

# Landscaping Artistic Techniques and Conception Expressions of Jiangnan Classical Gardens

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**Abstract:** The unique feature of Jiangnan Classical Gardens is that it combines Jiangnan culture while admiring nature. It mixes together natural landscapes with human landscapes and creates fascinating conception of beauty. This thesis probes into the aesthetic taste and cultural connotations of Jiangnan Classical Garden Art with the purpose of mastering the natural endowment and spiritual pursuit of classical garden creating art from the perspective of landscaping-creating artistic techniques.

## 1. Introduction

Chinese Classical Gardens is one of the important parts of Chinese traditional culture. As a kind of solidified art, it not only objectively shows the truth facts of different Chinese dynasties, such as the social conditions, the financial situations, the science and engineering technology, but also vividly reflects the development of Chinese world outlook, view of life and the conception of nature. Classical Gardens contains some religious and philosophical thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Also, it is influenced by landscape poem and paintings. Jiangnan Classical Gardens is a jewel in Chinese traditional culture. On the one hand, it describes the beautiful natural landscape by building gardens and pavilions. On the other hand, it becomes the bridge for gardens, the beautiful nature and poetry and paintings. It creates a peaceful and complete art space and condenses the diligence and wisdom of Jiangnan intellectuals and skilled workers.

The expression of artistic conception is one of important categories in Chinese aesthetics. It refers to the feelings that caused by the artists from the observation, understanding and experience to the objective things. The feelings are fully showed by special art structure and image, making up a new view. This view is a combination of the artists' subjective emotions and objective things. And it is also the similarity and compatibility between artists and nature. The feature of gardens is that people can truly and vividly feel the art objects by seeing, listening, smelling and touching. Jiangnan classical gardens' perfect combination of the art and technology make it amazing for people to promote aesthetic experience to the spiritual transcendence and the life perception.

## 2. Landscape creating techniques of Jiangnan classical gardens

The landscape creation techniques of Jiangnan classical gardens are as follows:

### 2.1 Great to See Small

Yuan Ye has said in the art of gardening that "Many beautiful scenes are in the gardens." Wen Zhenheng has also said in his work *Treatise on Superfluous Things* that "A stone can show the great of a mountain, a spoon of water can reflect the running rivers." Actually, the natural essences has been concentrated in the small gardens and the gardens are used for the pursuit of artistic conception.

Gardens usually use the change of the spatial composing relations to create an optical illusion of "Great to see small". For example, artists often use "gardens within gardens" to create and expand space. Also, they divide up space by garden architectures, garden walls, artificial hills and plants. Besides, they like to use different themes to set up landscape so that the room or the yard will be

much bigger to see. Mr. Chen has pointed that “Jiangnan classical gardens are always designed in “gardens within gardens”. This not only makes the gardens much bigger and wider, but also properly arranges the buildings and plants, affording to thought.

Mr. Liang has summarized that “Irregular Terrain can made into pools and hills and this can naturally make the room much bigger such as malus spring castle and Ting yu xuan in the Humble Administrator’s Garden of Suzhou, the stone forest yard and the Huabu villas in Lingering Garden and so on.

“Great to see small” has solved the conflict between small space and the vastness of mountains and rivers. The comparison and variation make people feel like “there is a way out”. It’s perfect for daydreaming and it creates profound ideal conditions of gardens.

## **2.2 Hiding Before Showing**

In garden art, either a big castle or a small pavilion, hiding half is much better than showing all.

In the Ming dynasty, Tang Zhiqi has explained the relationship between hiding and showing in Huishi Weiyan. He said that hiding half layer after layer, layer within layer makes the scenery more fun and more beautiful. The more things you hide, the bigger room you see.

Our classical gardens use the method of connotation, oppose showing all and stand for hiding before showing. For example, the Humble Administrator’s Garden of Suzhou makes a good balance between hiding and showing. When you go into the garden, you can see a rockery first. It is to block your line of sights. After going through the cave, a pool is only faintly visible. It is partly hided, partly showed. When you go to Yuanxiang Hall, the whole scene is showed in your eyes. All these help to make the gardens rich and fun. What’ more, the Huanxiu Villa, it used to be a small yard behind a big house. There is only a room and a pavilion in it and showing them all makes it boring. Thanks for the jagged rocks and towering trees, the room and pavilion are behind the rocks and trees. This makes people feel mysterious. Besides the Spouting Spring in Jinan, there are many willows around the Spouting Spring and the bridge, its buildings, rooms, pavilions and rivers are all partly shown, with the implicit artistic beauty of “how deep is the deep courtyard”. The main scenery and climax of Jiangnan gardens are usually “face partly covered by pious”, its essence will have to be wait for a long time before appearing and the appeal will be seen. It is really different from the direct opening style of western gardens.

So Jiangnan classical gardens really like to pay attention to the changes in space distribution, to pursue the natural feelings. Just as what was said in Yuan Ye, We can choose a winding path and feeling its attractiveness. It makes the visitors enjoy the beauties, hear the springs and take photos, satisfying the visitors aesthetic psychology of “fearing the mountains not deep, the forests not dense.”

## **2.3 Blankness and Fullness**

The painters in Jiangnan often use “seemingly dense, virtually thin” to explain the importance of density.

The arrangement of the gardens also needs to pay attention to the sharp contrast between blankness and fullness. For most of the private gardens after Tang and Song dynasties, due to their limited homestead, the function of “seeking virtual in the real” and “changing virtual to the real” is more prominent. It often separates sceneries by creating flower walls, transparent windows, screen walls and verandas in order to expand and falsify garden space, creating both real and ethereal wonderful realm and conveying intriguing interest. (FIG. 5-6) when the garden is separated into multiple theme landscape, visitors follow and find the space large or small, straight or curly. We don't know its ending, only finding it big, so the garden “the more isolated, the bigger”, “the realm becomes deeper and deeper, like different notes in music, making visitors produce different emotional appeal”. Shen Fu also has similar saying. It can be seen that by separating space, on the one hand, the space feeling of appreciators psychologically is expanded, on the other hand, the layers of sceneries is increased and the scenery interest is diversified.

The blankness and fullness of the gardens needs us to enjoy with our heart. Gardens connect the

real nature with the true love and shows great charm. Just as Li dongyang writes in his works, when you are alone in a garden, the fascinating sceneries will make you impressed and forget where you are.

The gardens attach importance to both the blankness and the fullness. Some blankness, such as the shadows of the moon, flowers and trees and the sounds of wind, birds and clouds and the sun, sometimes is much better than the fullness. Orioles Singing in the Willows and Plantain in Snow are two typical beauties of the blankness. The sea of clouds in Emei can make people free of mind and happy of heart. Many poems use beautiful words to improve the garden artistic conception into a higher level.

## **2.4 Humanizing Scenery**

The classical gardens have a closed relationship with our ancient philosophy, aesthetic ideology and moral principles. Therefore, some cultural references and tales of legends are natural reflected into the gardens. The owners of the gardens often show their dreams and feelings through these art expressions.

Ji Cheng says in his “Yuan Ye” that he escapes into the garden after experiencing much. Guo Xi also has similar sayings in his works. This shows that sceneries and architectures are not the aims of those people. What is the most important is the sentimental rhyme and interest.

In Jiangnan history of beauty, the aesthetic phenomenon of “comparing virtue” already exists in “Three Hundred Poems” in the Spring and Autumn Period. For example, jade can be compared with gentlemen’s characters. Influenced by Pre-Qin rationalism, thinkers connect natural beauty with people’s ethics and morality. In “The analects”, “Xunzi”, “Yanzi”, mountains, water, jade, stones are all compared with morality, whose viewpoints emerge from Confucius. Confucius is a great think who emphasizes the perfectness of human characters and aesthetic cultivation. His works reveal the similarities of human and nature and the communication between each other. This kind of relationship is just a kind of psychological feature of aesthetics. Its influence is wide and deep. Influenced by this kind of viewpoints, thick appreciation consciousness is also added into garden sceneries. Mountains, water, springs, stones, pine, bamboo, plum, orchid, lotus and chrysanthemum are all personified and become popular sceneries in gardens.

In Jiangnan classical Gardens, architectures and natural mountains and water are integrated. They are not only places to live, but also places to visit, to appreciate and to think about. Guo Xi in Song Dynasty tells us that benevolent people love mountains and wise people love water, such as Bai Letian and Wang Mojie. Chen Jiru in Ming Dynasty also says that once upon a time, there was a person who treats all kinds of flowers as his friends. So we can see that they arrange mountains and waters, plant flowers and trees not for decorating. What they care most is that they treat themselves as mountains, water, flowers and trees and try to keep lofty characters.

The natural scenery has included many character traits after humanizing; it is not the isolated individuals any longer, but the mixture of people's feelings and thoughts. It has built a mutual relation of the subjectivity and objectivity. Also, it strengthens the artistic appeal.

## **2.5 Showing Aims in Scenery**

The development of classical gardens has been closely tied to Chinese poems. They borrow ideas from each other and bring out the best in each other. Our traditional artists always have multiple art qualities. They are used to using simple poems to make up the mind first. They develop various themes for different gardens and then draw a picture according to the themes. They change and perfect the locations of buildings and plants during the construction. In the end, they give names to the gardens and buildings. Actually, this is the main way to show their feelings, thoughts and pursuances. In “A Dream in Red Mansions”, Jia Zhegdao says: “many sceneries, many pavilions, no-word titles, although beautiful sceneries, not attractive.” It clearly points out that mountains, stones, springs, rivers, buildings and pavilions could properly express the aesthetic interests of garden creators.

In ancient Jiangnan, not only the generals and ministers but also the poets and literary men pin all their ideals and feelings in the gardens. Most of the gardens’ names are related to their ideals and

feelings.

The Fan-shaped pavilion located in the corner of Su Zhou Humble Administrator's Garden western Chi Island, its scenery naming could be regarded as masterpiece. This small pavilion is common, but its name “Who sits together in the pavilion” deeply increases its implication. This name comes from “Who sits together---the bright moon, wind, me” in Su Shi “Dian Jiang Chun. Hang Zhou”. It expresses the noble sentiment of the garden owners willing to stay with the moon and wind. It also includes the admiration of Su Dongpo. It makes this common scenery attractive at once. Essayist Zhang Dai in Ming Dynasty points out that naming a garden is more difficult than creating its structure. Good names not only express meaning but also express emotion, not only clear but also implicit, not only thinkable but also imaginative. It can be said that the function of deepening implication, guiding and appreciating is fully exhibited and is one of the classics.

The Stay and Listen Pavilion and Drifting Fragrance Hall are both lotus appreciating places in summer. “Stay and Listen” comes from Famous poet Li Shang yin in Tang Dynasty; “Drifting Fragrance” comes from Zhou Dunyi’s “Ode to the Lotus” in Song Dynasty. These two names are brief and vivid. They not only point out the characters of these two sights and connect vision, hearing and smell as well. They also express the noble character of the garden owners and are wonderful examples of naming.

Besides naming, there are also many meaningful couplets and column carving, such as Pavilion of Surging Waves and master-of-nets garden. The couplet in the Pavilion of Surging Waves points out the interesting environment of neighboring forests. The couplets in the master-of-nets garden express the relaxing and merging state of mind of garden owners. Another example is the northern bank of Baotu Spring pool, Jinan Baotu Spring Garden. The couplets there all vividly describe fascinating sceneries and attract limitless imagination.

Jiangnan classical gardens have some human interest plaques, couplets, poems and inscriptions. They are rich in meaning and contain more meanings than the expression of words. They have been a kind of special artistic creating method in landscape arts. They not only provide deep cultural deposit, but also describe the ideals and feelings.

Rodin once said that “the world is full of beauty, you just need to find it.” Jiangnan classical garden is a kind of art that full of cultures. It is not a poem, it's more fascinating than a poem. It is not a painting, it's more beautiful than a painting. This kind of poetic beauty is the key to classical gardens.

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