



# CHARMS OF CLASSICAL CHINESE GARDENS

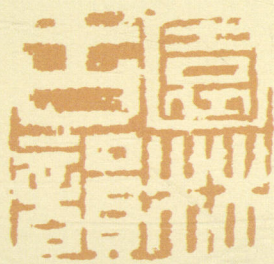


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園林

# **Charms of Classical Chinese Gardens**

— An ideal ambience for domestic life and pleasures

古韻

Supervised by  
Information Office of the State Council  
People's Republic of China

China Architecture & Building Press  
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# Charms of Classical Chinese Gardens

— An ideal ambience for domestic life and pleasures

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## Prologue

People, after toil and moil, have to take a rest, refreshing their body and mind through entertainment and pleasures as an indispensable part of their way of life. Through the ages, people have long since made use of natural conditions and resources such as bricks, tiles, earth, wood, stone, spring and other living creatures and vegetation to build an amiable environment for their settlement. Gardens, among others, are certainly the best choice of all. Landscape gardening in China boasts a long history, dating back to 3000 years ago. From the Shang Dynasty (16th-11th centuries B.C.) to the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), with their creative and pioneering endeavors, the Chinese garden architects of all the ages have altogether created a unique artistic style of Chinese gardening architecture, making a brilliant contribution to the history of the world gardening architecture.

Compared with the gardening art of the West, the Chinese landscape gardening distinctly expressed the love and aspiration for the beauty of nature and pleasures of life cherished by the Chinese nation, fully embodying the philosophic idea of the “unity of universe and man” and achieving an effect of “being done by man, as if created by nature.” It has passed down to us a great deal of distinguished gardening architecture that will be treasured forever.

This album, with its artistic photo works and succinct commentaries, is intended to give a comprehensive introduction to the history of the Chinese classical gardens, their architectural features and artistic achievements. It will not only help our foreign friends have a further understanding of China, but also promote the level of knowledge of traditional Chinese culture and gardening art for our fellow countrymen. So, these lines of words are written as the prologue for this creditable and valuable works.

羅哲文

Luo Zhewen

Early summer of 2006



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## Poetic Ambience in China





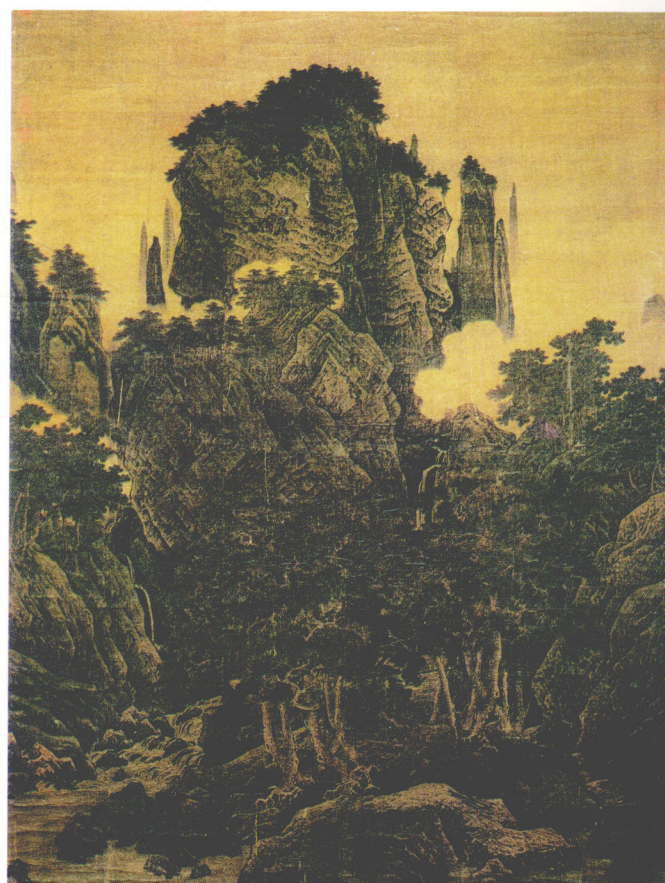




## Poetic Ambience in China

China, known as “*huaxia*” in ancient times, is a civilized old country with a long history of 5000 years. The classical garden architecture, as a brilliant gem in the treasury of the traditional Chinese culture, has a long history and is famed for its artistic achievements all over the world. Sir G.A. Jellicoe, the English landscape architect, in his speech at the annual conference of International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) in 1954, pointed out that ancient Greece, Western Asia and China were the major motive forces in the development of world landscape architecture. He said that the Chinese gardening art had produced important influence upon Japan and the 18th century Europe.

The history of the Chinese garden architecture can date back to the period of Shang and Zhou Dynasties (16th -221 B.C.) over 3000 years ago. The “garden” in the period was called “*you*”, especially for the royalties and noblemen to amuse themselves with landscape and hunting. According to historical documents, the terminology of “garden” was first found in the literary works after the period of the Western Jin (265-316). When Buddhism was introduced to China in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), monasteries and temples were building up across the country along with their gardens. In the Tang Dynasty (618-907), two great poets, Wang Wei and Bai Juyi, took the lead in building their villas one after another at the Wangchuan River and in Mt. Lushan respectively, bringing about the upsurge of building private landscape gardens. Up to the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911), the Chinese gardens had developed to various systems, such as imperial gardens, private gardens, temple gardens and cemetery gardens (mausoleums), etc.



Pines Dancing in the Winds in Valleys,  
by Li Tang (about 1049-1130) in the Song Dynasty

The Mountains stand tall with peaks one higher than another. The white clouds float in the sky. The paths loom through the woods and rocks. And a waterfall is running down into a stream twisting along the ravines. The perfect skill of the painter endowed his artwork with a poetic style.





## Historical Context of the Classical Gardens

### Origin of Gardens in the Dynasties of Shang and Zhou

The construction of landscape gardens in China was probably initiated early in the Shang-Yin Dynasty (16th-11th centuries B.C.). Such kind of places, named “*you*” at the time, were commonly fenced round for growing plants, birds and animals and serving royalties and nobles as the leisure-hunting grounds. According to the *Books of Odes* and the *Records of the Historian*, King Wenwang of Zhou constructed the Lingtai Podium Garden, Lingzhao Water Garden and Lingyou Hunting Garden for his pleasure.

Built in Haojing (capital of Zhou, west to Chang'an County, Shaanxi Province), the three gardens mentioned above were regarded as the earliest ones of the natural landscape gardens in China in the recorded history. As the symbols of high mountains, vast oceans and wild fields respectively, the three gardens implied that “every inch of land belongs to the king” (just like a proverb says: “Kings have long arms.”) since monarchs regarded themselves as the sons of God. Moreover, even the princes and dukes also possessed their own “gardens” just as kings did. The difference was that their gardens might be smaller in size than those of the kings. During the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.), the gardens were constructed on higher plane. Many of them are well-known masterpieces such as the Gusu Podium, Heavenly Pond, Wutong (phoenix tree) Garden, and Luyuan (Deer-Feedlot) Garden, all built by Fu Chai, the King of Kingdom Wu.

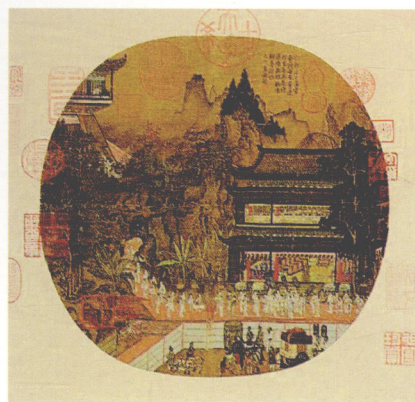
### Styles and Systems of Gardens in the Dynasties of Qin and Han

In the period of Qin (221-206B.C.) and Han Dynasties (206B.C.-A.D.220), the “*you*” was developing into “*yuan*”. The garden

construction came to its climax for the first time. Soon after the First Emperor of Qin (259-210 B.C.) had unified China, he began dreaming of an eternal life so as to enjoy his life time forever! To serve the purpose, the alchemists told the Emperor if he could wander among the various palace gardens mysteriously as a supernatural being, he would be living forever.

Therefore the Emperor bended himself on constructing his “fairyland” – “Shanglinyuan Garden” – on a large scale in Xianyang, the capital of Qin. It was a vast complex of palaces combining with gardens, including the most famous palace “Efanggong Palace” (E-Pang Palace). Although not yet finished by the time when the Qin Dynasty was overthrown, the complex, however, had produced a monumental influence on the designs of later imperial gardens.

In the reign (140-87B.C.) of Emperor Wudi of Han, he continued the construction of the “Shanglinyuan Garden” on a large scale. As a result, this imperial garden consisted of more than 70 palaces and annexes, extending over 200 kilometers and covering an area of five counties. According to the *Chronicles of the Han Dynasty*, the completed project was capable of serving as a comprehensive pleasure resort, though it had been originally planned to build as a royal hunting ground. One of its major buildings was the Jianzhang Palace, which was finished in 104 B.C. According to the *Illustrated*



Imperial Palace of Han, Zhao Boju, Song Dynasty





*Record on the Capital Chang'an Area (San-fu-huang-tu)*, the Jianzhang Palace was more than 10 kilometers in circumference and comprised so many buildings involving a total of "one thousand gates and ten thousand rooms". It was located outside the capital city of Chang'an, west of the Weiyang Palace. To its north was the Taiye Lake (the Celestial Lake) with three islands named Penglai, Fangzhang and Yingzhou, simulating the legendary fairyland in oceans. In addition to the natural vegetation, so many exotic fruit and rare trees were transplanted there from other areas.

In the Han Dynasty, the landscape architects already had mastered good skills in waterscape-making. There were many large man-made lakes dug in the palace gardens, being the key part of imperial gardens along with the rockeries, which set an example for the construction of a watery-and-rockery landscape in imperial gardens in the later 2000 years. The vast lakes were built to simulate the oceans and a fairyland in the fables. According to historical records, many waterscape systems at that time were of splendid designs. For example, water was spouting from a bronze dragon's mouth into a cup held by a bronze immortal. The design really counts for a great deal in China, even for the history of the world landscape architecture.

## Garden Construction in the Dynasties of Sui and Tang

From the period of the Three kingdoms to the Southern and Northern Dynasties (220- 581), the landscape gardening was developing from simply modeling on a specific natural scenery to applying the way of generalization and abstract idea to the design of landscapes. At the same time, more attention was paid to the functions of entertainment, a garden could play in its spacious area, thereby gradually forming up a unique artistic system in the Chinese gardening architecture. Another group of famous gardens were set up in the period, such as "Hualin Garden (Garden of Flourishing Woods)" and "Leyou Garden (Garden of Pleasant Tour)". In these gardens, so many rockeries were piled up, with fantastic peaks, caves and waterfalls flowing amidst them, to create a natural scenery. All of these fully demonstrated the execution of garden architecture in China had attained a higher level at the time. However in the period of the Western Jin (265-316) or later, making most use of natural sceneries to embellish people's gardens was staging a comeback and prevalent at the time.



Autumn Scenery of Mts. Queshan and Huabuzhu, Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368)

The Chinese painting presents the autumn scenes of Jinan in ancient times, in Shandong Province. This painting had been kept in the imperial court of Qing.





Landscape Bonsai of Tang Tricolor Glazed Pottery, Tang Dynasty

At the early stage of the Sui Dynasty (581-617) with its capital in Chang'an, Emperor Wendi of Sui followed a thrifty policy, attaching importance to his people's subsistence. So there were only two gardens constructed in his reign. They were Daxing Garden (Garden of Great Flourish) in the north, and the Fu-rong Yuan (Lotus Garden) at the southeast corner of the capital, which was also well known as the Qujiang Lake (the Winding River) for its beautiful landscape. It was regarded as the best garden in the capital then.

Afterwards, Emperor Yangdi moved his capital to the city of Luoyang and launched a massive construction of palaces and gardens for his enjoyment. Even a canal was dug to link the capital with Hangzhou for his tour of the south China. According to the *Chronicles of the Sui Dynasty*, as soon as being enthroned, the

Emperor began to build Xianyang Palace in his capital. Rare timbers and boulders, exotic plants and herbs, and precious birds and animals were collected from all parts of the country. Moreover, the Emperor ordered to set up a number of temporary abodes outside the capital, such as "Jiangdu Palace" in Yangzhou, which was a gigantic complex involving thousands of rooms built with the most exquisite craftsmanship never seen before.

The gardens constructed in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) were even more magnificent than those in the Han Dynasty. In his poem "On Emperor", Luo Binwang (619-684), one of the great poets of Tang, wrote "He possesses himself of the land over thousands of kilometers. He gets his palace surrounded with dozens of walls. Unless you have a look at where an emperor lives, you could never understand how dignified he is." There were three major imperial palaces and three imperial gardens in the capital considered as the typical of the kind at that time. The three palaces were: Taiji Palace (Palace of Supreme Being), Daming Palace (Palace of Great Brightness), and Xingqing Palace (Palace of Prosperity and Celebration). They were also called the Western Imperial Palace, Eastern Imperial Place and Southern Imperial Place respectively. The three gardens were: Western-, Eastern- and Forbidden Gardens. Take the Daming Palace for example. It was noted not only for its grand building, Hanyuan Hall (the Hall of Containing Vatility), set up on the Lofty Terrace, and also for the Taiye Chi (Celestial Lake) to its north. The lake, with Penglai Isle on it, was enclosed with a 400-bay cloister. At the southeastern corner of the city lay the clear Qujiang Lake, which was lined by the palaces and pavilions row upon row, with flourishing plants in the background. Du Fu (712-770), one of the most famous poets of Tang, wrote many poems to praise the Furong Garden at Qujiang, still appealing to everyone today. But finally such an imperial garden was turned to be a public scenic spot. Either the nobles or ordinary people, even the emperors, were swarming into the garden for enjoyment on traditional Chinese festivals or holidays. Another landscape garden should be mentioned was the villa-garden built by the great poet Wang Wei. Located in the





A Scene of the Riverbank at Dusk,  
by Dong Yuan (?-963) in the Southern Tang Period (937-975)

mountain area southeast of Chang'an, the garden comprised more than 20 scenic sights. Since only a few of them were artificially made, the garden was well known for its natural landscape.

## The Garden Culture in the Dynasties of Song and Yuan

During the years from 960 to 1911 (from Song Dynasty to Qing Dynasty), the Chinese garden art developed into a stage of maturity. In the Song Dynasty (960-1279), greater importance was attached to the civil officials. The biased personnel policy brought about a great number of higher-paid, and arrogant civil officials more than the military ones. Both the royals and populace then were pursuing after a taste of leading an elegant and snug life, indulging themselves in writing sentimental poems and enjoying paintings. The North Song Dynasty (960-1127) had its capital established in Bianzhou (now Kaifeng city), known as the "East Capital" at that time. The emperors often summoned the painters to first work out a blueprint of palaces, then to construct them. As a result, the schools of boundary painting and secretariat painting developed rapidly along with the advancement of the architectural technology.

There were four famous gardens in the capital city in the early stage of Song. They were Yujinyuan (Nectar Garden), Yichunyuan (Pleasant Spring Garden), Qionglinyuan (Jade Woods Garden) and Jinmingchi (Golden-brightness Lake). A group of palaces were set up after the enthronement of Emperor Huizong. All of them were magnificent with carved beams and painted columns, and attached gardens. As for the imperial gardens of Song, the outstanding one was the Longevity Hill piled up in the reign of Emperor Huizong. The landscape garden gained high praise for its large scale and refined structures. Emperor Huizong was a talented and free-spirited person, well versed in calligraphy and painting, as well as literature and music. He used many precious plants and exotic rocks transported from south China in the construction (beginning in 1117) of the Longevity Hill garden. It took more than 10 years to complete the construction, and thousands of labors were employed for the project. The elaborately designed imperial garden was of perfect beauty; waves of the lake lapping banks, waterfalls gushing down from the rockeries, paths looming from the mountainous woods and ravines and farm cottages



scattered in the rustic field. A herb plantation and a Taoist monastery were located west of the Longevity Hill, where was the place to produce the elixir for Emperor Huizong who believed in Taoism and mysticisms. As a typical imperial landscape garden in the Northern Song Dynasty, the Longevity Hill realized the idea expressed in the landscape paintings of Song and brought the gardening art to its acme at that time. The combination of the garden architecture with the gist of classical Chinese painting was regarded as the tradition of the imperial garden designs in the following dynasties.

Similar to the imperial gardens, the resplendence of the garden architecture was demonstrated by private gardens of the Song Dynasty. In his work *“On the Notable Gardens in Luoyang”*, Li Gefei listed more than 20 famous gardens in the capital of Song. Meantime, the garden culture in south China saw its prosperity in and after the period. A great deal of private gardens was constructed, such as the Gentle Waves Pavilion Garden (Cang-Lang-Ting Garden) and the Mountain Villa in Elegant Surroundings (Huan-Xiu-Shan-Zhuang) in Suzhou, and Shenyuan Garden in Shaoxing, etc.

The most famous imperial garden in the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) was the West Garden, or the “Three Lakes” (Sanhai) now in Beijing. During the Liao Dynasty, the garden was developed into a temporary abode for the emperor in 938. Later, in the Jin Dynasty, the Central Capital was established there in 1151. And in the year 1163, a Golden Sea was built on the same site. During the Yuan Dynasty, when the Great Capital was founded, the Golden Sea was renamed as Taiye (Celestial) Lake. In the “Golden Sea”, an isle was piled up and rockeries were set up with rocks transported from the Longevity Hill in Bianliang. The isle had been called “Qionghua Dao (jasper isle)”, and was later renamed as Longevity Hill. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the garden was further enlarged and named as “Xiyuan” (West Garden). Similar to the imperial gardens of Qin and Han, the artistic style and layout of the West Garden essentially followed the

traditional concept of execution of “one lake and three hills”, imitating the Penglai, Fangzhang and Yingzhou three Islands on high seas where, as a legend says, the celestial immortals live.

In the period of Song and Yuan Dynasties, the style of the landscape paintings created by the literati gradually became mature. These paintings were characterized by their literary atmosphere, stressing a taste for resemblance of a painted object not only in form but also in spirit and the combination of the realistic style and the style of freehand brushwork painting. Many landscape painters



Mountain Summer Resort at Chengde in winter