

# Chinoiserie Garden in the History of Picturesque Movement

—View from the Comparison of Space-time View—

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## Chapter 0. Preface

### 0-1 Research Background

There are distinct thinking differences between Eastern and Western countries. Such difference reveals in the result of intercultural communication. A typical history of the cross-culture translation, is in the picturesque movement in 18th century, when Chinese garden design was interpreted with English filter. In this context, through analyzing how intrinsic thinking differences were manifested in the cultural translation during the history of picturesque, this research is going to figure out under such different thinking and cultural background, what kind of influence did Chinese garden bring to the picturesque movement.

### 0-2 Research Purpose

This research aims at interpreting the Chinoiserie stream in the history of picturesque movement with the space-time view, to offer a new perspective on that period of history. To be specific, this article is about how the differences of space-time view of China and Britain are revealed in the picturesque movement, and under such differences what kind of result was achieved in cultural translation.

### 0-3 Research Method

**Chapter 1:** Summarize the information about the space-time view from the previous research, to settle the definition of "space-time".

**Chapter 2:** By translating the two chapters of *Yuan ye*, the space-time view in *Yuan ye* will be interpreted in terms of the literary order and the specific description in the text. The latter one will be further interpret through supplemental information of actual cases.

**Chapter 3:** The general context of the Picturesque Movement and its Chinese influence will be summarized and combed from previous research. Also, the way people deal with nature in the period will be summed up, and their space-time view will be further discussed.

**Chapter 4:** Extract the space-time view in the garden theory of William Chambers, in terms of the literary order and the specific description in the text. Analyze them with comparative consideration with Chinese ones.

**Chapter 5:** Apply the theory of Abstraction and Empathy to the previous analysis, and further discuss how Chinese garden was translated to England, and the reason of such result.

### 0-4 Research Framework

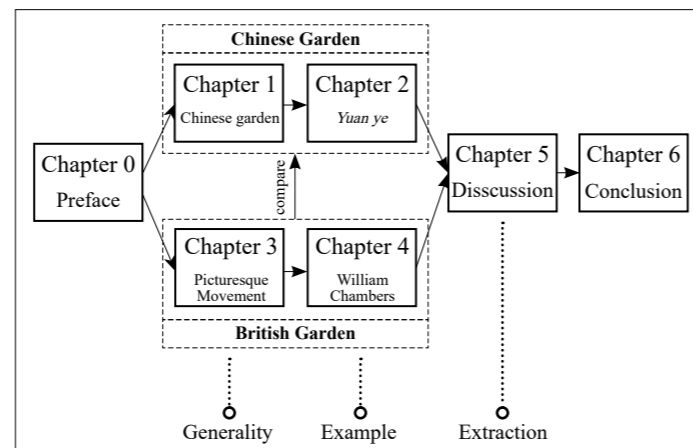


Figure 1. Research Framework

## Chapter 1. Space-time view in Chinese Garden

### Blurring Here-and-Now and Then-and-There

“闲居曾赋，芳草应怜。”  
“The life of leisure has been the subject of a fu poem;  
Fragrant plants respond to one's sympathy.”  
(translated by Fung, 2000)

The text of *Yuan ye* re-organizes the cultural memory rather than simply reappear the past. The historical stories are correlated with the scenery description, therefore readers have to motivate both cultural memory and

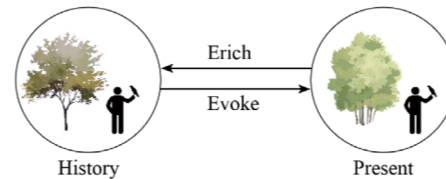


Figure 2. Correlation of history and present

### Blurring Subject, Object and Action

When reading a whole paragraph of *Yuan ye*, readers can find that the description alternates between self experience in the garden, action to the circumstance and scene itself<sup>[1]</sup>, and there are no obvious transitions or conjunctions between each perspective.

compound effect of writing method and content brings subtle changes between the lines, creates a dynamic narrative in both space and time. Self, action and scene is juxtaposed, together with the literary allusion, providing a more flexible space-time pattern than a simple repeat from here-and-now to there-and-then.

### Currents on Timeline

While Western tradition interpret the world as composition of static “things”, Eastern country observe it currents with ceaseless transformation<sup>[2]</sup>. It is worth noting that here each event does not exist separately, but overlaps and interweaves with each other, appearing a more complex and multi-dimensional state. Such state is more similar to the real nature, in which nothing has been simplified by tree-diagram classification.

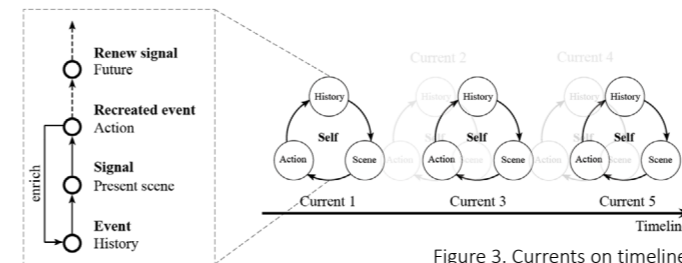


Figure 3. Currents on timeline

### Result

Chinese space-time view can be summarized as the following two points:

- **Blurring the boundary of subject and object.**
- **Mutual relationship and multi-dimensional overlapping.**

The latter one can be regarded as the macro performance of the former one.

① Blurring the boundary of subject and object					② Mutual relationship and multi-dimensional overlapping				
Self-Time		Here-There and Now-Then		Self-Scene-Action		Events on Timeline		Ceaseless Shuttling	
Method	Effect	Method	Effect	Method	Effect	Method	Effect	Method	Effect
Juxtaposition of seasonal experience	Blurring entity and time.	Literary Allusion, Metaphor	metaphoric reach-out in time or parallel world	Juxtaposition of sentiment, scenery and action	Arousing peripatetic thinking shuttling between subject and object	Let events overlap and interweave together	Seize the real state of complex nature	Combine all the preceding contents	unity of heaven and man

Figure 4. Summary of Chinese space-time view

## Chapter 2. Space-time view of Chinese Garden in *Yuan ye* and Actual Cases

### Literary Order Analysis

1. **Subjective engagement:** Most of the article is presented as if the subject is fully engaged in the garden sceneries, letting the relationship between subject and other constituents ambiguous.

2. **Multi-dimensional ambiguities:** The ambiguities are mainly created by arising readers' imagination, which is not limited to a single dimension. The subject is engaged with specific time(past stories and future), time flow(changing seasons), 2 dimensional scene(painting), 3 dimension scene(vast of space, sceneries in distance) and parallel world(fairy stories). All of them refers to “somewhere else”, in terms of both space and time. Neither time nor space point to a single dimension. Both of them involve dimensions from point to a broader meaning.

3. **Multi-dimensional pattern repetition:** As the chapter comes near to the end, the repetition of patterns increase, in terms of no matter order of content or organization of factor relationship, or even the space-time relationship implied in the description objects. By this means, the thinking mode of the former parts is emphasized.

4. **Shuttling beyond classification:** Although rhythm and currents can be seized through semantic meanings, the peripatetic thinking and repetition of pattern appear beyond the classification of both. It implies that multiple dimensional thinking frame exist throughout the text, and each of them are not interfere with each other's complete expression. Here the precise classification of Western framework is invalid.

### Analysis of Contents and Actual Cases

#### Picturesque scene

刺字隐环窗，彷彿片园小李；岩峦堆劈石，参差半壁大痴。  
*The panoramic view of the round window in the temples reveals the works of Piantuxiaoli; the mountain stacks evoke the landscape paintings of Dachi.(Yuan ye, Translated by Wang<sup>[3]</sup>)*

Both Piantuxiaoli and Dachi refers to the ancient painter. Here two scenes become the analogy of painting: temple in a round window, and wrinkling rockery. The former one indicates the classic design so called “enframed scenery”. The latter wrinkle on rocks, reminds visitor about the wrinkle brushstroke in Chinese landscape painting.



Figure 5. Enframed Scenery

Here the designer's intention is consistent with the way of thinking reflected in writing. Both the frame and the wrinkle serve as catalyzer of imagination. Through the metaphor in garden, the designer strengthens the connection between different things in the mind of the viewer, and therefore make the space-time of here-and-now(scene) and there-and-then(painting) become unity.

#### Changing Scenery with Moving Pace

Through “changing scenery with moving pace”, visitors experience a series of spaces with different effect. By fully engaging with the scenes, the boundary of subject and object become ambiguous.

Besides, the previous discussed topics like the changing scenes and the above discussed parallel world brought by picturesque scenes, are all interweave with each other, creating multi-dimensional ambiguities between time and entity, here and there, object and action.....This is exactly the realization of multi-dimensional pattern repetition in the documentary analysis of *Yuan ye*.

### Result

The actual manipulation is highly in accordance with the thinking mode in the text. In a culture developed in a self-contained system like China, artistic volition and the form of art are highly related and consistent.

## Chapter 3. Chinoiserie Garden in Picturesque Movement

### General Review of Picturesque Movement

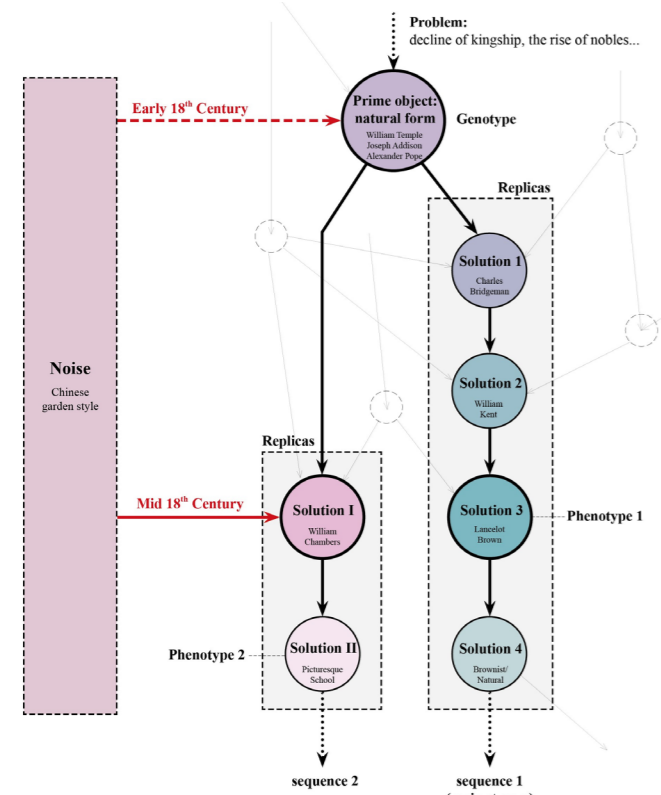


Figure 6. Exaction of contexts in Picturesque Movement

There are two clearly recognizable contexts in the garden design of picturesque. The founder of main stream quiet Chinese garden at the early 18th century, to promote pure nature where sign of artificiality is hard to be found in their gardens. The other one is affected by the “noise” of Chinese garden in mid 18th century, advocating a combination of nature and artificiality<sup>[3]</sup>.

### Viewing Filter in Picturesque

#### Claude glass and Painter's Eye

“A painter, or whoever views objects with a painter's eye, looks with indifference.” (Uvedale Price)

At the time artists had their own way confronting with nature. At the time artists had their own way confronting with nature. The Picturesque travelers view nature through the reflection of a small mirror named “Claude glass”. The tinted mirror is able to turn the image of scene as if the landscape painting of Claude Lorrain.

#### Intervention of Literary Vocabulary

During the Picturesque Movement, the discourse around the term “nature” was focus on the relatively subjective aesthetic principal, rather than the inherent value of nature itself. Literary vocabulary was used to define nature, and therefore become a romantic filter when people face nature.

① Picturesque ② Sublime ③ Beautiful.....

[Example]Sublime is often related to negative and strong feelings such as “astonishment”, “horror”, or pain and danger. It is the self-protection emotion that result in the aesthetic of sublime. Its concrete forms often includes contrast of light and shade, spaciousness and endlessness<sup>[4]</sup>.

Their understanding of nature implies a huge gap between the greatness of nature and insignificance of human beings, indicating the separation of object and subject.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Chapter 4. Space-time view in the Work of William Chambers

### Thinking Mode in Chambers' Work

#### Separation of Subject and Object

In Chambers' work, the identity of visitors is stated as “spectator”, showing his clear agreement towards the separated relationship between visitor(subject) and scene(object). On the other hand, to Chambers, when describing the visitors, he considered visitors as a subject, his tone is more like a clam outsider rather than a sympathetic one. Thus the subject-object separation reflect in both the relationship of visitor-and-scene and author-and-people in the article.

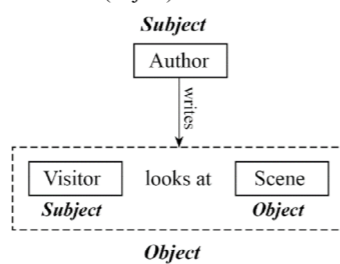


Figure 7. Relationship of subject and object

#### Unidimensional Classification

Applying the comparison of Yuan ye and Chambers' work to the theory of “A City is Not a Tree” (1965)<sup>[5]</sup>, the tree structure of the essay of Chambers is similar to (b), where the real situation is somehow simplified under a unidimensional classification. Yuan ye is more like the semi-lattice structure of (a), leaving more room for diversity.

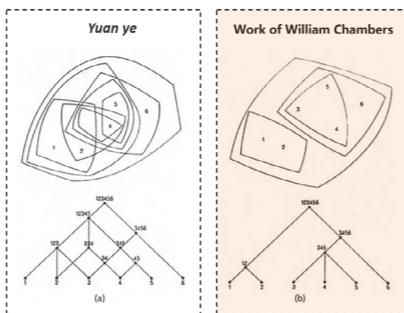


Figure 8. (Christopher, 1965)

#### Specific Description in Chamber's Work

Chambers provided many description that is in accord with the actual situation of Chinese garden, like the winding and natural spaces, the changing scenery with moving pace etc.

For example, the below text march the “changing scenery with moving pace” in Chinese garden:

“Sometimes they lead you through dark caverns and gloomy passages, at the issue of which you are, on a sudden, struck with the view of a delicious landscape, enriched with every thing that luxuriant nature affords most beautiful. At other times you are conducted through avenues and walks, that gradually diminish and grow rugged...when unexpectedly a rich and extensive prospect opens to view...” (1757:17-18)<sup>[6]</sup>

However, The way Chambers view Chinese garden still fits the unidimensional classification like mathematical model of a tree, in which both “sometimes” and “at other time” accommodate a single contrast of scene.

#### Result

What distinguishes the Chambers' way of thinking from Eastern land lies in the below two categories. Similar to Yuan ye, the latter one is the macro performance of the former one:

- **Subject-object separation:** including the separation of entity and time/scene/action.
- **Unidimensional thinking:** where mathematical rational framework is usually applied, to simplify things by unidimensional classification.

Regarding Chambers' specific description of Chinese garden, through the comparison with previous chapters, Chambers provided a considerable part of the practical description in terms of phenomenon. Nevertheless, there is a paradox between his thinking mode and his description. Moreover, his text clearly shows many traces in his own cultural background, such as politics situation, painting theory and literary vocabulary, and he stiffly attached them to the representation of Chinese garden.

## Chapter 5. Abstraction and Empathy in Chinoiserie Garden

### Paradox of Abstract Volition and Empathetic Form

Artistic Form		Design of Picturesque Garden
① Abstraction	② Empathy	①<<②
Geometric form	Natural form	①<<②
Divorced from changes	Adapt to changes	①<<②
Clear and definite	Unclear and indefinite	①<<②
Absolute beauty	Relative beauty	①<<②
Mainly lies in plane expression	Mainly lies in spatial expression	①<<②

Figure 9. Analysis of artistic form of picturesque garden

Artistic Volition		Ideology of Picturesque Garden
① Abstraction	② Empathy	①>②
Fear of nature	Yearning for nature	①>②
Divorced from timeliness	Admitting timeliness	①>②
Transcendence of representation	Move into the object	①>②
Overcome fear with rational thinking	Grasp the chaos of life with intuition	①>②
Regard Mathematic as the most advance form of art	Obscurity of artistic perception	①>②

Figure 10. Analysis of artistic volition of picturesque garden

calmly taking himself as a spectator instead of immersing into the scenes; Although perceptual vocabularies like pleasing and enchanted were used in gardening treatise over and over again, Chambers' thinking remained in the rational classification; In other words, the obscurity of artistic perception is just an appearance, yet mathematic thinking is the essence behind it. The trend of empathy at that time is not a disruptive revolution, but rather another perspective towards the world. The artistic volition is dominated by abstraction that rooted in Western thinking, although the artistic form appear as a highly empathic one.

#### Causal Analysis of the Paradox

Here comes the question that, why the artistic volition and artistic form are disjointed in picturesque movement. The reason is inferred as follows:

① **Intervention of painting and literary filter:** In the picturesque movement, people viewed nature through “painters' eye”, and discussed the irregular garden in terms of literary excitation like “beautiful” “Sharawadgi” etc, rather than specific form. Through the intervention of painting and literary effect, artists are able to avoid facing the nature directly, and their impulse of abstraction can therefore be weaken.

② **Superficial pursuit of style:** The filter together with the ideology trend of Neoclassicism, letting the Chinoiserie become a criteria of judgment and technique of manipulation, rather than the pursuit itself. What originally belonged to a subordinate position took the decisive role, and thus result in a mere imitation of empathy representation.

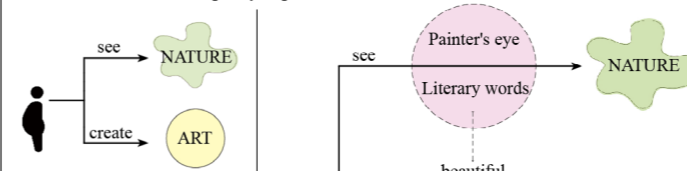


Figure 11. Abstraction

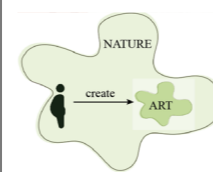


Figure 12. Empathy

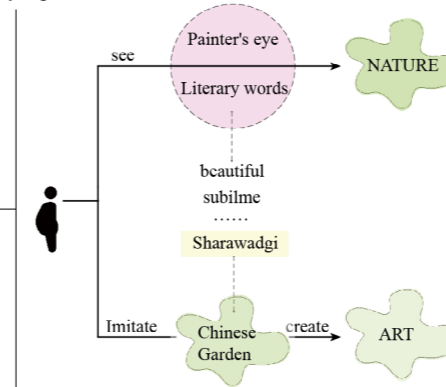


Figure 13. The transition from abstract volition to empathic art

### Changing Role of Chinoiserie Symbol

Since Chinese garden has become a superficial symbol, its connotation was bound to be interpreted in an optional way.

Chinoiserie garden was introduced to the UK in the embryonic period of picturesque movement in late 17th century, it was enumerated as a model of natural design. Stimulating by the early statement, a kind of purely imitative nature in the main contextual sequence has obtained considerable development. Later with the publication of Chambers' work in the mid 18th century, Chinese garden became a powerful argument for the reconciliation of nature and artificial traces. Interestingly, the superficial knowledge in the early stage seems to have brought about a tendency of “overcorrection”, and this was “corrected” by the relatively deep understanding in the heyday.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion

In chapter 1 and 2, the space-time view in Chinese garden are analyzed in terms of both literary order and design technique. Fundamentally Chinese space-time view can be summarized as the unity of subject and object, and the specific design is highly in accord with the inherent thinking.

In chapter 3 and 4, Chinoiserie garden in picturesque movement are summarized in terms of general context and the publication of William Chambers. Two distinction sequences can be exacted from the general context, proposing pure natural form and the harmony of nature and artificial traces respectively. Regarding the British space-time view, contrasted to Yuan ye, no matter the whole ideological trend or the individual works of Chambers is dominated by the rooted thinking of subject-object separation. That caused some paradox between his thinking and the phenomenon he described.

In chapter 5, the previous analysis is applied to the theory of Abstraction and Empathy. Here Chinese garden can be regarded as naturalism art with highly empathic artistic volition. However, in the process of cultural translation, a paradox of abstract artistic volition and empathic artistic form can be seen in picturesque garden. It can be infer that it is the intervention of literary vocabularies that allows artists to divorce from the impulse of abstract volition. The literary intervention together with the ideological trend of Neoclassicism, letting Chinoiserie garden became a criteria of judgement rather than an artistic aim. Therefore, the picturesque movement can be interpreted as is not so much an art of empathic naturalism as it is an art SIMILAR to the empathic naturalism. Moreover, when Chinoiserie was seized as merely a representation, its represented meaning was able to change throughout the time, and eventually developed into two rival contexts.

To summarized, the cultural translation from China to the West brought an empathic tendency to the form of English garden on the whole. More specifically, the relatively superficial introduction in early stage and more in depth description in mid 18th formed two rival contexts and eventually came into being a significant debate in the heyday of the movement.

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Figure 5. author's photograph(Liu Garden)  
Figure 6-7. drawn by author  
Figure 8. Christopher Alexander, 1965, processed by author  
Figure 9-11. drawn by author