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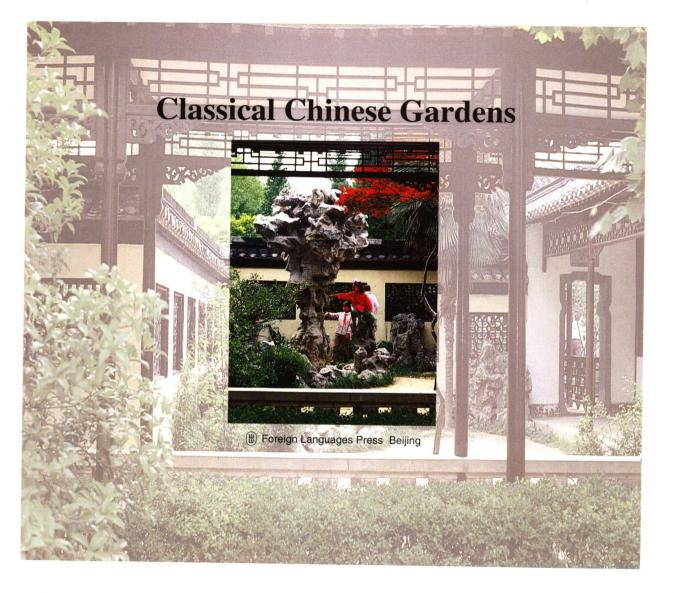
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#### **Classical Chinese Gardens**

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# Classical Chinese Gardens

### **Foreword**

In the long history of Chinese civilization, many scholars have left beautiful poems describing exquisite classical Chinese gardens, including those of the emperor's temporary residences, rich families' flower gardens, or lofty imperial palaces. Today, when we pay visits to these gardens to appreciate the elegant halls, towers, pavilions and corridors, we can still feel the luxury and poeticism of the owners of these gardens, and cannot help feeling: "Though man-made, these gardens are so natural."

With their long history and consummate art, classical Chinese gardens occupy an important position in the world history of gardens. Hence, China enjoys the reputation of being the mother of garden construction. As both a material and spiritual expression of the most direct and closest connection between man and nature, classical Chinese gardens are an artistic combination of ancient architecture and horticultural design, as well as a component of traditional Chinese culture. Now, many classical gardens have been named as key historical monuments under state protection, of which many are included on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Classical Chinese gardens, which are located all over the country, fall into three main types—imperial, private, and temple gardens. Imperial gardens generally refer to those in which the emperors administered state affairs, enjoyed entertainment, and lived, with large-scale architecture, luxurious decoration and bright colors, like an imperial palace. Such examples include the Summer Palace, Yuanmingyuan (the Old Summer Palace), and the Mountain Resort in Chengde. Usually, imperial gardens have natural hills and water; their general layout is based on natural scenery and private gardens. Many imperial gardens contain the exquisite and enchanting characteristics of the gardens south of the Yangtze River. Private gardens are closely related to civilian residential houses; they were privately owned by

bureaucrats, landlords, rich merchants, and the scholargentry. They are the further extension and expansion of living spaces. Small in size, a private garden is a place for the owners to rest, entertain friends, hold banquets, or read. Most private gardens are in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. There is an old saying: "Hangzhou is famous for its lakes and hills; Yangzhou for its gardens and pavilions; Suzhou for its shops." Temple gardens, in various sizes, are mostly located in beautiful environments with natural hills and water. They are attached to Buddhist and Taoist temples, altars, or shrines. In the shape of a courtyard, the temple garden often contains lush green trees with small bridges and running water—an ideal place for scholars to cultivate their minds. Here we will give a brief introduction to some imperial, private, and temple gardens.

With a history of over 3,000 years of garden construction, China has perfected the art of garden construction. Tracing back the footsteps of our ancestors, we find that natural landscapes and large-scale construction were a virtually universal manifestation of the high position of emperors, princes, generals, ministers, and high officials. Inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th - 11th century B.C.) describe ancient Chinese pleasure grounds near mountains, rivers, woods and other places abundant in birds and animals. In the Qin (221 - 206 B.C.) and Han (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.) dynasties, the places specially designed for emperors' entertainment were called 苑 (meaning garden). Emperor Qin Shihuang (r. 221 - 210 B.C.) had Shanglin Garden constructed to the south of the Weishui River, including the Efang Palace. Historical records reveal: "The Efang Palace was about 400 m from east to west and nearly 150 m from south to north, and it could hold 10,000 people." Emperor Wudi (r. 140 - 87 B.C.) of the Han Dynasty had Shanglin Garden expanded and constructed Taiye Pool as well as Penglai, Fangzhang and Yingzhou hills. Many others popularly adopted the layout of "one pool and three hills" later. After the Han Dynasty, Chinese society was in turbulence, and many officials and scholars felt disheartened.

They withdrew from society and lived in solitude, writing and painting landscapes to vent their feelings. All of a sudden, many landscape gardens seeking harmony between man and nature sprang up like mushrooms. During the reign of

Emperor Mingdi (r. 58 - 75 A.D.) of the Eastern Han Dynasty, China's first Buddhist temple was established in Luoyang,

which gave rise to the birth of temple gardens and added the customs of Buddhist temple construction to other types of ancient gardens, especially imperial gardens. During the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern dynasties (220-581).

Buddhism and Taoism flourished throughout China. As an

integral part of religious architecture, many temple gardens were constructed, reflecting the profound aesthetic and ideological trends of the era. Increasing numbers of people sought gardens pleasing to both the eye and mind. In the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907), landscape gardens developed on all fronts because of the country's advanced concern, strong state

because of the country's advanced economy, strong state power, and flourishing culture. Many large-scale imperial gardens inside and outside the capital of Chang'an were constructed, such as Forbidden Garden, Eastern and Western Internal Gardens, Southern Gardens, Taiye Pool, and Penglai Hill. In the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279) the construction of

private gardens came into vogue. From the capital to the countryside, from the emperors to officials and ordinary people, all vied with each other in building private gardens. As scholars occupied all the state administrative positions during the Song Dynasty, private gardens constructed by

scholars became very common.

After the Liao Dynasty (947 - 1125), the emperors of the Jin (1115 - 1234), Yuan (1271 - 1368), Ming (1368 - 1644)

and especially Qing (1644 - 1911) dynasties constructed largescale imperial gardens in Beijing. According to historical records, almost all the emperors of various dynasties preferred handling state affairs in imperial gardens, especially the emperors of the Qing Dynasty. Thanks to development over

2,000 years and so, Chinese classical garden construction art matured in terms of outlay, construction techniques, breeding of birds and animals, and cultivation of flowers and trees. By fully using the natural landscape and preexisting favorable conditions, and absorbing the excellent traditions

of the gardens of the Tang and Song dynasties, garden construction art reached a historical height. In addition, the economy of the Ming and Qing dynasties developed and expanded, leading to a bountiful national treasury. All this provided material and technical conditions for the construction of gardens. The Qing Dynasty took the lead in the number

and variety of gardens of all the dynasties in the Chinese

history. As a result a great number of large-scale imperial gardens were built, such as Yuanmingyuan, Quiet and Pleasant Garden (Fragrant Hill), the Summer Palace, and Beihai Park. In the imperial garden the emperor could both attend to state affairs and relax. Hence the imperial garden was more lively than the solemn and magnificent imperial palace. The imperial gardens and the gardens of the princes'

residences display the highest achievements of the garden

construction art. During the reign of Emperor Kangxi (r. 1662-

1722), the construction of large-scale imperial gardens was concentrated in the northwestern suburbs of Beijing as well as Chengde in Hebei Province. In the 42nd year of the Kangxi reign period (1703), the construction of the Mountain Resort started at Chengde. The site was providently endowed with a picture-perfect landscape and a cool and pleasant climate.

a picture-perfect landscape and a cool and pleasant climate.
In the mountain resort, the emperor and all the members of
the imperial family could enjoy themselves by practicing

martial arts and hunting. From 1703 to 1790, 72 scenic attractions in the Mountain Resort were completed, covering an area of about 533 hectares, divided into three scenic categories—lakes, plains and mountains. The mountains are not tall, the lakes are not large, and the islands are crisscrossed, full of changes. The complexes of buildings are scattered here and there, hidden among mountain forests. In its heyday the Mountain Resort boasted 72 scenic spots, 36 of which were constructed during the Kangxi reign, and the remaining 36 in the Qianlong reign. Each scenic spot changes with the season, and each is named after a mountain, river, forest, or spring. The Mountain Resort of Chengde gathers all the characteristics of the architectural outlay of north China, integrates the construction art styles of various regions in China, and ingeniously com-

bines the simple and unsophisticated characteristics of

architecture of north China with the graceful and exquisite

decoration techniques of south China. The Eight Outlying Temples refers to a group of monastic complexes situated outside the Mountain Resort of Chengde. Together with the imperial resort, the complex is a distillation of the aesthetic trends of the Qing Dynasty.

The imperial garden complexes of northwestern Beijing are crossed by sparkling streams, studded with glistening springs, and set against the backdrop of a jumble of mountains. During the height of the Qing Dynasty, many large-scale famous imperial gardens were constructed there. None of the Western Hills imperial gardens are better known than the "Three Hills and Five Gardens," which refer to Xiangshan (Fragrant Hill), Yuquan (Jade Spring) and Wanshou (Longevity) Hills, and Jingyiyuan (Garden of Quiet Pleasure) in Xiangshan Park, Jingmingyuan (Garden of Quiet

Brightness) on Yuguan Hill, Qingviyuan (Garden of Rippling

Waves) on Wanshou Hill, Changchunyuan (Garden of Pleas-

ness or the Old Summer Palace), thus forming the largest imperial garden area. The oldest imperial garden was Changchunyuan, which was constructed by Emperor Kangxi. To the northwest was a private garden built in the Ming Dynasty; Emperor Yongzheng renovated that garden and named it Yuanmingyuan. Yongzheng liked to enjoy himself there and handle state matters away from the turmoil of the world. Yuanmingyuan was the most magnificent imperial garden in Chinese history. Several emperors of the Qing Dynasty, including Yongzheng, Qianlong, Jiaqing, and Daoguang, spent tremendous national strength and financial resources for its expansion and renovation. With an area of about 347 hectares, of which half was taken up by water, Yuanmingyuan had a total constructed area of 150,000 square meters. Besides garden architecture, Yuanmingyuan contained more than 150 other attractions, such as altars. temples, theaters, and libraries. A museum of garden construction and horticulture, Yuanmingyuan contained imitations of many famous scenic spots throughout the country. Thanks to its large scale, varied scenery, and consummate achievements, Yuanmingyuan enjoyed the prestige of being the "Garden Surpassing All Gardens." The world-famous garden now lies in ruins. Only a few stone ruins remain, along with some desolate scenery. We

ant Spring), and Yuanmingyuan (Garden of Perfect Bright-

Palace, you may imagine you are following the footsteps of the emperors of ancient China. The predecessor of the current Summer Palace was Qingyiyuan, constructed in the 15th year of the Qianlong reign period (1750) after the completion of the scenic spots of Yuanmingyuan to celebrate his mother's birthday and with the pretext of controlling the river. The construction of Qingyiyuan lasted more than 10

may, however, take a tour of a well-preserved imperial

garden-the Summer Palace. While walking in the Summer

Qingyiyuan enjoyed a high reputation among all imperial gardens. The Summer Palace can be divided into two major parts-the front hill and lake, and the rear hill and lake, with a

years. Due to the natural beauty of its lakes and hills,

total area of nearly 300 hectares, of which three fourths is taken by water. The Summer Palace includes over 3,000 ancient architectural structures, which cover an area of 70,000

square meters. On the basis of the natural hills and lakes. this imperial garden includes numerous classical structures, such as corridors, bridges, pavilions, water-side pavilions. halls, temples, and terraces, many of which are replicas of

scenic spots and historical sites in southeast China. An old

saying goes: "Which is the pleasantest place in the Yanshan Mountains? It is the park by the Kunming Lake (i.e., the Summer Palace)." In the 10th year of the Xianfeng reign period (1860),

Qingyiyuan, Yuanmingyuan, and the other imperial gardens

were sacked during the invasion of Anglo-French allied forces. The buildings were burned to the ground and the treasures and cultural relics in them were looted. In the 12th year of the Guangxu reign (1886), Empress Dowager Cixi diverted a large amount of silver from the navy's allocation to rebuild the garden on the ruins of Qingyiyuan, renaming it Yiheyuan (known as the Summer Palace), meaning "Garden of Health and Peace," in 1888, which presents the mag-

nificence and elegance of the former Qingyiyuan. Now, the

Summer Palace is the best-preserved imperial garden in

China. Because of limited financial resources, Yuanmingyuan

was not restored. Now people can only imagine the formerly

majestic Yuanmingyuan from the ruined lakes, stones, and foundations in the park. If imperial gardens are majestic and imposing, with large halls and temples, private gardens are small and elegant, with pavilions and bridges scattered here and there. When

hearing rain falling onto palm leaves, watching the sunshine on moving bamboo grooves, and enjoying exquisite and beautifully shaped rocks from Lake Tai, the observer feels carefree and joyous. The beauty of a natural landscape is condensed and reproduced in a small space. Private gardens

reached their zenith during the Ming and Qing dynasties, and were spread all over the country. Many private gardens of high artistic value are located in the cities to the south of the Yangtze River, where the economy was prosperous and a large number of talented people were concentrated. Some excellent examples are Mountain Villa with Embracing

Beauty, Lion Grove, the Humble Administrator's Garden, and

the Lingering Garden in Suzhou and Geyuan and Heyuan gardens in Yangzhou, representing the historical peak of the development of the garden in feudal society. The Humble Administrator's Garden includes halls, terraces, towers. pavilions, balustrades and corridors. One views new scenery with each step forward. Shihu Garden features condensed scenery and winding paths that lead to quiet and secluded spots, away from the turmoil of the world. The Surging Waves Pavilion is a fine example showing how the natural landscape both inside and outside can be integrated. In the Lingering Garden, hills, water surfaces, trees and flowers

tidiously imitated. Private gardens, small in size, are elegant and tasteful, perform multiple functions and can be combined with the natural scenery. During the Qing Dynasty, Yangzhou became a communi-

combine to form a garden of multiple depths. Size and height,

straight lines and curves, shade and light-all these are

alternated to bring about a spatial system of varying hues

and contrasts. Therefore, it is an important contribution of

private gardens to garden construction techniques and

ideology. With the limited space of a garden, nature is fas-

cations hub and a collection and distribution center of salt.

lake is flanked by flowers and willow trees, and the road to the hill is lined by towers and terraces." Today, Yangzhou still has more than 30 private gardens, including Geyuan Garden, Craggy Stone Mountain Lodge, Jixiao Villa, Yuyuan Garden, Xiaopangu, and Weiyou Garden. A popular saying goes: "Above, they have Paradise. Here, we have Suzhou and Hangzhou." Suzhou and Hangzhou are lands of abundance and prosperity. Besides their natural scenery, these two cities are known for their breathtaking gardens. On the basis of highly mature rural construction in south Jiangsu Province, private gardens were constructed, in which architecture and natural scenery had a symbiotic relationship, mutually enhancing each other's radiance and beauty and forming a perfect whole. In the limited space of a private garden, visitors may enjoy natural scenery that is more concentrated and representative than nature itself. During the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom rebellion, the gardens

of Suzhou were badly damaged. It was not until late in

Its advanced economy and culture provided the material and

intellectual encouragement for garden construction. During

the reign of Emperor Qianlong, the private gardens of Yangzhou enjoyed a high reputation—"Yangzhou has the best

gardens in the world"-because of their large number and

beauty. Yangzhou was also one of the major foreign trade

cities at that time. Through extensive commercial exchanges

between Chinese and foreign merchants. Western garden

construction techniques were introduced to the private gardens in Yangzhou. As a result, a large number of private

gardens of different styles sprang up in the city. Walking along

the Slender West Lake, visitors can find row upon row of

villas, gardens and buildings erected on the lakeside, each having its own unique shape and beauty. A poem goes: "The

the Qing Dynasty that garden construction revived, when bureaucrats and warlords vied with each other in displays of conspicuous consumption. In the 1950s, 188 well-preserved residences remained in Suzhou. Gardens in Suzhou are picturesque, full of the flavors of history and culture.

Hangzhou is also one of the cities in southeast China with a large number of private gardens. The charming scenery around the West Lake was highly praised in numerous

poems and other writings by ancient scholars. The two chainlike dykes across West Lake, which contribute to the graceful scenery, have been imitated time and again in other gardens. For instance, when Emperor Qianlong had Qingyiyuan built,

temples, bridges and dykes.

In examining the history of China's classical gardens, a certain cultural spirit has always been present. More specifically, it is not a unitary cultural spirit. The different aesthetic perceptions of imperial, monastic and private gardens originated in different cultural spirits. Without such spirits, the architecture, flowers, trees, and landscape construction are only special techniques. The influence of China's

rich ideological and cultural heritage on garden construction

techniques is an important reason why China's classical gardens have their own unique characteristics. Chinese clas-

Kunming Lake was modeled after West Lake, including its

sical garden art embodies the national culture in a nutshell, including almost all categories of ancient sciences and culture. It originated from nature, but is higher than the poetic beauty of nature, and is based on the combination of natural and artificial. All these reflect their value as a world cultural heritage in history and art. Among the world's gardens, Chinese gardens, as an independent garden system, enjoy a high reputation.

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#### The Summer Palace

(Yiheyuan 颐和园)

The Summer Palace in northwest Beijing is the most complete of China's surviving imperial gardens, featuring a magnificent group of ancient buildings in natural scenery dominated by Longevity Hill (Wanshoushan) and Kunming Lake. Housed among magnificent pavilions, bridges, corridors, halls and palaces with over 3,000 rooms, the Summer Palace has enjoyed a reputation as "the First Garden in the Divine Land" since the early Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming dynasties (1368-1644). In 1860, this magnificent imperial garden—along with the nearby Yuanmingyuan (Old Summer Palace)—was plundered and burned to the ground by Anglo-French allied forces. In 1886, it was reconstructed under the orders of Empress Dowager Ci Xi with funds that had been earmarked for

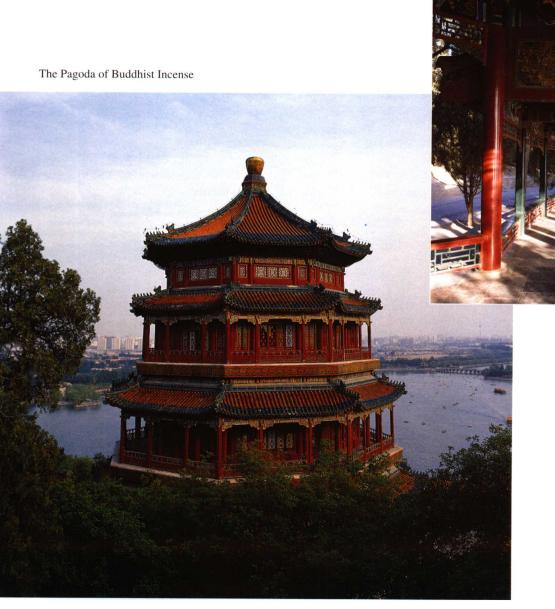
the Chinese Navy. In 1900, the Summer Palace was again destroyed by the Eight-Power (Austria, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Tsarist Russia and the United States) Allied Forces. It was restored in 1903, so that the resplendent buildings—including the Pagoda of Buddhist Incense, the Cloud-dispelling Hall and the Great Stage in the Garden

A view along the western slope of Longevity Hill. The Summer Palace, epitomizing the best of Chinese gardening art, attracts tourists from all over the world

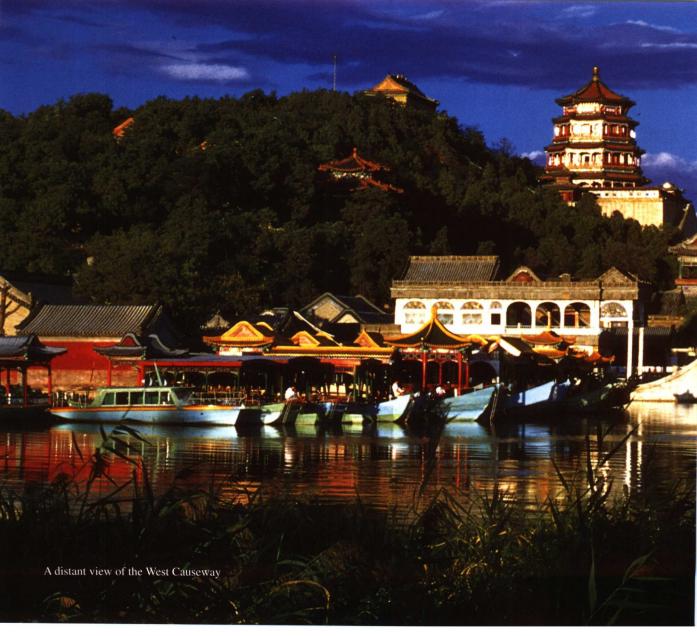
of Virtuous Harmony–are in a style of wood construction characteristic of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

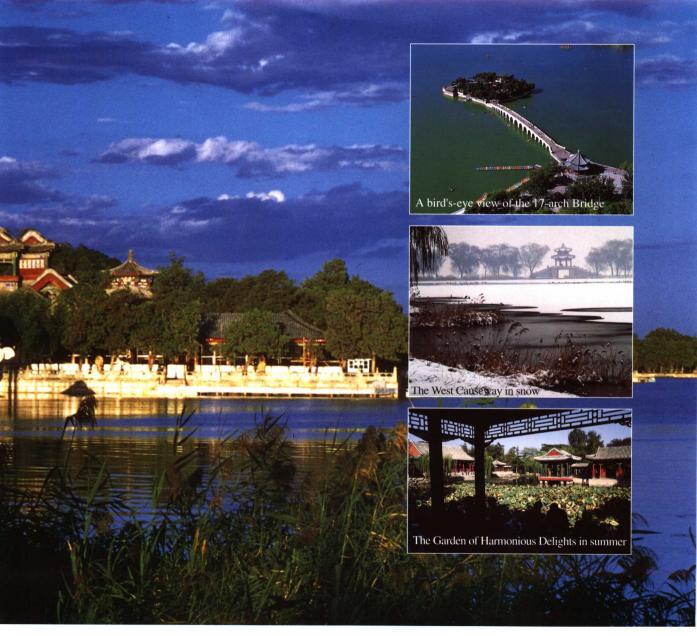
At the southern foot of Longevity Hill, the Long Corridor winds along the lake for 728-meters, making it the longest of China's ancient corridors. At the eastern foot of Longevity Hill lies the Garden of Harmonious Delights, "a garden within a garden" that is an imitation of the Garden for Ease of Mind at the foot of the Huishan Hill in the city of Wuxi. Most pavilions, bridges, corridors, halls and palaces that make up the Summer Palace are reminiscent of scenic spots and historical sites south of the Yangtze River, in landscaping that recreates natural settings. On December 2,1998, the Summer Palace was added to the list of World Cultural Heritage sites.









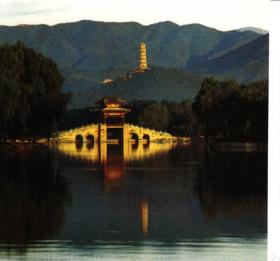




The Great Stage in the Garden of Virtuous Harmony



The Willow Bridge



The Suzhou Street

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