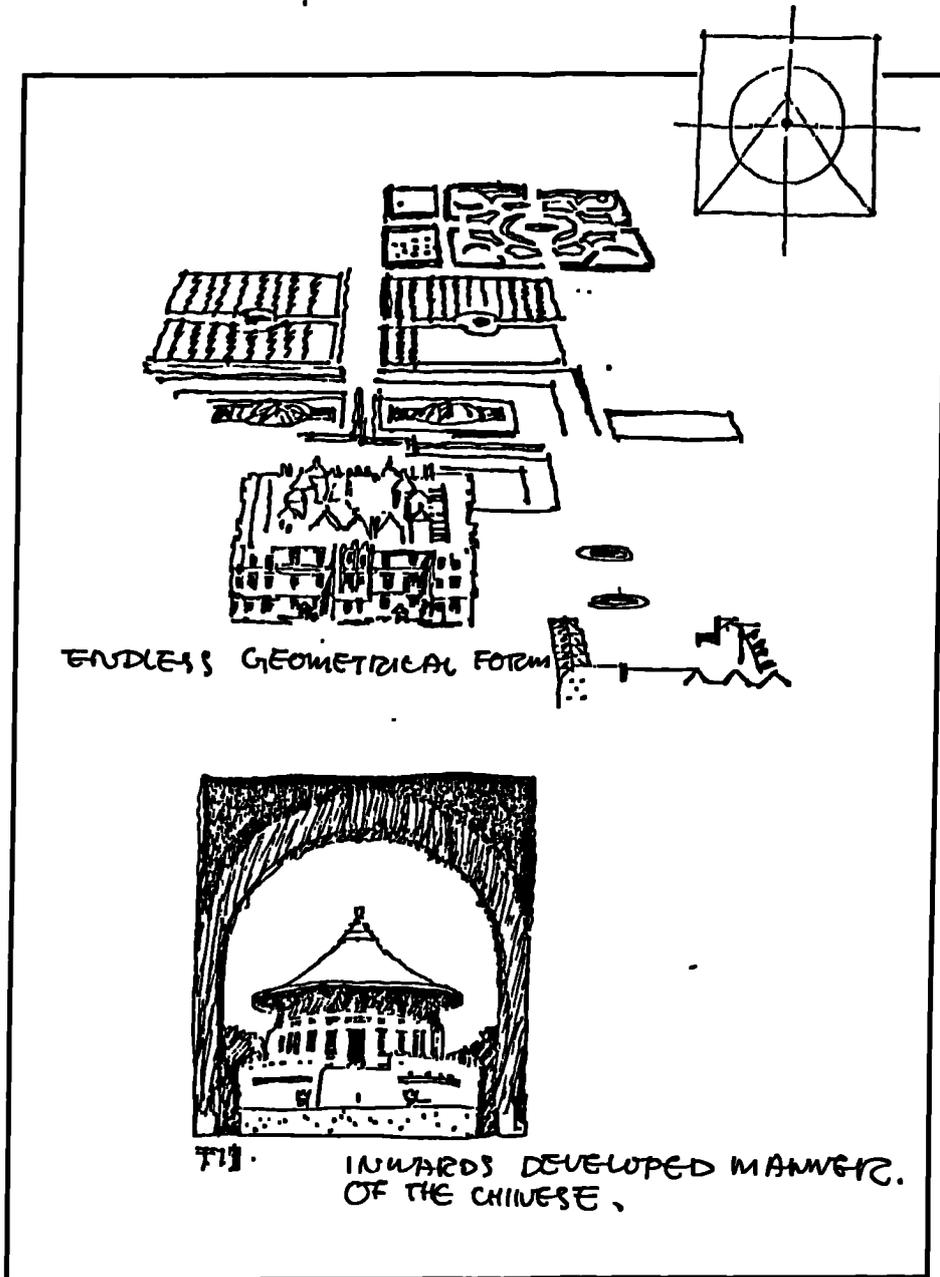


Fig. 16-5: Different Attitude Towards Nature.



## 16.4 ATTITUDE TOWARDS PROFIT

Different approaches in the search for natural beauty and the expression of understanding human power have also molded essentially different attitudes towards profit in the activity of landscape design, which has particularly influenced the character of designed places.

In the case of the Chinese School, even at the beginning the utilitarian trend was restricted. Generally, the images were mainly inherited, as in a place famous for its scenery or historical relics, or derived from experiences of natural beauty or the pastoral scenery, or the search for symbolic meaning, poetic and pictorial flavour, etc. The aim was enjoyment, though with time the purpose of the design became more profound, as we discussed before: a search for spiritual liberation, for a higher realm of life. Meanwhile, certain very narrow but influential ideas came from Confucianism: "A person of noble character searches for righteousness; a person of low position pursues benefits"; there is "Nothing beyond learning"; and even, "A true gentleman is one who does not indulge in comfort at home." On the other hand, concerning the origin and macro-structure of the world, the methodology, the philosophy of Tao, had nothing to say about real material benefits, and even ignored them.

Art according to Confucianism had some sort of function to only promote feudal morality, while Laozi had no direct opinion on art. Influenced by these typical approaches the Chinese aesthetic theoretical system on the whole lacks a proper relationship between 'Pleasure and Profit'. However, it was confirmed again and again that pursuit of benefit is not the business of noble-minded men, and most intellectuals were trained without reference to material benefit or even despising it. Therefore the idea of 'Pleasure with Profit' in Chinese traditional landscape design has never occupied the position it could have.



Reviewing the earliest designed landscape in China, the Jeweled Palace in Elfland's Hill, shows the original motive to have been a designed landscape initiated to realize a dream, the desire for immortality. In fact, the result was to provide a place to entertain people, to play games. In almost two thousand years of evolution, landscape design developed as a kind of pure art, with great emphasis placed on the one-sided idea of searching for spiritual satisfaction. Landscape art and material benefits were separated, the relationship between Pleasure and Profit was often ignored. This tendency was so strong that it even causes serious problems in the development of modern landscape design in China today. The conflicts between the need of promoting tourism and public pleasure with conservation of natural the landscape and historical heritage, and of urgently increasing food and timber supply or developing local industries, are even greater in China than elsewhere in the world. Conversely, as we discussed in Part 4, at the beginning of making gardens practical utilities were noticed by the British. For instance, in the earliest courtyard gardens in monasteries or walled outdoor spaces, the daily needs for sustenance, herb and vegetable supply, or privacy for meditation were the most important objectives. The idea of 'Pleasure with Profit' which adjusted the relationship between material and psychological needs at the beginning of the 18th century was so well recognized that it pushed the development of English landscape design in a relatively healthy direction. Ideas such as ornamental farming, forest belts, classifying and collecting species from different sources and combining the management of an estate with possibilities of landscape beauty, required a systematic and comprehensive approach. This promoted the combination of science with landscape art and provided a sound base for establishing the modern landscape profession and its education. Principles of making a landscape garden such as, "A field of corn makes a pleasant prospect" (Addison), "calling the countryside" (Pope), the use of the Ha Ha, as well as the early



advocacy of "Growing more trees" lifted the utilitarian scene to an aesthetic level. Even today these ideas should be highly valued [Fig. 16-6].

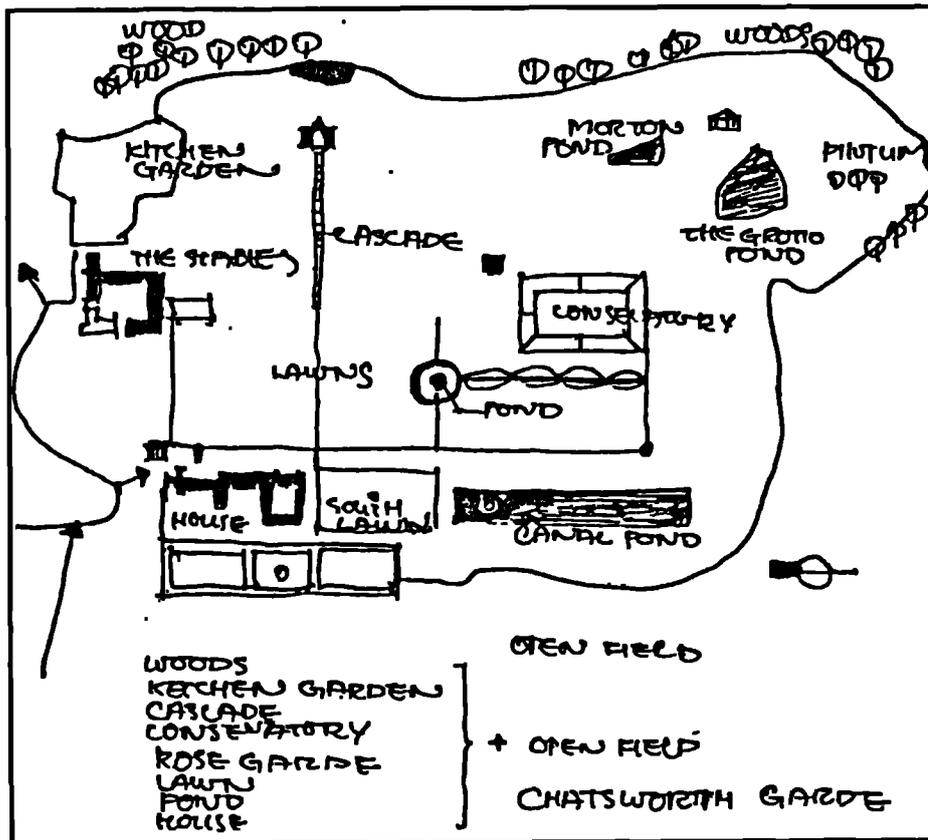


Fig. 16-6: Attitude Towards Profit.



## 16.5

### HISTORY FROM INDIVIDUALS or FROM TRADITION

Reviewing written history, we can see clearly that the evolution of the English School was clearly related to the efforts of distinct individuals, whereas that of the Chinese was related to tradition. The basic reasons were that firstly for the Chinese, theory and practice had been separated for a long time; aesthetics belonged to the metaphysical realm, and there was no need for it to be involved in any practical methods of technique and skills often taught by oral instruction by thinkers or senior craftsman from one generation to another; secondly, there was an agreeable doctrine or academic code accepted by most of the Chinese gentry of “Talking (discussing) without writing”, which was practiced by early masters such as Confucius and Laozi. The former created a model for a perfect code of social conduct; the latter provided mindful ways of thinking and ideas of time and space which formed a sound base for the development of Chinese aesthetics. The cultural structure based on these ideas was complete and stable and worked so well that there was no uncertainty in it. It was just as people naturally accept and appreciate the rhythm of the rising and setting of the sun and changing of the seasons. What is more, even Confucius and Laozi had no intention of leaving a written legacy; most of their ideas were noted down by others. Even today, it is still uncertain who exactly was the writer of the ‘Five Thousand Sentence’: *Tao De Jin*.

Why is this so? Tradition is more important than invention; a sense of totality more important than that of individuality; discernment more than speaking out; inheriting more than exploring. From one viewpoint, the tradition has been continued and enriched; on the another hand, it caused great difficulties for the Chinese in breaking spiritual shackles when facing challenges of reforming their aesthetic thinking to meet the needs from great changes in modern life. Moreover, the tendency



to ignore technique on the part of the gentry became another great obstacle to summarizing the design skills and experiences of managing landscape. Thus, the overlooking of personal contributions is not simply a way of advocating a modest manner, but a reflection of a kind of handcuff of Chinese traditional culture. In contrast, the process of evolution for the English School entailed many exchanges and disputations in which individual contributions were recognized with even the name of amateurs and foreigners recorded in the evolutionary process [10]. From Kent to Brown and Repton, from Bacon to Burke and Gilpin the whole landscape practice and aesthetic idea of the English School from the end of the 17th century to the beginning of the 19th century have been recorded with notable names. It is significant that individual ideas were not withheld but encouraged and recognized by the public. This decisively promoted the development of aesthetic ideas of the English School of landscape [Fig. 16-7].

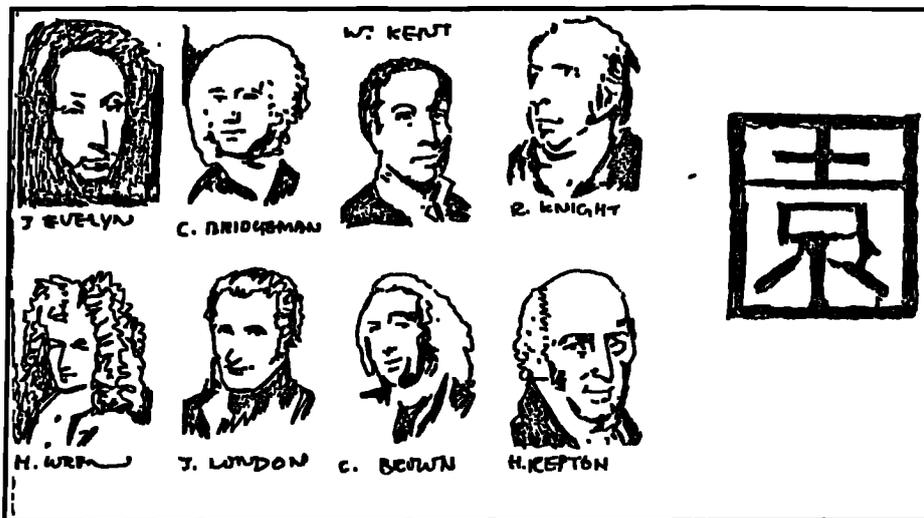


Fig. 16-7: History from individuals or from tradition.

10 See chapter 12 to 15.



## 17

### A CRITICISM OF SOME AESTHETIC ISSUES

Our living environment is part of our culture, and landscape design is an intense reflection of the same culture. Thus we should examine our aesthetic ideas which influence our practice decisively in their cultural context. Some key aesthetic issues such as preference, artistic trend (Romanticism and Picturesque), ways of defining space and line of beauty, etc. which have directly influenced landscape practice both of the English and of the Chinese need indeed a critical overview at this stage.

#### 17.1

##### CULTURAL PREFERENCES

The term 'taste' is commonly used by theorists and critics to mean a fashionable tendency of art or design, although it is somewhat ambiguous. For the Chinese, the matter is slightly different. It was rare in Chinese history to use the term to describe landscape design, but it was a common term of aesthetics such as the 'Taste of Heaven' which, as discussed in chapter 10, is a very important aesthetic category related to Chinese philosophy, meaning the essence of art. Also, the term 'style' is not used very often, since there are not as many dramatic changes of style in the history of Chinese landscape design as those in Britain, in spite of



the differences between the Northern and Southern School of Shan Shui painting and landscape design.

In fact, taste reflects a kind of cultural preference which originates from experience and is influenced by particular cultural and educational conditions. Chinese calligraphy, for instance, an art form derived from written language, has cultivated a general preference for **linearity**, a specific mode of visual appreciation which emphasises linear qualities in painting, architecture, sculpture and even landscape design.

Also, repetition of a certain kind of visual impact can establish a **familiarity** which may mold preferences for pictorial composition. For instance, the observation of precipitous mountains in most parts of China may be one of the reasons why the compositions of Shan Shui painting are usually vertically arranged, whereas in Dutch or English landscape paintings the landforms are mostly horizontally developed.

The analysis of preferences can therefore be based on the study of habitat theory and cultural environment. There is an interesting example in so called Chinoiserie in Europe. In 17th century, increasing wealthy Dutch merchants imported from the Far East to Europe Chinese porcelain, Chinese patterns of interior design (wallpaper and furniture) and eventually a manner of gardening which spread not only to Holland, but also to France and England. This "Chinese taste" was something acquired, a fashion. But actually it reflected a wider 'Rococo' trend thought as of a symbol of wealth and status which was characteristic of the time, and inclination for new decoration from foreign cultures (also a symbol of wide knowledge). Chinoiserie was a product of the European cultural environment and economic development, whether it was shallow or profound in its aesthetic results, a kind of European taste rather than that of the Chinese.

When talking about cultural preference we refer often to a representative 'collective taste' which reflects a basic orientation of certain



kinds of art in a certain region at certain time. Preferences are characterized by the main stylistic features of the culture. Preferring Ideal Forms and using a geometrical design language, Le Nôtre established the French School of landscape design; conversely Chinese gardens, the southern private gardens in particular, are made as if 'Naturally So'; while the English School is in between the French and Chinese. These are essential preferences in the different cultures [Fig. 17-1, 17-2 and 17-3].

The comparison of different preference indicates that 'to have taste' is not a simple matter of making some sort of fashionable artistic gesture. The deeper philosophical implications of taste, as we discussed in parts 3 and 4, are crucial to help us to assess design styles from a reliable cultural base and encourage us to learn from each other without ridiculous imitations, promoting a true diversity in landscape art and design.

Although typical landscape preferences differ from country to country, one thing common to both Britain and China is that the taste of the upper class influenced the general tendency of landscape design. What was done by the English Court and the Chinese Emperors needs no further explanation. However, more subtle influences from the gentleman class of both the British and the Chinese must not be underestimated, particularly landscape ideas derived from the kind of Escapism which promoted the adoration of natural beauty, since this class was in a position to give full expression to their ideas — their dream of creating an ELYSIUM.

The search for political safety and psychological peace was an important motive in landscape design in 17th century England, and the same idea was very popular as early as the 4th century in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, one of the most toilsome periods in Chinese history.

The influence of the upper class includes their idea of linking appreciation of landscape with morality, which also exerted a certain influence on the way people designed landscape both in Britain and China. For instance, in the mainstream of Chinese thought, the ideas, particularly



of knowledge and conduct, are seen as one thing; Truth and Goodness cannot be separately understood. As mentioned previously, in Chinese minds, the quality of nature was paralleled with that human (the wise and the benevolent must prefer water and mountain).

It is remarkably similar to Confucianism that a typical English gentleman, Shaftesbury, once advocated (1709): taste and morals harmonized to make the perfect man; and taste was the product of correct feelings or 'the polite imagination'. In his writing *The Moralists* (1709): "What is beauty is harmonious, and proportionable; what is harmonious and proportionable is true; and what is at once both beautiful and true is of consequence agreeable and good." For him, nature has a 'genuine order', and even the wild place is good for contemplation which can evoke feelings of high moral values.

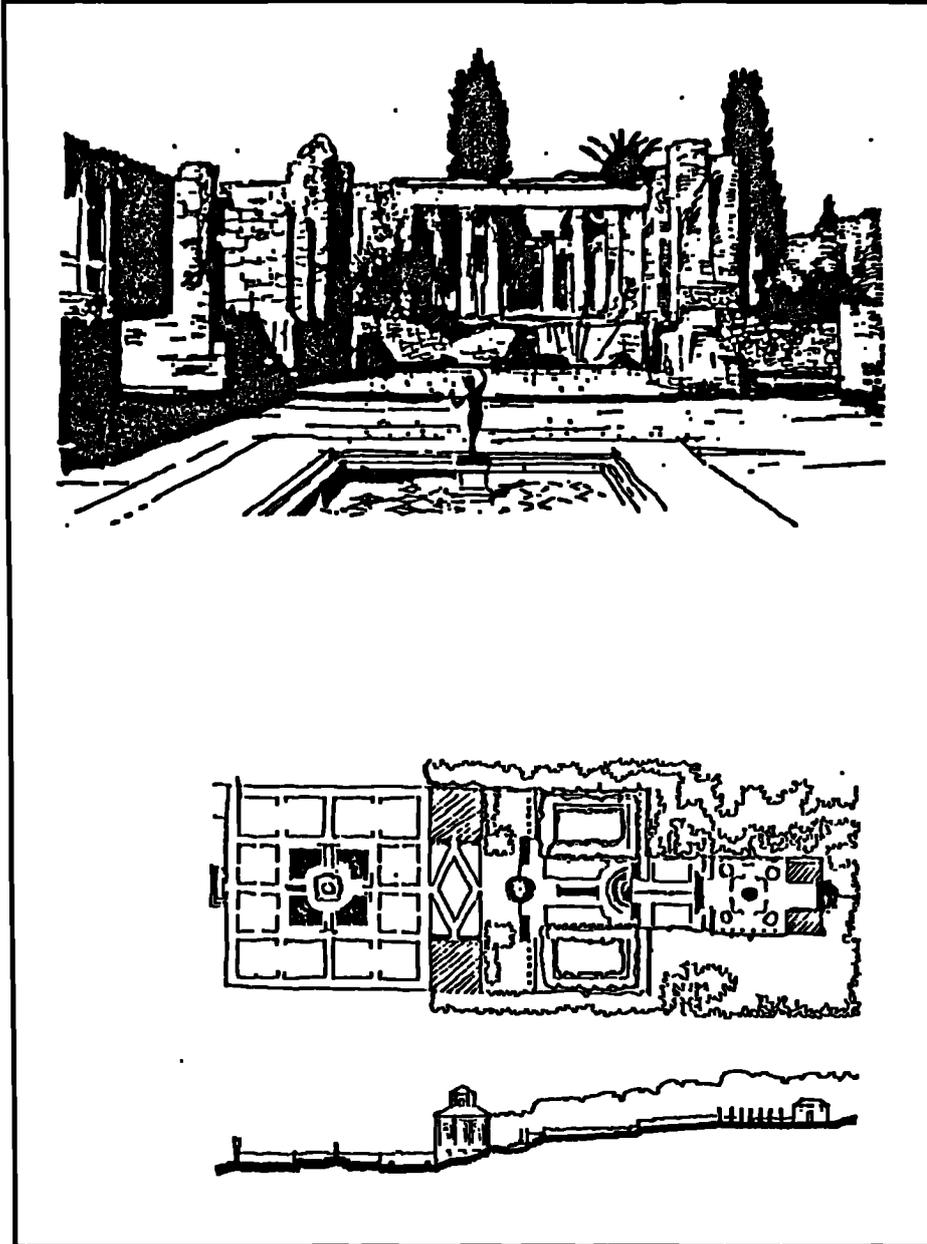
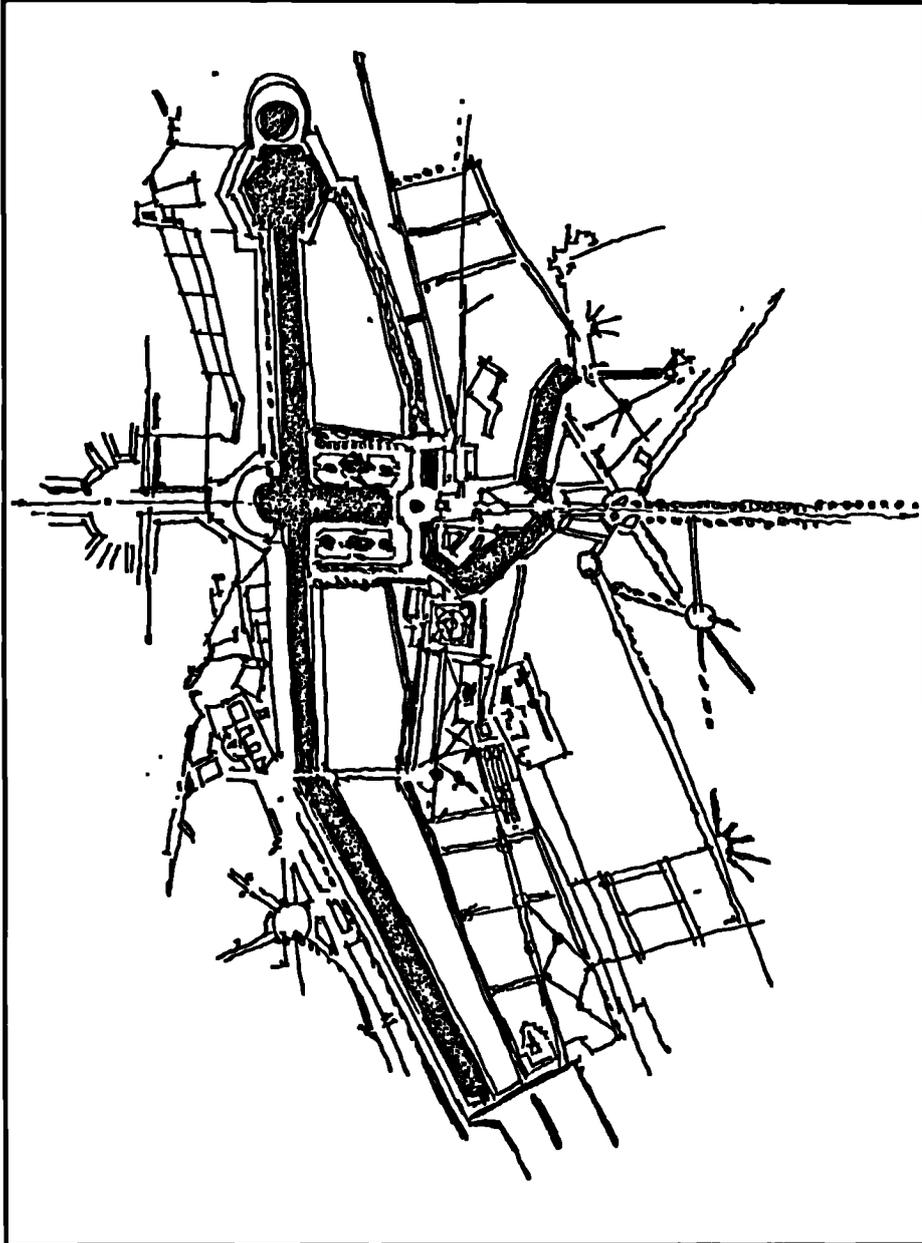


Fig. 17-1: From Classic to Renaissance [illustration with reference to Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe (1987), *The Landscape of Man*, Thames and Hudson London, p.160].



**Fig. 17-2: The powerful image of the French formal garden [illustration with reference to Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe (1987), *The Landscape of Man*, Thames and Hudson London, p.307].**

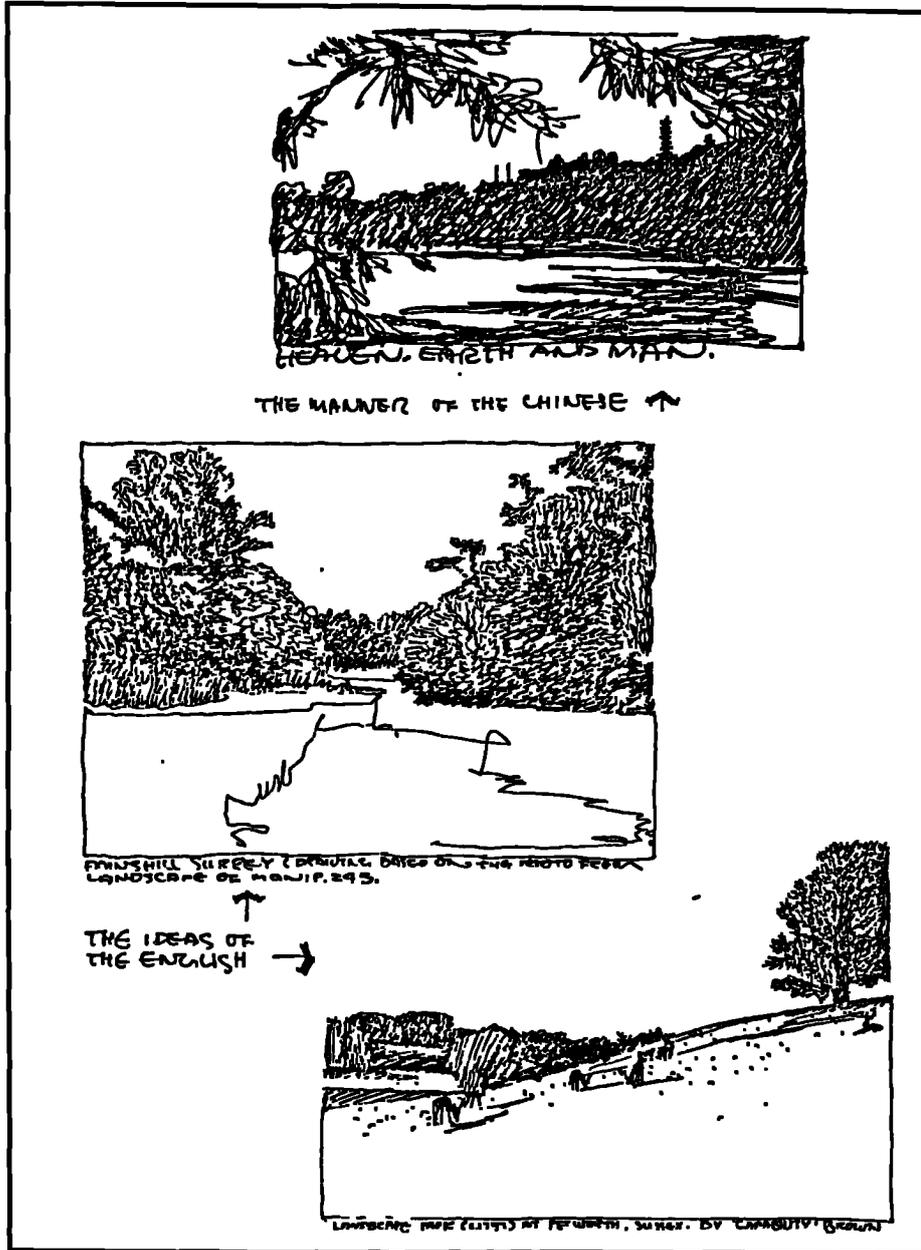


Fig. 17-3: A 'compromise' between human and nature [illustrations with reference to Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe (1987), *The Landscape of Man*, Thames and Hudson London, p.243].



## 17.2 ROMANTIC ACCENTS

Landscape painted or designed with a sense of place can be seen as a 'Placescape'. The landscape image of the 'Placescape' is refined but real, stimulating our emotions. The language used by landscape painters or designers is usually with a strong romantic accent. The theories and practice both of the English and of the Chinese school convince us of this. The key aesthetic concepts such as the Sublime, the Beautiful, the Picturesque and Yi provide clear categories of research into this universal landscape aesthetic phenomenon. However, the subtlety of this issue does not allow a simple analysis, since within this common aesthetic trend there are still subtle differences, which distinguishes the individuality of different landscape cultures.

By the substitution of emotion for reason, Burke theoretically defined the concept of sublimity as one of experience, of psychological response to objects. The source of the sublime for him was pain, danger, i.e. any sort of terrible object or manner, which is the root of emotion, and that "the Sublime emphasizes that man was disconcerted primarily by that which lay beyond his control or comprehension" [1] and "... When danger or pain press too nearly they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience." [2] As an opposite, the qualities of the Beautiful are a certain kind of delicacy of form and colour. For Burke, "The ideas of pain, sickness and death fill the mind with strong emotion of horror; but life and health, though they put us in a capacity of being affected with pleasure, they make no such

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1 William Vaughan (1978), *Romantic Art*, Thames and Hudson, London. p.33.

2 Jay Appleton (1975), *Experience of Landscape*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, New York. p.28.



impression by the simple enjoyment.” For him, human’s two most powerful feelings are LOVE & HATE, the causes of which are ATTRACTION AND REPULSION, and this is “vital to the Romantics, since it emphasizes the suggestive quality of art, because it gives a new importance to the disturbing.” [3] This theory is “a great enlargement of aesthetic appreciation” [4] which broke away from the classical aesthetic doctrine and opened a wider aesthetic area, the realm of the Romantics. In terms of philosophy, the English aesthetic approach was Empirically oriented focusing on experiences and human psyche.

Compared with the English, the Chinese have shown a constant preference for this trend for centuries. Actually, the Chinese aesthetic concepts of Yi and Yijing [5] greatly emphasizes the link between subject and object; expression and representation. In other words, feeling is in the scenery which exists to encourage it. Thus, there is no necessity to idealize nature, but only to understand it, feel it, and in particular, to be aware of the relationship the contradictory factors of all life phenomena such as female/male; moon/sun; water/mountain; soft/hard; cool/hot; movement/still; broken/continuous, etc.

Interestingly, we can also define attributes of the Sublime versus the Beautiful by means of the Yin Yang theory:

**YANG**  
**THE SUBLIME**  
Vast  
rugged / negligent  
dark / gloomy  
surprising  
founded on pain

**YIN**  
**THE BEAUTIFUL**  
small  
smooth / polished  
light / delicate  
relaxing  
founded on pleasure [6]

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3 William Vaughan (1978), *Romantic Art*, p.33.

4 Christopher Hussey (1967), *The Picturesque*, p.55.

5 See Part 3.

6 The references of this table are: Christopher Hussey (1967), *The Picturesque*, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., London and Edinburgh, p.58, p.59 and Jay Appleton



In this sense, we can say people do share these common feelings when appreciating landscape. However, in painting landscape, designing gardens or parks, searching for the quality of locality, linking natural environment with daily life, evoking the emotions, and in finding 'Home of Feeling', Chineseness and Englishness are expressed naturally.

The manner of a romantic attachment to nature is not to depict an idealized world. In such art there is not always a "noble simplicity and calm grandeur", [7] but more a concern with true experiences of place and. The creed of romantic art is to prefer a search for feeling in landscape instead of idealizing it. Therefore, a way of depicting the human psychological response to landscape becomes the basic characteristic of this trend.

However, there is still an obvious difference between the English and the Chinese in that the English have more concern for experience with reason, whereas the Chinese prefer mastering the general philosophical sense and pay more attention to intuition. For a cultural background linking with Western tradition, English romantic expression was based on classical artistic and design vocabulary such as ways of defining space (perspective), [8] the media of painting (colour system, light and shadow and relevant techniques), the elements of landscape design (classical temple, mansion, sculpture, etc.); whereas that of the Chinese was of pure Eastern mood and oriental "accent". Parallel with this is the understanding of the 'Line of Beauty': although both the English and the Chinese prefer Serpentine or Zigzagging Lines, the results of embodying this preference are very different, with a strong national characteristics in the same "flavour" (See paragraph 17.5 in detail).

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(1975), *Experience of Landscape*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, New York. p.30.

7 Kenneth Clark (1973): *The Romantic Rebellion*, p.20.

8 This issue will be discussed in following paragraph.



Moreover, there were sociological reasons for both the English and the Chinese to operate the romantic landscape language in different manners. As we discussed previously, after the Tang and Song period, the Chinese feudal system looked stable but was hardly as glorious as the past. The decaying of this old political system weakened the national strength and invited intruders from time to time. Thus, the mood and feelings of Chinese intellectuals were fatally connected with national tragedy and personal disappointment. As a result of this social life, Shan Shui art became secluded, gardens became far away from real life, e.g. a pure intellect game to release all sorts of sentimental feelings. Though the Romantic artistic trend was obvious, the expression was somehow passive, and art and design became too subtle, and art theory became even mystical.

Unlike the Chinese, in Britain, particularly after the 18th century with the increase of wealth and national pride, "As the 'New Romans', the British began to see their own landscape rather differently." [9] Ruins, for instance, was a sad story in Chinese minds, but in Britain, the symbol of power of the past and a parallel of increasing national strength were re-discovered, re-evaluated and admired. In this sense, the British nostalgic taste for the beauty of ruins was different from that of the Chinese and even from that of Claude and Poussin, and there was a consensus among artists and patrons which related to their specific national concern at that specific historical moment [Fig. 17-4 and Fig. 17-5]. Thus, "the taste for new sights and sensations agreeably discovered (by) them from the highlands of Scotland to the inaccessible crags of north Wales. Edmond Burke's *Sublime and Beautiful* carefully examined the aesthetic criteria arising from the emotional reaction to those phenomena." [10]

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9 Charles Hemming (1989), *British Landscape Painting*, Victor Gollancz Ltd. . London, p.41-42.

10 Charles Hemming (1989), *British Landscape Painting*, Victor Gollancz Ltd. London, p.40.



Therefore we can conclude that although Romanticism is a kind universal artistic trend it must register an indigenous understanding of place and people, as well as their social context. As we noted in parts 3 and 4, Romanticism particularly relates to the understanding of philosophy such as Tao in China and Empiricism in Britain. The art forms of this trend vary according to the purposes of depicting or designing places. There is no formula for this art, only a general principle of combining feeling with place. Romantics link themselves with tradition, their art language is expressive and readable. Compared with expressionism, particularly with abstract expressionism, Romantic art is more tangible.

The value of the Romantic art is that the art belongs to the land and people, influenced by their thoughts, in which diversity is derived from locality and individuals. In this art there is a sense of coherence (man + feeling + nature), a search for the correct understanding of human power, an intense artistic expression. Thus, based on real experience, to create a kind of “overpowering form of beauty” [11] became the most important motive for the Romantics. However, all the great landscape artists and designers both in China and in Britain have an aesthetic obsession with their own landscape, employing different techniques, different media. They share the same Romantic approach to landscape art and design, but have their own individual Romantic “accent”.

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11 William Vaughan (1978), *Romantic Art*, p.32.

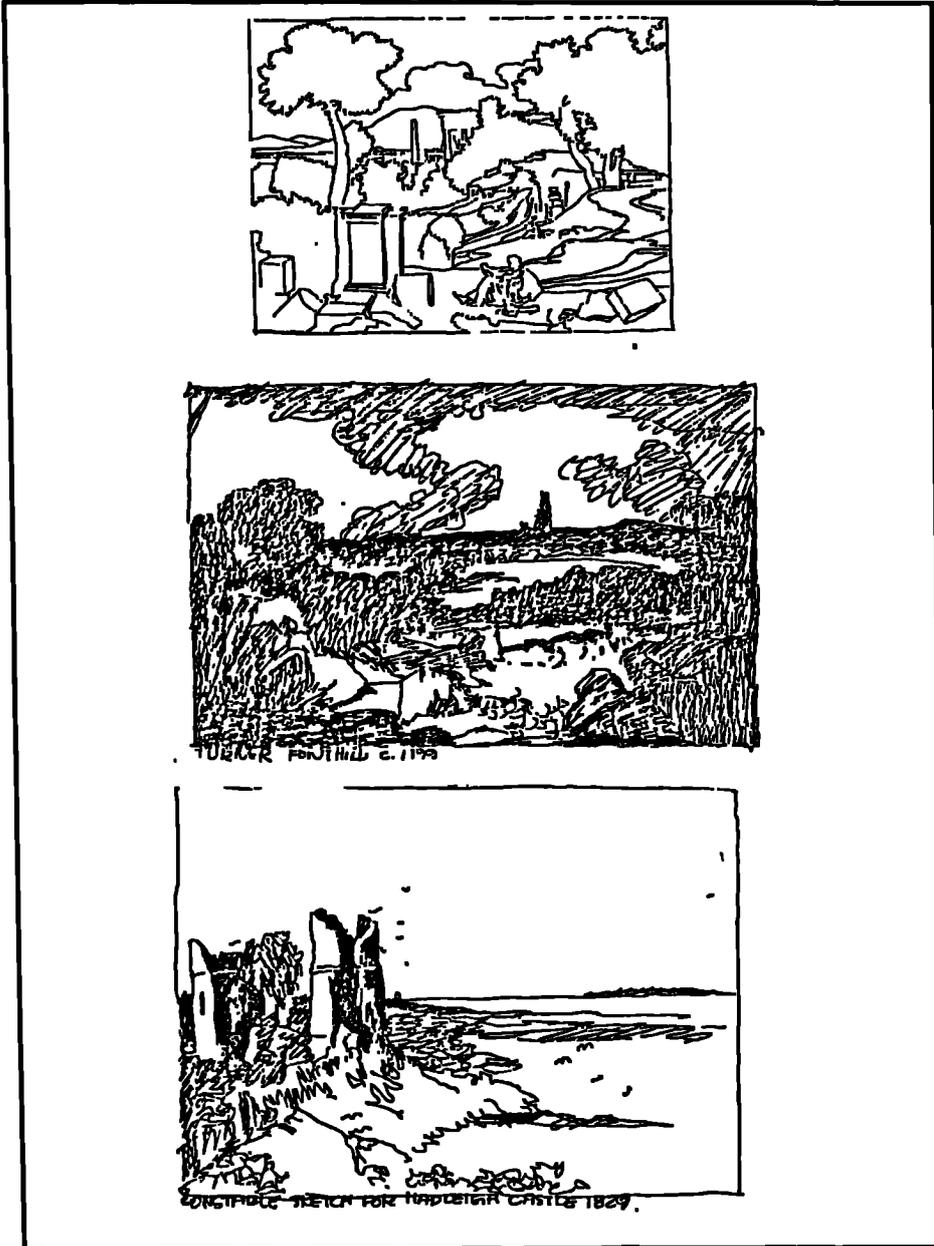
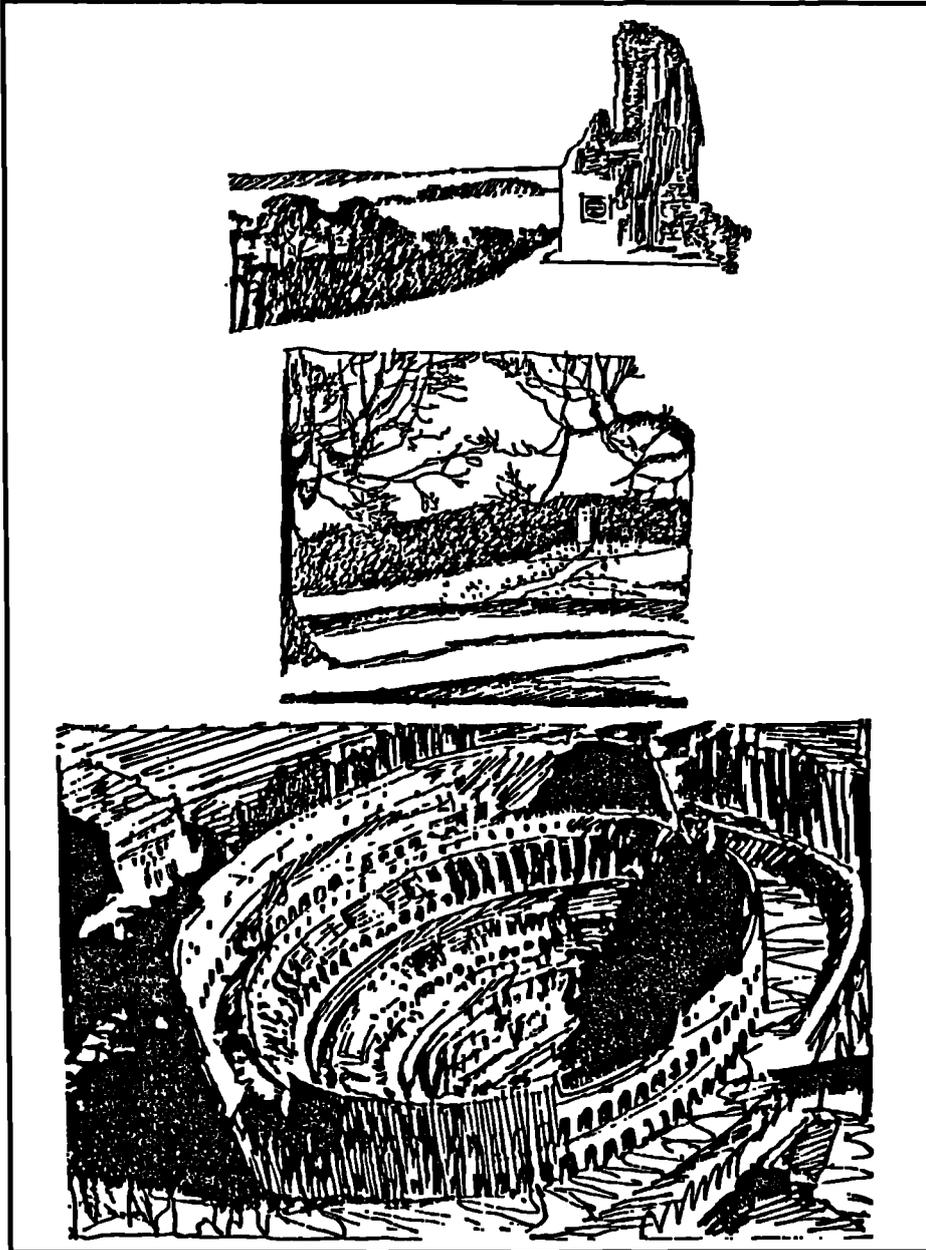


Fig. 17-4: Ruin in Painting, a Nostalgic Flavour.



**Fig. 17-5:** Ruin as a Symbol of Power and Glorious Past [illustrations with reference to Laurence Fleming and Alan Gore (1979), *The English Garden*, p.109 and p.142].



### 17.3 MEANINGS OF PICTURESQUE

There is no doubt that The Picturesque is an important aesthetic category followed by both the Chinese and the English School, in which there are both common interests or subtle differences.

The Picturesque for the British was an independent theoretical system rather than one of a simple pictorial flavour. It was an important development after the theory of the Sublime and the Beautiful. According to Christopher Hussey (1967): "Thus had Burke broken away from a moral concept of beauty, but got only as far as sensuous concepts. Moreover, his theory did not touch objects that had neither smoothness of the beautiful nor the overwhelmingness of the sublime. These were to be recognized later as forming the third category, the Picturesque." [12]

The question was: between those extremes such as hate and love, fear and attraction, i.e. the Sublime and the Beautiful (the black and the white), is there something else. The answer is Picturesque, something interesting, worthy appreciating. Thus, "The capacity for seeing nature with a painter's eyes was picturesque vision." [13] Picturesque implies worthy of a picture: "the Sudden change and texture caused by irregularity and variety are generally accepted as its touchstone," and according to Uvedale Price, "The two opposite qualities of roughness and of sudden variation, joined to that of irregularity, are the most efficient causes of the picturesque." [14] For the theorists of the Picturesque, such as Gilpin, "'Romantic' implies a type of scene too irregular even to be accepted as Picturesque." [15] Therefore, we may generally summarise

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- 12 Christopher Hussey (1967), *The Picturesque*, p.60.  
13 Christopher Hussey (1967), *The Picturesque*, p. 64.  
14 William Vaughan (1978), *Romantic Art*, p.38.  
15 William Vaughan (1978), *Romantic Art*, p.38.



the completion of 18th century English aesthetic theory by these three key categories: the Sublime, the Beautiful, the Interesting (the Picturesque), which imply different aesthetic experiences but share the same philosophical root in Empiricism.

As an aesthetic category, the Picturesque was well developed in the second half of the 18th century when facing the mannerism derived from Brown. Price on the objective qualities of picturesque. Uvedale Price argued that the picturesque as a kind of quality of landscape should be distinct from the Beautiful and the Sublime; qualities such as variety and intricacy, partial concealment and curiosity which amuse the mind are its essential aspects. Gilpin focused on the pictorial 'Surface', Knight on 'Association', the subjective responses, Price on the objective qualities of picturesque. All the thinkers attempted to find a new approach to improved design by researching into the essence of the Picturesque.

As discussed in Chapter 15, it is doubtful whether limited pictorial patterns can represent the whole beauty of nature; for instance the kind of paintings by Salvador Rosa cannot be represented by a stylized picturesque manner. To discover the subtle natural beauty needs an industrious effort, rather than following the formula set up by theorists. What is more, a real embodiment of the new theory demanded a practical experiment. It was Humphry Repton who continued Brown's Romantic ideas, absorbing the delicate picturesque flavour and linking the Picturesque landscape ideas to landscape design. However, the ideas of those abstract thinkers are still very important subjects.

As discussed in Chapters 6 and 12, the Chinese Pictorial Flavour is an important aesthetic aspect which relates to the interpretation of the inner feeling of the painters and designers. It is conditioned by the aesthetic stance, functional needs and material possibilities or potentials of art media and site. The key in practicing the picturesque idea is to overcome the barriers in the limitation of space with a concern for



explanation and discovery of expressive symbolic forms, and to achieve an intense symbolic landscape expression through simple but concentrated scenes. Since such rich feelings and aesthetic contents must be conveyed by a few elements expressed in three dimensions, to practice the Picturesque needs also a reflective mind and integrated skills of fine art, calligraphy, architecture, planting and so on.

The Chinese concept of Picturesque with a special study of designed landscape forms should not be understood as merely a sort of pictorial flavour. The basic Chinese aesthetic attitude towards landscape and design practice of 'Naturally So' is still the guiding principle. In the Chinese mind, "scenery is just like a painting" rather than "painting is like a scenery", which means that the picture in mind is more important than that which is seen. This describes the basic idea of Chinese Picturesque and manifests a close linkage between landscape design and fine art. Nothing is found here about merely imitating painting to make landscape, only the embodiment of the general Chinese aesthetic principle in design. The key approaches of Chinese Picturesque are firstly, to reveal the inner relationship between Shan and Shui, to transfer the theory of the painting into the design, since both Shan Shui painting and landscape design are seen as sharing the same aesthetic roots. A limited space can not itself imitate a vast natural panorama; a high refinement is necessary.

Secondly, since it is extremely difficult to express certain kinds of feelings and emotions by three-dimensional design materials, a typical pictorial patterns may take on this function. Refined two-dimensional images are borrowed from paintings and made by real landscape materials, which are efficient, "economic" and striking such as a planting composition on a white wall. That is why we consider Chinese Picturesque as a symbolic system for depicting the feelings of people and the macro-structure of the world. For instance, as mentioned in chapter 11 the postures of plants, in the mind of Chinese designers, are rather more



important than plants themselves; what expressed is more important than what is represented.

Moreover, for the Chinese, there is no essential difference between the painting made with brushes and the landscape constructed with materials; the media of art are not as important as the motive; and there is no difference between a piece of paper and that of a white wall, a tree trunk and one stroke of the brush; a painting frame and a window, etc. The way is to use two-dimensional art language for recording what can be discerned, especially with a vision of Tao, then to build refined images “into the scene” (designed landscape) to express what is seen in the objects. Since idea and understanding come before anything else, the ideas of Chinese Picturesque are guided by philosophy rather than the search for superficial pictorial images.

In brief, both the British and the Chinese see the Picturesque as a important aesthetic category for appreciating, depicting and designing landscape. The Picturesque of the English Schools of landscape design is a result of searching for new design approach, a study of aesthetics rather than a suggestion of mere art-imitation, and relates to the way of seeing, searching for natural beauty and designing landscape by means of a striking art language. Nevertheless the British have placed more emphasis on interest (certain aesthetic experiences missing in Burke’ theory), i.e. on searching for the richness and the diversity experienced in nature. Chinese Picturesque is a traditional symbolic system in which the subjective motive seems more important; the Picturesque is simply a symbolic depiction of Chinese philosophy [Fig. 17-6].

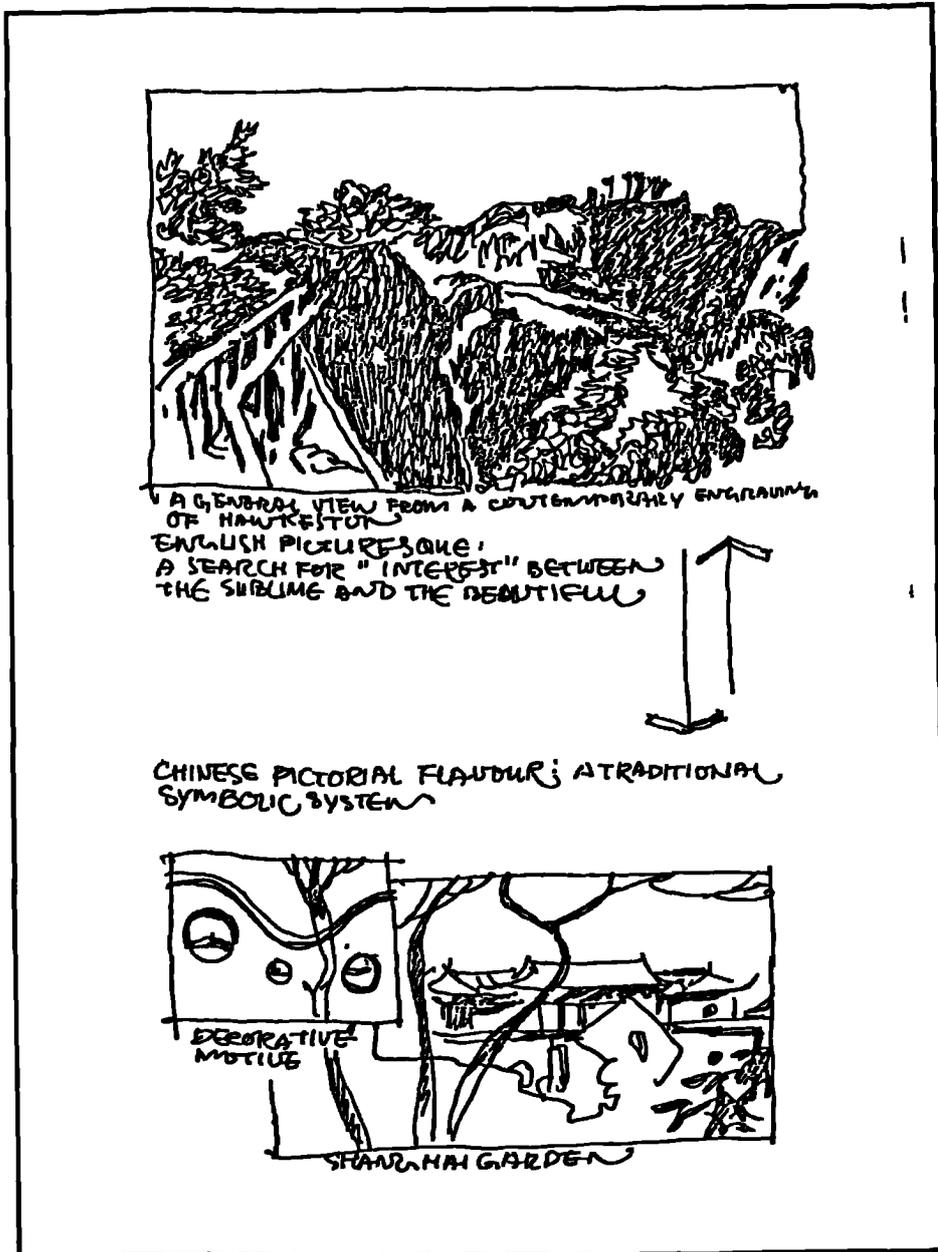


Fig. 17-6: Meaning of Picturesque [illustration with reference to Laurence Fleming and Alan Gore (1979), *The English Garden*, p.106].



## 17.4 PERSPECTIVE

As mentioned previously, Perspective is a method of seeing and defining space which has influenced ways of depicting and designing landscape. There is quite a different approach to understanding and implementing the mechanisms of perspective between a Westerner and Easterner.

Chinese perspective is characterised by a scattered focus which can be HIGH and FAR, DEEP and FAR, LEVEL and FAR, or all together. [16]

This way of seeing and depicting landscape has decisively influenced Chinese landscape design. For instance, there is no necessity to have a dominating focus in scenery which is supposed to be seen from different angles, and thus the effects of height, depth, and openness are created in the manner of 'Naturally So'; also, for appreciating this kind of scenery the visitor must move and see around. This induces a great interest in the qualities of continuity, variety and a certain kind of 'Agreeable Surprise'. Like nature, the richness of designed places are achieved by scenic and spatial arrangements experienced through movement from one side to another, from step to step. With this in mind, there is no difficulty for us to further deepen our understanding of the basic design methods of Chinese landscape design which we discussed before such as: Beyond the Boundary, the Zigzag Way, CHI, A Communication Media, the Emptiness, Scattering and Chinese Pictorial flavour and so on [17] [Fig. 17-7].

Compared with the Chinese concept of Perspective, ideas of perspective in Western minds seem a little rigid and still. It is efficient for

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16 See Chapter 6.  
17 See Chapter 12.



analysing certain spaces, but on the other hand it provides a geometrical spatial system or formula which controls and limits the scope of observer, and restricts the possibility of exploring variations. Even in paintings by Turner, who showed such a free manner in depicting his emotions, there is still a controlled depiction of space. This is an essential difference between Eastern and Western painting. The result of Western perspective may be thought of as logical, and correct in the sense of mathematics. However it only defines the space from a fixed angle whose result is far away from the true images of any spatial beings perceived by those who are living in it, moving through it, or imagining it. The limitations of this perspective are clear, and also its relation to the Ideal Forms once so dominating in design; the Forms and the Perspective were organized in a complete system that provided both a method and a powerful, but rigid way of seeing.

In the West, at the beginning of this century it was the artists of Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism and 'the Style', who broke away from the restriction of traditional Western perspective. Linking new concepts of time and space in the understanding of space and making a revolutionary changes in visual art, they promoted a great leap towards modern design thinking. The key contribution was a change in way of seeing. By seeing in relation to the passage of time, with references to movement, different angles and speed, and by seeing analytically with inner eyes, other true, richness, and complete images of objects have been built up; *the inner* structure of reality has been realized. This reformation of observing in the West is indirectly the result of the industrial revolution. For art and relevant designs, it can be seen partly of as an outcome of the West meets the East since the influences of Eastern art on modern art movements was obvious.

However, the focusing perspective still remains a useful tool in studying particular details and illustrating certain visual effects with



specific purposes. As a logical, rational visual language grammar, it may be aided by computer to overcome the shortcomings of its traditional form in communication of landscape design and planning, commercial art and so on.

In short, the meaning of the study in ways of seeing not only lies in solving visual problems, but also in developing our way of design thinking and method, since a true and complete understanding of the deeper structure of objects is more crucial than those simple pictures. For instance, where landscape is a place in which people live, a certain order and focus is needed, and the rational relationship between objects and human activities must be analysed from one angle to another, from general control to fine details. Thus, certain kinds of logical relationships should be considered by way of defining certain areas of space and their research aspects. As long as we can keep a sense of coherence, logical ways of seeing may lead us to a successful process of reasoning and exploring.

Meanwhile we must always try to see totally and with feelings. Here, to make personal contact with the scenery is crucial, realizing that to see is to be seen, the observer is the observed. Chinese perspective, in this sense, is a more flexible system, enabling the observer to discover more landscape aesthetic values in a limited space, more clues for searching for landscape potential, more freedom for scenery composition.

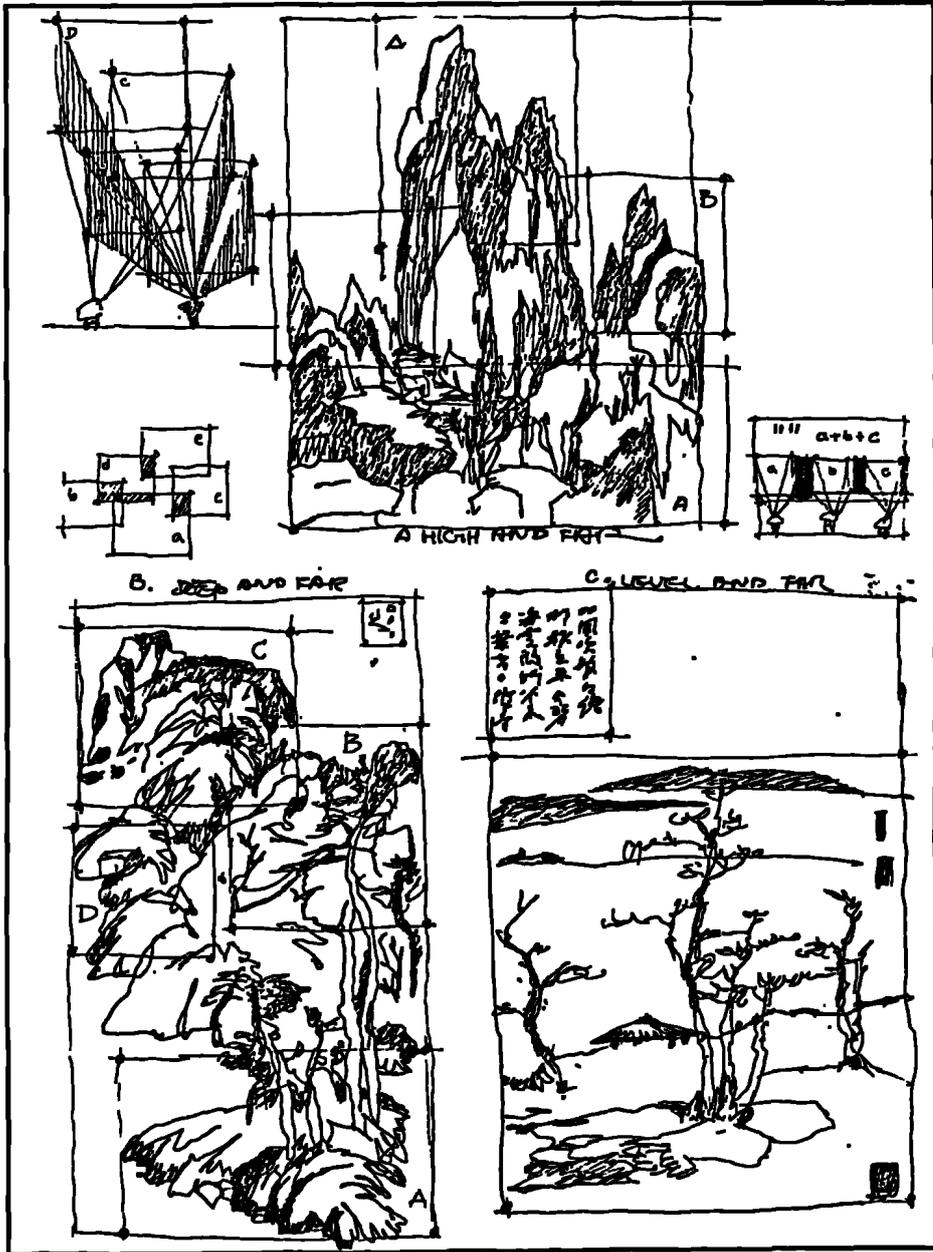


Fig: 17-7: PERSPECTIVE: Way of Seeing.



## 17.5 LINE OF BEAUTY

No doubt, the link between landscape design and fine art is shared by both the British and the Chinese. This link is reflected in both landscape ideas and artistic forms. For instance, it was classical landscape paintings, particularly the paintings by Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin, that inspired the ideal landscape design in Britain, while the paintings of Salvador Rosa provided a reference for theorists of Picturesque theory. Similarly it is very clear that there is almost no boundary between Shan Shui painting and Chinese landscape design in essence, and it is often the case that the Shan Shui painters were also landscape designers; the theory of the painting was also that of the landscape design. [18]

For the British and the Chinese, the concept of a Line of Beauty is one of the most typical common factors in landscape designs found attractive to both nations. The linear art form is one of the most important medium for the abstract or concrete expression of an understanding of natural beauty.

On artistic form, as mentioned in Chapter 6, Hang Binhong, remarked: "The more zigzag the way, the deeper the scenery." This idea seemed to share the same artistic concept as William Hogarth (1697-1764) who advocated the 'serpentine line', 'line of beauty' and 'line of grace'. Interestingly, these painter's opinions were enthusiastically echoed in landscape practice by the designers of China and Britain. [19]

Yet according to Christopher Hussey (1967, p. 55), Hogarth's Line of Beauty derived from the baroque forms of later Italian art. The inevitable link between his concept of the line of grace and use of a

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18 See Part 3 and Part 4.

19 See Part 3 and Part 4.



Serpentine line in landscape design was established through a common sense search for Englishness on native ground. This tendency was so strong that Francis Coventry in his *The Word* (1753) even asked: “whether a modern gardener would consent to enter heaven if any path there is not serpentine” [20].

Although appreciation of the qualities of lines is a common interest for both traditions, there are still subtle differences between the Chinese and the British.

Firstly, the line for the Chinese is the most essential art medium for any kind of art. Even in Chinese sculpture and architecture, linear character and quality goes beyond other artistic aspects such as colour and texture or light and shadow which distinguish Chinese arts from those of the West. Thus, line in Chinese art has an independent position. What is more, the writing of the Chinese became an independent kind of art before the Tang Dynasty, and it is thought of as a reflection of the quality both of the art and the artist. Compared with this, however much the British appreciate the line of beauty, generally their art has still followed the mainstream of European tradition in its emphasis on depicting light and shade, volume and space.

Secondly, the way of using the painting brush is a very decisive factor which must come before anything else, [21] a tradition which greatly influenced Chinese aesthetics generally. In terms of landscape design, superficially there is a similarity between the Serpentine Line of the English and the Zigzag Way of the Chinese. However, the British were concerned with diverse lineal forms which could evoke the richness of experiencing natural beauty; whereas the Chinese, with their own cultural distinction, the attitude to the use of lines is more or less philosophically oriented.

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20 Miles Hadfield (1969), *A History of British Gardening*, p.221.

21 See Chapter 6: On Six Principles.



In general, the aesthetic consequences in the concept of the Serpentine or Zigzag line can be summarized as being in accordance with issues of landscape design thinking as below:

- To satisfy natural taste by resembling natural forms;**
- To encourage variation of landscape vision by an indirect, varied line of movement;**
- To provide a decorative medium (particular for the Chinese);**
- To link spaces directly or indirectly,**
- To suggest certain abstract design ideas;**
- To use the flowing lines for the comforts of human activities;**
- To evoke an association of infinity in limited space;**
- To gain the quality of Softness by softening the relationships between man-made things;**
- To create possibilities for the enjoyment of surprises;**
- To be sympathetic with indications of land-forms.**

In short, the idea of Beauty of Line as an important aesthetic category developed by both the British and the Chinese, matters not only in art form, but also as the genius of place and people. Meanwhile, Lines of Beauty is the obvious feature of these two landscape schools which identifies a certain cultural individuality such as the Celtic, the Chinese, and the landscape art of the English School. It has had tremendous influences on the practice of landscape designers [Fig. 17-8 and Fig. 17-9].



Fig. 17-8: Line of Beauty: The Identity of Chinese Art.

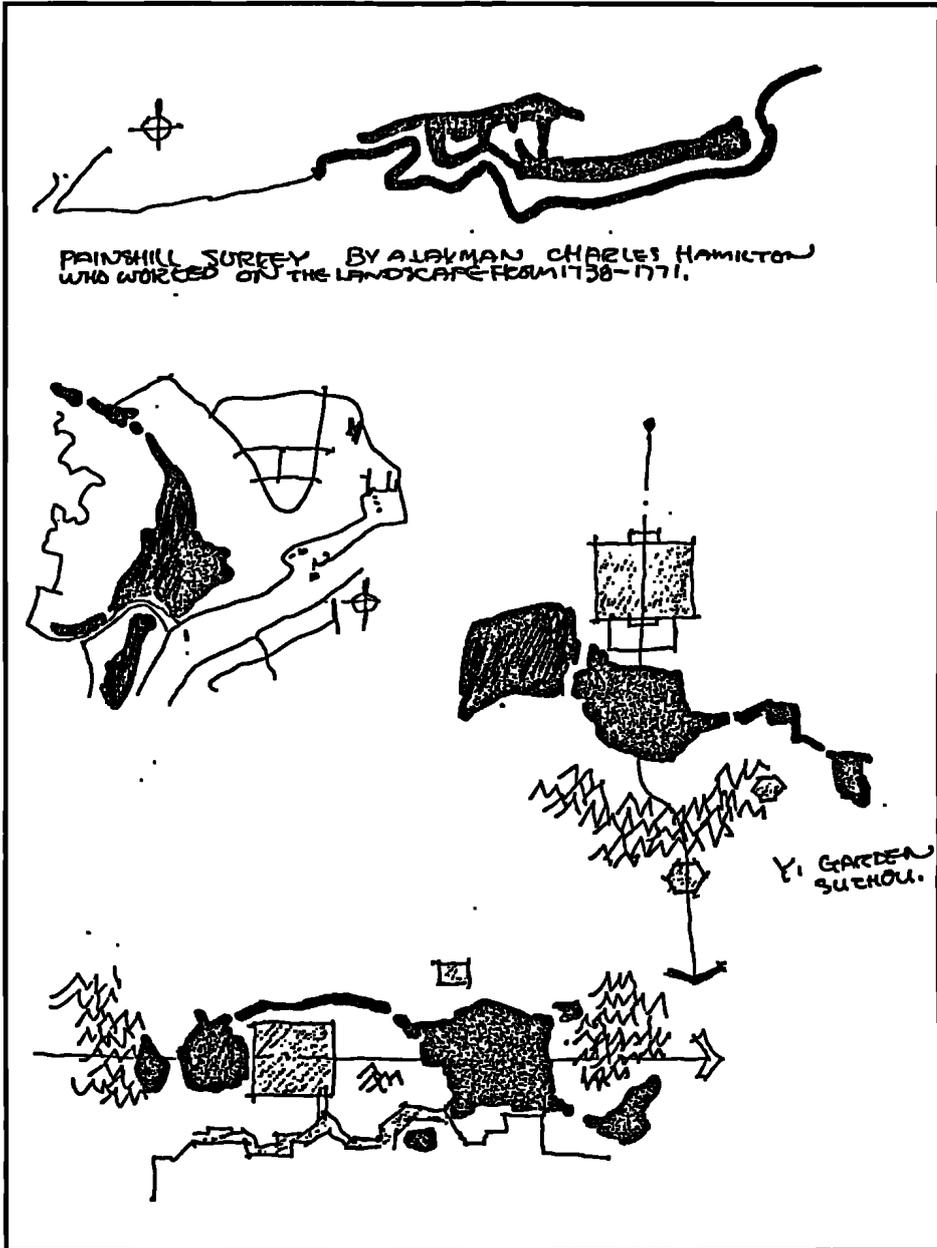


Fig. 17-9: LINE OF BEAUTY: A Common Aesthetic Category of both the English and Chinese School.



## **17.6**

### **A SUMMARY**

#### **WEST MEETS EAST**

People usually define the characteristics of Chinese landscape design as a 'Free Style', and that of the English as Romantic. As a cultural phenomena underlying ideas of the two together are more profound and more essential than their appearances.

Although rooted in a different cultural soil and conditioned by different physical circumstances, there are still some aesthetic ideas that the Chinese and the British share. As we have already noticed, attitudes towards nature and ways of exploring and representing natural beauty are mostly different between the West and the East. However, to some extent the British seem an exception among Westerners. Since real landscape experiences were emphasized in the process of establishing the English School, particularly in the 18th century, the English way of designing landscape developed in a complex manner. The aesthetic stance of those interpretive theorists such as Addison, Burke and so on opened a new aesthetic sphere of perception, enabling the British to appreciate their own landscape. Also the historical remains, infinite changing climate, misty light and mild temperatures gave a mystery and interest to the undulating green land and dark woods which characterised the English landscape and provided design motives for the designers. Thus, a Romantic colour covered the landscape; a natural manner of landscape design combined with English rational thinking. The 'colour' and the 'manner' invited a comparison with an Eastern mood, which may be one of reasons why traditional Chinese landscape design discussed in England from 17th century onwards.

In terms of similarity, there is an ethical linkage between an appreciation of landscape and morality both in Britain and China, although



for the Chinese this tendency seemed more influential due to the strong influences from Confucianism. There is also no doubt that these two schools shared a similar way of seeing landscape design as a fine art, which was demonstrated by an obvious influence from landscape painting on landscape design in both Chinese and English history. Romantic aesthetic categories such as the Sublime and the Beautiful as well as the Picturesque which developed later associated natural beauty with human feelings and interests. They are to some extent similar with Chinese landscape approaches such as the paralleling of natural phenomena and human senses according to a cosmic map, and relevant art theories discussed in Parts 2 and 3. Reviewing history, the Chinese have a unbroken continuation of their own landscape tradition, whereas the English seem to have moved between East and West.

Nonetheless, in terms of differences of landscape ideas between the Chinese and the English School we must include the following areas: evolution history, attitudes towards natural beauty, understanding of human power, the combining of 'Pleasure with Profit', and approaches to design.

Obviously, an open developing system of landscape design such as Britain's may occasionally face challenges from outside. Sometimes rejection or change is painful but eventually a healthy progress will be achieved by learning, absorbing and exchanging landscape ideas. The cross-fertilization may promote cultural development, particularly when we cope with common environmental problems. What is more, the genius of a place will eventually assimilate all sorts of influence to establish an individuality for those people who love their homeland with their own ways of thinking.

In a closed system, cultural identity is obvious and stable, based on the continuation of tradition. However, the scope of people may be narrowed by a powerful tradition; the capabilities of designers in coping



with changing inner or external conditions may be weakened; the possibilities of improvement through learning from others experience may be less than in an open system. Compared with the Chinese School, the whole evolution of the English School can be seen as a typical development of an open system, characterised by continually absorbing exotic influences, finding the genius of the land, changing attitudes towards the external world.

However, some traditional landscape ideas as the cream of human culture are worth rediscovering. For instance, an understanding of the totality of Heaven, Earth and Man in Chinese thinking, and the essential wisdom of the philosophy of Tao have profound ecological and methodological significance for research into modern landscape aesthetic issues. Landscape design is a modest profession; the designer should not be the 'make-up man' of landscape. That is why the Formal Garden was rejected by the British in the 18th century, and why the achievements of Brown, the great contributor of the English School, was disputed in turn by his successors. It is also the reason why we value Repton highly, and why we should now study the meaning and value of traditional Chinese landscape design. There is a danger in thinking we are conquerors of nature. It is also wrong to use a formula to "improve" different places. We have lesson to learn from the past. A landscape aesthetic philosophy related to the principle of 'Naturally So' is still meaningful.

Facing the challenge from contemporary environmental issues, the idea of 'art for arts sake' may not work any more; on the other hand, attitudes to the exploitation of nature should be cautious. It is time for thinking and healing rather than endless "conquering".

If we are concerned with total environmental issues, landscape ideas cannot be found without influencing on each other. When a cultural collision happens, the inevitable cross-fertilized result may be more creative and healthy. In cultural history, East meets West is an old topic,



but a virtual collision between Chinese and Western culture has not happened often; for the Chinese at least there was no fundamental change or influence from the outside world until recently. In the long run, the period of hesitation should not last too long, since environmental influence is now world-wide; the 'East meets West' is inevitable. The Chinese design tradition should be reformed for the welfare of its nation, one-quarter world population. According to Laozi:

“Know honour,  
But keep the role of the disgraced,” [22]

- We must get rid of the burden of the past, to learn as an innocent pupil, since the genius of land and human creative nature will help us to find out a better way to approach our own landscape.

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22 Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*: XXVIII, 63, P.85.



**PART 6**

**AN OUTLINE OF  
LANDSCAPE MORPHOLOGY**





**We have had a long journey from art to landscape design; from China to Britain; from reviewing history to analyzing design philosophies; from comparison to criticism. However, we review history not for the sake of nostalgia; we make comparisons not for purely academic interest. The central aim of this research is to bridge between aesthetics, practice of landscape design and education through study of typical schools of West and East. It is therefore valuable to sort out our own understanding of landscape design methodology with our own words through learning from the past, investigating the present and thinking of the future.**

**In landscape design, the issues which bother us are the conflicts between desires and possibilities, quantity and quality, art and science. With an “ambition” to contribute to a philosophy of landscape design, I will try to propose a framework for design thinking with reference to all cultural contexts.**

**Design thinking is different from that of pure art and philosophy. The designer has more concern for making things rather than only appreciating, representing or reasoning. To design a landscape is to make general space become a particular place: to create the desirable qualities where human sentiment can be integrated with the material environment. Only a type of theory able to connect design methodology with aspects of philosophy and social science and art as well, can be relied on to establish our aesthetic design approach, since the meanings of landscape are complex; the meaning of even a small garden relates to many concepts**



such as faith, power, order, cultural expression, personal expression and healing. [1]

Because of these integrative attributes of design thinking and with deep concern for landscape education, we are interested in how to move between philosophy and practice with reference to real design tasks. This way of thinking is neither Platonic nor purely pragmatic, but a general idea for developing individual landscape creativity.

Design thinking must involve imagination and reason, thus an alive landscape form should have a physical “body”, show logical relations and express certain emotions or feelings. As an essential part of design and having a basic vocabulary, form plays a key role in landscape communication and linguistic system. These meanings of landscape form now call for a systematic study, which we will refer to as a discussion of landscape morphology.

The discussion of the morphology here is divided into three sections: the first is chapter 18: ‘Form, Logic and Emotion’, which deal with the basic issues of landscape morphology, the structure of landscape design language in order to search for a clear understanding of landscape design language itself; the second, chapter 19, is a discussion of the approaches of design thinking, which focuses on the way of using the language; the third, chapter 20, is a general concern for landscape education, in which the aesthetic aspects in the teaching of landscape design, i.e. the relationships between landscape morphology and its teaching, are studied.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Francis Rondolph T Hester, Jr. (Ed. 1990), *The Meaning of Garden*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England.



## 18

### FORM, LOGIC & EMOTION

Any landscape design activity must be involved in the following basic aspects:

- I. Thinking with reason — Logic;
- II. - Thinking with feeling — Emotions;
- III. Thinking with images — Forms.

Among these, the form as a medium transfers logic and emotion from concepts to concrete landscape images; which provide a basic structure for operating spatial language of landscape design.

#### 18.1 FORM

The dictionary meaning of the word 'form' is "outward physical appearance of somebody/something; shape; specific type of arrangement or structure of something; manner in which something exists or appears; kind or variety; general structure and arrangement of something created such as a musical composition or piece of writing, in contrast to its content; etc." [2]

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<sup>2</sup> A. P. Cowie (Ed. 1990), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Oxford University Press.



In the context of landscape design, our understanding of the word is slightly specialized. The meaning of form can be very concrete, referring to the outline, the posture of plants, the shape of a piece of stone, or water feature and so on; it can also be very abstract when it refers to the interrelationships between all designed objects and spaces.

Thus, here, we prefer to define Form as a State of designed objects or spaces, which refers to the appearance of the object such as an outline or shape but more than this; it is not a still image, but a result of a dynamic balance [Fig. 18-1 and Fig. 18-2], and influences the whole design atmosphere or is influenced by the general atmosphere.

#### **FORM WITH AESTHETIC IMPLICATIONS**

Form can be seen as a symbol of aesthetic ideas; a change of form may indicate a change of aesthetic stance. For instance, as we have discussed in parts 2 and 4, the changes of the trend of landscape painting in Western art history and that of the landscape forms from 17th to 18th century England demonstrate the evolution of landscape aesthetic ideas of the English School. The so-called CHINOISERIE in the area of landscape design, for example, actually reflected a preference for irregular form which was thought as a symbol of natural style in Europe.

Psychologically, form is perceived as an impression of objects by an observer; aesthetically, it is a final result of an entire thinking, imaging and creating process. Thus, logically, to design is to actually study certain kinds of form and its aesthetic implications and the possible aesthetic response to it. Form should be seen as a key issue in design thinking, since it is a representation of aesthetic stance, a symbol of aesthetic deal or ideas.

#### **FORM OF MEANING**



When we study form, we can easily define and measure its size, proportion, position, texture, construction and other physical qualities arising from certain functional needs. But when discussing the form of beauty, we are in difficulties from time to time, and we must hesitate to comment on any particular form or single relationship, since they will involve a great many complex cultural issues.

The relevant cultural aspects of form relates to people's (users') social and economic status, educational level and experiences or many other factors. For instance, the symbolic accompaniments of religious rites, specific ways of dressing, composition rules of poetry, styles of presenting theatre, indigenous approaches to visual art, ceremonies of marriage and death, even ways of using food: all these forms may be based on a particular cultural system. For example, the spatial relationship between the place for death and for living in England it is usual that church, graveyard and housing area link to each other closely, the distance between life and death in terms of space only one step, whereas for the Chinese this is incredible. Thus it is obvious that all cultural aspects are indeed strongly expressed by certain spatial forms or ways of managing land which fundamentally influence aesthetic trends. Therefore, when designing, we should respect all these cultural implication [Fig. 18-3].

Form can be objectively observed from studying objects. It can also be subjectively conjured up by thoughts. For instance, so-called Ideal Forms which follow the Platonic thinking belong to the second category. As discussed in Part 4, the layout of landscape by means of the avenue system in France is typical. In contrast to this, the form of landscape layout of Painshill and Stourhead in England and that of most Chinese private gardens are so-called 'Irregular Forms' which follow the experience of natural beauty and can be seen as a landscape form deriving from a compromise between the ideal and intuition [Fig. 18-4].



Theorists in the past were used to defining these design variations in terms of style; modern scholars go further, examining their relation to Preference in certain social circumstances.

In terms of design practice we need both natural and ideal forms, since we must understand there is no such thing in the world as perfection. To design is to search for certain clear, tangible relationships between man and his environment; because idealized forms are more easily controlled and constructed with man's limited capacity, they are practical devices for the designer. This is particularly true for designers making provision for standardized or ordered human activities, such as car parking, sports fields or outdoor spaces to accompany housing or other buildings. But landscape is not a pure human process; if without natural ingredients it is not complete. Thus, on the other hand, our reasons, ideals and needs should be adjusted to the natural conditions of the site or the surrounding context and to the natural environment, therefore an clear ecological awareness is essential[Fig. 18-5].

Another crucial point is that our experience of natural beauty is an essential source of design thinking. How can one indulge only in the ideal, ignoring the richness of down-to-earth experiences? According to Yin Yang theory, we see beauty as the result of a harmonious balance between contradictory forces; we reach an aesthetic solution to design problems by achieving a balance between inner needs and outside conditions; we pay attention to both 'Refuge' and 'Prospect', operating skills of hiding and exposing; we reason and experience at same time. In brief, we search for the meaning behind all sorts of landscape forms, and we understand forms not only through their superficial characteristics but through their deeper meanings.

Once we understand the meaning of forms, we will not hesitate to use any kind to serve our design purpose. For instance, the 'perfect' spatial composition of square and circle, the most ideal of geometrical



forms, are used in the layout of the notable Temple of Heaven in China where landscape design is thought to follow the so-called 'Free Style' [Fig. 18-6).

### **FORM AS A DESIGN LANGUAGE**

We can describe landscape design in terms of space or place. Although the term 'space' is abstract, it helps us to analyze the objective spatial qualities of a designed landscape. Place is a relatively concrete term for describing humanized space, suggesting the relationship between certain people and certain spaces, which is not just a physical reality but involves association, memories, experience, value, etc.

Landscape design organises space into a particular type of place in which people stay, play, live or appreciate beautiful surroundings. Although the design task is complex, eventually what a designer can offer are certain objects and their spatial relationships embodied in an appropriate manner of operating design language. Form as the basic vocabulary of this language, the medium of design imagination, can communicate in various different spaces, or hold the various relationships needed in one location, playing an important role in the process of making spaces into place.

For instance, between mountain and water, we establish a ferry or bridge; above water we construct a fishing terrace; among woods we open a winding paths; between buildings we plant trees or grow flowers; in a courtyard we lay out a fish pond, display potted plants; between mansion and countryside we lay out a park. By all these designed forms (or forms of spatial linking) we adjust and integrate different spatial relationships, to embody the communication between objects, spaces and man.

However the forms are used, whether in landscape painting or in design, the meaning of use differs from place to place, from time to time;



like language itself they differ from each other not only in pronunciation or accent, but also in the language system. The differences between the Western tradition and that of the Chinese shown in the comparison in Chapters 16 and 17 indicate the different role played by the design languages [Fig. 18-7 and Fig. 18-8].

### **FORM VISIBLE OR INVISIBLE**

Design thinking requires images. Form is the core of those images. The images (forms) are not mere graphics, but something with meaning and values.

There are two kinds of forms: 'Form Visible' and 'Form Invisible'. Both of them are bred and conditioned by certain cultural and natural circumstances.

Generally, visible forms refer to those of concrete objects which have tangible outline, shape, gesture, and texture; for example, that of land-forms, vegetation, screens and backgrounds, focal features (art works, shelters, furnishings) and so on. On a small scale, the form can be a pattern of pavement; on a large scale, it can be the whole layout of a designed place. In terms of attribution, visible forms can be regular or irregular, soft and hard.

The choice of which kind of form in general or in detail belongs to the designers; however, to make this choice may be surprisingly hard. For instance, in Britain to transfer from the formal French style to the English form of landscape park occupied almost a century with the devoted efforts of three generations of designers. We may think that the use of visible form looks easy but actually it is not so simple for the reason that an invisible form operates behind.

Invisible form can be understood as a kind of underlying relationship of parts or processes which are conditioned by substantial natural limitations such as ecological patterns of local species of



vegetation and animal and geographic features plus functional needs such as transportation, living, leisure, etc. But, where designed landscape is more likely a kind of spiritual outcome, it is also conditioned by even fewer visible influences: ways of thinking, cultural orientation and other social factors [Fig. 18-9].

Although the basic elements of a designed landscape all around the world may include similar things such as water features, land-forms, vegetation, shelters, and so on, the relationships of those elements are very different as produced in different places by different people. Why is it so? As discussed in previous chapters, the world outlook and cultural roots of the people are the decisive factors which have influenced the way they understand the invisible forms. A parallel example of this is an interesting Eastern comparison of the 'Tea Drinker' with the 'Coffee Drinker'. The 'Tea Drinker' (Easterner) may be familiar with ceramic, rice, silk, bamboo and the tea-house; the 'Coffee Drinker' (Westerner) is thought to be familiar with machinery, bread, roses, cars or coffee bar. The former we call 'Tea Culture', the later we call 'Coffee Culture', and the places designed for them are very different [Fig. 18-10]. All sorts of forms in the tea and coffee cultures are different, yet serve the same purpose — drinking. Much like the style of drinking, landscape for us is a subject of culture rather than a matter of tree planting or simply an arrangement of outdoor spaces.

With design practice, invisible forms are a crucial medium for creative thinking which help to decide the communicating relationships of any designed landscape.



Fig. 18-1: Form: a state of dynamic balance.

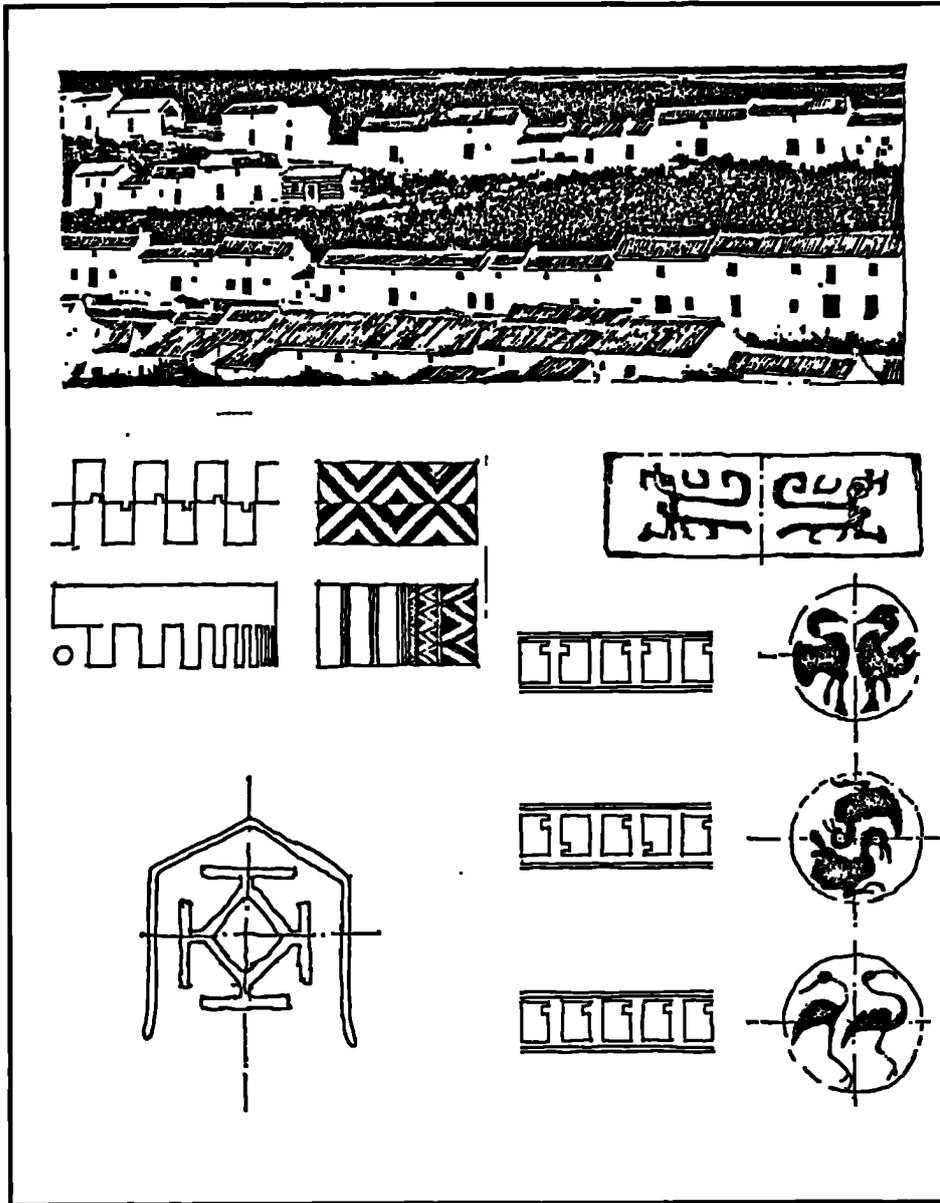


Fig. 18-2: Form, Rhythm, and Formal Beauty.

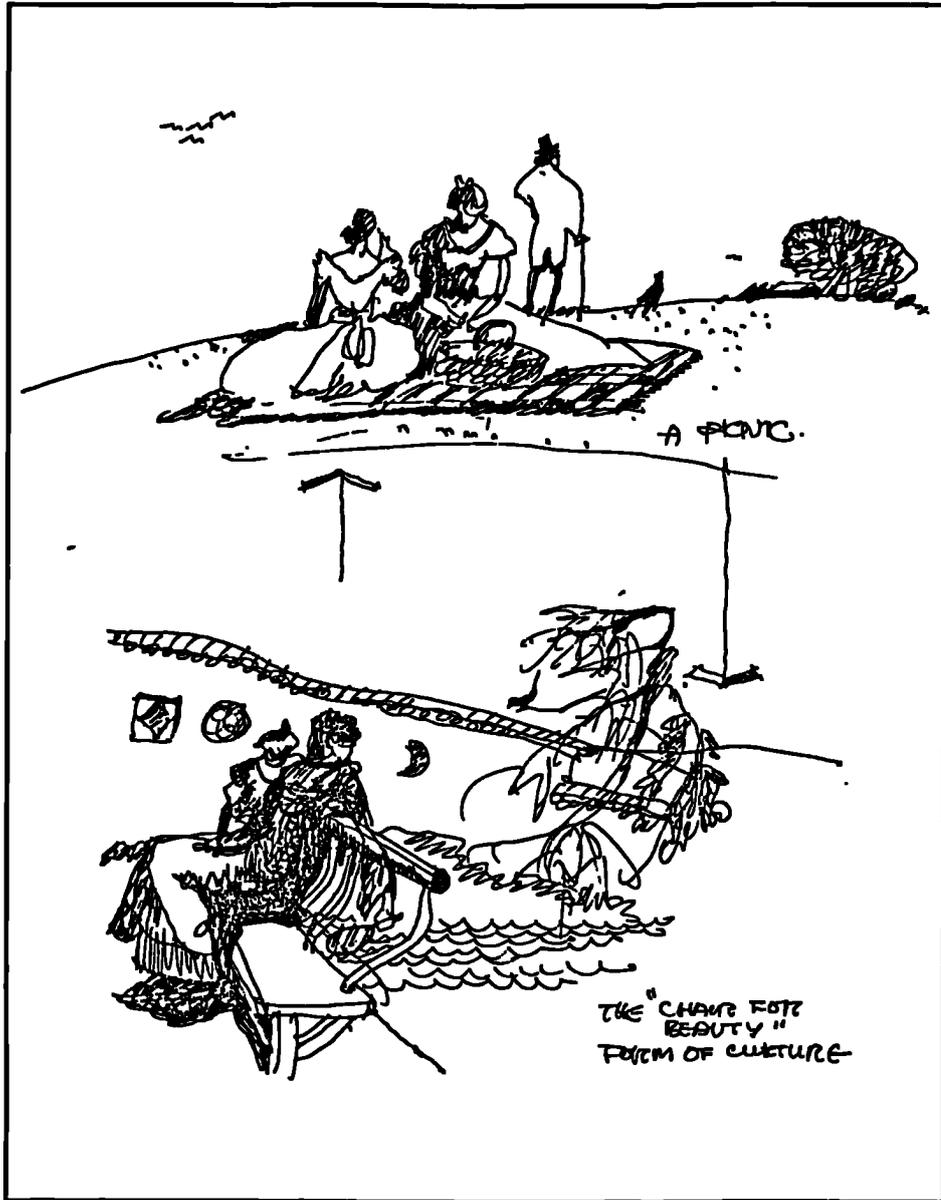


Fig. 18-3: Form of Meaning.

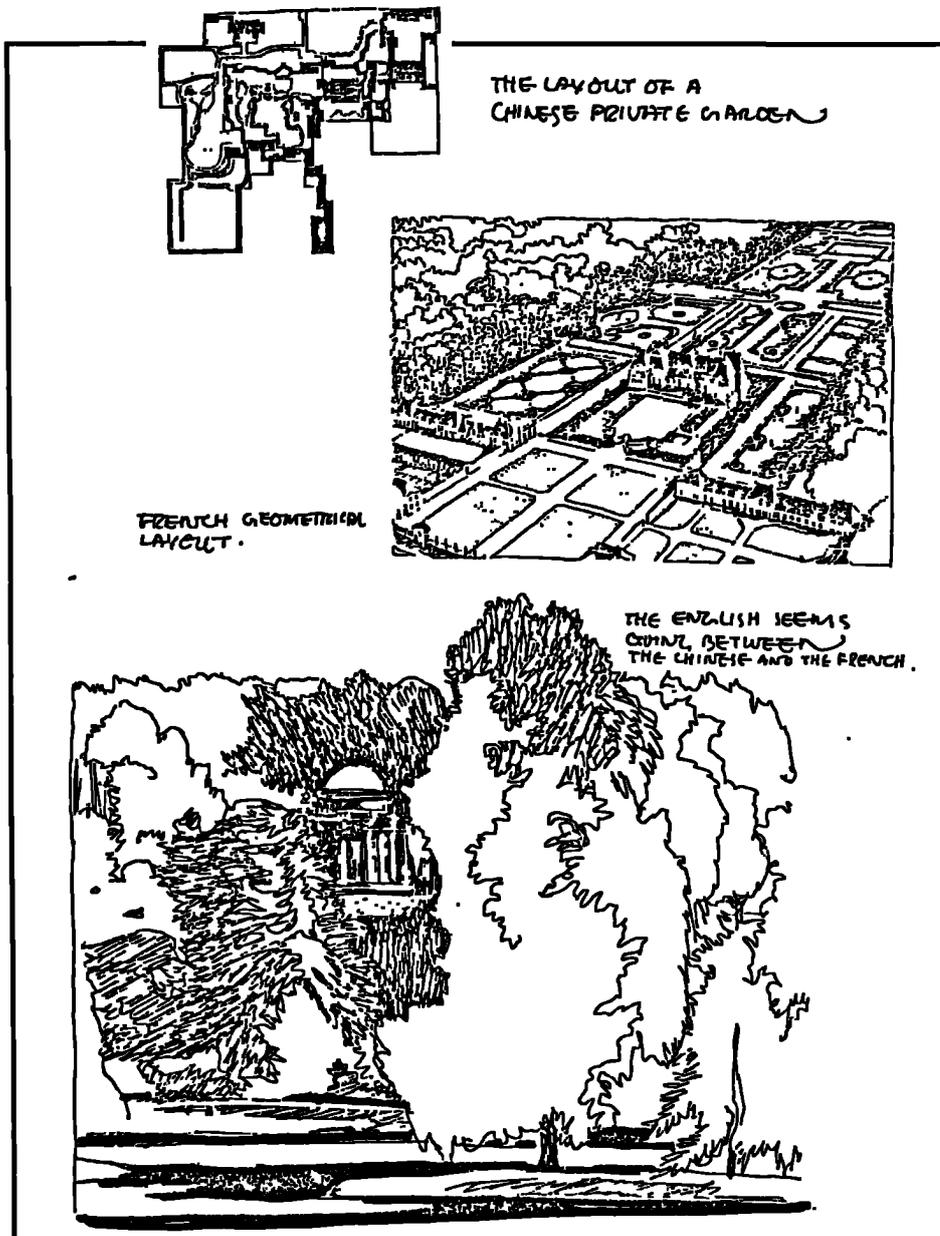
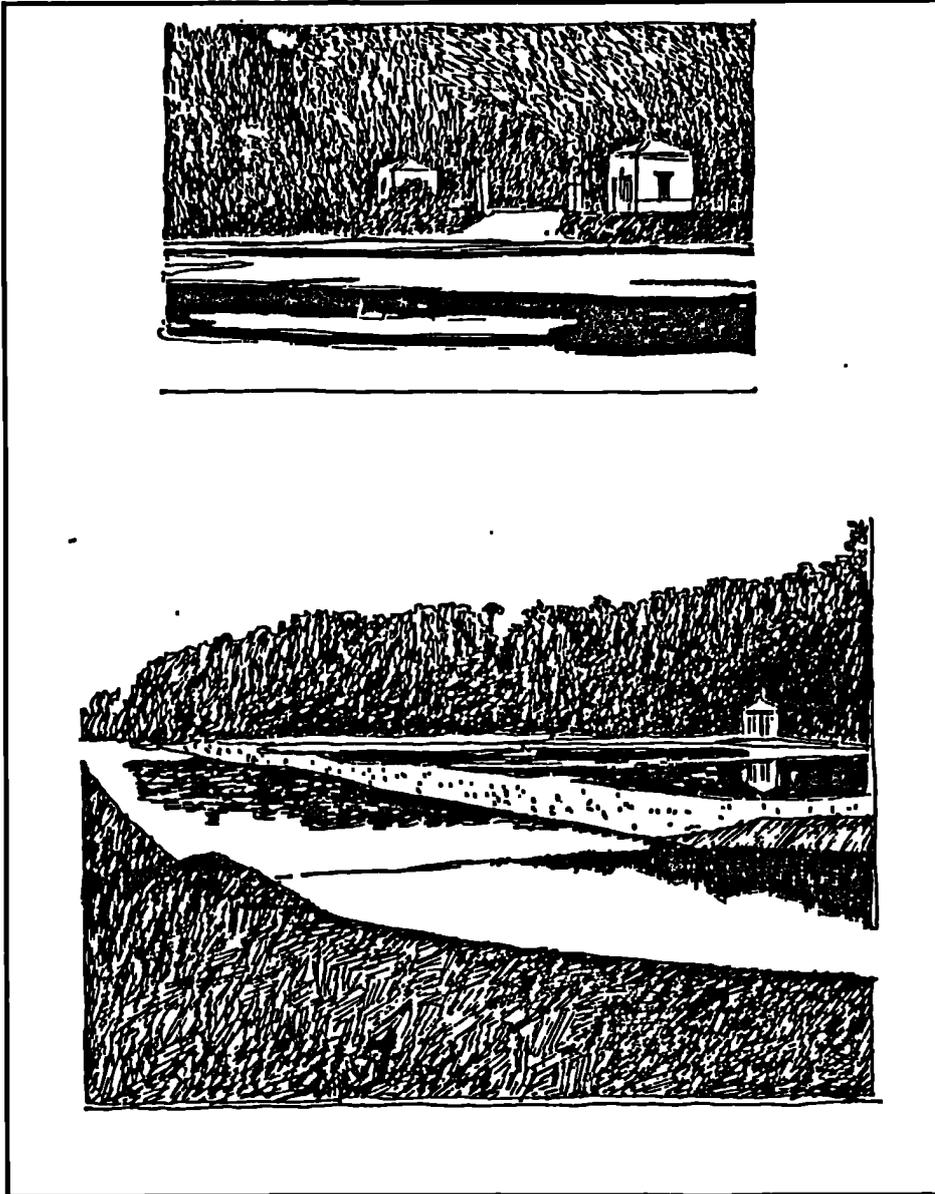


Fig. 18-4: Forms can also be subjectively conjured up by thoughts.



**Fig. 18-5:** Our reasons, ideals and needs should be adjusted to the natural conditions of site and context; therefore, an clear ecological awareness is essential for environmental design [illustrations with reference to Laurence Fleming and Alan Gore (1979), *The English Garden*, p.83].

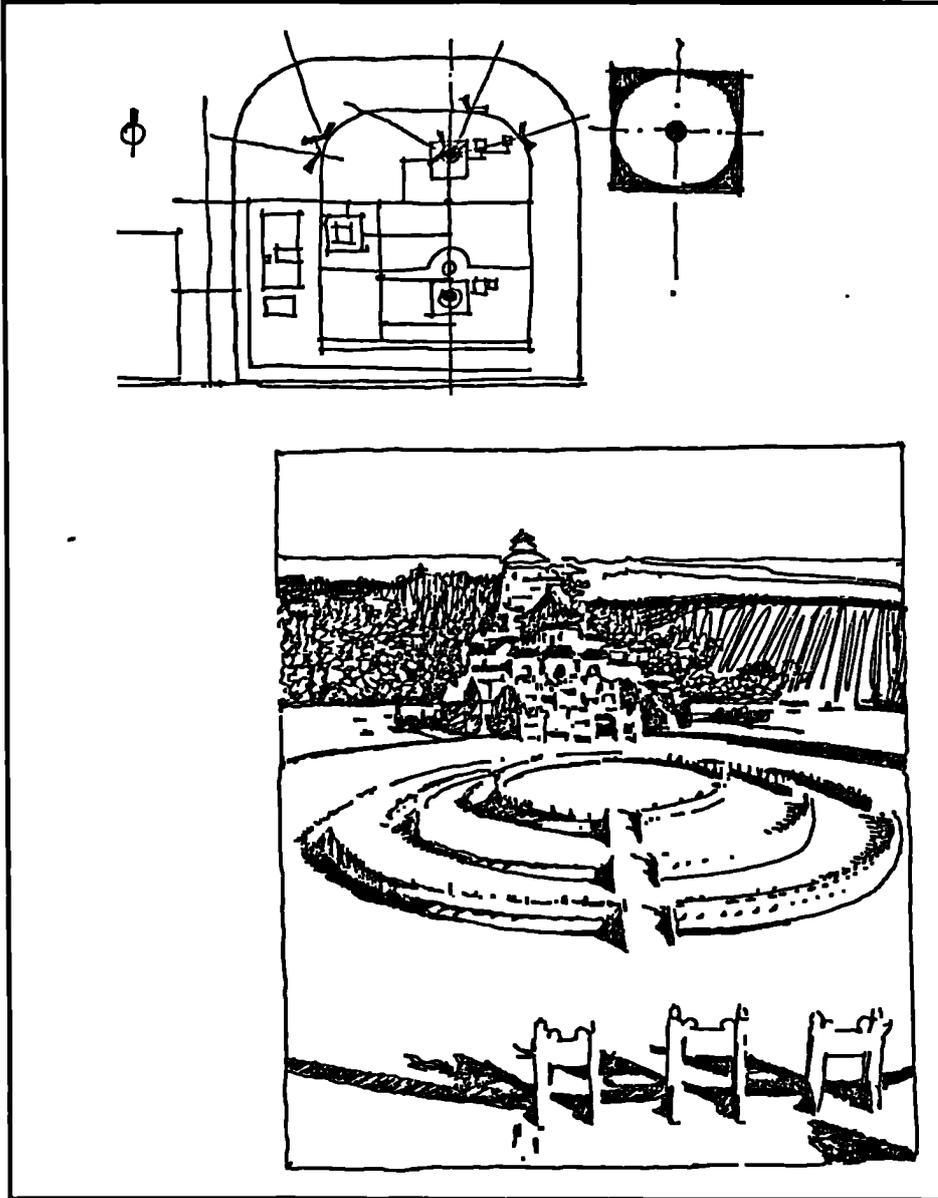


Fig. 18-6: The 'perfect' spatial compositions, the most ideal geometrical forms are used in the layout of the notable 'Temple of Heaven' in Beijing where landscape design is thought to follow so-called 'Free Style'.

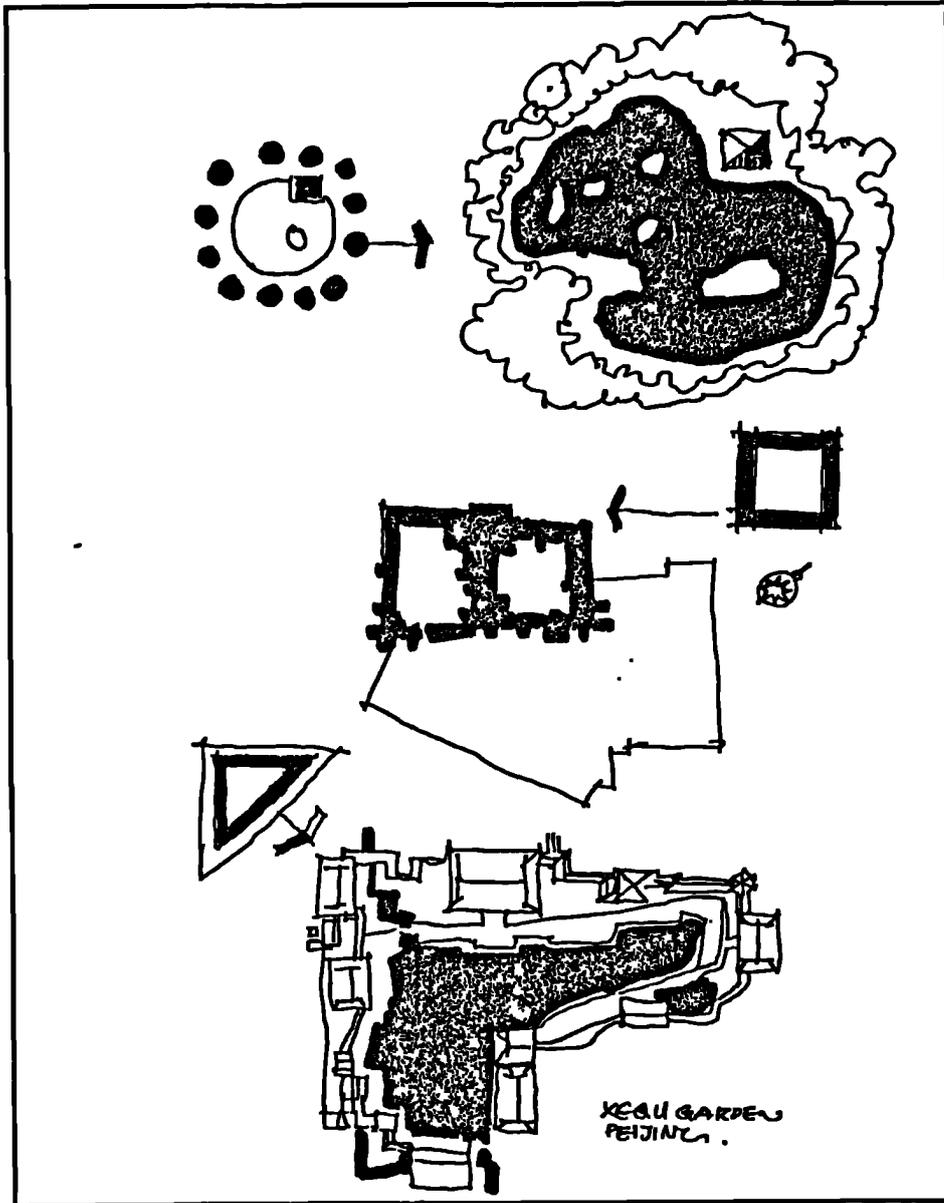


Fig. 18-7: The use of design language.

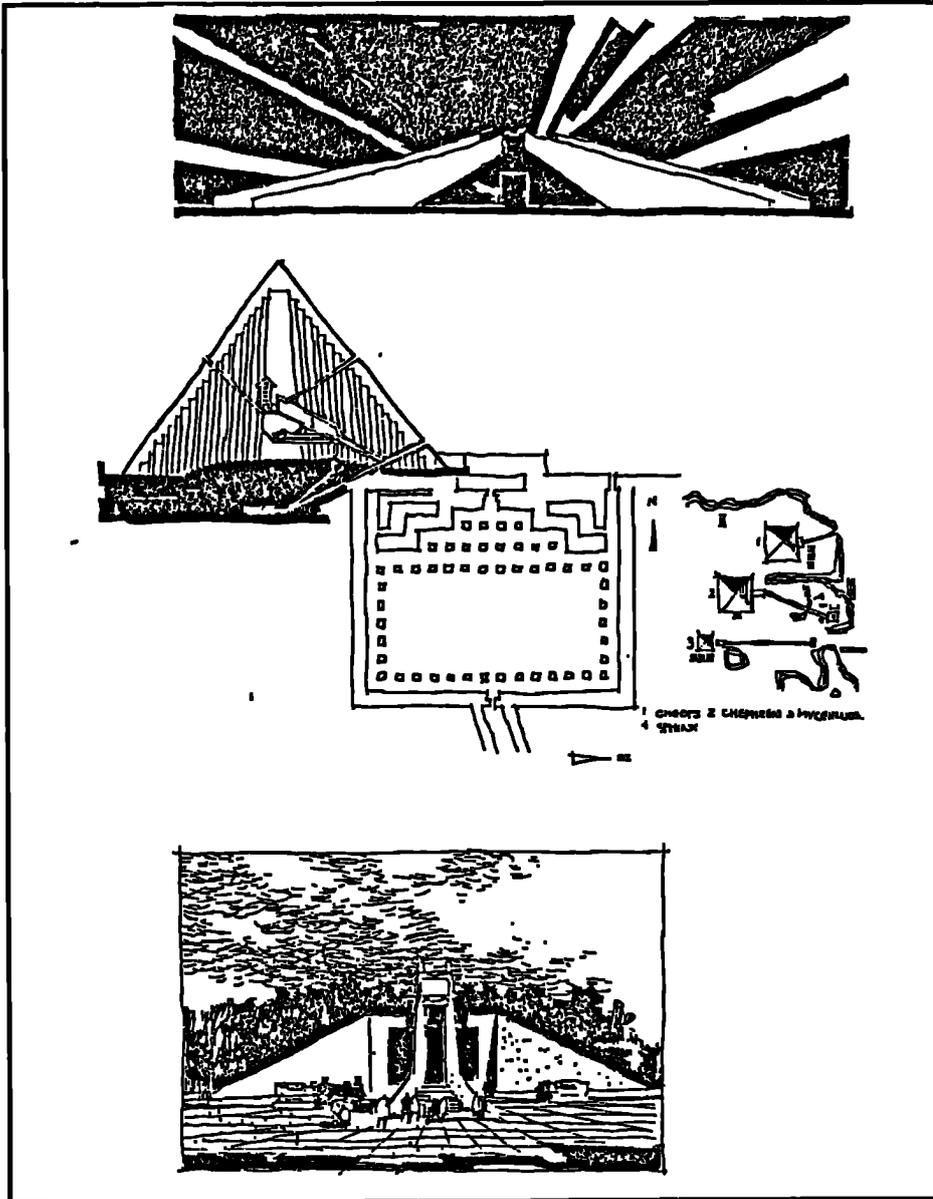


Fig. 18-8: Form of design language.

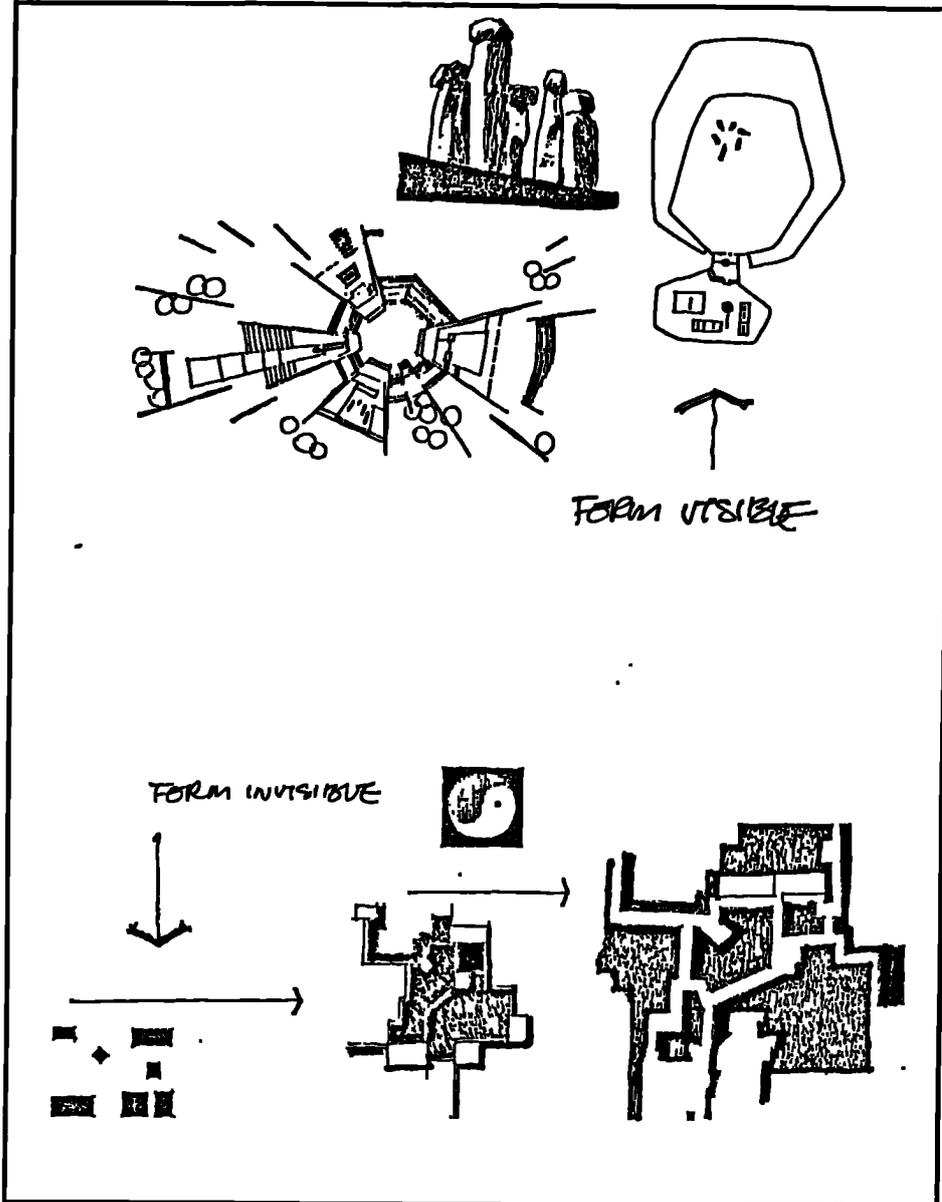


Fig. 18-9: Form Visible or Invisible.

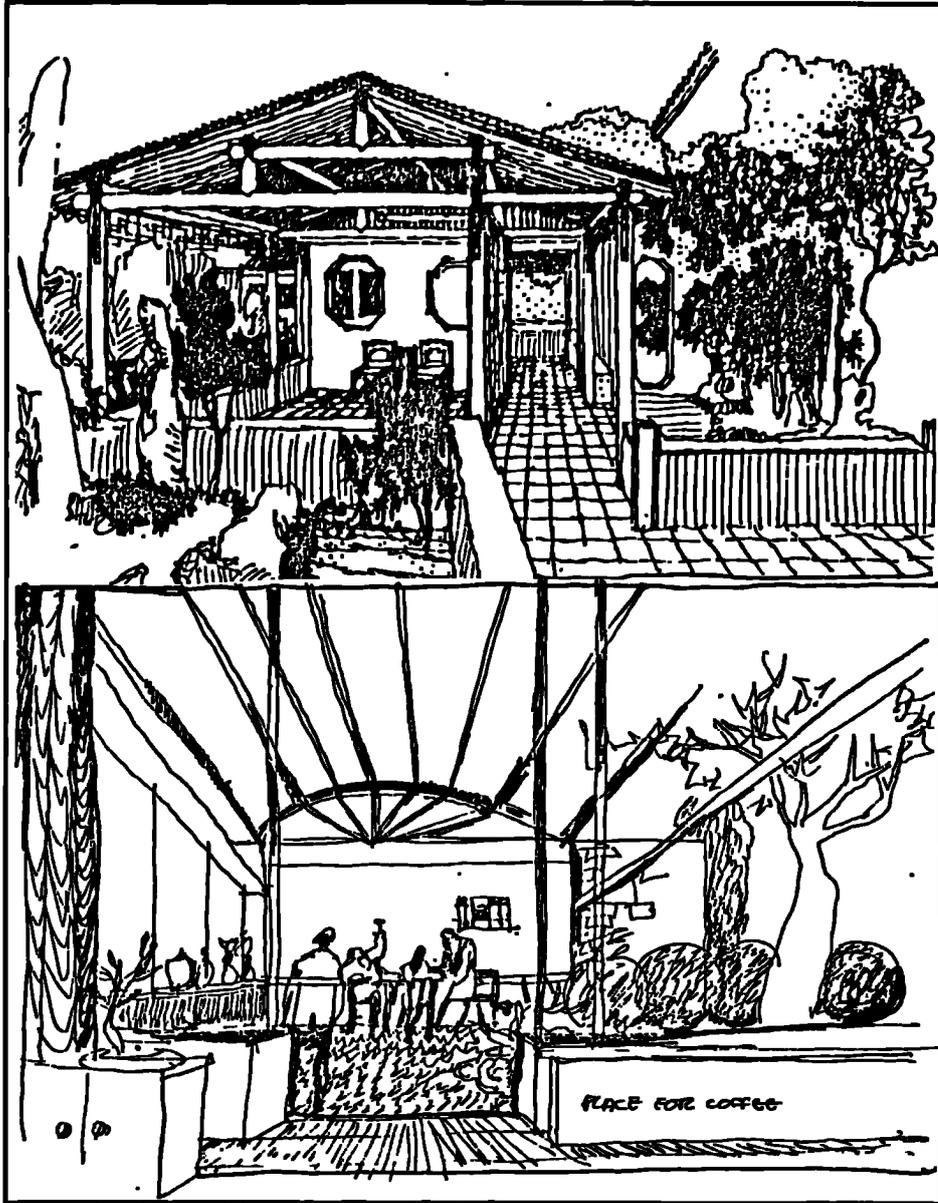


Fig. 18-10: Forms of 'Tea Culture' and that of 'Coffee Culture'.



## 18.2 FORM & LOGIC

Another important aspect in studying form is to understand how to use it to organize our design thinking, i.e. the logic of design language. We call this Form of Logic.

### THE LAW & THE MANNER

In discussing design philosophy, we are looking for the general principles to guide design behavior. For instance, the principles of 'calling in the countryside' (Pope) [3] and 'Naturally So' from Tao have been transferred from ideas to real landscape images by designers in Britain and China. This indicates that philosophical ideas can be valued in terms of design practice, and can be thought of as the 'form of design thinking'. What is more, manner is conducted by thought, and the form of landscape design is the outcome of reasoning in landscape thinking.

The hierarchy of problem solving is usually thought to be a matter of the design method. In fact, the key in achieving sequential logical thinking is to be found in more essential ideas of reasoned landscape thinking.

For instance, consider the 'Sense of Coherence', an idea which encourages the designer to connect relevant issues with a view of the whole effect rather than focus on parts of it. Such an approach might be in designing the position and gesture of a tree, we think about the window from which to view it; in locating a bridge, we think about what will be seen from it over the water; in creating a resting place, we think about where we do not want people to stay or perhaps where one can be alone, secluded, private, with no interruptions. This manner reflects a certain kind of logical design thinking [Fig. 18-11].

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3 See Part 4.



## **STRUCTURE OF DESIGN THINKING**

**A complete understanding of landscape design thinking includes three necessary and parallel aspects.**

**First is to meet the needs of human life and manage the land to develop its potential. The 18th century Ornamental Farm; the English traditional landscape device of the Ha Ha; the idea that “A field of corn makes a pleasant prospect” (J. Addison); the campaign “to grow more trees” by J. Evelyn; all these landscape ideas are based on the approach we call ‘Pleasure with Profit’ which respects the practical function of landscape.**

**The second is landscape as a spiritual refuge in which people release themselves from the burdens of daily life, gaining pleasure through escaping from the increasing industrial chaos or political struggle, or the troubles of personal life. In their minds, landscape is as the place for retirement, for love, for peace and tranquillity. This spiritual function will decide the characteristics of the place; its forms may be those of a Dutch landscape painting, or Shan Shui by Yizan. We may describe this form as Landscape for Quietness.**

**Third, in a designed landscape intended to provide complete aesthetic enjoyment above all, the quality of landscape as ‘fine art’ is also essential. As Titian depicted his homeland or Poussin painted his designed images, the designed landscape is a creation or memory of natural beauty. For instance, the landscape practice of Brown and Repton in Britain, or Wen Zhenming in China, the theory of English Picturesque and the Chinese idea of “Scenery as if painted”: all have obvious links with fine art.**

**Thus, a designed landscape as a human habitat should be functional, as a spiritual refuge should be able to provide great**



psychological comfort; and as fine art should be attractive at the higher artistic level.

However, there is no a clear separation between practical utilities, spiritual quality and the artistic delights in design thinking; all these qualities should be capable of being combined as a general function in the mind of the designer to serve users [Fig. 18-12].

In a design process, we reason and try to answer Yes or No for making decisions. However, the answers are usually not as clear as the difference between Black or White; the result of the questioning may often be Grey. For instance, between Burke's aesthetic categories of the Sublime and the Beautiful come the category of Interesting that provoked a debate about the concept of Picturesque among British aestheticians for almost a generation. It is such a difficult question we forever cannot achieve an absolute answer by any means. We talk about Yin Yang, yet a single Yin or Yang does not make any sense in landscape design; what really matters is the result of their meeting each other. As Laozi said "The myriad creature which carry on their backs the Yin and embrace in their arms the Yang are the blending of the generative forces of the two." [4] Hence while a compromise is needed between Yes and No, the Grey is necessary between Black and White. The use of design language is therefore to articulate a conversation between all landscape elements to the tune of Grey. We call this integrated structure of design thinking, a 'State' of design progression. Here, the concept of balance is the core of the thinking framework [Fig. 18-13 and Fig. 18-14].

Remembering this, we can therefore explain the design meaning in processes such as Contrasting and Harmonizing, and why the classical "order" looks so "happy" standing on the green of the free style landscape park, or the formal traditional building looks 'Naturally So' in a Chinese garden [Fig. 18-15].

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<sup>4</sup> *Tao Te Ching*: XLII, 94, P.103.



**Following a particular design principle or style of landscape design, or emphasising certain preferences for visible forms is hardly performing virtual design thinking. Only by thinking about the inner structure of a designed place, by operating visible forms in a framework of invisible forms, the form of relationship, structure and balance, may it be possible to touch the essential design task: an operation of landscape form with logic.**

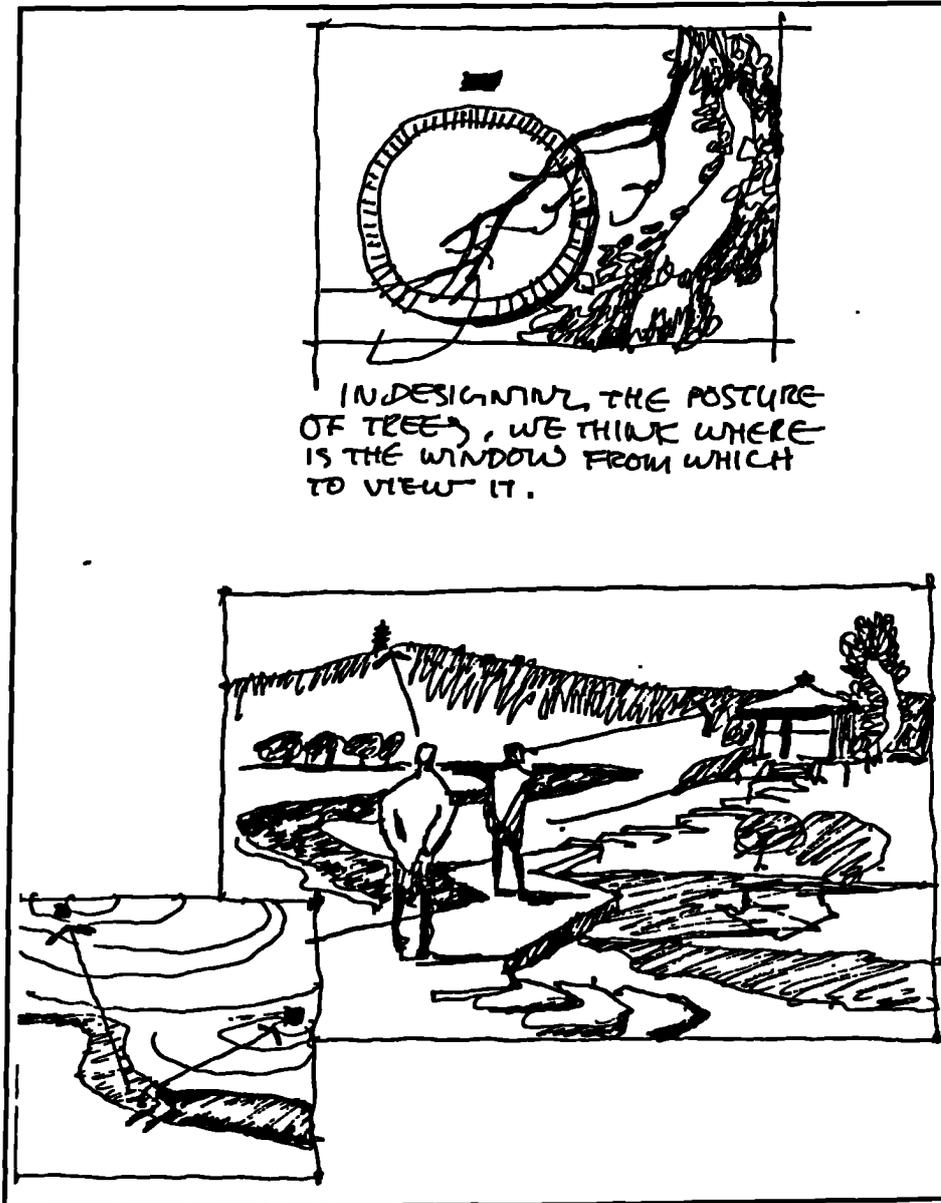


Fig. 18-11: The Law and the Manner.

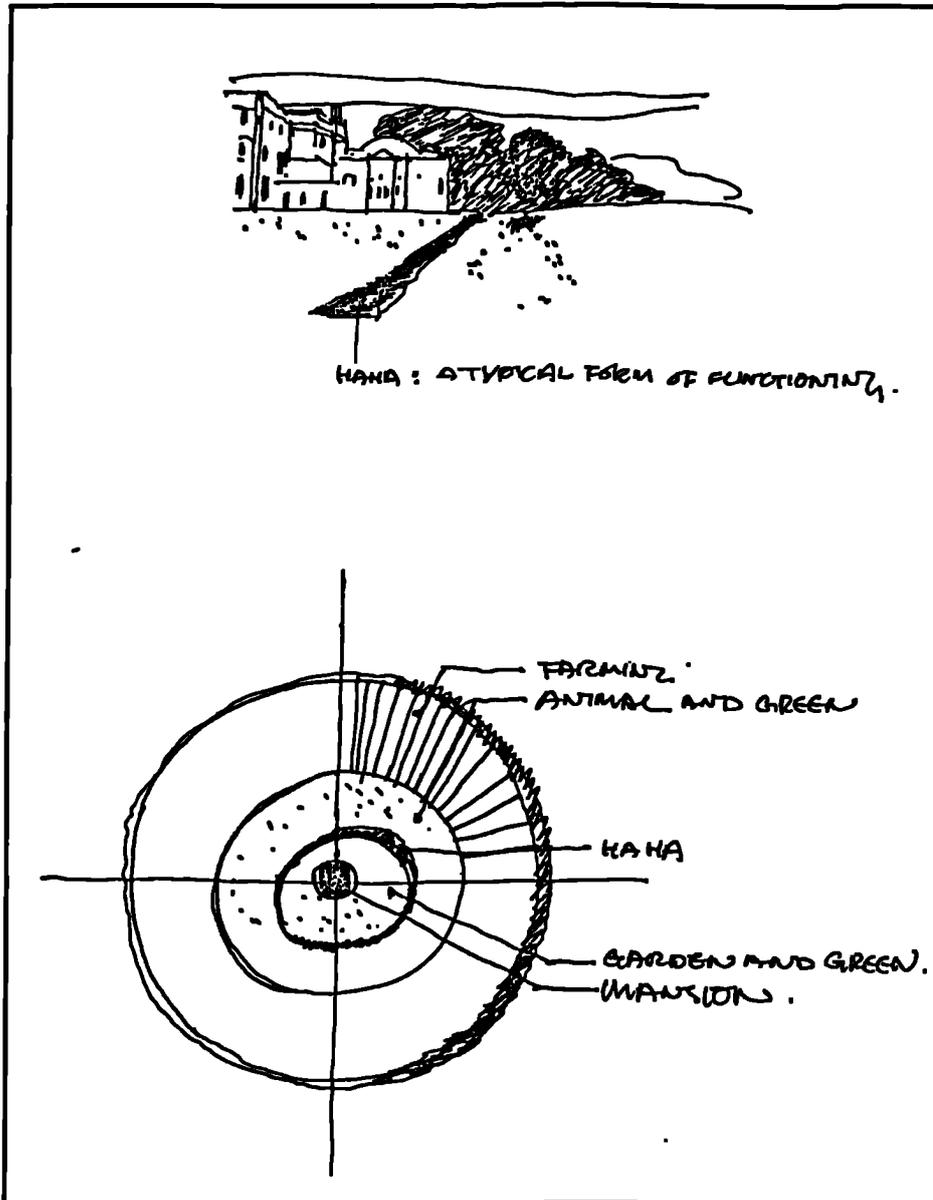


Fig. 18-12: Structure of Design Thinking.

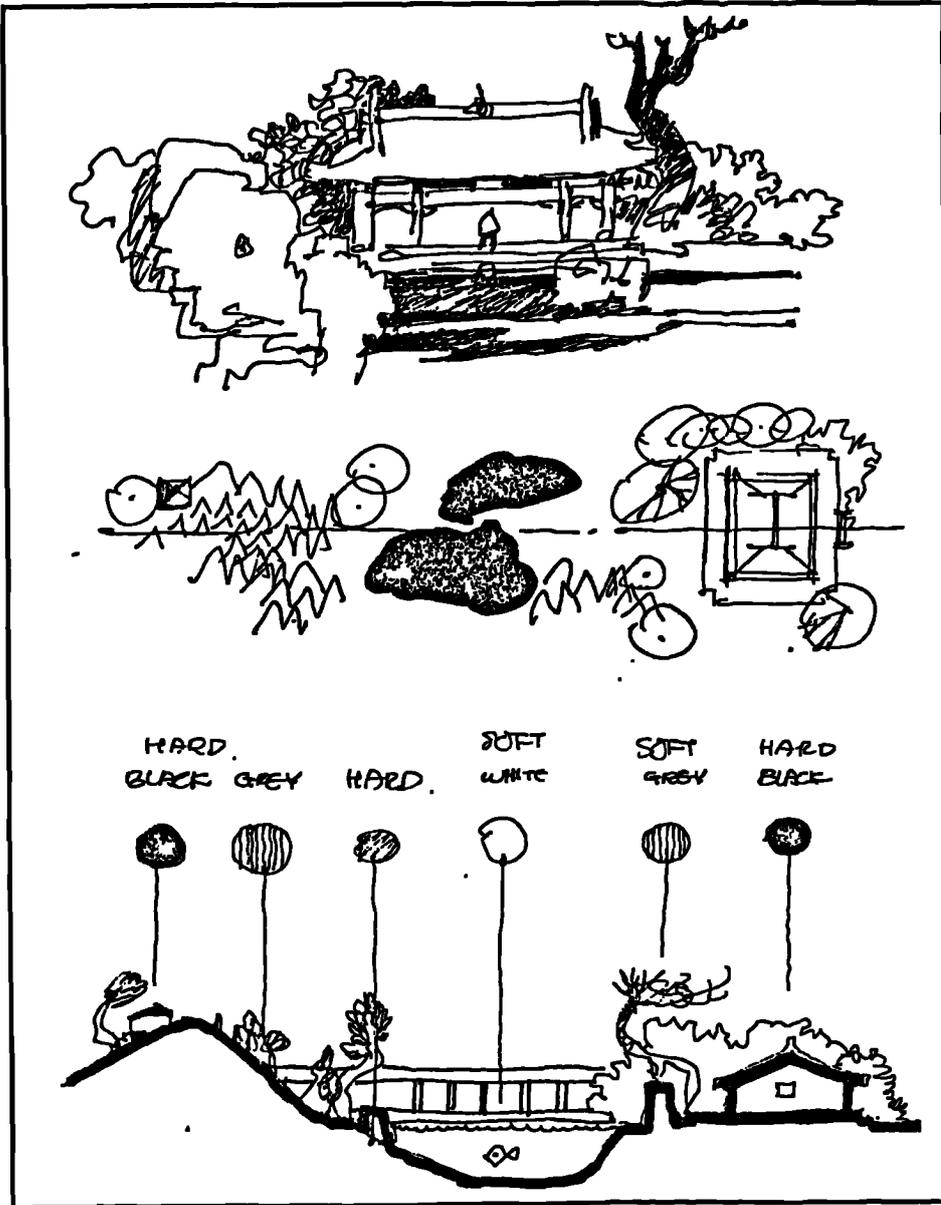


Fig. 18-13: The Tune of "Grey".

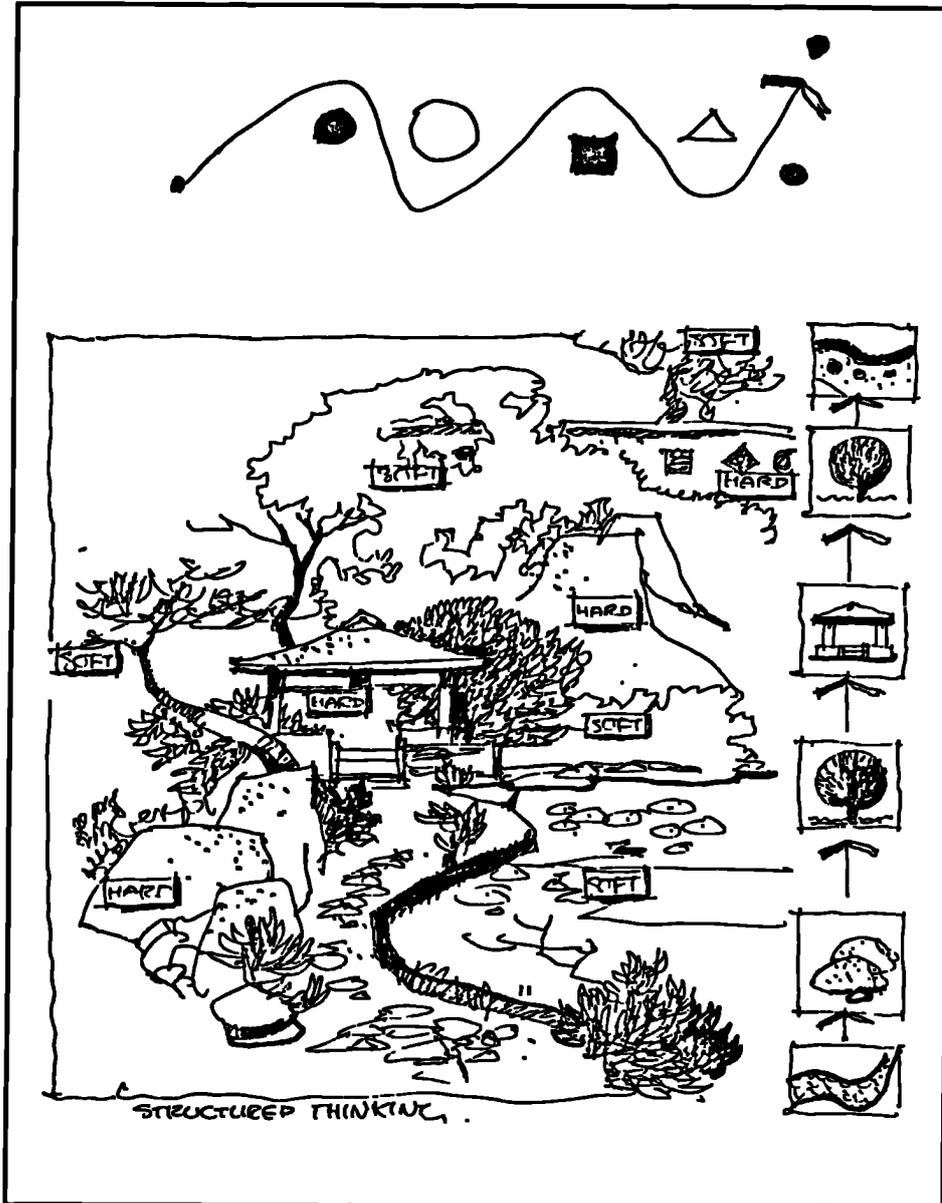


Fig. 18-14: The spatial richness evoked by subtle 'tune' of transitional spaces, the 'Grey'.

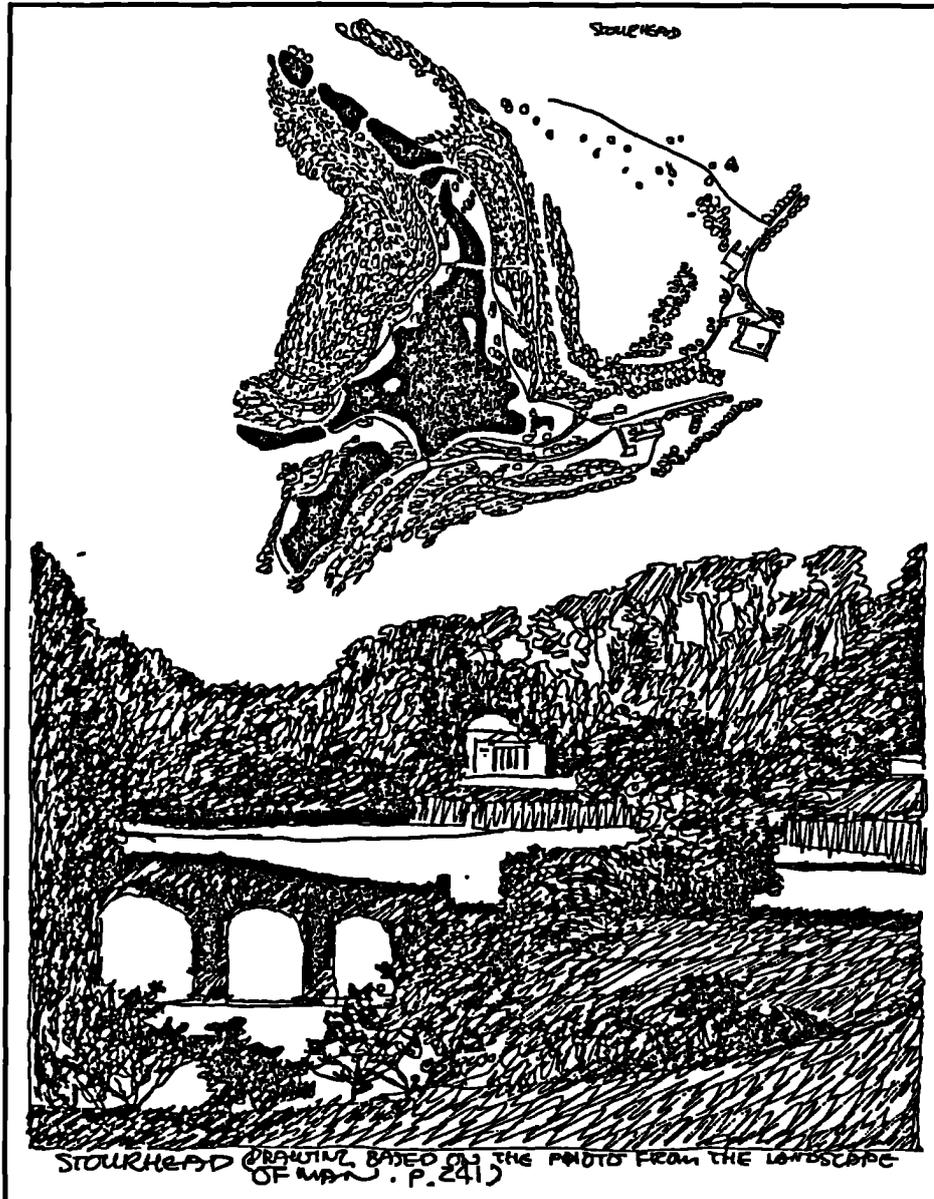


Fig. 18-15: The classical "order" looks "happy" standing on the green of free style landscape park, or the formal traditional building looks 'Naturally So' in a Chinese garden.



## **18.3 FORMS & EMOTION**

**In the previous discussion, we have thought that landscape art is for “love with thinking” (emotion + intellect). The Romantic movement tells us this truth; the Chinese landscape arts have strengthened this opinion that landscape is a ‘Home of Feeling’.**

### **FORM OF FEELING**

**As a spiritual refuge, landscape contains the form that looks pure, peaceful, ‘Naturally so’: an ideal place to release the tension of a boring daily job, escape from the chaos of urban life. It provides an alternative environment for living or visiting, and a rather free, easy atmosphere to think and create. As studied in Parts 3 and 4, the link between escapism and landscape has a long history both in the East and the West. Why do people escape, why do they choose landscape as the place to “hide” themselves?**

**A general answer may be when there is pressure, unhappiness or boredom in highly humanized environments, when people are bothered, confused by the uncertainty of political or economic situations, then they want to touch things that are original, face un-pretending natural things to seek the real meaning of life, to find spiritual privacy in communicating with natural creation. They want to change, to be clean, to relax or play. In the landscape people can dress casually, behave freely. They laugh, shout, love, play, run, walk, talk, think, do what they want. There is less necessity to be formal, because here the sense of hierarchy and difference is weakened, people become close to themselves, and in this ‘Home of Feeling’, people can touch their own souls.**



### **FORM OF ROMANTICISM**

**There is a difference between sense of locality and a sense of homeland. The former is a kind of awareness of the objective conditions of a place, its concrete and physical characteristics, whereas the sense of homeland relates to all sorts of relationships between man and the place in which they live.**

**With a Sense of Homeland, a person must relate to those involved in his or her personal life (parents, lover, children or relatives), or those things which can tell a personal story. A highly personalized space may further strengthen the sense of territory. The same is true for a group of people or for a nation. This sense is also one of the most important sources of emotion, giving rise to an urge for people everywhere to devote themselves to landscape art. For instance, the landscape paintings by Yuan masters in China and the pictures by Gainsborough and Constable in England are typical, evoking a strong feeling of homeland. By reviewing these paintings we can understand why people feel greatly moved and even cry when facing a landscape picture since in such paintings there may be the pain and tragedy of a nation or a pride in one's home ground. [5]**

**There is a type of landscape form which links the land, mountains, water, even a ruin to an individual, a group of people, even a nation, through which passionate feelings are aroused. We can define these landscape forms that combine the fate of nations or individuals with the experiences of the Sublime and the Beautiful of natural scenery to express Yi, or to evoke intense feeling of love, hate, sadness, loneliness, etc., as Form of Romanticism [Fig. 18-16].**



### **FORM OF IDENTITY**

The form we call Romantic is specific to certain places and people, having its special characteristics, layout, materials and technique.

The quality of 'legibility' requires that a landscape, painted or designed' must reflect a certain taste or a set of preferences. The complications of this can be understood as being due to visible and invisible forms. For instance, the 'Taste of Heaven' discussed in Part 3 is a higher aesthetic realm of appreciating, thinking and designing a landscape which is invisible yet influential and decisive. 'Collective Taste' indicates a refined specific flavour, specific approach, specific features of landscape art and design; it involves certain preferences which convey the quality of Familiarity, an essential aspect of legibility and identity. Comparing the designed landscape of the Chinese with the English or the French we can see how all these aspects connect [Fig. 18-17 and 18-18].

Conversely, there is a 'popular taste' that may appear as a type of fashionable formula in art and design. Yet a concern for mass popular taste must also be part of design morality, for there is a clear difference between creative individuality and cultural snobbery. Although an understandable or agreeable taste is usually a compromised one, we should not undervalue it; we must be ready to follow it cautiously.

### **FORM OF CHANGING**

We can discuss Form of Changing at two levels: practical and theoretical.

With design practice, any design solution is usually the result of a comparison of different design ideas which are demonstrated in different design forms. However, a designer cannot change the forms at will, for design activity is conditioned by many influential factors previously mentioned. In this sense, a study of the skills for handling forms of



change has its very practical function for improving design quality. To do so, the art of graphic thinking is obviously needed to efficiently undertake a substantial comparison. [Fig. 18-19]

On the other hand, we can understand the form of change in a historical sense. The forms of landscape design have changed and continue to change from time to time. This is inevitable a constant law in which myriad things should follow. Reviewing Part 4, THE ENGLISH SCHOOL, it is also obvious that this kind of change, including the dramatic revolutionary change from the 'Formal Garden' to the English Landscape Park is a reflection of the historical process itself. Such changes involve a process of learning, imitating, reforming and creating. Even the form of the stable traditional Chinese landscape design has changed from the North to the South, from its early stage to its recent history. Surveying the past into the present, we can also find that different landscape ideas have been exchanged, cross-cultivated, and reformed by each other. Thus we can think of a changing landscape form as a mirror of the past and present, and a reflection of mood and feeling [Fig. 18-20].

Therefore, any kind of narrow minded nationalism may be an obstacle to learning and improving, which results in a weakness of a personal knowledge and weakens the strength of a tradition. The cross-fertilizing, learning and reforming process of the English School is an example that has proved that an open system will create an indigenous form of landscape design without sacrificing cultural identity and love of homeland. Conversely a closed system of landscape design and research will result in an undesirable situation. We learn clear lessons about this from recent Chinese history. Thus, to value 'Form of Changing' properly it is necessary for the reform and development of any traditional civilization.

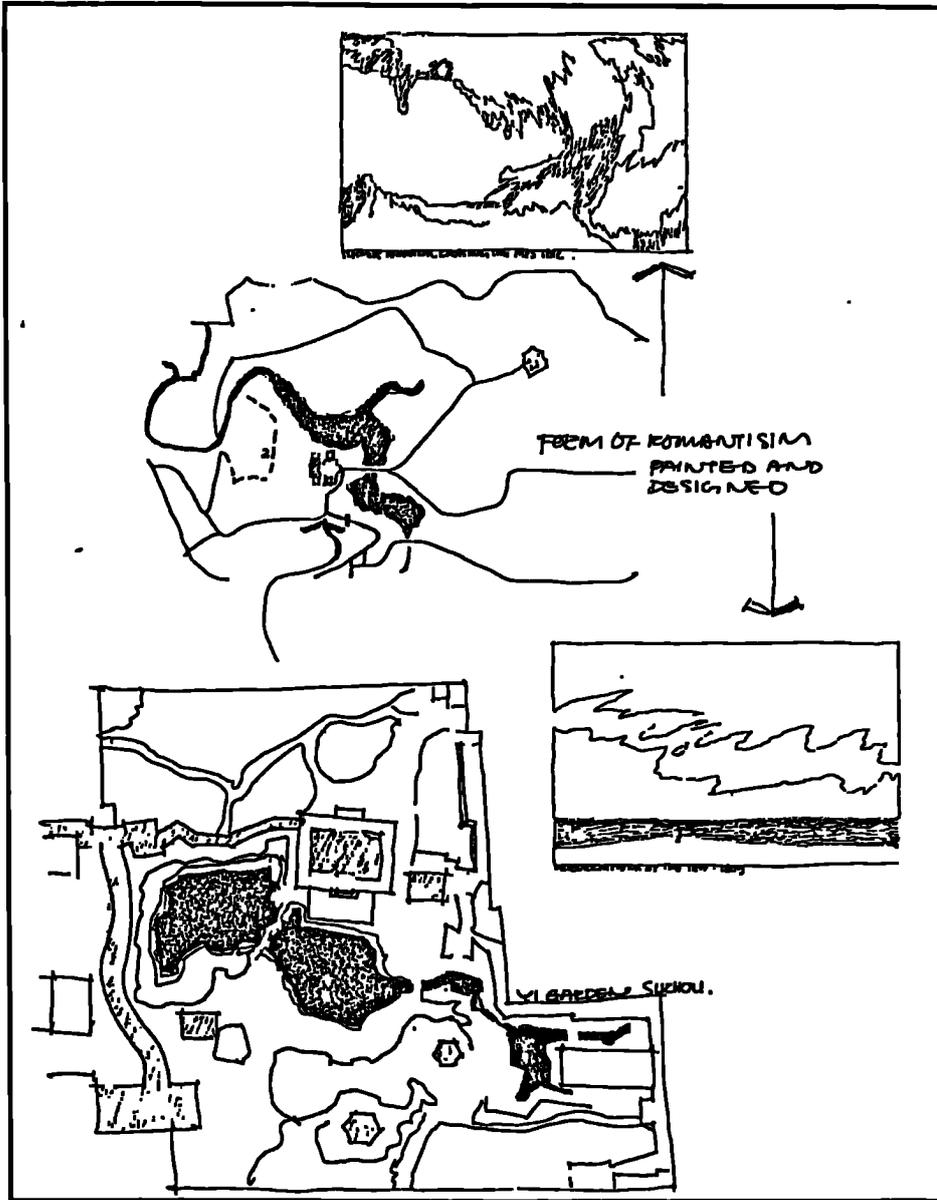


Fig. 18-16: Forms of Romanticism combine the fate of nations or individuals with the experiences of the Sublime and the Beautiful of natural scenery to express Yi, evoking intense emotions of 'love or hate'.

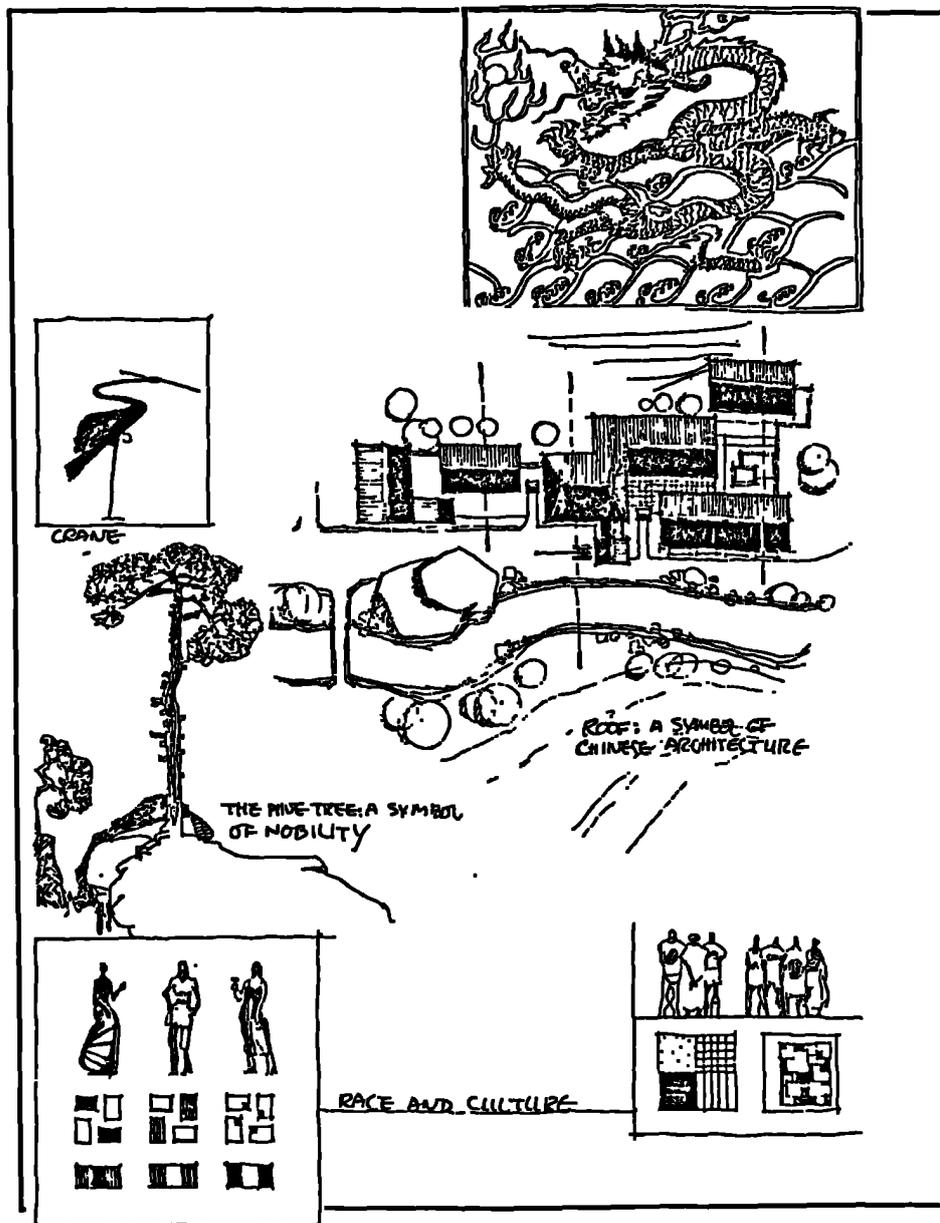


Fig. 18-17: Form of Identity.

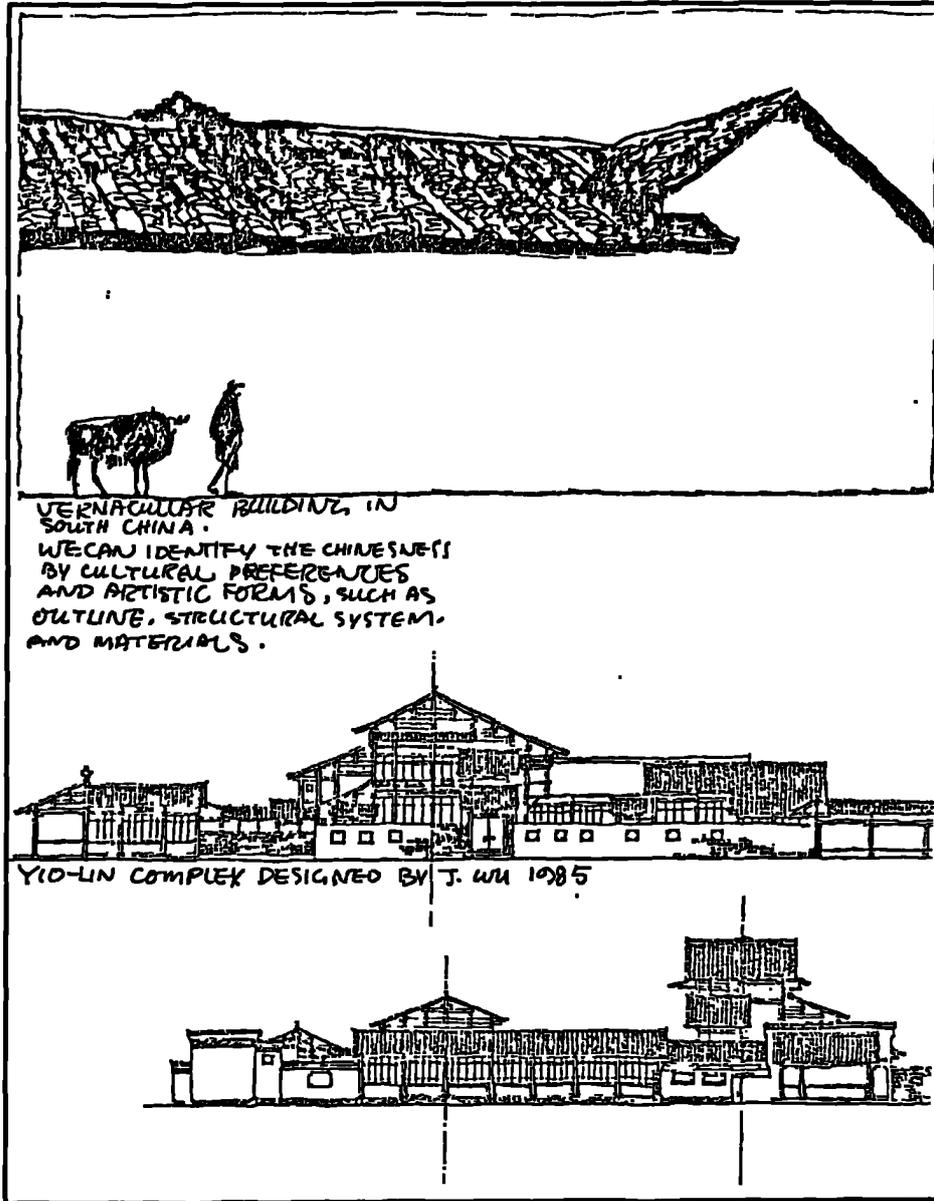


Fig. 18-18: The so-called 'Collective Taste' and Place.

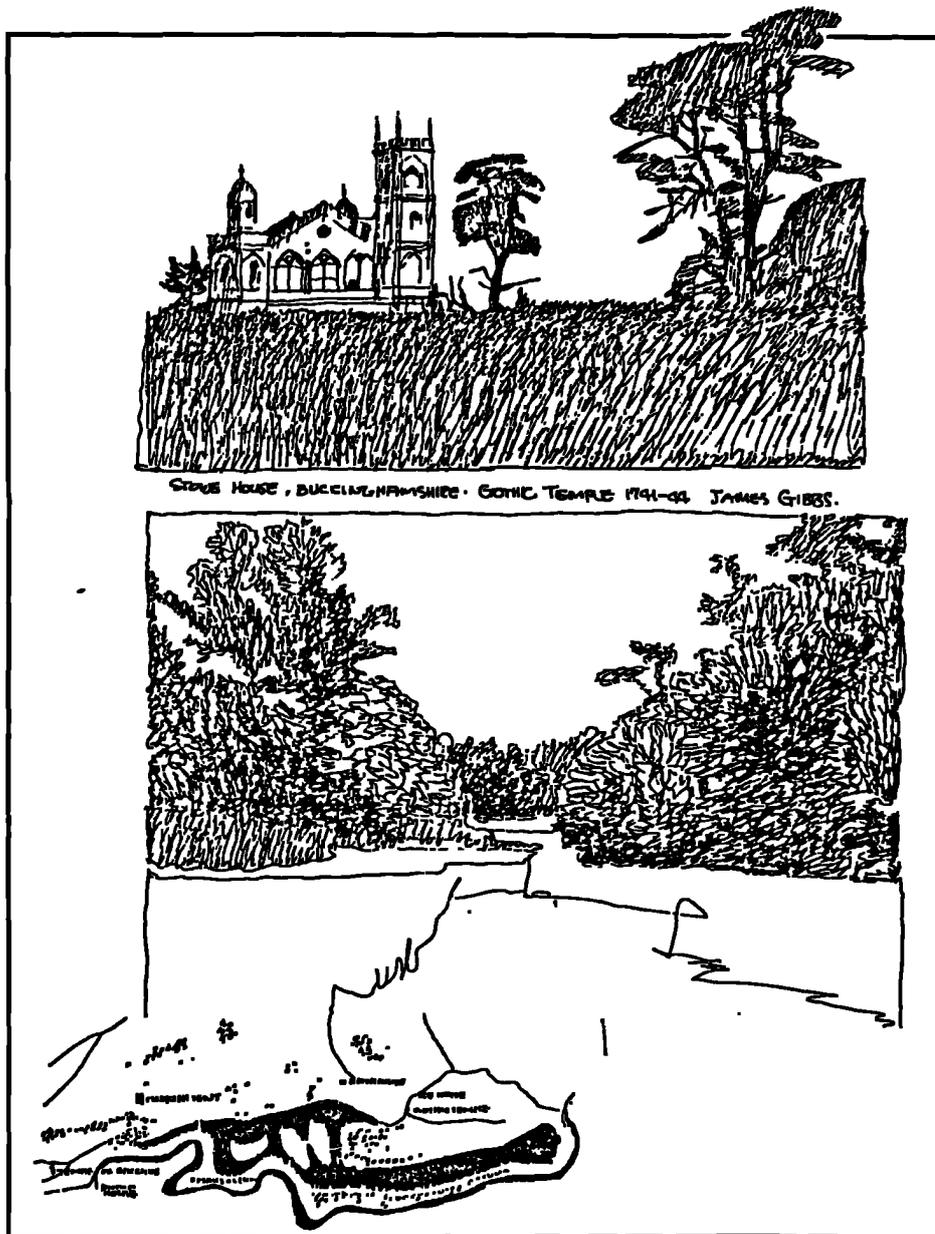


Fig. 18-19: The Concept of Legibility.

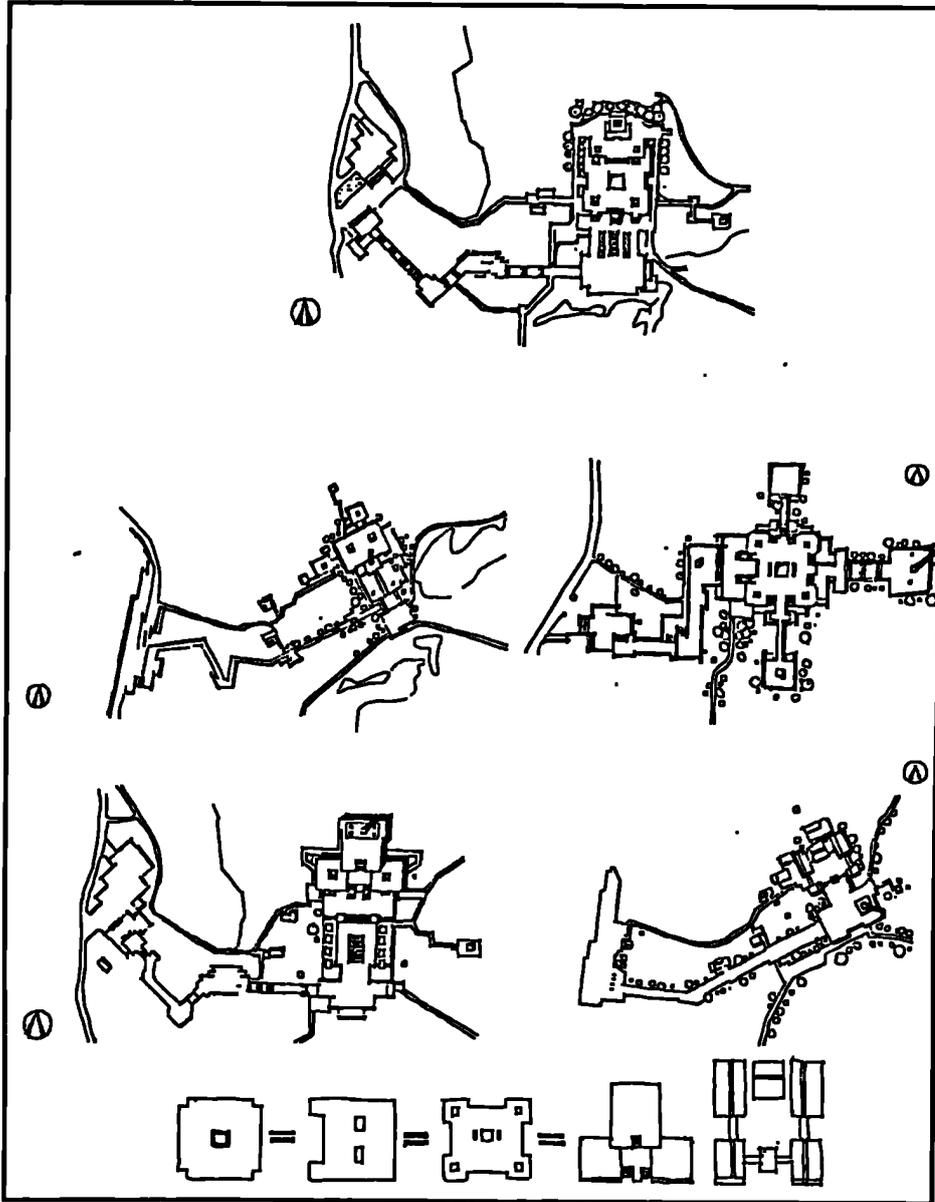


Fig. 19-20: Form of Change: an analysis of a monumental complex by Jiahua Wu, 1987.

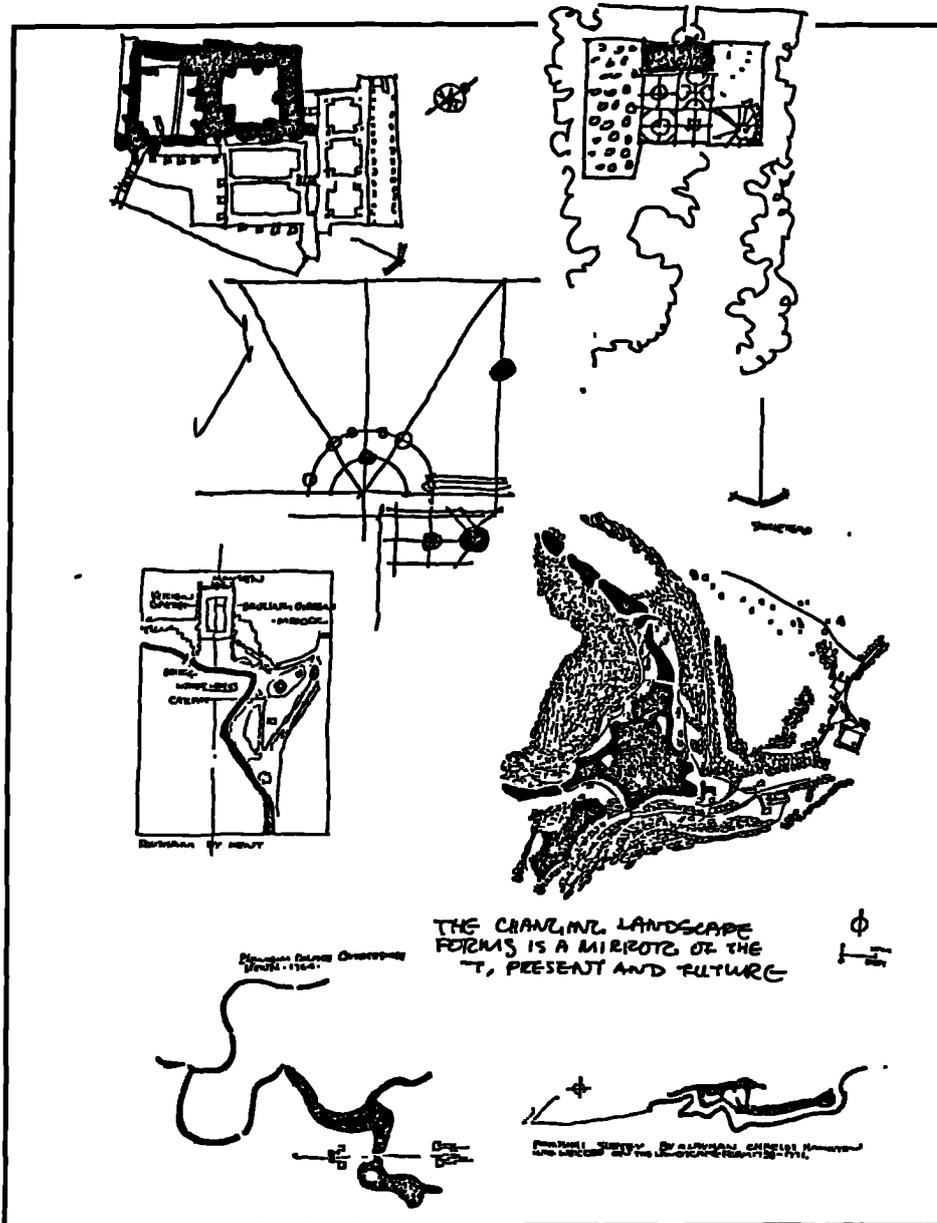


Fig. 18-21: Form of Changing in the history of English landscape design: the changing landscape form is a mirror of the past and present, and a reflection of people's mood and feeling.



## 19

### FORM IN DESIGN THINKING

Furthering the discussion of the basic aspects of landscape Morphology: 'Form, Logic and Emotion', the question of how to link these concepts with practice of design obviously becomes a key issue. Here I shall try to draw an outline according to following three categories related to a complete design process.

**OBSERVATION:** seeing in between.

**ANALYSIS:** form of symbiosis

**INTEGRATION:** form of talking.

#### 19.1

##### **OBSERVATION: SEEING IN BETWEEN**

The starting point of understanding a design task is to investigate a landscape for establishing a design concept. Thus, the way of observation is crucial.

Merely looking at a landscape does not mean one has really understood landscape since real seeing is with thinking. I call this thought of seeing, observation; it is important not only for appreciating landscape but more for designing.



The act of seeing is not a purely biological behaviour, since we see through 'coloured spectacles'. The 'colour' is from our training, our beliefs, our customs, and also from the memories of experiences which most strongly influence our way of perceiving. That is why traditional Chinese artists see outlines of objects with scattered focus while they refine the results of observation, whereas Western artists pay more attention to volume (lights and shade) with the perspective defined by a limited focus and angles. In fact, we usually see what we want to see, i.e. selectively. In other words we see with purpose.

As the Chinese painting Master Shitao said: "Collect all marvelous mountains for a draft (of Shan Shui)." That is the typical way of seeing with obvious subjective motivation. Because of this, the same spot for different artists may result in a very different painting; the same site for different landscape designers will reveal different preferences in the resulting design. Thus, we can reason that the action of seeing is a two-way process. On the one hand, those things being seen are separated from the observer; on the another hand, the images perceived by the observer reflect the way they perform the action of seeing: they are transferred from the objects to a comprehensive outcome of the subjective performance. The result of seeing is a "picture" conjured in the mind, not exactly objects themselves but something observed by the beholder, the result of sight and thought together.

Being aware of this, as landscape designers we can perform the action of seeing more consciously. We must be aware that we see with certain cultural preoccupation or certain preferences. But when designing we should give more regard to the perception of others, since landscape design is not an art for pure self-expression, but serves to make places for those in need who possess their own logic, life style and particular way of seeing. Therefore, the method of observation for a landscape designer



must be with understanding, particularly the understanding of people and their individual way of reacting to the immediate environment [Fig. 19-1].

Lorenz' phrase, "to see without being seen" [1] has been quoted by Appleton as a basic aspect of people's reaction to environment in the landscape, from which a kind of aesthetic satisfaction from hiding or exploring may be derived. We can find the same prototype of aesthetic patterns in children playing; in a common game, the pleasure derives from skillful hiding and successful finding. For designers, "to see without being seen" has a methodological significance, providing a convincing explanation of the Chinese design method of Hiding and Exploring [2]. This is a highly developed design skill, reflecting the primitive sense of human behaviour suggested by Lorenz yet has profound consequences, challenging people to persevere and think for themselves, creating pleasure with acceptable surprise. For instance, a visitor usually has difficulty finding the private garden in the traditional towns of South China, since most of the wonderful gardens are behind the plain walled housing complexes. It is a big surprise, having to pass through the small doors, the courtyards and corridors, to suddenly find a "nature" in the downtown housing area. Thus a great joy is the interesting discovery, the rarely seen and doubly precious scenery in the crowded living environment. Further, with managing inner spaces, the interest of visitors is heightened by the alternative opening and hiding, offering hints and suggestions; the landscape seems like a person, profound but mystical, "beautiful but shy." The surprise is 'agreeable'; the effect is dramatic. This we may call Form of Hiding [Fig. 19-2].

This inspires us to study the way of seeing: to investigate the behaviour of visitors; to discover delights in seeing in between, while

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1 Jay Appleton (1975), *Experience of Landscape*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, New York. p.70.

2 See Chapter 12.



movement, while looking up and looking down; to express the relationship of Yin and Yang; by alternating between 'Refuge' and 'Prospect', by leaving room for associations to heighten the effects of movement and changing scenes. Eventually, after a long journey, the dramatic focus of the landscape image may be refined with their own Forms of Imagining from their experience of joyful place.

### **FORM OF DEFINING**

Another issue related to observation is the form of spatial definition. As we have discussed in Chapter 17, the way of using perspective plays a crucial role in the process of defining space. The main issues-here are that we need to define space emphatically enough to give certainty to the environment. On the other hand, we also need to break from rigid spatial arrangements to perceive more richness in the designed place. Thus, the design form, i.e. the form of defining space should either be delicately controlled or dynamically varied.

For this purpose, both the perspective with concentrated focus and that of scattered focus can be used together in order to create certain 'prospects', varying the scenery for people's interests in exploring. However, while we are also aware that to create a focus is to set up a visual framework in the designed place, the question of how to guide visitors towards that focus demands great concern for patterns of movement in a limited space. The understanding of Chinese perspective, i.e. the HIGH-FAR, DEEP-FAR AND LEVEL-FAR, may give us the ideas and skills to help arrange various views along a designed sequence.

A sense of spaciousness is derived from feeling free in a complex place, rather than in a huge but empty expanse; spatial richness depends on how much can be experienced by people, rather than on the actual size of space. The great joy is to feel spatial richness within a clearly limited spatial framework, as we have the facility both to cope with complexity



and to appreciate the skillful change of scenery. People need both still and moving pictures to engage their attention; moreover, to structure space by scattering the focus provides an extra kind of freedom to compose pictures they prefer in order to satisfy their own interests [Fig. 19-3 and Fig. 19-4].

## **19.2 ANALYSIS: FORM OF SYMBIOSIS**

Further the discussion of Observation what is also important is how to analyze the design task, particularly the spatial relationship of the designed place and its surroundings. Here the sense of environmental Symbiosis is crucial while no designed place can be conjured up in isolation, the interaction to each other, including the limitations of confront us in undertaking a design process.

### **FORM OF CONDITIONING**

The limitations we face when designing are derived from either existing built environment or natural, social context, etc. Thus, for operating the design process effectively we must be clearly aware of the way in which design is limited by external conditions, i.e. study Form of Conditioning.

A design must meet the user's needs, but these needs are also conditioned by different social, cultural and economical conditions. These are revealed by certain landscape forms and intermingle with the environmental context. Thus, we should also see landscape form as the Form of Integration with built townscape, existing farming patterns, border of forest, contours of land, skirt of mountain, edges of reservoir, bank of lake, seashore, circulation of water (canal and river), road for



transportation and so on. Among these, some are troublesome, since they are formed only for reasons of profitable production. Highways and industrial forests, for example, are usually typical conflicts with the creation of a desirable landscape.

Natural conditions such as light and landform also have a great influence on the effects of design form. As discussed before, light created the difference of northern landscape painting from that of the south; and the difference of landforms in northern and southern China conditioned the landscape images of the so-called Northern and Southern School of Shan Shui painting. In terms of landscape design, and because of a concern for lighting effects, higher trees were planted in England (as Kent practiced) for achieving the contrast of lights and shadows, whereas in South China large tree-canopies are needed for creating shade to cope with the hot weather.

Relevant social aspects are also very influential. For instance in areas of high density population with high rise housing the quality of the spaces between the buildings, i.e. the “breath” of the physical environment, is a critical spatial problem. Facing the pressures from the tension of those hard built environments, landscape design becomes extremely difficult but valuable for softening and healing the living environment to provide limited outdoor spaces for people, particular for children and the elderly. In low density areas, security of residence may become the obvious issue which also influences the form of the layout of landscape design, although landscape design is not the unique means to solve these social problems.

In short, we humans have endless desires to modify our living environment, but our power is very limited; our natural and social circumstances are different; our environment is conditioned by tangible or intangible spatial forms. Thus, design thinking must go with being aware of these forms of conditioning, i.e. to understand how spatial limitations



are the primary design aspect. Actually, the geniuses of landscape design are those who can think and create with respect to the natural, social, and built environment. That is to say a good landscape design must follow a law of 'environmental symbiosis', i.e. balance inner needs with external conditions to achieve an environmental compromise. Moreover, the design must reflect certain qualities of its context which relates to the important quality of landscape art: locality, i.e. the use of local materials, technique or craftsmanship, the typical architectural and structural style. In a broad sense, designed landscape is not only a public place in an abstract sense, but the home of people (individuals and groups of people), an identity of people and place [Fig. 19-5, 19-6, 19-7 and 19-8].

#### **FORM OF ARTICULATION**

Being aware of these varied conditions, the design process becomes complicated and even more interesting. A newly designed place may be thought of as very individual with its own spatial logic and manner of spatial expression, but eventually a part of its context; it may interact with other forms. For the management of place, spatial form is the basic aspect by which the designer shows concern for how people feel the designed landscape.

As mentioned before, only if we feel free can we really achieve a feeling of spaciousness. We also know that the sense of spatial freedom is not dependent on size, but on the manner of arrangement. Thus, to design is to create something solid by contrasting it to something vacant. i.e. something which is tangible; something which causes illusion. In this sense, the Yin Yang theory may again help the designer to handle their process of the problem solving. Based on the creation of varying and contrasting spatial effects, a dynamic balance in an integrated spatial structure may be firmly established.



However, this is not the final purpose. The purpose holistic landscape layout and logical arrangement is to search for an expression of Yi, i.e. to embody certain landscape ideas. Thus, the relationship between the principal and subordinate landscape element need to be confirmed skillfully by the manner of spacing. For instance, the spaces around a dramatic focus, such as a classical temple or a reception hall, functionally provide supporting facilities, yet they serve as the spacing elements creating hierarchies in order to enrich spatial relations and suggesting sequence and circulation, and eventually to determining people's general impression of the whole place. Here, the skill of operating spatial contrasts is fundamental, the interaction between Density and Spacing will play a crucial role.

Therefore we can reason that Spacing is a type of intangible form which articulates a profound understanding of design philosophy and functions and penetrates in between different layers and different parts of a designed place. The more difficult task in a landscape design is to treat the transitional spaces between the obvious central part and its subordinates, and the key here is how to approach the focus. If it is too direct, as with an unskillful story teller, the audience (visitors) will become bored very soon, since they already know the end of the story in the first place. Thus, an implicative discovery process is indeed necessary.

The concept of Implicativeness therefore becomes the core of design thinking in order to arrange the whole "plot" with a clear but interesting sequence. It needs not only to be functionally reasonable, but also spiritually implicit. The type of indirect landscape expression allows people to know the spatial layers, to be attracted by diverse contrasts, guided with increasing pleasure continuously.

Using Burke's terms, there may be things vast/small; rugged or negligent/smooth or polished; dark/gloomy or light/delicate; surprising/relaxing, etc. It is of course not necessary for one to feel pain



versus pleasure; a suitable description of such effects we would like to call **ACCESSIBLE** feeling or experiencing of articulate landscape form, an enjoyable play of the spaces which is also a source of interest, a pleasure derived from being aware of order yet appreciating diversity.

In short, the meaning of form of articulation is not simply to tidy up the relationship of objects, but to create an appreciable interrelationship for guiding and organizing people's activities and perception. 'Form of Articulation' is the form that can be seen and associated or felt, which provides a real freedom for moving and thinking in a designed place [Fig. 19-9 and Fig. 19-10].

### **FORM OF UNFOLDING**

Our land is limited. In fact, we need boundaries to divide land for developing farming, forests, industries, transportation and housing for meeting the needs of modern life. What is more, the sense of territory is obviously an instinct of all living creatures which is eloquently proved by ethnologists and psychologists.

There are two kinds of boundaries: invisible and visible, i.e. boundary in physical form and boundary in mind. Those boundaries can be invited into a landscape picture. Some of them are even made extremely dull and aggressive, which cause a kind of unpleasant spatial pressure by its closeness and visually damages the scenery.

However, the right starting point in most design work is to analyze the limitation of the site to cope with the problems created by the boundaries. Our concern here is mainly focused on how to make the best use of the boundary, overcoming its limitations to create **A VISION BEYOND**. [3]

Learning from the experiences of the Chinese and the English School, we can achieve this by the Form of Unfolding, which does not



mean elimination of functional boundaries, but design with the sense of going beyond them. [4]

First, we can make the boundary itself a valuable object of a designed place. The city walls of York and the gateway of Phoenix County in Hunan province of China combining landmark with boundary are typical examples. Second, we can simply hide it. The Ha Ha, for example, is a clever device for skillful spatial division, but also an extremely simple way to achieve the sense of going beyond the boundary. The more demanding skill is to divide inner spaces without sacrificing their totality, achieving a synthesis of the functional and the beautiful. For design with this sense of totality, the Chinese way of interlinking inner spaces provides a remarkable demonstration of creating spaciousness in a limited space. [5] [Fig. 19-1].

### FORM OF MEANDERING

'Lines of Beauty' are not equivalent to beauty of line. As discussed before, 'Line of Beauty' is an important aesthetic category developed by both the British and the Chinese, which matters not only for linear form, but also in connection with the landscape designed in a manner which indicates the special aesthetic taste. Obviously, the Serpentine Line resembles natural beauty, whereas for the Chinese the Zigzag Way symbolizes The Taste of Heaven. These aesthetic complications of line can be described aesthetically as a Form of Meandering, which can be analyzed according to three levels:

I. As an artistic form and decorative medium, the preference for line of beauty is a flavour derived from natural (free) forms which can be expressed. These lines are usually paths, circulation routes, boundaries, banks or outlines of water, planting, and so on; linear landscape forms

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4 This discussion was developed in Chapter 12.

5 See Chapter 12.



developing in a gently winding manner, sympathetic with undulating landforms. Contrasting to geometrical form, the lines display a softness and gentleness in a gesture which evokes the visitor's interest by its charming and mystical characteristics.

II. As a practical design device, the lines can be physical, but also intangible, serve as a linear spatial link, a clue, a visual linkage to suggest certain abstract relationships between different points. Moreover, moving along a serpentine line, going in a zigzag way, people feel there is nothing artificially but only what is 'Naturally So', while their views change from time to time, from place to place. That is the right way to guide people to find variation of landscape perception, to create possibilities for the enjoyment of surprise. With the increased experience of spatial richness, a sense of infinity in a limited space is evoked.

III. In terms of psychology, this kind of softness derived from form of meandering is a therapeutic aesthetic category, the flowing lines evoking a desire of further exploring and giving comfort for human activities. In particular, by experiencing this natural spaciousness and gentle variety, those who live in a formal life style, cope with mass products and follow a rigid routine will feel free and gain a great release.

However, the line of beauty, or as we call it the Form of Meandering needs a communicating context to display its aesthetic values and embody its landscape meaning [Fig. 19-12 and Fig. 19-13]. This context we call the Form of Talking.

### **19.3**

#### **INTEGRATION: FORM OF TALKING**

In terms of the 'Way of Observing', we appreciate seeing in between and with knowing 'to see is to be seen'; on the 'Form of Conditioning', we emphasize the interaction of functional, natural and



built environmental limitations; concerned with the arrangement of different landscape elements, we highly value the 'Form of Articulation'; coping with site boundaries and inner spaces, we study the 'Form of Unfolding' and emphasize the sense of beyond the boundary; for creating the 'Softness' or 'Line of Beauty', we study 'Form of Meandering'. There is one common link in that all these forms function in a manner of interaction which is as if communicating. This is the landscape context, an integration alive, what we call 'Form of Talking'.

This "conversation" is about the sense of coherence, the interdependent relationship of different parts and linkage of varied landscape features, for a designed place does indeed have "breath", "blood" and "veins" connecting different parts of the "body" living and functioning. As we have discussed in Part 3, landscape is a synthesis of 'Heaven, Earth and Man', a unity of things made by artificial and natural processes in which Chi, the breath or vital spirit, has its universal value and meaning. As the communication medium of landscape design, Chi goes everywhere in a designed place, introduces and suggests relationships by related physical images, associations and visual connections, even by sound, smell and colours. Whether the "conversation" is direct or indirect, subtle or simple, it provides a harmonious context for fluent use of design language embodying all the above devices.

Thus, we consider that the 'Form of Talking' belongs to the design philosophy, the genius of human beings, and is an inclusive summary of FORM OF DESIGN THINKING [Fig. 19-14 & Fig. 19-15].

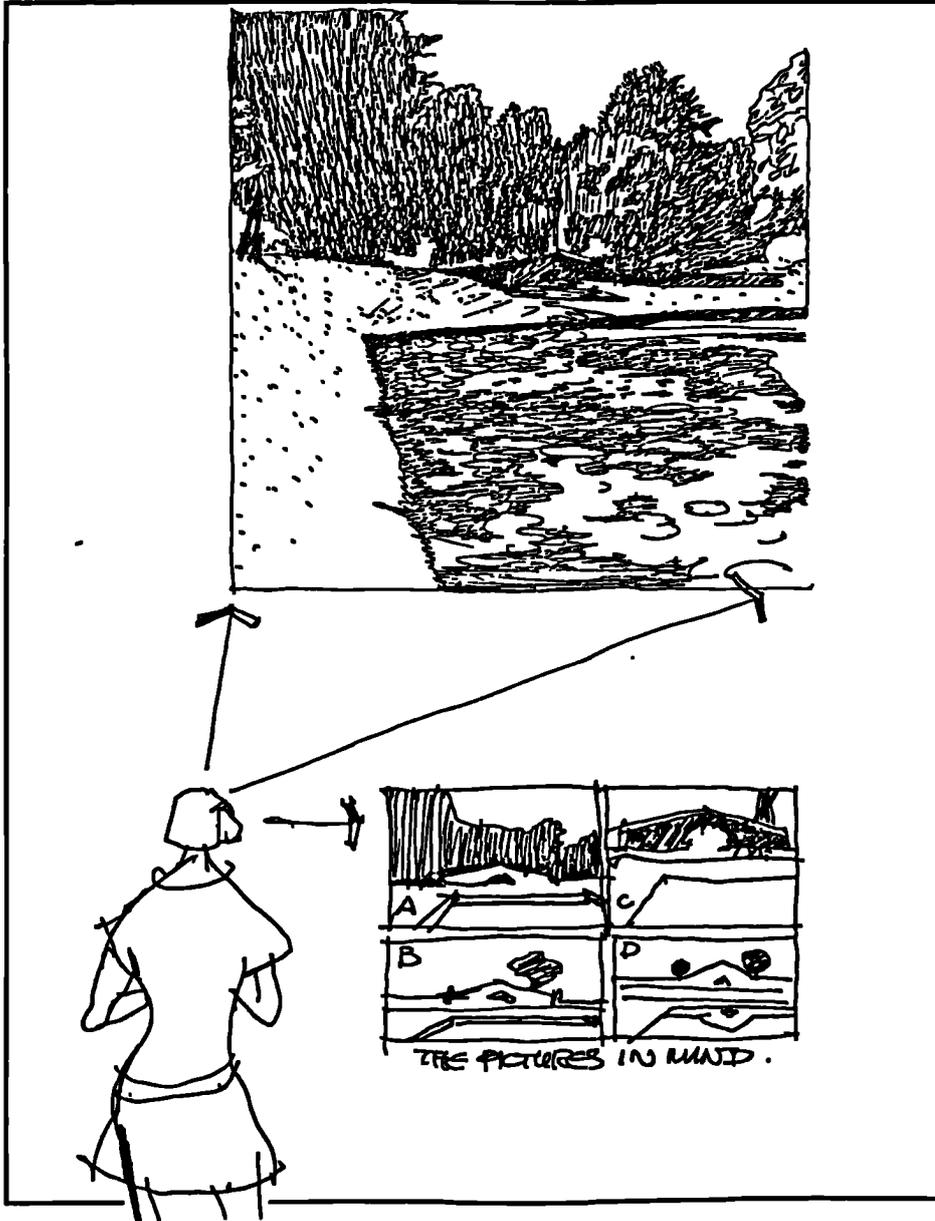


Fig. 19-1: Observer observed

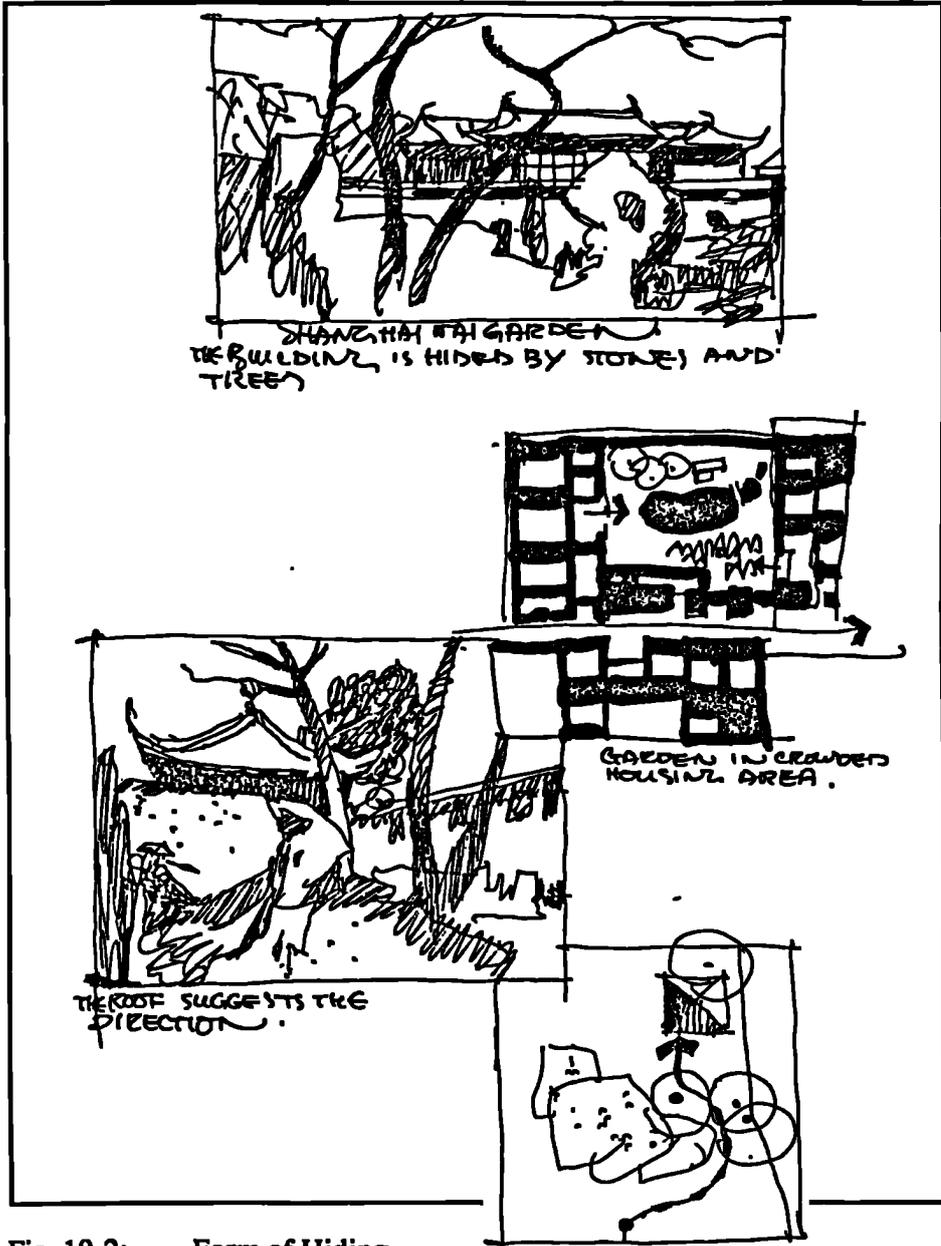


Fig. 19-2: Form of Hiding.

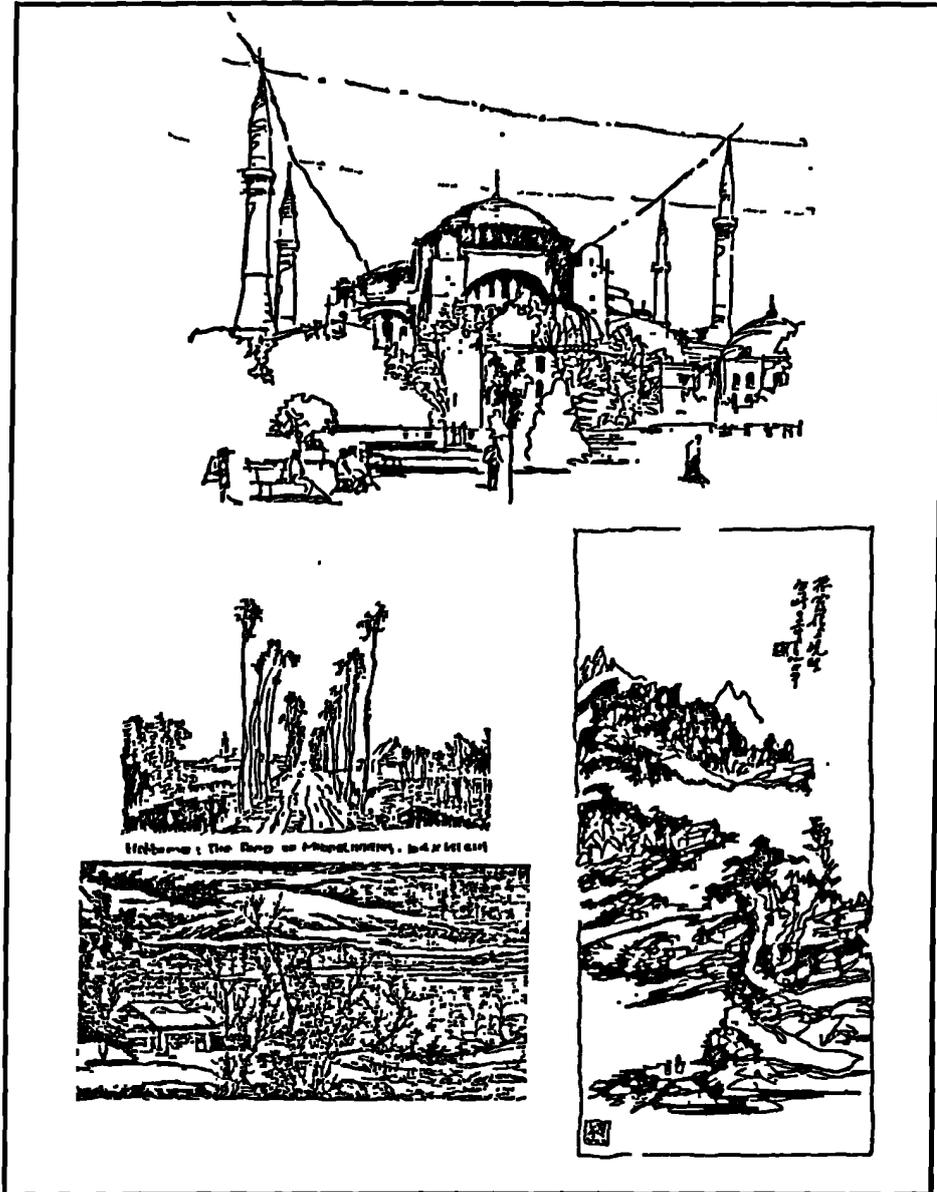


Fig. 19-3: Form of Defining.

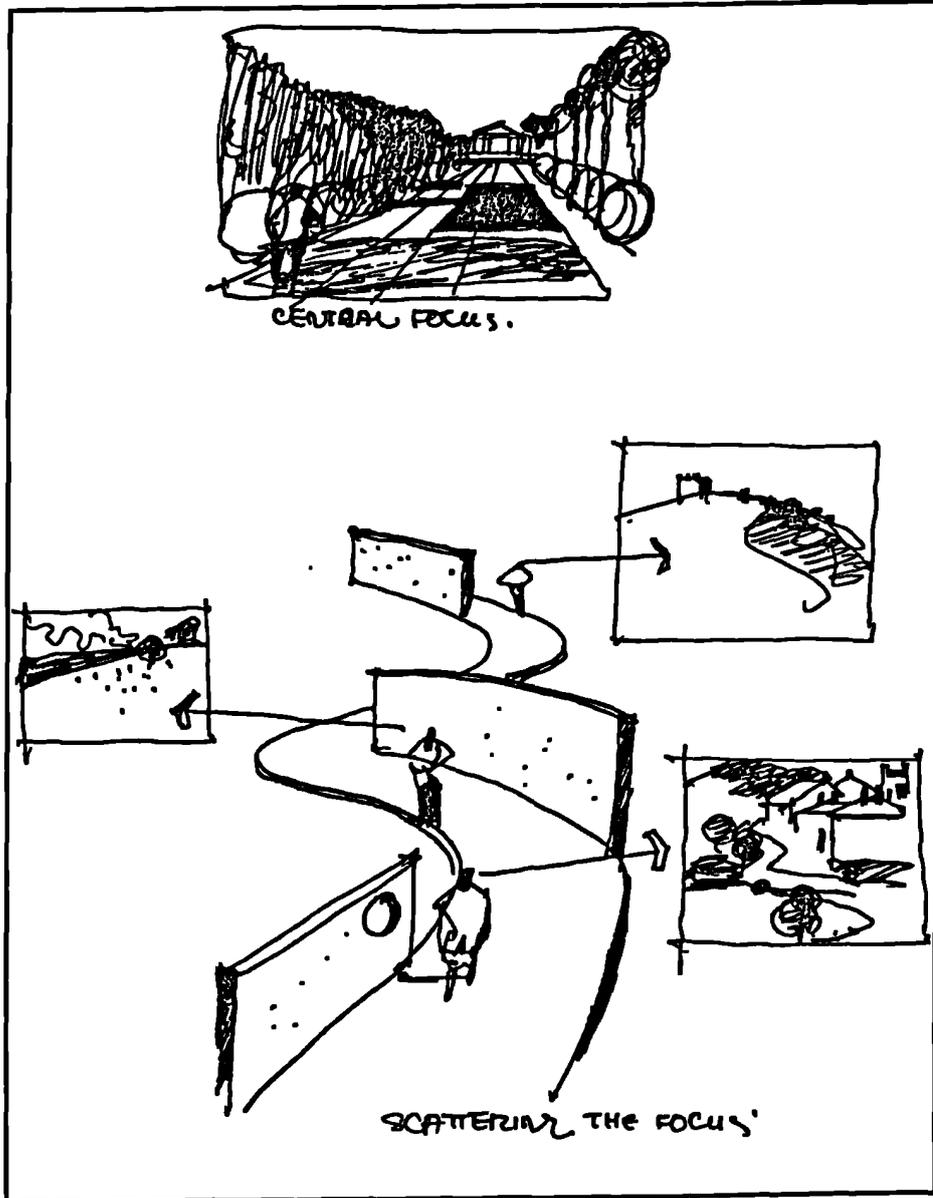


Fig. 19-4: Focus or Scattering.

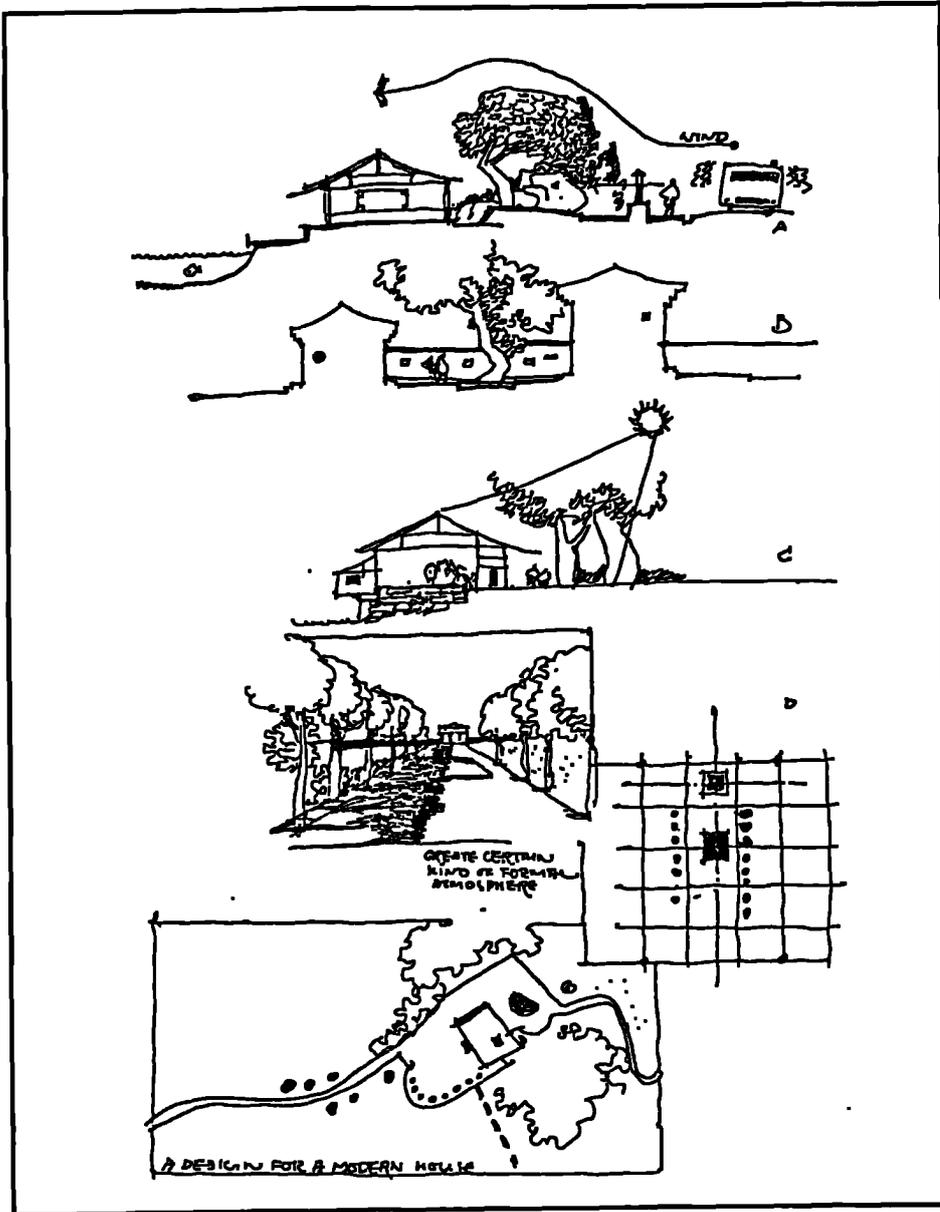


Fig. 19-5: Form of Basic Needs.



Fig. 19-6: Form of Beliefs.

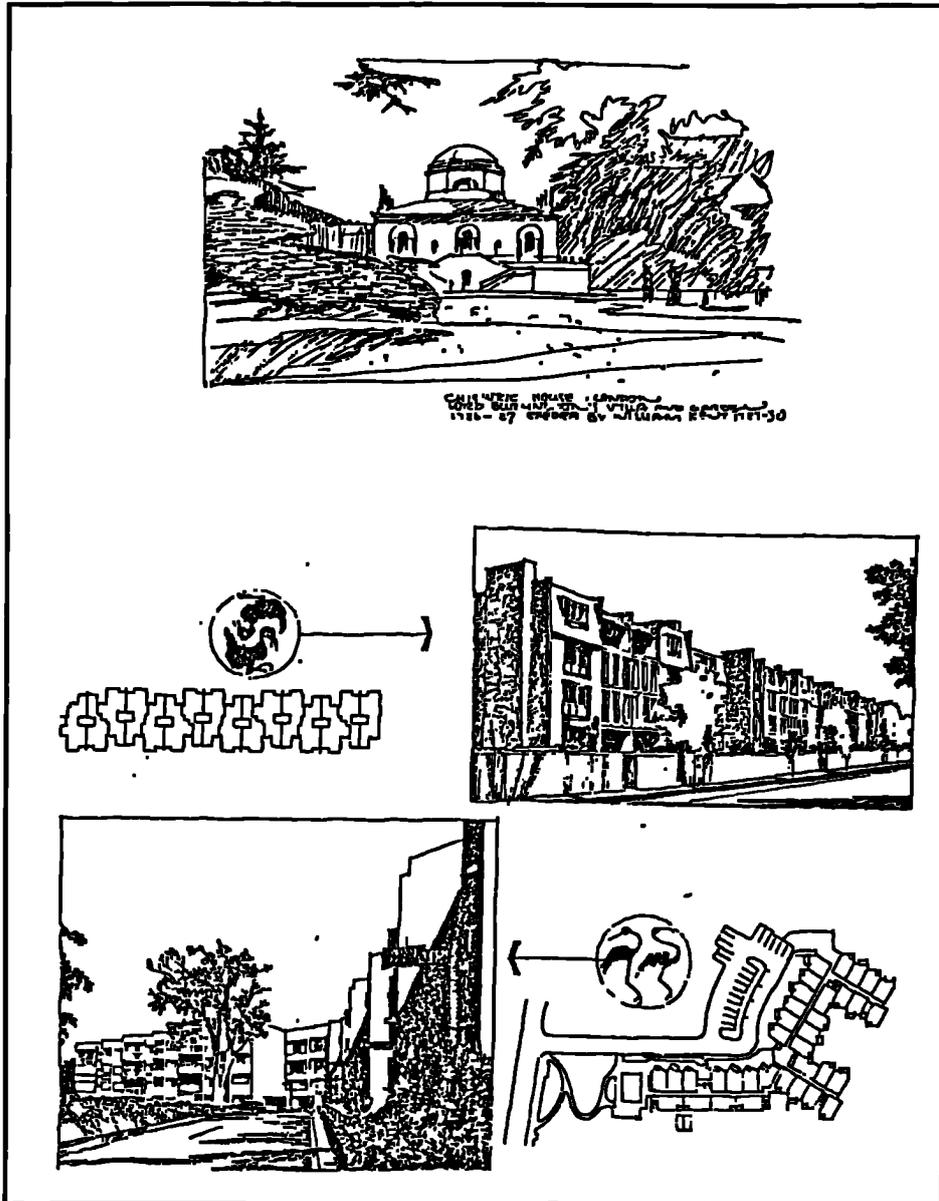


Fig. 19-7: Form of Living.

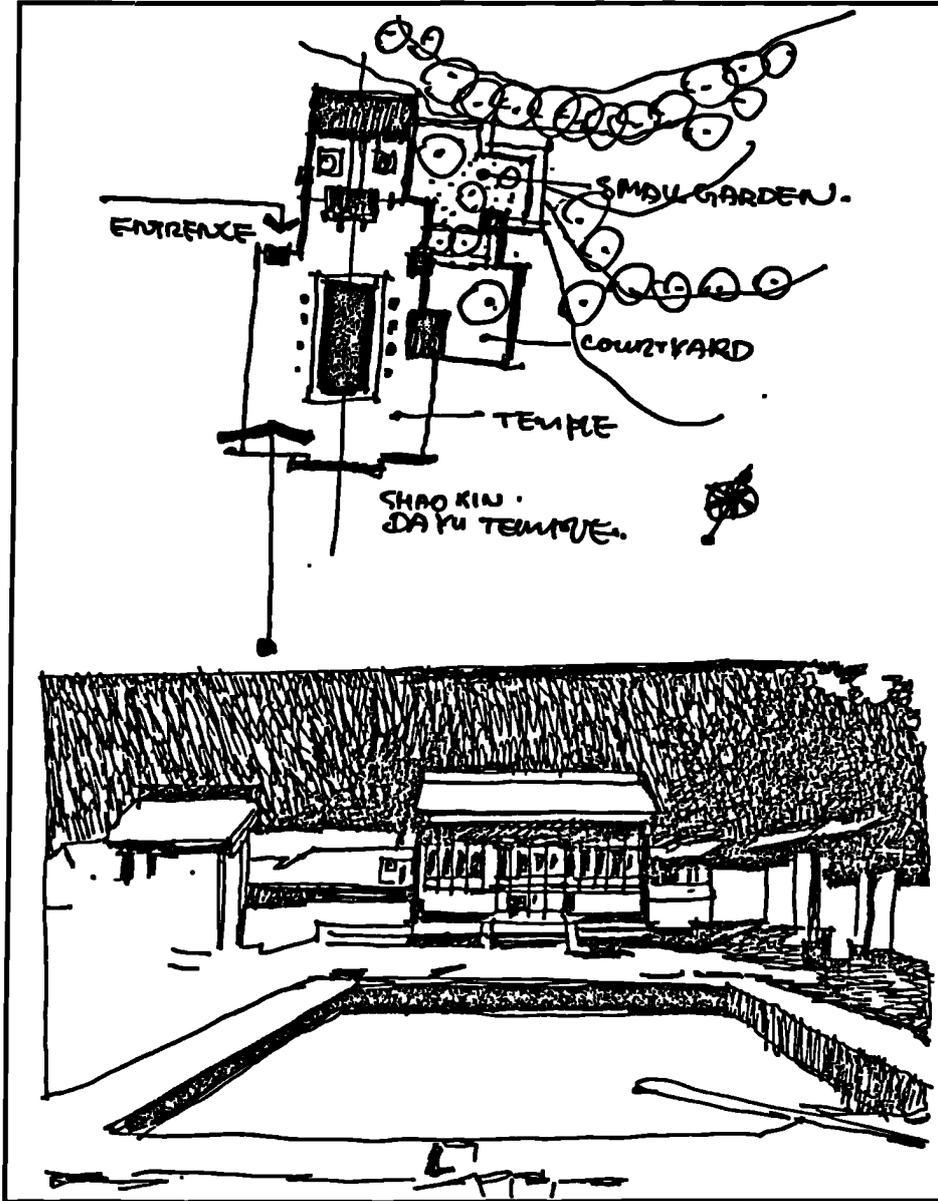


Fig. 19-8: Form of Conditioning.

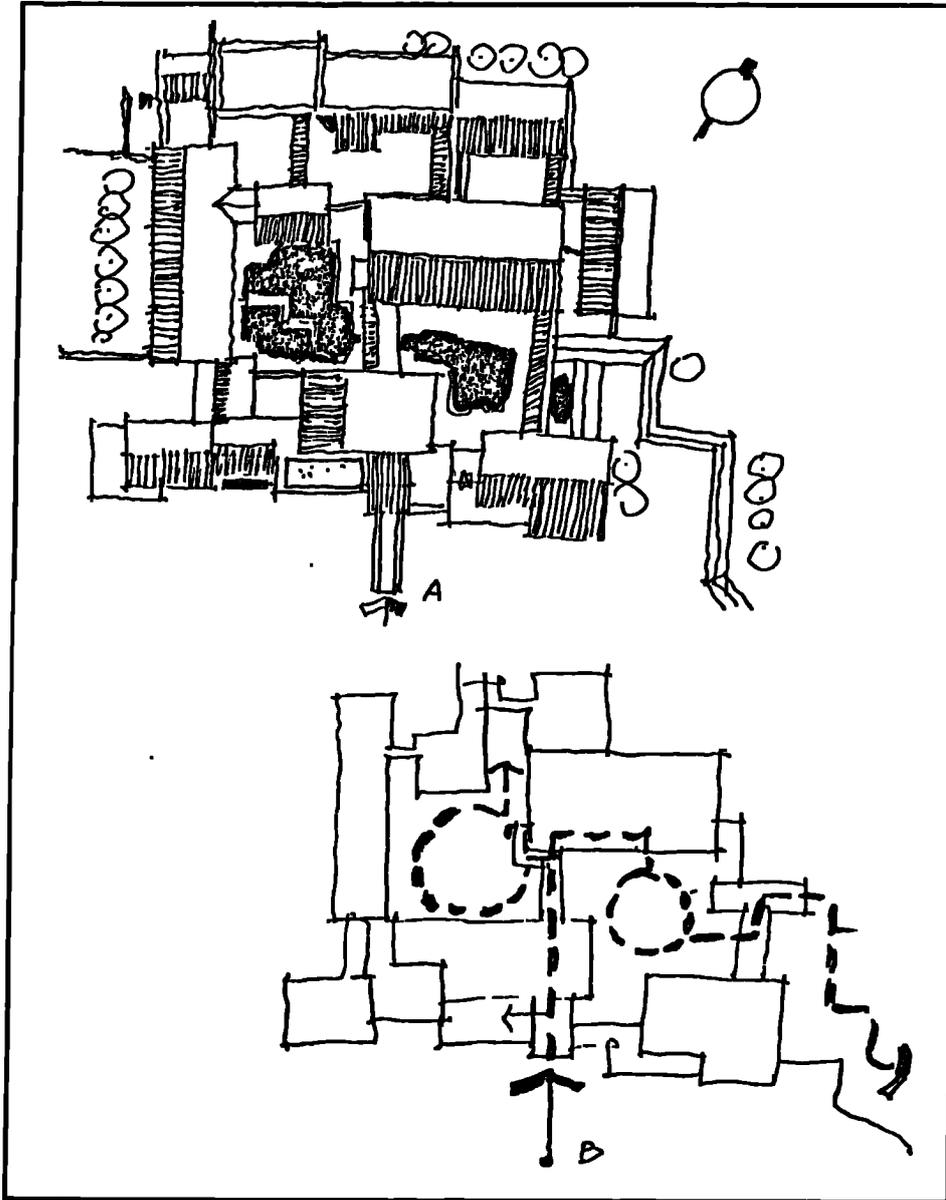


Fig. 19-9: Form of Spacing.

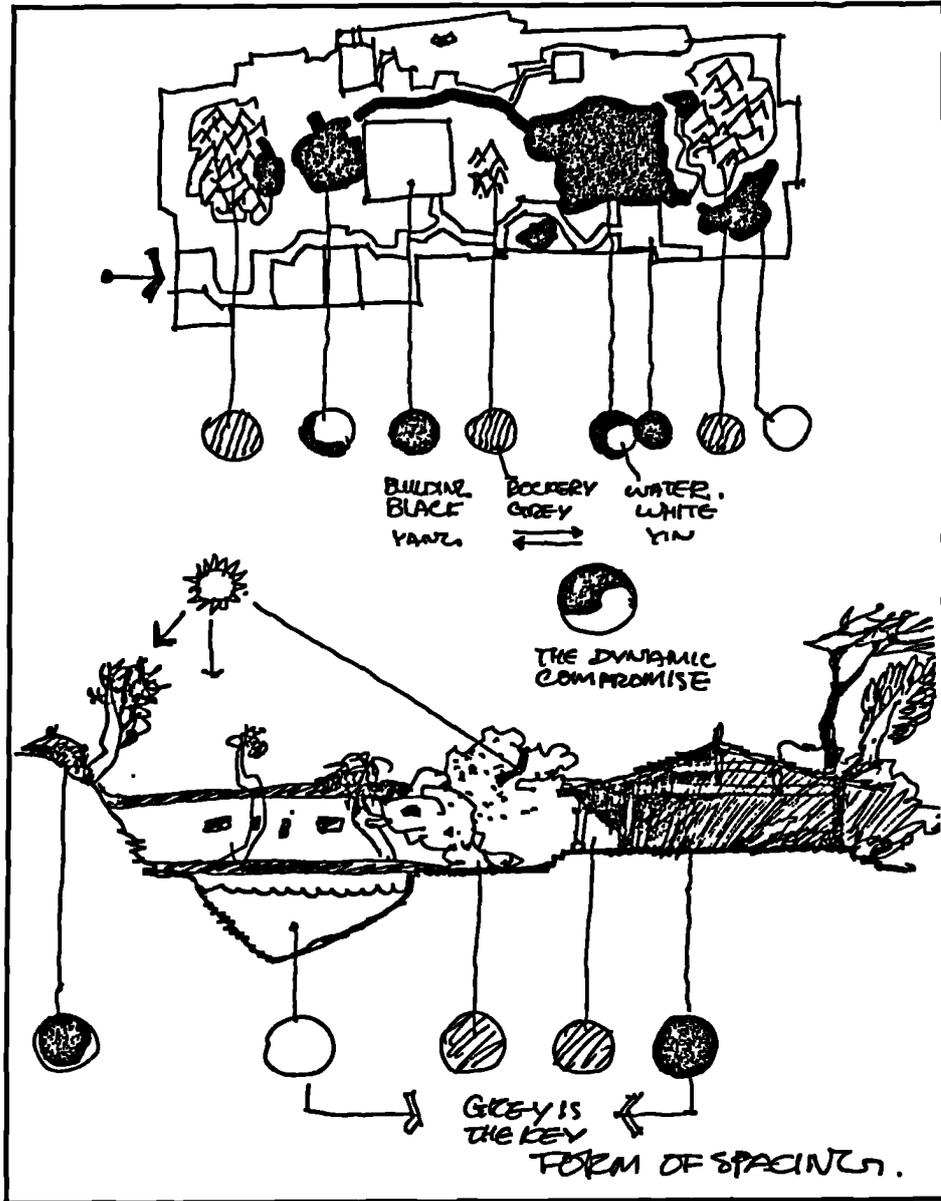


Fig. 19-10: Form of Articulation.

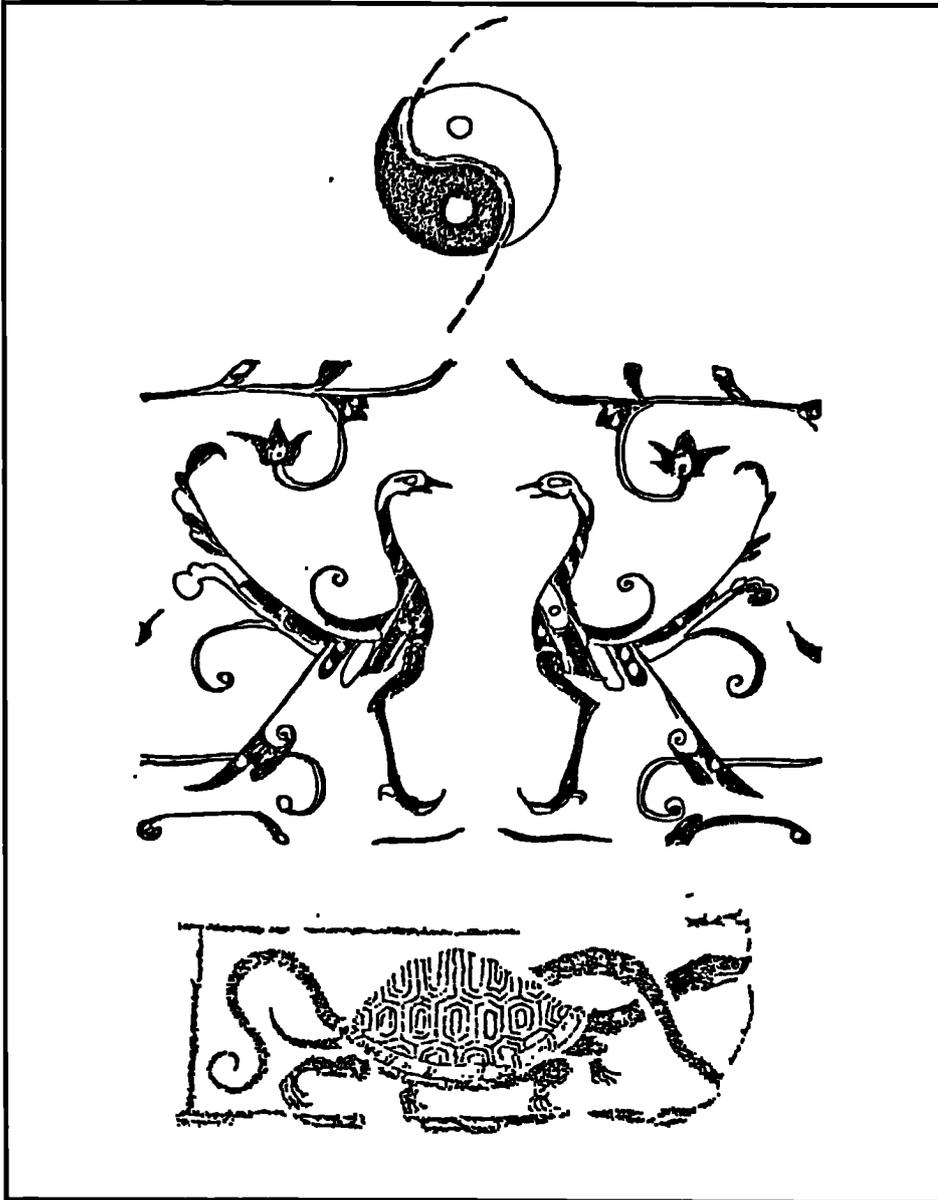


Fig. 19-11: Form of Unfolding.

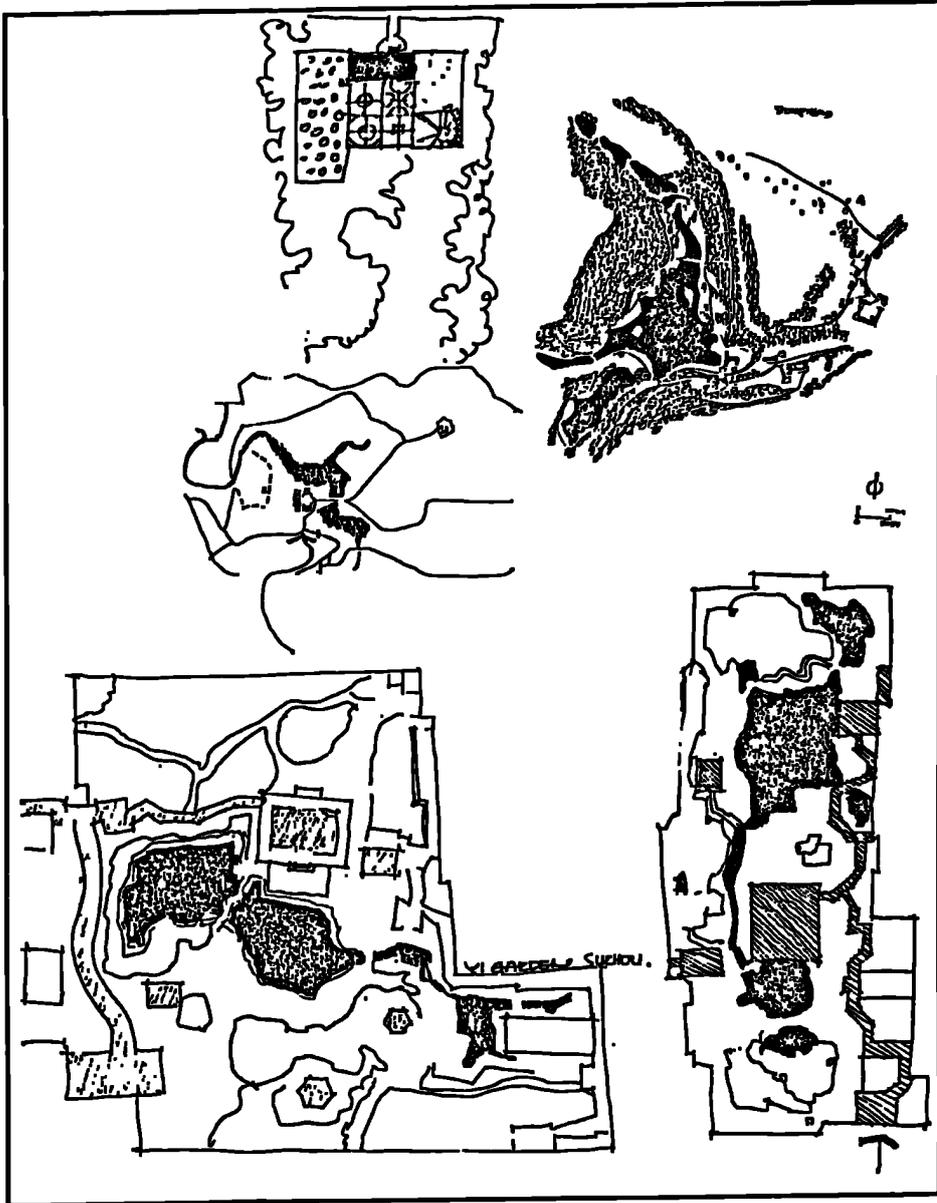


Fig. 19-12: Line of Beauty.

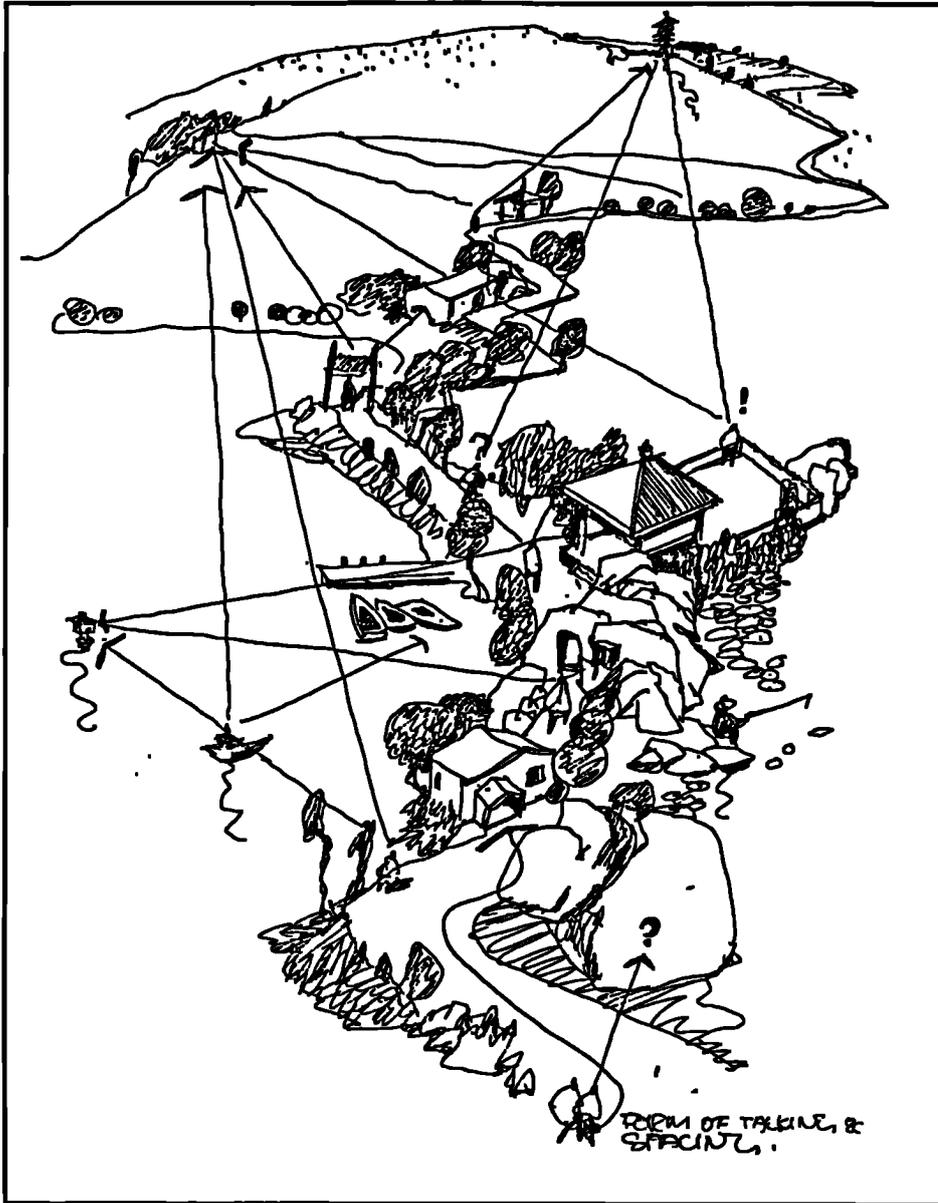


Fig. 19-13: Form of Meandering.

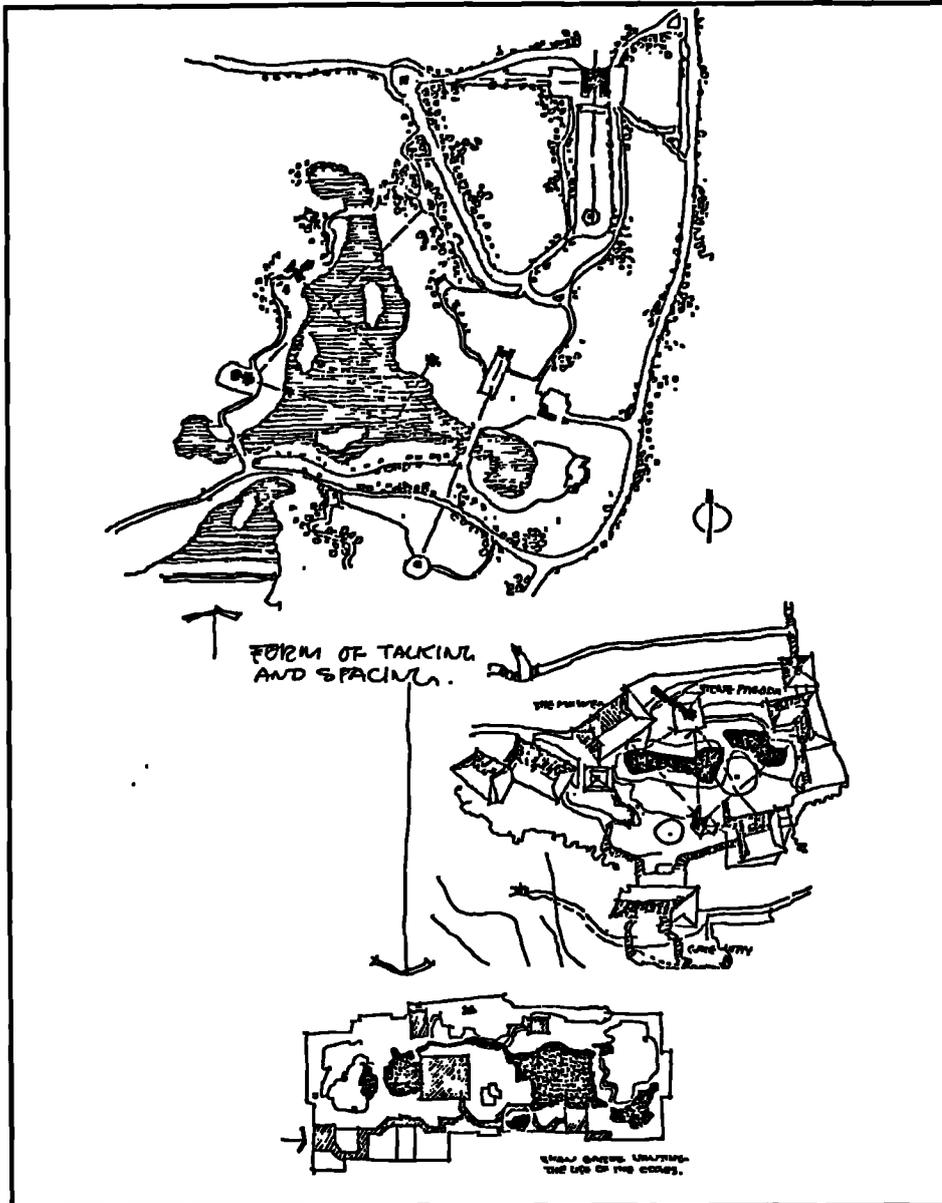


Fig. 19-14: Form of Talking.

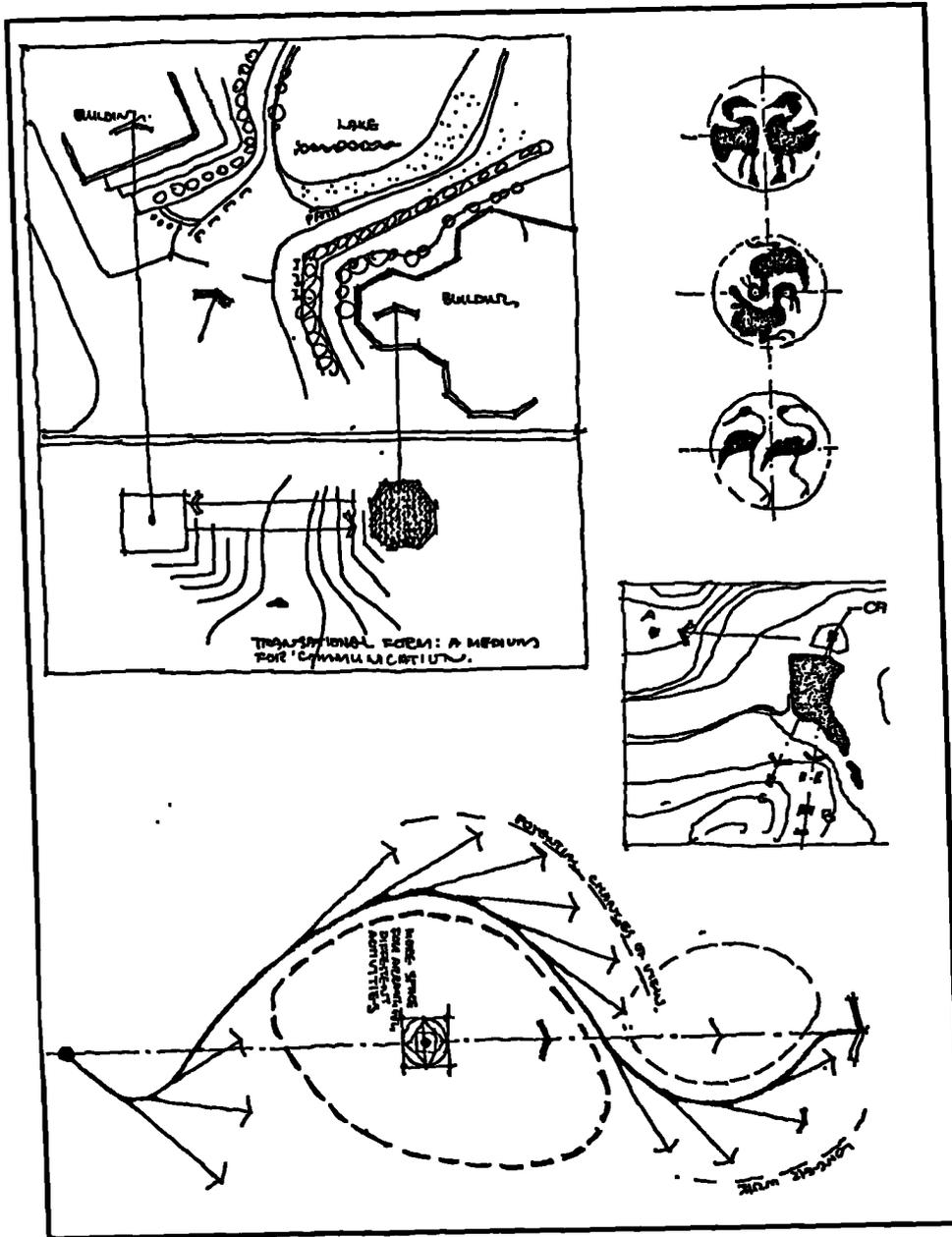


Fig. 19-15: Form of Integration.

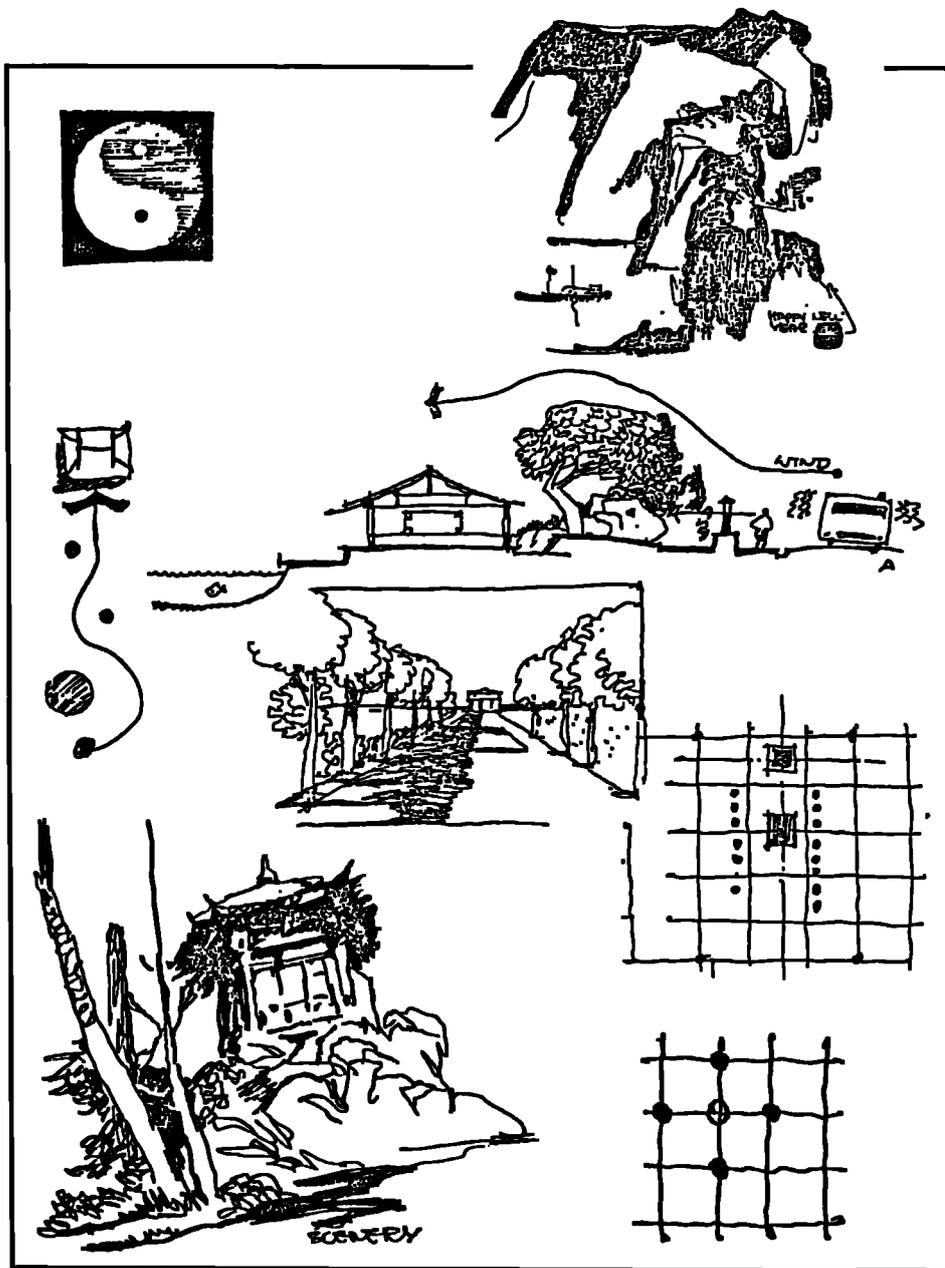


Fig. 19-16: Morphology: a Study of landscape form of living.



## 20

### MORPHOLOGY IN TEACHING

Concern for environmental change, particularly the damages caused by a rapidly developed industrial civilization and for the welfare of future generations, landscape design as part of the environmental healing process has great significance for the future. To establish the bridges between landscape aesthetics and design practice needs great attention and improvement. In the following pages, the role of landscape morphology in education is the central topic.

#### 20.1

#### AESTHETIC ASPECTS OF EDUCATION

Although landscape art and design may follow the same aesthetic principles, we cannot simply transfer the language of art to that of design without reference to the specific dimensions of environmental issues. As an important part of environmental design, landscape design relates to the following general aspects:

I. **Senses:** sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste; landscape as a particular kind of art should exhibit artistic implications directly or indirectly in terms of time, space, form and other media.

II. **Needs:** surviving, security, belonging, identity, comfort and interest. The art should be able to stimulate and care for people through



balancing the system of 'Environmental Symbiosis', providing pleasant living environment and information and functional satisfaction, and allowing people to participate or play without hindrance.

**III. Potential and Possibilities:** the art of landscape design, based on the principle of a healing environment, should also be communicative in which people can understand and be proud of their own place (past, present and future) and protect it from possible damages; there should also be enough 'room' for further developments which demands a concern for scientific and artistic principles.

**IV. Meaning:** the design serves as an expression of certain profound symbolic ideas, beliefs, life styles, customs and other sorts of cultural involvement which needs a high capacity of the designer in operating the design language, i.e. skillfully using all sorts landscape forms in a profound landscape morphological sense.

From this point of view, environmental art cannot be simply understood as a space plus some sort of added art work, since the qualities of an environment must be integrated, a synthesis of many.

The essential aspects of environmental issues have generally defined the attributes of landscape design. The value and meaning of a designed landscape cannot be revealed only by its visual quality; there must be a proper communication between artificial things and nature, people and a designed place, involving also relationships between present, past and future. Designed landscape as a concrete work of art should achieve certain ecological standards, meet human physical needs such as functional and economic satisfaction; as an abstract art it should also display a healthy future environment and satisfy people intellectually by providing stimulus, allowing for certain preferences, and respecting the various meanings people will find.

Essentially landscape design is such an environmental art, which searches for balance between natural and human processes, changing and



controlling, old and new, searching for a balance in real life. These attributes decide that landscape design must be a very modest and comprehensive profession. Compared with an architect or sculptor, the self-expression of a landscape designer is very much guided by an integrative sense. Considering landscape design as a work of environmental healing, the designers see no rigid boundary between art and science, sensual satisfaction and psychological needs. Thus, we may agree that a complete understanding of landscape aesthetics requires the integration of the scientifically true (following natural law such as ecological suitability or 'Sense of Coherence'), the functionally good (physically and psychologically satisfactory) and the sensual beautiful. Designers are required to be a rare kind of specialist embodying the highest aesthetic aim of environmental art with necessary scientific knowledge and design technique: protectors of the environment taking responsibility for reasonable land use and avoiding or healing any possible damage on our planet; participants in social life who always keep people in mind, and artists who have a profound sense of beauty and can find pleasure from craftsmanship in their working process.

We understand that this is an extremely demanding standard which could take a long time to achieve. Thus, an interdisciplinary teaching system is required which sees science, social and cultural aspects as well as design technique as all belonging to a 'harmony' of knowledge. The attempts of the developed countries to design different courses have revealed a possibility to achieve this synthesis, [1] although there are still many kinds of problems .

While way of teaching landscape design may vary in emphasis, and each approach has its specific profile and practical methods to achieve the educational aim, there remains one more thing in common: they must cope with the study of landscape form in a morphological sense.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix in detail.



The concept of a landscape morphology discussed in Chapters 18 and 19, as an outline seeing environment as a whole, studying the changes of landscape and dealing with real landscape forms and embodying certain aesthetic ideas, has its significance in landscape education in cultivating a suitable manner to face the challenges of modern environmental issues and a methodology for design thinking.

In regard to the role of art in landscape design and its implication in landscape morphology, the critical issues to discuss are: what is meant by art in the context of modern landscape design? what is the proper role of art teaching in landscape education? and what kind of inspiration should we draw from the art with a concern for its relation to landscape morphology?

## 20.2

### FROM LANDSCAPE ART TO DESIGN ARTISTIC IMPLICATION IN LANDSCAPE MORPHOLOGY

If we agree that designed landscape is an expression of art, the design language and that of art must have certain connected meanings which belong to a more general level of artistic expression, also found in poetry, music etc. For instance:

“The threads in a kind mother’s hand —  
A grown for her son bound for a far-off land,  
Sewn stitch by stitch before he leaves  
For fear his return be delayed.”

Meng Jiao (Tang Dynasty)



In the above lines, a mother's great love is described within "The threads in a mother's hand." The way of expressing the emotion is so subtle that we have to feel it through association between the lines. An inspiration here is that the more readable, simple and familiar the language, the higher aesthetic pleasure we can achieve. This is the quality of Simplicity and Familiarity. Aesthetically we see it as one of the most important principles in using any art language.

In order to invite participation of an audience, the quality of personal involvement in art work related to a specific cultural background is another important aspect in aesthetic thinking. For instance, the qualities of locality in the landscapes depicted by Southerners and Northerners in Europe and by Eastern and Western painters, are essential values; the personal feelings and cultural characteristics of these landscape arts have occupied a very special position. Appreciation of such art is heightened by their familiarity and individuality which inspires great delights through reading, looking, listening, staying in, meditating, imagining and associating with, and so on. We call this variation of artistic features Diversity quality, which provides wide-ranging aesthetic possibilities and invites the Participation of people; this is what we should achieve in using the language of landscape design.

Meanwhile, certain symbolic meanings are revealed in a certain artistic atmosphere. For instance, the interior and the music in a Gothic church may evoke a sense of holiness; a "Taoism" temple and its surroundings may evoke feelings of meditative seclusion. People value these places highly not only because of something "beautifully" designed, but for the total atmosphere itself; it is the whole environment which conveys this intense symbolic meaning, and this meaning promotes a kind of aesthetic response which is far beyond the limits of physical existence and definitely not a simple sensual satisfaction.



Art as an expression of higher aesthetic qualities is much more intense than the communication with ordinary language; in limited time and space, art must provide refined images, evoke high emotions and rich associations and embody complex ideas. We need this language, since we are, to some extent, restricted by certain formal modes of expression, life style, or damaged living conditions, and often, we lack the opportunities to express ourselves (our emotion, feeling, mood and understanding etc.) fully. That is why we link words such as Soul, Chi, Spirit, Essence to landscape paintings and some designed places, and why so many landscape artists and designers have committed themselves to nature and the preservation of its beauty.

To this extent, landscape art and design share the same aesthetic roots which relate not only to pictorial factors, but also to the ideas behind them. In typical examples analyzed in the earlier discussion of the art philosophy of Shan Shui and the aesthetic ideas of the Romantic Movement, there was an intense involvement in the intellectual implications of landscape.

Also a strong design sense was revealed in landscape paintings of the past which foreshadowed landscape design tendencies both of the West and of the East, providing important models for landscape design practice and education.

First, this is seen in the way artists combine the depiction of landscape images with their aesthetic ideal. The art of Ideal Landscape, for instance, symbolically expressed the ideal life style inspired by a dream of earthly paradise; [2] some Romantic Landscapes were inspired by down-to-earth experiences of the movement and change of a landscape revealing an unique relationship between natural forces and human fate. The reason we see such art so alive is because those pictures are not a mechanical depiction of natural images, but an outcome of artistic

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 15.



imagination and reasoning, i.e. they are pictures designed and conveying profound understanding. Even in the extreme example of the expressionist **Van Gogh (1853-90)** though his landscape are full of psychological as well as colouristic intensity, there is still a strong design sense functioning in that “his suns do not simply flow in his skies, but pull them into action; tense waves of linear dashes flow all over his paintings like so many electric currents, each object having its own magnetic aura.” [3]

Above all, this design sense found in the art of Poussin, whose rational two-dimensional management of landscape and mathematical exactness has dominated European art for centuries. The ghost of Poussin even haunts in the 20th century, leading us to doubt the originality even of Mondrian and Mies. The rational orientation of Poussin’s art and his full design sense in painting also substantially influenced the English School of landscape design. [4] The same is true in Chinese art history. The Chinese Pictorial Flavour in landscape design was also very much influenced by the understanding of the symbolic relationship between Shan and Shui, with the subjective factors playing an important role in this typical Eastern landscape art [5].

Secondly, a more evident design sense is revealed in the manner of using perspective through which artists have led the way of seeing and defining space. This has influenced design approaches in the West from the Renaissance to the early 20th century. It is due to the different ways of using perspective in that so many different landscape images can be found in landscape painting and design both in the West and the East.

Thus, art for us is more than a picture, and we definitely cannot confine artistic study in landscape education only in terms of the visual aspect. From the morphological point of view, the study of art in

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3 Bo Jeffares, *Landscape Painting*, Phaidon Press Ltd. Oxford, 1979, p. 68.

4 See part 4: The English School.

5 Also see chapter 6.



landscape design incorporates a great deal of research into cultural, social, philosophical and technical subjects, particularly the changing of landscape ideas, and ones from which we can draw lessons from the past and bridge aesthetic ideas with landscape practice.

As suggested in Chapters 18 and 19, if we combine the study of art and landscape aesthetics with a concern for its total context and the relationship of design forms, we will achieve a new understanding of the concept of landscape art and be able to lay a sound basis for fundamental research into design thinking.

Although art in design education is an old topic, once we link the art with the research of environmental totality, human cultural involvement and establish an inseparable relationship between art and design methodology, the study of landscape art (the symbiosis of all sorts of spatial forms) will convey a new meaning, and exert great influence on the qualities of landscape design. This is what I call the implication of art in LANDSCAPE MORPHOLOGY: a combined, integrated understanding and approach in the use of landscape design language.

However, in many institutions, art is still understood for art sake. The relevant teaching is usually treated pictorially and taught in fragmentary pieces scattered through the teaching of design history, studio projects or some specific seminars. It is difficult for learners to link the related issues of art with design methodology, integrate the whole theory at an aesthetic level, and transfer partial knowledge of art into real environmental design work. Particularly for those students from non-landscape design disciplines such as geography, horticulture, fine art or pure science, the learning difficulty is obvious.

What is more, the teaching timetable is usually full to meet the needs of teaching basic knowledge and techniques thought of as urgently needed in the professional world. In this situation we cannot expect learners to increase their understanding by thinking about or researching



into the design morphology on their own. Meanwhile there is a danger that some valuable traditions in the landscape profession such as the sense of craftsmanship shown by 'Tender Hands' Repton, and the high level of self-discipline will lose its position.

Therefore the teaching of landscape aesthetics should not cease at an abstract level or be restricted to fragments of introduction of art theory or in discussions of the changes in taste or fashion. It is not efficient that at today's higher educational level, the teaching of landscape aesthetics is still separated from the study of design methods; it is also wrong that the teaching is made too practical by only focusing on immediate benefits instead of promoting a 'Sense of Coherence'. With this in mind, the task of teaching landscape aesthetics should extend beyond modern conventions and concentrate on the basic landscape issues in terms of Form, Logic and Emotion, and the ways of observation, analysis and integration.

The morphology of landscape design is an aesthetic system which focuses on use of design language over a wide range of aesthetic aspects. It links art with the contexts of nature, history, social aspects and design philosophy in order to bridge the gaps between design and its cultural context, desire of human spaces and total environment. In this education system all sorts of landscape knowledge may be interwoven and should be taught from an interdisciplinary point of view. However, this study is still an underdeveloped research area. What we need is to re-examine our teaching system, reform our understanding of art and its implication in landscape aesthetics, further establish a morphological system for teaching design language.

We also know that it is ridiculous to propose a universal theory of design method in any kind of design area, since places and people are so different from each other. However, the outline of LANDSCAPE MORPHOLOGY proposed here is not as a formulated design guide-line,



but as an approach to a practical aesthetic analysis of design methodology which provides possibilities for designers or learners to develop their own design thinking aesthetically with a concern for the relevant context. We have lessons in what not to do from the past and in the present, in the 'isms' of design such as the Modern Architectural Movement, and the fact that some built environment developed in 1960s -70s following the design approach of modern idealism have been rejected by the public in many places of the world. Unfortunately, similar mistakes are being repeated in the Third World, particularly in countries like China who are facing huge problems of housing and economic development. The costs of environmental damage caused by these developments may be too high since once made, could, to some extent, be irreversible.

It is high time for us to promote the environmental healing process and reform our design education. Institutions in landscape design should not become "factories" for "producing" standardized designers enslaved by industrial civilization of endless mass production, but individuals who fully understand people and their place, and have strong sense of beauty who are committed themselves to the task of healing and beautifying our living environment.



## **EPILOGUE**

**In the near three years of study I have studied the history and theory of landscape painting and design and tried to investigate landscape aesthetic theory. The result of the research mainly covers five basic aspects:**

- I. Ideas of landscape art;**
- II. Tao in landscape;**
- III. Empirical landscape approach;**
- IV. A comparison of different landscape ideas;**
- V. Landscape morphology: A study of design language.**

**These incorporate an integrated series of landscape philosophy and design methodology, which is systematic and practical in the sense of interlinking landscape aesthetics to art, design and education; however, the imperfection of the work is obvious. This makes me both excited and anxious, since through this research I can clearly see the direction of any further research and, on the other hand, the experience of undertaking this research lets one also recognizes the difficulties in dealing with this huge theoretical system.**

**Taking the study of Landscape Morphology for example, the dictionary meaning of the word morphology is: a study of the form of animals and plants, form of words. Here in the context of landscape it is a study of 'Form of Alive' — the state of dynamic balance in a Placescape — a specific spatial relationship in a certain place or context and time in which things change, people live. The study involves the issues of environmental thoughts and humanity such as environmental changes and**



control, cultural involvement, continuation and evolution, as well as betterment of technique. This is not a pure platonic study but a synthesis of thoughts (philosophy, ecology, psychology) and culture, a study of form of living and changing for adjusting our landscape aesthetic thinking and conducting relevant practice and education.

Thus the attributes of the Morphology are:

- 1 Way of thinking is from top to bottom (from philosophy to practice) with a 'Sense of Coherence' — an ecological concept.
- 2 Seeing in between, appreciating things as a whole, and following the law of 'Naturally So' rather than seeking some patterns ready made for copying.
- 3 Achieving an environmental solution without expecting perfection but for the dynamic balance of different relationships in different dimensions, and so does in relevant education.

The topics about the future study of landscape Morphology will be:

- I **The Psycho-Aesthetic Issues**
  - 1 The Images Distort
  - 2 Eccentricity In Landscape Expression
  - 3 Individual Actions In Healing Process
  - 4 The Issues About Psycho-Aesthetics
  - 5 Placescape
  
- II **An Eco-Aesthetic Discussion**
  - 1 Topics of Ecology: 'Sense of Coherence'  
A Review of Environmental thoughts
  - 2 Ecology in art  
Landscape painted  
Place for living in



**3 Principles of Eco-Aesthetics**

**III FORM, LOGIC & EMOTION**

- 1 Form**
- 2 Form of Logic**
- 3 Form of Emotion**
- 4 Deconstruction and reconstruction**
- 5 Morphology in use**  
**Environmental protection and Development**  
**Relevant education**

**I hope that this could invite wider attention and concern from theorists, designers and educators in relative academic areas, and the kind of research could be continued in one way or another.**

**Jiahua Wu**

**Sheffield, England.**

**October 1992**



## APPENDIX

### SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE EDUCATION OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN WITH REFERENCE TO BRITISH LANDSCAPE EDUCATION

In order to prepare qualified landscape designers to meet the needs of preserving, improving and designing living environments particularly landscape, the most valuable part of our land, landscape education has developed as an independent branch of Environmental Design in many developed countries. [1]

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<sup>1</sup> According the Landscape Institute Year-book and Directory 1988, in Britain there are five graduate and six undergraduate entry courses of training in Landscape Architecture which afforded exemption from Parts 1, 2 and 3 of the institute's examination.

#### UNDERGRADUATE ENTRY COURSES

##### Three years full time:

\*Edinburgh College of Art, Heriot-Watt University, Department of Landscape Architecture (BA. HONS, LANDSCAPE);

\*Leeds Polytechnic, Department of Architecture and Landscape (BA. HONS. CNAA. DIP. LA.);

\*Manchester Polytechnic, Faculty of Art and Design, Department of Architecture and Landscape. (BA. HONS. LA);

\*University of Sheffield, Department of Landscape Architecture, (BS. HONS. LD);

\*Thames Polytechnic, School of Architecture and Landscape, (BA. HONS. LA.).

##### Four years full time:

\*Gloucestershire College of Art and Technology, Department of Landscape Architecture, (BA. HONS. CNAA, DIP. LA.);

#### GRADUATE ENTRY COURSES:

##### Two years full time:

\*University of Edinburgh, Department of Architecture, (Mphil. LA);



“The earliest professional body to be established for landscape architects was the American Society of Landscape Architects, in 1899. Before this date the profession’s activity had expanded from garden design to public park. It then moved to a wider involvement with park systems and urban planning, largely under the influence of Frederick Law Olmsted. The first course of education in landscape architecture was established at Harvard University in 1900, and the first U. K. course, at Reading University in 1932. Several postgraduate course were started in Britain during the 1950s and early 1970s.” [2] The British Landscape Institute, founded in 1929 as the Institution of Landscape Architects, is the body which serves the three divisions of professional landscape work: landscape design, science and management. [3] In relation to this professional body, the teaching of landscape design and relevant subjects has developed in different Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges. As a relatively matured system of landscape education, the teaching outline, philosophy or aim of the course and the course structure are clearly written or stated by those institutions.

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\*University of Manchester, Department of Town and Country Planning (BLD/MLD);

\*University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Department of Town and country planning. (Mphil. LD);

\*University of Sheffield, Department of Landscape Architecture, (MA./ Mphil / Ph.D.).

**Three year, part time:**

\*City Birmingham Polytechnic, School of Planning and Landscape (DIP. LA.).

2 The Course Outline of BA (HONOURS) DEGREE IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, Faculty of the Built Environment, School of Architecture and Landscape Design, Thames Polytechnic, p.2.

3 See the publication of The Landscape Institute, 1990, p.2.



## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Landscape Architecture has been defined at Thames Poly as “the art and science of the design and the integration of the natural and man made elements of the earth, water, vegetation and built elements. The landscape architect is responsible for making place, for a variety of use and habitation” and “The landscape profession has a major role to play in producing a ‘green environment’.” [4].

The opinion of Manchester Poly is: landscape design as “the activities of controlling and modeling external environmental changing in town and country ... its practice seek the best possible balance between benefit to society and the welfare of the whole natural order.”

At Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, “The central concern of landscape architecture is the interaction between man and nature, viewed from the perhaps uniquely combined perspective of both art and science.” [5]

The general philosophy at Sheffield is: “The academic study of Landscape Architecture has evolved to meet the needs of the landscape profession. It is a multi-disciplinary activity which requires those involved to have as understanding of scientific and technological as well as social and cultural factors. Landscape architecture is essentially a practical subject, in that the theories developed as the basis for design and planning decisions derive from studies of the inter-relationship between man and the land in a particular location at a particular time. As an

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4 The oxford Companion to Garden (1986), p.322, The Course Outline of BA (HONOURS) DEGREE IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, Landscape Design, Thames Polytechnic, p.2.

5 Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, School of Landscape Architecture: COURSE HANDBOOK 1989-1990, P.7.



applied subject it allows for constant testing of ideas and theories and it is this which provides the basis for research work in the subject area.” [6]

Commonly, the landscape architect is responsible for making a place for a variety of use and habitation. However, the ‘central concern’ of landscape architecture of some institutions is the interaction between man and nature and the combined perspective of both art and science. (Gloucestershire); whereas at Sheffield, the “understanding of scientific and technological as well as social and cultural factors” is emphasised as a priority. There is difference: the former give more weight to the interdisciplinary knowledge base of art and science; the latter emphasizes the general scientific, technologic and social basis.

The coexistence of different landscape educational directions are complementary and there is no doubt that it will meet the different needs from society in the practical process of landscape problem solving. Meanwhile the diversity of the courses may provide opportunities for the learners to choose their own learning target according their personal interests.

### THE AIMS OF THE COURSE

The aims of the teaching described in the course outline at Thames Poly is that, “The central aim of the course is to provide an academic and design-based education for student who intends to practice as a landscape architect. Graduates should have the ability: to formulate policies for landscape change, to design with flair and imagination, and to have a good understanding of landscape science and management.

At Gloucester: “ ... the overall aim of providing an honours level undergraduate education in the field of landscape architecture combining

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<sup>6</sup> The University of Sheffield, Dept. of Landscape Architecture 1989-1990: GENERAL INFORMATION, P.3.



elements both academic and study and vocational training. This overall aim is expressed through four significant characteristics of the course:

1. The intellectual freedom and development of the student is seen as paramount.
2. The explicit emphasis on the activity of landscape architecture is a determined response to the relatively recent emergence of profession and evidence of its changing role.
3. Project work is seen as the most important part of the course...
4. The course recognises the prime importance of the development of the ability to synthesize information and apply independent critical judgment.

At Manchester Poly, the aim of the course is "to develop a student's individual aptitude in a investigative frame of mind by encouraging and guiding personal interests and ways of thinking."

Although, the design skills and multi-disciplinary knowledge base is commonly recognized by these institutions, there seems no obvious difference between them. However, at Sheffield the social and cultural aspects are again strongly perceived to be connected with the aim, again in the General Information: "The aim of landscape architecture is defined as helping people construct habitats to meet their social and cultural needs, and to do so in way which minimize the adverse impacts on the natural and physical environment. Therefore at Sheffield, landscape architecture is understood to be essentially about constructing a new environment or adapting existing ones."

Obviously these statements of aims are very much methodologically orientated, with practical design performance the key at Gloucester, Manchester as well as Thames; whereas at Sheffield the link between social and context and environmental science is described as a priority.



## **THE COURSE STRUCTURE (UNDERGRADUATE )**

Following the general landscape idea, allowing the existence of the different teaching orientations, the course structure at different institution is also of individuality.

At undergraduate level, the course offered by the Landscape Department at the University of Sheffield call Landscape Design (with Plant Science) which leads to the degree of B.Sc. According to the course outline, "it provides a vocational training in landscape design for science based students wishing to enter the landscape profession, whilst ensuring they have a thorough training in relevant scientific technique."

This undergraduate course is structured to emphasize the teaching of pure science. The first year is described as a introductory year, in which about 570 hours are involved in the teaching of Environmental Biology, Environmental Geology, and Physical Geology, i.e. 84% teaching is engaged in pure scientific study, and only 16% of teaching time is used to do project work. In the second and third year the teaching moves onto landscape design. In the second year, the time of teaching pure science still occupy about 30% of total teaching hours under the subject title Plant Science which includes: Evolution of Ecology System, Environmental Microbiology, Evolutionary Mechanism in Vascular Plants, Environmental Physiology and Conservation and Management of Ecosystems. In the third year, the study of plant science relates to Physiological Geology, Biology of Pollution, and Crop Production and Protection will be taught by lectures almost 32% in the teaching practice. Obviously, at Sheffield, more than 48% of teaching hours are arranged for founding a scientific basis for the undergraduate students.

In contrast, the course (BA. Honours Degree) in Landscape Architecture in the School of Gloucestershire College of Art and



Technology is design based. The course is consists of three years full time study. After completion, students will be able to do a further fourth year of study leading to the Diploma in Landscape Design which provides eligibility for professional membership of Landscape Institution. The course is designed as two parts: Project Work and Subject Work. As the course handbook describes, the project work which spans all three years is "a key part of the education process". The sequence of Project Work is regarded "as the mainstream of the course as these projects provide a means through which students develop the skills and synthesis of knowledge and understanding gained from all the other areas of the course." The Subject Work consists of a framework of taught courses that provide the information as a basis knowledge of landscape design which are: Theory, Principles and Process; Art and Landscape; Contextual study of Landscape science; Plants and their use; Landscape Construction. All the above subjects are organized to relate to the suitable project works. According the timetable of the course, the landscape science at Gloucestershire occupies 200 student hours, i. e. about 14% of subject hours, 8% of the total student hours (48% at Sheffield), whereas that of Project Work at Gloucester is designed to be 2,526 student hours.

Obviously, at the undergraduate level, the course at Gloucestershire is typically design orientated, where as at Sheffield is scientifically based.

#### THE COURSE AT GRADUATE LEVEL

Unlike the course at undergraduate level, there is no essential difference in the courses at graduate level, since as a final stage of the professional education the target of the teaching is to meet the needs of coping with real landscape design and management. The student,



whatever kind of background they come from, are expected to have a clear outlook of the future task.

Commonly, the course at the Diploma of Landscape Architecture level is generally designed to give a wide-ranging introduction to environmental assessment and planning as well as design theory as a basis of landscape design and the planning and management of landscape.

The mandatory studies are Landscape Design, Landscape Management, Landscape Planning and Office Procedures.

Landscape Design includes the Introduction of Landscape, Landscape History, Landscape theory and Practice, Social aspects of design, Environmental Science, Design with Plants, Materials and Construction. The way of teaching and learning is mainly through design projects.

Landscape Management covers the studies of Horticulture Techniques, Nature Conservation Techniques, Landscape Ecology, Woodland and Forests. Practice and field visits are an important means in the teaching process.

Landscape Planning focuses mainly on study the Site Planning, Landscape Planning, Rural Planning, Recreation Planning, Environmental Law. The theory will be embodied by planning projects.

Office Procedures, mainly in the use of micro computer, Report Writing, Surveying Techniques, Contract Law, Professional Practice.<sup>[7]</sup>

Since the location and the teaching tradition, particularly the academic interests of the course leaders of institutions differ from each other, the course designs is vary from school to school. For instance, apart from the general landscape subjects such as landscape design, planning and management, the teaching of social aspects, housing environment planning and the use of microcomputers is increasing at Sheffield; urban

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Also at Sheffield for example, there are optional study in Dip. LA course such as Botany, Geomorphology, Hydrology, and the new course in Environmental Planning for Developing Countries.



environment, at Thames; landscape management, at Manchester and so on.

## THE TEACHING METHODS

The teaching methods are principally similar which mainly are tutorials in studio work and workshop; lectures and seminars; visits and field study. Students are expected to be independent learner, thus, the self-trained personal skills and the capacity to use library or other facilities is extremely important for the learners.

The British landscape education as a relatively matured education system covers a wide-range of teaching aspects for landscape professions such as designers, managers and scientists or even government officers. Some of those institutions have its international reputation and influence in the area. However, in terms of landscape aesthetics and its education there are still some issues worthy further discussion.

What interests us is the differences of the understanding and expression of the concept of landscape aesthetics. For instance, only in the course outline at Gloucester the concept of landscape aesthetics is directly mentioned as: "Aesthetics are primarily concerned with the appearance of nature and visual elements of landscape design." [8] In other course information, these aspects are only suggested indirectly, some ideas about landscape aesthetics are revealed in the instructions of the design theory, the history, social or cultural studies, settlement or urban studies, as well as the ecological studies which may also suggest a different understanding from that stated at Gloucester.

However, a general impression is that the concept of landscape aesthetics seems not clearly defined in those institutions, a lack of

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<sup>8</sup> Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, School of Landscape Architecture: COURSE HANDBOOK 1989-1990, P.7.



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