

AN EXPLORATION INTO THE SPECIAL IMPLICATIONS OF AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN CHINESE ROYAL GARDENS

JI, QIAN

Tianjin University, China, jiqian005@hotmail.com

ZHANG, CHUNYAN

Tianjin University, China, francezcy@163.com

1 ABSTRACT

Chinese royal gardens have had a long tradition of including agricultural landscape. Taking the ancient monarchs as the research objects, this paper explores several pivotal reasons why agricultural landscape was often included in royal gardens. Firstly, in ancient China, agriculture was the foundation of society, and the monarchs had to show that they valued agriculture and attached importance to their people's livelihood. Secondly, from the monarchs' personal point of view, they generally had a desire to escape reality, and longed for the life of an ordinary farmer, so the agricultural landscape can be seen as a symbol of escapism and this was reflected in their royal gardens. Finally, after analyzing the theories of the early thinkers and the worship of Heaven of the early monarchs, a new and more profound reason can be found for the extension of agricultural landscape into Chinese royal gardens - the ruling class's awe of 'the way of Heaven', which legitimized their dominance according to traditional Chinese thought.

1.1 Keywords

Chinese royal gardens, agricultural landscape, the way of heaven, ritual

2 INTRODUCTION

One of the main origins of Chinese traditional gardens is the nursery garden. The nursery garden was created by the early ruling class with a main focus on small-scale agricultural production (Zhou Weiquan, 2008). The nursery garden is regarded as the early garden rather than a farm as its planting is as much for ornamental value as it is for food production. Therefore the embryonic form of Chinese classical gardens was derived from the aesthetic of agricultural landscape (Yu Xiaosen, 2010). The royal garden is the mainstay of the early gardens, and the royal gardens are closely linked to agriculture (Yin Beizhi, 2008). By the Qin and Han Dynasties, the form of Chinese royal gardens reached maturity and agricultural landscape had already become a key feature. This tradition has been extended throughout the history of Chinese royal gardens all the way to the final Qing Dynasty. China's royal gardens are usually large-scale, rich in content, and generally contain small mountains and water features such as lakes and rivers. Agricultural landscapes in different royal gardens have different proportions, and sometimes it can form an independent section as a 'Garden within garden'.

In its early stages, the agricultural landscape of Chinese royal gardens had functions of sacrifice and production, but later it increasingly began to play a role for in entertainment and enjoyment. The production function can be seen as the most obvious reason for the emergence of agricultural landscape in Chinese royal gardens. Dating back to the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.), which was a period of low social productivity, there were a number of orchards, vegetable gardens and even livestock farms in the giant imperial garden, Shang-Lin Yuan. The fruits, vegetables and meat produced in the garden were transported directly to the royal palace for royal family members to eat. At the same time Shang-Lin Yuan was the royal ritual site, used to pray for the agricultural harvest. According to historical records, every spring the Queen of the Han Dynasty would work in Shang-Lin Yuan. This pious labour was the ruling classes' way of expressing to Heaven the high value which they placed on agriculture. According to the "Shui Jing Zhu", in the Sixteen Kingdoms period (A.D. 304 - 439), a large number of mulberry trees were planted in the famous royal garden Shang-Zi Yuan, and every year in the spring the emperor would pick mulberry leaves with his wives in this garden. From these we can see that the royal families offered sacrifices in the productive gardens.

In the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618 - 907), the Jin Yuan garden located in north side of the royal palace, contained orchards for pears and other fruits as well as vineyards. According to the historical records Jiu Tang Shu, Emperor Zhongzong regularly held entertainments and hosted banquets for his ministers in these orchards. This proves that the agricultural landscape in the royal gardens already had a recreational function. At this time the sacrificial function of agricultural landscape had been separated. For example, a separate ritual place – Can Tan Ting - was built. After the Tang Dynasty, it was obvious that the importance of production of the royal gardens had been gradually weakened. Alternatively, it could be said that a clear differentiation between productive gardens, sacrificial gardens and recreational gardens began to be made. The recreational gardens began to show the farming scenes just as part of the landscape, and pastoral scenery became more about fun and performance. In the Song Dynasty (A.D. 960 – 1279), according to Emperor Huizong's own description in Gen Yue Ji, his grand garden Gen Yue contained a 'Garden within garden' called the 'Western Village' which was designed and built to imitate the life of ordinary farmers, and the wheat, beans, nettle and other crops were only planted in order to form a farmland scene. When Kublai ruled China, Jing-Shan garden was the place where the royal family of Yuan Dynasty (A.D. 1271– 1368) enjoyed agricultural landscape, even if the rulers were nomadic. To the Ming (A.D. 1368 – 1644) and Qing Dynasties (A.D. 1644 – 1912), the agricultural landscape within the royal gardens reached a peak, both in terms of area and quality. Some of them were agricultural ritual places, such as Xian Can Tan and Can She while others were used for entertainment and viewing. The most famous one was the area around the Long River in the northern Yuan Ming Yuan. Dan Bo Ning Jing, Xing Hua Chun Guan, Shui Mu Ming Se, Ying Shui Lan Xiang and other scenic groups formed a large area with a strong pastoral scenery (Figure 1). Similar agricultural landscape groups also appeared in the Summer Palace and the Summer Resort.



Figure 1. the Agricultural Landscape in Yuan Ming Yuan.(The Forty Scenes of Yuan Ming Yuan, National Museum of China).

These are the development of agricultural landscape of Chinese royal gardens, and it is easy to see that agricultural landscape had a variety of functions. There are complex reasons why the agricultural landscape occupied an important place in Chinese royal gardens for thousands of years. Previous researchers (Yu, 2010, Zhang, 2012, Ren, 2008) have often linked the existence of agricultural landscapes in the royal gardens simply to economic productivity, and some other important reasons such as the emperors' preferences, beliefs and the legitimacy of their regime, have been overlooked.

3 AGRICULTURE AS THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIETY

The emergence of agricultural landscape in Chinese royal gardens, in essence, is linked with socio-economic factors. These links go back to the ancient China's main production model. From a geographical point of view, China is a continental country, so in ancient times, China naturally became an agricultural country. For ancient China, land and farming were the fundamental foundation of society, and agriculture was the most basic mode of production. The agricultural economy not only supplied the consumption needs of other sectors in traditional society, but also occupied the main part of the authoritarian state's fiscal revenue. From the point of view of the composition of the social classes, the peasant families undertook the main tax burden, and farmers' social status was not low. In *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, Feng Youlan said: "Chinese people's inherent thoughts include the ideas of the so-called 'fundamental' and 'final' occupations. 'Fundamental' here refers to agriculture, and 'the last' means business." Ancient Chinese social class status from high to low were: scholar, farmer, craftsman, and businessman, and so the social status of a farmer was second only to a scholar's. Thus ancient China was a country based on agriculture, both at a social and economic level. It is for this reason that all of the ancient Chinese regimes took a clear policy of attaching great importance to agriculture.

Every ancient emperor knew that the agricultural yield would directly affect the stability of social order and his ruling. Therefore the emperor needed to express his attitude towards agriculture, and attending to farming personally was a good way to show it clearly. An emperor who was able to do farm work was easily able to establish a good image, and could become a role model for his people. Since the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty (1046 B.C. – 256 B.C.), every Chinese monarch would undertake an ablution on a special day every year nine days before the beginning of the spring and then hold a grand ceremony with his ministers at the start of spring, at which he would do farming work personally. The purpose of holding a grand ceremony was also to show the country's determination to agriculture. This tradition was held in China for over three thousand years, and it was also one of the grandest celebrations of the royal family.

The place where the monarch held the agricultural ceremony was usually chosen in the royal gardens. Therefore, the agricultural landscape in the royal gardens had a practical value; it can be seen as a place that the emperors used to show self-image and raise prestige. Agricultural landscape, located in Chinese royal gardens, was a manifestation of the social status of agriculture, and also was a symbol that ancient rulers always paid attention to people's livelihood and always looked after the farmers.

4 THE EMPERORS' OWN AESTHETIC PREFERENCES

For the royal gardens' owners, including emperors, the existence of agricultural landscape in the royal gardens was a reflection of their own personal preference. Devoted garden owners attempt to create ideal spaces that reflects their own mind and the way they look at the world. Chinese scholars' private gardens tend to be seen as the owners' paradise which allows them to escape from reality, and sometimes the royal gardens are the same. The emperors regarded their gardens as their ideal spaces, and put their own spiritual worlds into the gardens.

In Chinese royal gardens, there were not only some spaces to show that the world was united and the national power was strong (such as Jiu Zhou Qing Yan in Yuan-Ming Yuan, which had political complexion), but also some spaces for escapism. For men at the pinnacle of power, ancient autocratic monarchs still had the same desires as ordinary people — to escape from everyday life. In this regard the emperors had different tendencies. Some envied immortal life, so they built wonderlands in their gardens (This gradually formed another important tradition of Chinese royal gardens). Some of the emperors yearned for civilian life. There are a lot of classic stories about Song, Ming, and Qing Dynasty emperors traveling in disguise and living with everyday people, such as Emperor Huizong of Song, Emperor Zhengde, Emperor Qianlong. In these stories, the ordinary farmers' life was particularly favored by some emperors, especially those of the Qing Dynasty. The Qing emperors, left more than sixteen groups of the Farming and Weaving Pictures which is an amazing number for it far exceeds the sum of all the previous dynasties (Zhang Xiaolei, 2015). and given this data, the scale of agricultural landscape can be said to have reached its peak during the Qing Dynasty.

For instance, Emperor Yongzheng (1678 – 1735) made a prominent contribution to this growth. While the purpose of other emperors to publish the Farming and Weaving Pictures was to emphasize the importance of agriculture, Emperor Yongzheng had a personal preference for agricultural landscape. In his Farming and Weaving Pictures, the protagonists were no longer ordinary farmers or peasant women but he and his wife. These groups of pictures show Emperor Yongzheng and his wife dressed as peasants and cultivating the fields, and they reflect the joy of the emperor (figure 2). Emperor Yongzheng, in his poems Yue Xin Ji, said that he dreamed of a simple, and quiet life, and wanted to live with indifference to fame or wealth, and he also called himself "the world's most leisurely person". There is other evidence which shows his dream of becoming an ordinary farmer living a civilian life. For example, the Paintings of the Amusement of Emperor Yongzheng show the Emperor dressed as fisherman, huntsman and farmer. All of them reflect the emperor's longing for pastoral life. From his special preferences, the emperor built a large area of agricultural landscape in YuanMing Yuan, and then when his successor inherited this wonderful garden, he enhanced the quality and the scale of the agricultural landscape, and let it become the most prestigious agricultural landscape in the history of Chinese gardens. This achievement was driven by the emperor's personal preference.



Figure 2. Yong Zheng Farming and Weaving Pictures. (China Palace Museum).

In above analysis, some of the agricultural landscape of Chinese royal gardens can be seen as the link between the emperors and the pastoral life. These agricultural landscape were valued and loved by emperors themselves, and they were built to satisfy the emperors' own wishes, and became their owners' spiritual ballast.

5 THE LEGITIMACY OF THE RULER AND THE WAY OF HEAVEN

Focus on the emperors themselves and it can be found that the emergence of agricultural landscape in Chinese royal gardens was linked to the power of the ruling class. In ancient China, every monarch would claim that he was obedient to the will of Heaven to rule the people – a declaration which was even written at the beginning of each edict. This kind of thought was a tradition in ancient China for thousands of years and was related to the status of Heaven in the eyes of ancestors.

In the pre-scientific period, Heaven was regarded as having supernatural force, and was treated as the creator of the world. The ancients thought that Heaven determined everything in the world. Shang-Shu considered Heaven as “the mother of all the world's creatures”, Confucius said that Heaven was the greatest force in the world. The ancients thought that Heaven had emotions, and the way how Heaven treated the world was 'the way of Heaven'. As early as ancient times, monarchs began to try to contact Heaven. For instance, the Emperor Yao (around 2377 B.C. – 2259B.C.) and Shun (around 2287 B.C. - 2067 B.C.) had religious rituals recorded in Shang-Shu. When the country became a centralized bureaucratic state in the Western Han Dynasty, the theory of the 'divine right of kings' was presented systematically by the outstanding thinker and politician Dong Zhongshu (197 B.C. - 104 B.C). This theory had a deep-rooted influence on the ruling class of China for thousands of years.

Dong advocated that the true master of the world was not human, but the sacred Heaven. However, Heaven could not command the world directly. The only way to achieve its will was to give power to someone in the world, and the chosen one would become the monarch. Dong's theory established the direct connection between the monarchs and Heaven, and put the monarch in the mortal world's most sacred position (Li Mian, 2013). Thus, the way in which the rulers acquired power became "legalized". This theory was accepted by the ruling class of ancient China for thousands of years. Dong's theory consolidated the monarchy, but also acted as a warning to the monarch. He emphasised that, since rulers got power from Heaven, they should rule in obedience to the will of Heaven. If they violated this will, Heaven would cause disasters to show its anger. The occurrence of a disaster represented Heaven blaming the ruler and which meant the legitimacy of their rule was being questioned. “The root cause of calamities is the improper conduct of the ruler, and the calamity is a condemnation from Heaven”, as Dong wrote in Chun Qiu Fan Lu. It can be seen that he regarded the human monarch as the person responsible for the calamity. His purpose was to encourage the rulers to be diligent in the political affairs in order to prove the legitimacy of their own dominance. Almost all of the ancient Chinese monarchs accepted this claim.

Agriculture played a very important role in this theory as it was often the victim of disasters. Whether it was earthquakes, landslides, droughts and floods, the harvest was usually the first to be affected. In other words, agricultural output could directly reflected the scale of a disaster and thus the scale of Heaven's anger. For the ruler, a terrible harvest was a clear danger sign to his regime.

So from the rulers' point of view, the theory of the “divine right of kings” placed agriculture in a more sacred position, and made agriculture closely connected to their regime. Rulers attached importance to agriculture, not only for economic considerations, but more from the fear of faith. This also created a very interesting phenomenon in Chinese traditional culture: once a drought, flood or other disaster damaged agriculture and started to cause distress to the population, emperors would issue an edict named Zui Ji Zhao, to admit to the masses his own failures. In the Han Dynasty, there were a dozen emperors who issued nearly sixty of these edicts (Wu Qing, 1995), and each of the edicts had to be written with caution. The emperors called themselves “talentless”, and were “shamed to cause such a calamity to the people”, “very fearful of the loss of agriculture”, and so on. It is not difficult to see from these words that these monarchs carefully reviewed their own negligence and treated themselves as the culprit for causing disaster to agriculture. The success of agriculture had become a manifestation of a ruler's performance, and the stability of agriculture conveyed the satisfaction from Heaven to the ruler, that is, agriculture had become the standard of testing the legitimacy of the ruler's regime. That also explains the phenomenon that before becoming more about entertainment, the agricultural landscape in Chinese royal gardens served as a ritual site in most cases.

In the early days, in addition to production needs, the purpose of putting the agriculture-related elements into their gardens was for prayer, and the elements expressed an attempt to establish contact with Heaven. The ancient monarchs' activities in the early agricultural landscape were more like a consolation to Heaven. There was a delicate connection between agriculture and Heaven that the rulers feared, so that the agricultural landscape that appeared in the early royal gardens had a special sacred position. Putting the agricultural landscape into their gardens was a convenient way for the emperors to pray for a long and stable rule, and also make a reminder of agriculture's importance for themselves.

6 CONCLUSION

The need for production was the most basic reason for the birth of agricultural landscape in Chinese royal gardens. Agriculture was the foundation of the country, and the rulers expressed their attention to agriculture and the concerns of the people's livelihood by means of the agricultural landscape in the royal garden. With the improvement of productivity and social development, agricultural landscape become an aesthetic demand, and some rulers had a special preference for such designs, so agricultural landscape played a large part in their gardens. The emperor Yongzheng was the most prominent one of them. There is also an invisible reason in that the agricultural landscape is also a reflection of the rulers' longing to establish contact with Heaven under the influence of the theory of the 'divine right of kings'. This exploration into the special implications of agricultural landscape in Chinese royal garden helps to re-examine the role of agricultural landscape in the royal garden and brings new inspiration to the modern agricultural landscape design. Moreover, the significance of agricultural landscape in social, aesthetic and religious fields reflects the value of Chinese classical garden protection. Previous research on agricultural landscape in Chinese classical royal gardens rarely made the link with the emperors' preferences, beliefs and the legitimacy of their regime. However, the reasons are not simply limited to these factors. While this paper has attempted to explore some issues ignored so as to further broaden the vision of academic research, it still leaves much space for further explorations, for example, whether the agricultural landscape in the royal gardens also served as a place to conduct agricultural experiments. For example, Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty tried for several years to introduce lychee, olives and other produce into the Shang-Lin Yuan (Sima Xiangru). It could also be studied whether the location of the agricultural landscape in the royal gardens layout reflected the ecological concept of the ancient Chinese. These questions are worthy of further study.

7 REFERENCES

- Dong Zhongshu. (2011). *Chun Qiu Fan Lu (ancient book)*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
- Du You. (2016). *Tong Dian (ancient book)*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
- Feng Youlan. (2013). *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Huang Shuhui. (Ed.). (2015). *Shang Shu (ancient book)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House.
- Li Daoyuan. (2009). *Shui Jing Zhu (ancient book)*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
- Li Mian. (2013). *The Philosophy of Heaven and Man and the Rites of the Emperor Accession*. Nanjing Normal University.
- Ren Yaofei. (2008). *Research on Agricultural Culture of Chinese Traditional Garden*. Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University.
- Sima Guang. (Ed.). (2014). *Zi Zhi Tong Jian (ancient book)*. Beijing: Overseas Chinese Book Company.
- Sima Xiangru. *Shang-Lin Fu (ancient book)*.
- Wei Hong. (1985). *Han Jiu Yi (ancient book)*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
- Wu Qing. (1995). *Calamity and Han Social Structure*. Journal of Northwest University. 1995, No.3.
- Xing Bing. (Ed.). (2014). *Xiao Jing (ancient book)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House.
- Yin Beizhi. (2008). *the Agricultural Function of China's Early Gardens and Its Practical Significance*. Journal of Ancient and Modern Agriculture. 2008, No.2.
- Yong Zheng. (2010). *Yue Xin Ji (ancient book)*. Beijing: Overseas Chinese Book Company.
- Yong Zheng. *Yong Di Ji (ancient book)*.
- Yu Xiaosen. (2010). *Study on the Relationship between Agriculture-related Elements and Landscape Architecture*. Beijing Forestry University
- Zhang Qingxin. (2012). *Studies on Farming Culture in Chinese Classical Gardens*. Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University.

Zhang Xiaolei. (2015). *A Study of Ancient Chinese Poetry about Farming and Weaving Pictures*. Nanjing Normal University.
Zhonghua Book Company. (Ed.). (1975). *Jiu Tang Shu (ancient book)*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company.
Zhou Weiwan. (2008). *History of Chinese Classical Gardens*. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press.