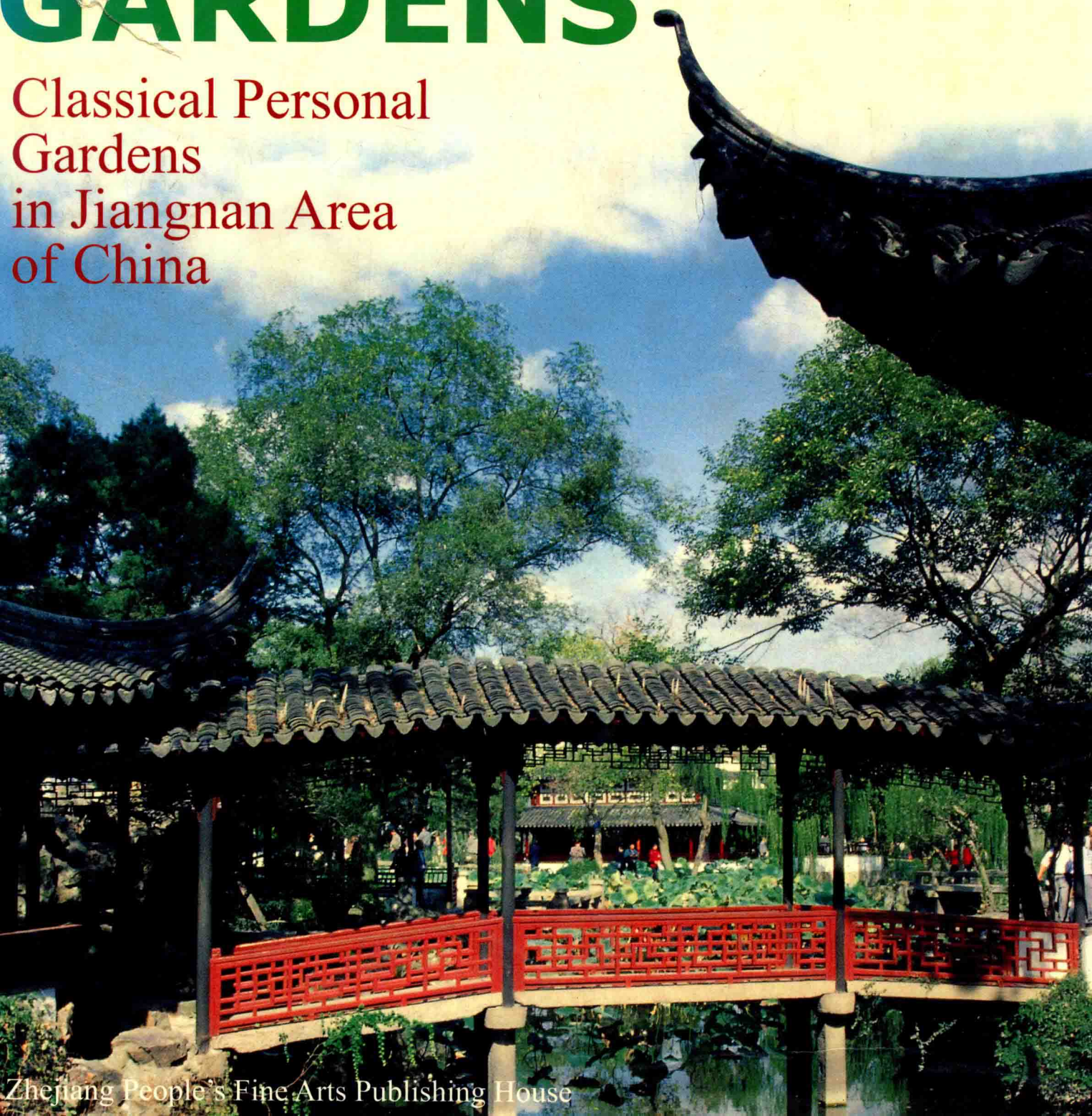


CHINESE CLASSICAL GARDENS

Classical Personal
Gardens
in Jiangnan Area
of China



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A photograph of a traditional Chinese building with a sign for the Suzhou Garden Museum. The sign is a dark rectangular plaque with gold Chinese characters. Above the sign is a decorative roofline with green foliage. Below the sign is a light-colored wall.

蘇州園林博物館

Gardens —

Paragon Creation of Harmony
between Man and Nature

Foreword

Chinese classical gardens consist of four elements: mountains, waters, constructions and plants, gathering together all kinds of arts on literature, philosophy, aesthetics, paintings, drama, and calligraphy, engraving, architecture and gardening to form a kind of delicate space of art with artistic conceptions, full of sentiments and flavours of poems and paintings.

Chinese classical gardens are represented properly by personal gardens in Jiangnan area. They originated as early as in Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.) from "Gu-su Tai" Terrace (a pleasure terrace in Suzhou, Suzhou has another name called Gu-su) and the "Guan-wa Gong" Palace (a palace built for Xi-shi the No. 1 beauty of Jiangnan) by the emperor Fu-chai of the Wu State. After more than two thousand years of development, they left over in the Jiangnan area, specially the area around Suzhou, plenty of vestiges of classical gardens, which are certain carriers and symbols of Chinese classical culture and are, at the same time, the precious component of the world cultural heritage (in 1997-2001, there were successively nine classical gardens of Suzhou listed in the Directory of the World Cultural Heritage). If you are interested in having a further understanding of the details of Chinese Jiangnan classical gardens, I suggest, you may as well make a visit to the Suzhou Gardens Museum. It is the only museum with a special topic about gardens in China which is located between the Zhuo-zheng Yuan Gardens and the Mansion of Zhong-wang, one of the leaders of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, and was the former residential part of Zhuo-zheng Yuan gardens on the northeast of the ancient Suzhou city.

This book will take the introduction to the conception and historical background of the art of Chinese classical gardens as the point of departure, through the analysis of their respective elements to enable the readers to have the basic understanding of the art of Chinese classical gardens. Besides, in the latter half of this book, the appearances and artistic features of the existing famous Jiangnan classical gardens will be displayed and introduced, and the relationship between the Chinese classical gardens and contemporary human life will be approached.

May this book increase your understanding and love of Chinese classical culture.



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in Jiangnan Area of China

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Catalog

1. Origin of Gardens

- 10 Imitating the Nature
- 10 All the Best Gathering in Jiangnan
- 11 Distant Source, Long Stream
- 12 Utter Difference between Chinese and Western Interests
- 12 Remote Influences
- 16 Suzhou Paragon

2. Refinement of Gardens

- 20 Natural Beauty
- 42 Architectural Beauty
- 78 Humanity Beauty

3. Treasure and Delight in Famous Gardens

- 101 Zhou-zheng Yuan
- 108 Liu Yuan
- 114 Wang-shi Yuan
- 120 Huan-xiu Shan-zhuang
- 122 Cang-lang Ting
- 124 Shi-zi Lin
- 128 Ou Yuan
- 130 Yi Pu
- 134 Yi Yuan
- 136 Tui-si Yuan
- 138 Yu Yuan
- 142 Ji-chang Yuan
- 146 Zhan Yuan
- 148 Ge Yuan
- 152 Ji-xiao Shan-zhuang and Pian-shi Shan-fang
- 154 Shen Yuan
- 156 Zeng Yuan
- 158 Guo Zhuang
- 160 Qing-teng Shu-wu
- 162 Tian-yi Ge
- 164 Xi-lin Yin-she

4. Gardens — The Ideal Homeland of Mankind

- 168 Jiangnan Gardens — Ideal Living Spaces
- 169 The Spatial Principle of “A World in the Pot”
- 171 Transcending Concrete Form To Display Spirit-seeking
- 172 Admitted to Enter the World Cultural Heritage List
- 174 Mankind and Nature — An Eternal Topic



1 . Origin of Gardens



The simplest necessity in the overall arrangement of a garden (“園” means “garden” in English with “yuan” as Chinese Phonetic Alphabet while [ju:'a:n] the International One) no matter how varied the change would be, can be included only within the Chinese character “園” after pictographically diagramming, the outside “口” means its enclosure, and the “土” in the rear looks like the plane figure of a house which can be regarded as the building of a pavilion or a water-pavilion; the “口” in the middle is a pool and “木” in the front simulates the rock and the tree.

From *The Book on Jiangnan Gardens* by Tong Xi

Tong Xi, the modern Chinese famous specialist in architecture and the theorist of the art of Chinese gardens, was born in Shenyang, Liaoning Province on 2, Oct. 1900. 1925-1928, he went to Philadelphia, U.S.A. and studied in the Department of Architecture in Pennsylvania University and obtained the master's degree, died in Nanjing in 1983. His work *The Book on Jiangnan Gardens* was written in 1973, which is the earliest theoretical monograph on Chinese garden-building that is expounded in scientific way in modern China.



1 Tai-hu Lake basin is the cradle of Wu-yue culture

Imitating the Nature

Chinese nation discovered the beauty of nature long ago because of its being in harmony and blending mutually with the nature, and acquired the unique ability to appreciate its beauty. In China, Taoists maintain the proposition: “To combine mankind with nature”. They put forth the view of “Imitating the nature is valued for being true”, while the Confucians seek for the truth of natural principle: “To combine nature with mankind”, paying attention to searching for the genuine way of human life to coexist harmonically with nature. The theory “To combine nature with mankind”, however, has run through the whole cultural and ideological history of ancient China.

Chinese gardens originated from the imperial palaces and gardens which resulted from the theory of “Imitating the nature”. They came into being in the period of Northern and Southern Dynasties as scholars’ gardens. Scholars always put into the gardens their sentimental thought and charming conception to make them come to be the carriers of the arts of poems and paintings. With the development of people’s aesthetic consciousness, the arts of gardens have advanced continuously to a higher grade and expanded themselves step by step to be a form of freehand gardens with hills and waters inside them. (note: “freehand” means freely conceived or conceived with free imagination.)

As the “universal model of arts”, Chinese classical gardens strive for complying themselves with the nature and make efforts to express the beauty of natural construction, avoiding as far as possible the regularity of pure formation, and imitating the nature, modelling themselves on hills and waters to make them one of the greatest characteristics of Chinese gardening arts.

All the Best Gathering in Jiangnan

Chinese gardens are characterized by distinctive local cultural styles: In the Northern, imperial gardens are grand and magnificent, and in Jiangnan, the personal gardens are quaint and exquisite, while in the south of the Five Ridges, they are gorgeous and compactly arranged, full of earthly interests.

As an artistic system, all the Chinese gardens are “artificially heavenlike” natural scenic gardens which gather the True, the Good and the Beautiful within them, especially the personal gardens in Jiangnan, they have essentially accomplished the formation of the beauty of neutralization of Chinese traditional gardens to reflect the traditional spirit of Chinese culture and arts, and deserved the name of the paragon of Chinese gardens.

Jiangnan gardens are centered in the network of water areas of “Tai-hu” Lake reaches including the gardens in the areas along the Changjiang river in Jiangsu Province and areas in Shanghai, Zhejiang Province and parts of areas in Southern Anhui Province.

In the belt of Jiangnan, there are plenty of lakes, marshes and water courses which facilitate channelling water into the gardens, and there are a great number of rocks in all picturesque postures for decorating them as well. The four seasons there, in addition, are clearly distinctive from each other, and the climate is warm and moist, its earth is fertile, with such conditions suitable for flowers and plants to grow luxuriantly, plus its rich resources and products, making it known as “a land of plenty”, “productive land of silk”, “a state of cultural relics” and “paradise on earth”.

Jiangnan people advocate civilization and regard arts as important, which make the area a gathering place of all kinds of cultural works such as poetry, calligraphy and painting. As to craft, the workmanship is fine and exquisite, craftsmen come forth in a large numbers, and master-hands emerge in great numbers, hence the exquisite artistic style of Jiangnan gardens.

Distant Source, Long Stream

Jiangnan gardens came into being in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476B.C.) and the period of Warring States (475-221B.C.) as imperial enclosed gardens, such as the “Gu-su Tai” and “Guang-wa Gong” gardens of the king of Wu State, and the “Hui-jing Yuan” garden of the Yue State. After the Warring States, Jin Dynasty (265-420) went down south, giving new vigour to the Jiangnan’s economy and culture, the beauty of nature then became an independent aesthetic object to be considered, poems and paintings of hills and waters emerged along with the gardens built with hills and waters as the times required.

In the flourishing age of Tang Dynasty (about 713-755), the theory of artistic creation “To imitate the nature in the outside world and acquire inspiration in the inner heart” was set up and used on the creation of gardens, the conception of poem and painting began blending itself into garden arrangement.

In the long and peaceful period of Five Dynasties (about 907-960), gardens of such types were all in fashion for quite a long time in the regions of former Wu-Yue States.

Until Song Dynasty (960-1279), the aesthetic criterion of the *Literati* and officialdom circles turned to small scale and feminization. They were seeking for the poeticized surpassing charm in the secular life, then the gardens of freehand style of hills and waters became the most suitable carrier of it, and the Gardens with Themes came out in large numbers showing the maturity of Jiangnan *Literati* gardens.

Capitalism developed in the Ming-Qing Periods, a new conception of social value and the humanism trend of thought of pleasure-seeking and respects for human desires were formed. Garden-building became an elegant custom of Jiangnan richmen, and gained the fame of “The finest gardens under heaven”. With their perfection, the gardening technique came up into a theory, and the works concerning gardening theory sprang out



2 “Wan-yue Chi” (a pool of enjoying the moon) in Ling-yan Shan Mountain in Suzhou, a scene in Guan-wa Gong Palace in the Wu State in Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.)

successively, such as: *Garden Refinement*, *Miscellanies of Leisure Enjoyments*, and the *Book of Surplus Things for Leisure Enjoyments*, etc..

Utter Difference between Chinese and Western Interests

The interests between Chinese and Western gardens are utterly different. Westerners pay attention to formal logic and are good at applying the mode of thinking of inference and analysis. In building their gardens, they do it meticulously according to the geometric structure and mathematical relations, and force the nature to accept the law of symmetry. Therefore, what their gardens display is the artificial beauty of patterns, the reformation and conquest of nature by mankind which manifest a kind of orderly and rational nature.

While Chinese scenic gardens are planned with liberty and mobility, not sticking to one single pattern, they express a pure natural beauty, showing the intimacy and harmony of mankind and nature which manifest a kind of epitome and imitation of natural scenery that is complying with the law of formation.

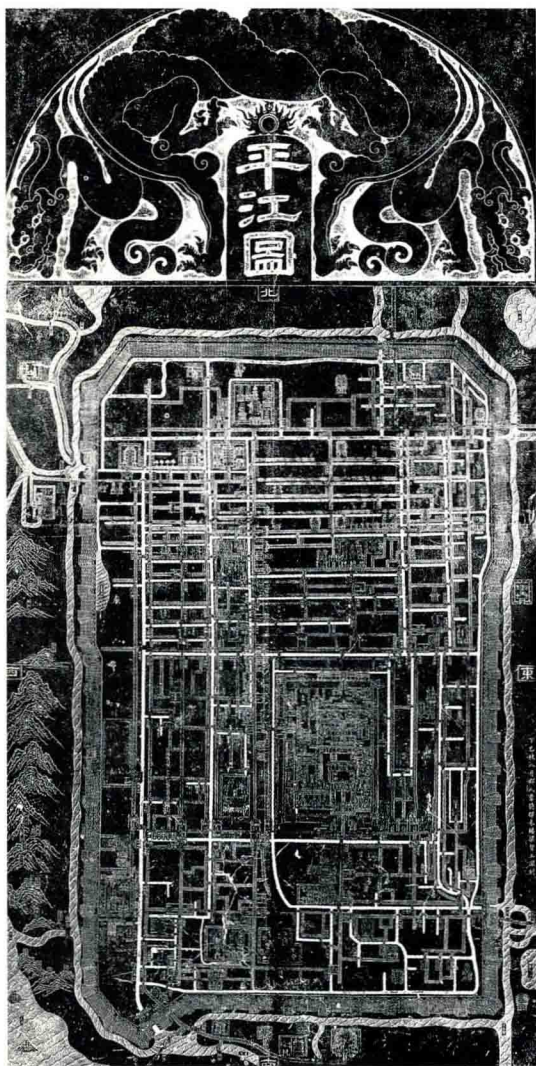
The greatest characteristic of Chinese gardens lies, too, in their not taking the concrete images of gardens that are displayed before our eyes as the terminal goal. The Chinese gardens are seeking for an idea that can manifest something more than such images and something beyond such images. This is the ideal aesthetic state for the owners to place their feelings, senses and philosophy on.

Remote Influences

As an exquisite article of Chinese culture, the charm of Jiangnan gardens has gone far beyond their regions and eras.

In the period of Sui-Tang Dynasties (581-907), the poet Bai Ju-yi had composed a poem: "Gardens in the lower reaches of Luo River should know their own selves well, Jiangnan's scenic style is stealing in", pointing out that the influences of Jiangnan style was coming into the Luo region. In Ming-Qing Periods, gardens belonging to Emperors and Noble Relatives made the creams of Jiangnan gardens reappear in the northern Chinese gardens by means of introducing the technique of Jiangnan's garden-building; reappearing the themes of Jiangnan Gardens; and imitating the famous gardens in Jiangnan. It was just as what Wang Kai-yun said in his poem *Yuan-ming Yuan*: "Somebody talked of the beauty of Jiangnan scenery, as removing the miniaturized world into your arms".

In Asia, the Jiangnan style has been a long time the artistic model of countries of Korea, Vietnam and Japan. For example, the Lan Ting garden in Shaoxing City of Jiangnan has been famous for the twisty stream in the garden where Wang Xi-zhi (the greatest calligrapher in Eastern Jin Dynasty



3 Pingjiang Map Stele (Pingjiang is another name of Suzhou) – The extant oldest map of a city in China, recording the general picture of Suzhou City in Southern Song Dynasty

4 "Rui-yun Feng" (auspicious-clouded rockery peak), famed as "the most beautiful and ingenious rockery peak in Jiangnan"





—317- 420) and his friends had held the exquisite gathering, letting cups of wine flow along the stream, as the cup came before a person, he might drink the wine up and improvise a poem during his drinking. Such had been used not only in the imperial gardens in Northern China, but also in gardens of countries of Korea and Japan outside China.

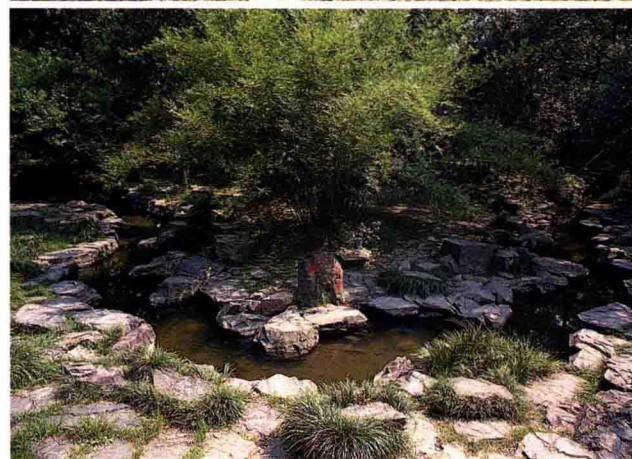
In early 7th century, a Japanese minister once built the first garden in his country which adopted the technique of Chinese garden-building, and called the bridge situated among the landscapes in the garden “Wu Qiao” —bridge of Wu style. (“Wu” was a state in ancient China, its realm covered a part of south Jiangsu and north Zhejiang Provinces. In this area, Jiangnan’s excellent landscapes have been concentrated.) The garden “Hou-le Yuan” of Japanese is a typical garden to show the coexistence of the Japanese “He” nation and the Chinese “Han” nation. It was named according to the remark of Fan Zhong-yan, a sage in Song Dynasty: “Be the first to worry about people’s sorrows, and the last to enjoy the pleasure of them”, here “Hou-le” means “the last to enjoy pleasure”. In the garden, not only the dykes of its West Lake was titled as that of the West Lake in China, but also its architectural style was imitating the Chinese West Lake as well. Another one is the Hall “Ba-gua Tang”, which was built in Chinese style, too. They are full of Chinese flavour. “Ba-gua” is a profound symbol of “Eight Diagrams” manifesting the initial root of all phenomena of natural world and human society and that of their development and change as well.

In 18th century, a blast of “Chinese gardens fever” was set off over the Europe. In Great Britain there were gardens of Anglo-Sino style or Sino-style, while in France, there were more than 20 Chinese pavilions in Paris Gardens. In Germany, a “Mu-lan Cun” village was located in Wilhelmschön. By the village, a mountain stream called Wujiang river shows its origin of Wu- Yue areas in Jiangnan of China.

Nowadays, when China is in reforms and open, the Fever of Chinese gardens throughout the world springs up again.

In 1980, the classical gardens in Ming style called “Ming Xuan”settled in the Metropolitan Museum in America (which is modelled on the houselet “Dian Chun-yi” of the Suzhou garden “Wang-shi Yuan”). From then on, replicas of Jiangnan classical gardens were in great demand abroad, and those others like “Si-tui Zhuang”, “Ji Yuan”, “Suzhou Gardens”, “Lan-su Yuan”, “Yi Yuan” and “Yun-xiu Yuan” were then settled respectively in places all over the world.

The garden-culture has played an important part in the activities of exchange between the Eastern culture and Western culture.



6 Flowing Cups with Wine along the Twisty Stream in “Lan Ting” (orchid pavilion) in Shaoxing is one of the paragon of scene-making in Chinese classical gardens