Status of the Materials Used in Suzhou Gardens
in the Late Ming Dynasty

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INTRODUCTION

Suzhou gardens built in the Ming dynasty aimed to produce a replica of nature in miniature through the arrangement of the landscape using stones, water, plants, and buildings. Writers, such as Maggie Keswick, express that gardens represented the harmony of heaven and earth and the merging of man and nature. All of the elements used -- stone, water, plants, and buildings -- have multiple layers of symbolic meanings that were always closely tied to the concept of reclusion – a virtue of the righteous officials.¹

Craig Clunas, however, points out in his books, Superfluous Things and Fruitful Sites², that the symbolic ideal of reclusion was not the complete picture of the garden culture in Suzhou in the sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries of the late Ming dynasty. In fact, a “garden” was a commodity, a symbol of status, and an area for competition of wealth, class, and status. Due to the fact that Suzhou was a consumption driven city, economic power became an important element in

determining social status. The strong consumption power destabilized the original composition of the Suzhou elite group. Suzhou literati, a respected group within the elites, safeguarded their slightly higher status by highlighting their cultural power and positioning themselves as connoisseurs, or leaders of taste. They codified their connoisseurship in taste manuals such as *The Treatise on Superfluous Things*, written by Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 (1585 – 1645) during the late Ming dynasty.

Defining taste was a strategy used by Suzhou literati to secure their social status. Acquiring a literati taste was the strategy used by other Suzhou elites to gain status. One way to display status was to construct a garden with expensive materials. When everyone could afford to construct a garden with similar materials, other strategies were used to get beyond the cost of tangible materials and to increase the status of the gardens. This paper will discuss how the garden owners raise the status of their gardens by adding intangible value which associates with “virtue” to the costly tangible materials used in the garden.
CHAPTER 1. WRITINGS ABOUT CHINESE GARDENS

The most quoted book by today’s scholars on ancient Chinese garden design is **Yuan ye 《園冶》 [The Craft of Garden]**, written by Ji Cheng 計成 (1582 – c 1642) in the Ming dynasty. He wrote about different aspects of designing the garden. In his book, Ji Cheng discusses the selection of land, the setting of foundations, the different types of buildings, the supporting structures, the interior decorations, the balustrades, the windows, the walls, the floor tiling, the different types of “fake” mountains, and the selection of stones. At a glance, *Yuan ye* seemed to be a design handbook, but it could also be read as a taste manual to increase the status of both the writer and the patron.

When writing *Yuan ye*, Ji Cheng placed strong emphasis on his literati credentials to establish his authority in garden design. For example, in the preface of his book he claims that he is a painter and he loves to travel. His first sentence

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4 Flora Li-tsu Fu, “The Representation of Famous Mountains: Chinese Landscape Paintings of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century” (University of California at Berkeley, 1995). 67-106. Travel was in vogue among the elites during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.
is, to paraphrase: Building a garden requires 30 percent craftsmanship, 70 percent ownership. “Ownership” here refers to the designer, who is usually said to be the “owner” of the garden. In terms of painting Ji Cheng loved those of Guan Tong (c. 906-960) and Jing Hao (c. 855-915) because of the atmosphere portrayed in their paintings. Ji Cheng writes: “While arguing with some people about how to make a fake mountain beautiful, I by chance started my career as a garden designer……This book is a collection of my experiences as a professional garden designer……written in the fourth year of reign of Chongzhen (1631), late autumn, by Foudaoren (a pen name of Ji Cheng) leisurely written in Yuyetang [The Hall of Yuye].” Yuyetang was the name of the residential hall of scholar Wang Shiheng (dates unknown), whose garden was designed by Ji Cheng.

Ji Cheng claimed that it was just “by chance” that he engaged in landscape design. By doing so, he deliberately distinguished himself from craftsmen or artisans. He did not provide 30 percent of the work, an unsubstantial part of the

garden design, but he, who was a painter, a traveler, and one who knew the poetic quality of landscape, created the landscape with the owner. This implied that the book he wrote was not a manual for artisans but rather a handbook for the owners and an aesthetic guide.

Moreover, Ji Cheng’s approach to the subject was very similar to Wen Zhenheng’s approach to his book, *Treatise on Superfluous Things* 《長物志》, published in the Ming dynasty. Ji Cheng wrote in an authoritative manner. Frequently, he described what was “best for” 勝, and “proper for” 宜; what was “improper for” 忌, and “not allowed or not recommended” 不可. In most cases, he described the proper way without giving a reason. In some cases he related the proper way of creating a poetic atmosphere or aesthetic quality. In one or two cases, he actually mentioned the practical reason, such as a certain arrangement of “fake” mountains may be dangerous to children. ⁶

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⁶ Ibid. 231.
The writing of books like the *Yuan ye* or the *Treatise on Superfluous Things* 《長物志》 is fully analyzed by Craig Clunas in his book, *Superfluous Things*.  

Clunas warns against interpreting these books purely as writings on the conventional aesthetic standard by the literati without also considering the social and economic conditions of this consumption driven period of pre-modern China. He further expands his analysis of these books to understand the culture of the Ming dynasty. The class structure, due to the rise of the merchant class, was more blurred and this had a direct impact on the literati class. This created anxiety among the literati group and this anxiety is reflected in their writings. The writings were intended to establish literati taste to reinforce their high status. Moreover, Clunas points out that these books could have been written for a patron because under a consumption-driven society, it was possible to sell anything, including “literatiness.” In other words, when we approach Ji Cheng’s book we should not only interpret it as a garden construction manual but rather a “taste” guidebook which records the

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7 Clunas, *Superfluous Things*.

8 In a traditional Chinese society, the society was divided into four classes with the literati being at the top, followed by farmers, followed by artisans, and merchants at the bottom of the structure. Such a division was proposed in the Spring and Autumn Period and Confucius was not the only scholar who proposed such a division. Also refer to section 2.1.
conventions of the literati in the late Ming dynasty to enhance personal credit as well as a patron’s status.

The second group of books always quoted by modern scholars is the writings about gardens in the Ming dynasty, such as *Wang shi Zhuozheng yuanji* 《王氏拙政園記》 [Records of the Wang’s Zhuozheng yuan] written by Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470 – 1559) for Mr. Wang, the owner of Zhuozheng yuan 拙政園. Wen was not the only writer who wrote about gardens. Other literati writers, such as Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1547-1593), wrote about their own gardens in a similar fashion. Wang Shizhen also wrote about his visits to gardens in Nanjing in the form of *biji* 筆記 [personal notes]. He recorded some features of the gardens, and sometimes how to view some features.

The writings of these literati allow us to get a sense of what features of the garden were considered to be “fit” and “proper” under the literati taste. However, we should be aware of the motivation behind these writings. In some cases the writings were products of negotiation between patrons and writers, or in other cases served

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9 Zhuozheng Yuan 拙政園 is translated in English as “the Garden of the Humble Administrator” or “the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician.” I will refer to the garden as Zhuozheng Yuan in this paper.
as guidebooks or tour maps to raise the status of gardens. For example, in the case of *Wang shi Zhuozheng yuanji*, the writer, Wen Zhengming, was a very famous poet and painter. He was trained to be an official scholar. Although he failed many times in the official exam, he was recognized as a good example of literati painter and poet; that is, one who did not paint for money. Wen and Wang, who was the owner of Zhuozheng yuan, were friends. We cannot be certain if Wang asked Wen to write and paint about his garden, but we know for sure that Wen produced the writing *Wang shi Zhuozheng yuanji*, and two collections of album leaves depicting the garden. Wen's writing and painting simply describe the different views or scenes of the garden and explain how the naming of the garden is associated with literati writings in the past. His writing cannot strictly be classified as memoir or travelogue but rather just his expression of how he appreciated the garden. By understanding the relationship between Wen Zhengming and the owner of Zhuozheng yuan, we see that Wen's writing and painting might not have been purely based on his appreciation of the garden but rather for financial gain. Clunas explains in another book, *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming*, that
financial benefits were exchanged between literati in the form of gifts and reciprocal gifts tradition.¹⁰

The traditions of writing guidebooks and travelogues about gardens continued through to the Qing dynasty. Scientific researches were not carried out until many Chinese architects tried to restore the gardens in the 1950s and 1960s. The architects did detailed surveys on gardens in Suzhou and in the Jiangnan region (modern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang). In addition, they also studied pre-modern writings about gardens such as those of Ji Cheng and Wen Zhengming. Their studies focused mainly on aesthetic value and design theory. Many symbolic associations with the virtue of reclusion and the re-creation of nature in miniature were systematically documented.

Numerous garden publications were done by famous architects, such as Yang Hongxun, Liu Dunzhen, Zhang Jiaji, and Chen Congzhou, when they restored the gardens in Suzhou starting in the 1950s and 1960s. These architects were concerned about the design theory of the garden. For example, in the book

Chinese Classical Gardens of Suzhou《蘇州經典園林》，the author, Liu Dunzhen, discusses the layout of the gardens in general, such as borrowed scenery, the contrast of scenic spots, and the route that linked the scenic spots. He continues with water elements, building elements, mountain elements, and types of windows and balustrades. In each case, he gives detailed examples of how such an aesthetic standard could be found in gardens in Suzhou. He also includes detailed architectural drawings, and accurate measurements of almost every garden in Suzhou. His book is a design theory and manual for Chinese gardens. The readers would have understood what was considered to be a well-designed garden after reading his book.

Some scholars introduced other elements into the pure aesthetic and design theory. When they discussed these gardens, the literati ideal of reclusion was introduced. For example, Chen Congzhou introduces in the book, On Chinese Gardens《說園》，the literati elements, such as poems, to express the influence of

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the poetic quality of the layout and composition of the garden. He used this book to say to garden restorers that they could not restore the gardens without understanding the history of the garden and without understanding the motive and the design ideologies of the past. However, Chen’s major concern was still the aesthetic and design quality of the garden.

These studies, as Craig Clunas points out, only concentrated on one aspect of the garden culture – well designed gardens were used for reclusion in a miniature world of nature -- and failed to look into other cultural aspects. Clunas’ *Fruitful Sites* aims to present practices of gardening by the elite class in the Jiangnan region in the Ming dynasty. The book introduces other aspects, such as the economic value, land property, or farming of gardens. *Fruitful Sites* reminds readers that gardens in Suzhou built in this time period did not solely represent the “loftiness” of the owners. Gardens in Suzhou by the late Ming dynasty had become a commodity and a symbol of status. The purpose of the garden was not solely for literati pursuits; gardens also served many practical needs such as exhibiting one’s wealth, class, 

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and status in the society. Gardens had also become a way to compete for higher status.\textsuperscript{13} No other writers have yet challenged Clunas’ view. However, Clunas did not explain in his book what strategies garden owners employed to compete for higher status of their gardens.

Michael Marmé in his book \textit{Suzhou, Where the Goods of All the Provinces Converge}, points out that in the Ming dynasty Suzhou was a consumption driven society.\textsuperscript{14} In order to compete for higher status for their gardens, garden owners displayed wealth, class, and status through the selection of materials used in the construction. Furthermore, if most of the gardens displayed similar materials, then intangible value, associated with virtue and the literati taste, would be added to the expensive tangible materials used. Tangible materials could be seen, touched, sensed, had a utilitarian function, and bore a cost to acquire, while intangible values were derived from the way in which the materials were presented, and how the materials were associated with virtue and literati taste.

\textsuperscript{13} Clunas, \textit{Fruitful Sites}.
CHAPTER 2. STATUS ANXIETY OF SUZHOU ELITES AND GARDEN CULTURE IN THE MING DYNASTY

“Class,” “status,” and “culture” are very vague terms and are often used interchangeably. According to Max Weber, status is defined as the "social estimation of honor" one receives in the society. Status is different from class; status does not involve economic achievement. A group of people of the same status will share a common culture and exclude other people. The exclusiveness can be reflected in the form of dress, speech, and worldview. Often the group is made up of people who share the same profession. Pierre Bourdieu expanded on Weber’s idea and said that status and class could not be clearly distinguished. David Swartz clearly summarizes Bourdieu's view on class, status, and culture:

Bourdieu offered a class-symbolization model of status

where cultural differences serve as markers of class
differences. Class differences find expression in status
distinctions that rank individuals and groups on scales of

social honorability rather than in terms of economic interest

alone. They go misrecognized, since they are legitimated

through the powerful ideology of individual qualities of talent,

merit, and giftedness.\textsuperscript{16}

It is not the objective of this paper to apply these theories that developed to compare western culture to the early modern Chinese society. However, it may be pertinent to point out that the fluidity between class, status, and culture could explain some phenomena of the garden culture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Suzhou.

Traditionally, under the Confucian four-class system, the literati class was at the top of the four classes and merchants were at the bottom. Literati held the key to high culture which was considered to be a symbol of high status in the society. However, in the Ming dynasty, Suzhou was a commercial center of the country and Suzhou elites were made up of not only aristocrats, literati, and landlords but also wealthy merchants. Cultural power originally held by the literati class could also be

exchanged with economic power. This easy transformation of cultural and economic power caused many literati (men of culture) and wealthy merchants (men with money) to be concerned and anxious about their status. One way to display status was to construct a garden of “taste.” The association with taste, through the materials used in the garden, could reflect a higher status of the garden owner.

2.1. CLASS SYSTEM IN THE LATE MING DYNASTY

Starting from the Spring and Autumn (770-476 BCE) and Warring States (475-221 BCE) Periods, Chinese society was divided into four classes under the ruling family. The four classes of citizens were namely *shi* 士 (literati/scholars), *nong* 农 (farmers), *gong* 工 (artisans/craftsmen), and *shang* 商 (merchants).

Although Mencius 孟子 and Xunzi 荀子 disliked the merchant class because merchants made their profit from trading and did not engage in primary production, during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, these four categories of citizens were relatively equal in social status. Only after the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), did the government start to establish many policies to suppress the merchants, and merchants became the lowest class of the society. Since then, the
four-class structure of the society, with literati being the highest class and
merchants being the lowest, was more or less established in China. This structure
was used as a basic class division until the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). In
theory, literati despised trading and would not engage in trading or any
profit-making business.

In the Ming dynasty, the class structure was not as rigid and social mobility
was high. Literati could easily fall in and out of favor in politics a few times in
their lives. For example, the owner of Zhuozheng yuan, Wang Xianchen (dates
unknown), went up and down the ladder twice. Wen Zhengming, a famous
member of the literati in Suzhou, became a court official for two years and resigned.
Merchants, too, could move up the ladder in a few ways. Merchants could purchase
farmland and become landlords. This way, they became “farmers” and engaged in
primary production. Or, merchants could pay to educate their sons, just as Tang
Yin’s (1470 – 1524) father did. Alternatively, merchants could climb the ladder

\[ \text{Wei Zhengtong} \text{ 韋政通. *Zhongguo wenhua gailun* 中国文化概論 [Brief Introduction to Chinese Culture]. (Taipei: Shuinui chubanshe, 2003), 295-97.} \]
\[ \text{Ibid. 345-50.} \]
through arranged marriages. These movements intensified, as Suzhou became a commercial center, rather than relying on a primary farming industry. Literati, aristocrats, wealthy landlords, and merchants formed the elite class in Suzhou in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

2.2. THE ATTRIBUTES OF HIGH STATUS AMONG ELITES

When a merchant moved up the ladder by becoming a landlord or by studying Confucian classics, he did not automatically gain equal status within the literati class. To gain status, not only did one have to be a learned man but one should abide by the behavior and rites of the Confucian ideal. Within the group of elites, what attributes contributed to higher status? Let us study two examples: Wen Zhengming and Tang Yin, also commonly known as Tang Bohu 唐伯虎.

Wen Zhengming was considered a key member of the literati. He was born to a family of scholar-officials. He was trained in the Confucian classics to become an official to serve the government when he was young; however, he failed the scholar test many times and only in his fifties was he recommended for a position in Beijing. After two years of officialdom, he resigned and returned to Suzhou. From then on,
he devoted himself to painting and studying art and antiques and withdrew from the political turmoil.\(^{19}\)

On the other hand, Tang Yin came from a wealthy merchant family, which means he was not born with a high social status, yet he was considered as literati because he passed the examination and become a \textit{jinshi} 进士; however, he was not considered a key member of the literati by his peers because of his debauched lifestyle. Wen’s father once commented to Wen that Tang was undisciplined and would not accomplish anything. Tang would not be Wen’s match.\(^{20}\) Later Tang returned to Suzhou with no hope of an official career because he was suspected of cheating in the examination. Tang became a professional painter in Suzhou.\(^{21}\)

Although Wen painted, he did not sell his works. This was very different from his contemporary, Tang Yin, a professional painter who was as famous as Wen. The difference lies in whether the painters would intentionally sell their art, whether the painters would accept commissions to paint for special occasions, and whether

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\(^{21}\) Ibid. 194.
they would let their clients dictate the subject and style of their paintings. Wen, unlike Tang, would certainly defend his amateur status and that his paintings were true self-expressions.\textsuperscript{22} Instead of receiving commissions, Wen used his paintings as reciprocal gifts for some wealthy patrons.\textsuperscript{23} Wen was aware of the fact that his paintings were expensive and there was a market for them. Occasionally, he gave some paintings away in order to help his friends financially,\textsuperscript{24} but he did not directly engage in the trading process in order to reinforce his literati status.

From the story of Wen and Tang, we can conclude a few things about the status of Suzhou elites. First, wealthy background alone did not ensure a high status, and knowing the Confucian classics and passing the examination were important. Tang was considered one of the literati because he had knowledge of Confucian classics and passed the examination. Second, officialdom was not the key determining factor of a member of the literati. Wen was already a well-known member of the literati even though he failed the examination many times and did

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. 248.
\textsuperscript{23} By sending gifts and receiving reciprocal gifts, Wen did not engage in trading and he could not be regarded as a merchant.
\textsuperscript{24} Cahill, \textit{Parting at the Shore}. 248.
not become an official until a censor offered him a position based on his virtue 德.

Third, the Confucian class system still played a role. Wen traded his paintings in a “gift and reciprocal gift” manner rather than “selling” them. Hence, selling and trading should be avoided for literati to reflect one’s “loftiness” 清高. Fourth, virtue played a key role in the evaluation criteria as a key and influencing member of the group. Even if one were wealthy and learned the Confucian classics one could not be considered in the top tier of the elites if he did not "play by the rules of the game." Tang passed the exam with distinction, yet he was considered not “proper” or not “virtuous” because of his debauched and undisciplined lifestyle. Wen was selected to be an official and considered as representative of the real literati because of his virtue and his ethical standard.

Thus, wealth (economic power), officialdom (political power), knowledge of Confucian classics (intellectual power), and virtue (moral power) were attributes of high status in Suzhou in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Virtue seemed to be the key determining factor because it was the most difficult to quantify, and virtue could only be manifested by a strict adherence to the Confucian principles. The
explanation and interpretation of such principles could only be done by the literati class. In order to represent status, one would associate oneself with virtue by acting virtuously and following the conventions of “virtue,” or associating oneself with someone of high status in the society.

2.3. **SOCIAL MOBILITY AND THE STATUS ANXIETY OF ELITES IN THE MING DYNASTY**

The comparison of Wen Zhengming and Tang Yin also brings our attention to the mobile social structure of Suzhou in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Often literati and merchants would mingle freely. This unclear class- and status-structure brought anxiety to the elites and virtue began to be used as an abstract quality by elites to distinguish themselves.

Michael Marmé says that by the late fifteenth century different sectors of the economy of Suzhou were already flourishing.  

This was largely because of the extraordinary burden of land tax imposed on the Suzhou area by the Ming founder, who forced the inhabitants of Suzhou to rely less on produce from land but to act as the center of commerce to mobilize resources in other areas. With its excellent

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transportation network, Suzhou imported rice from Jiangxi, iron from Guangdong, lumber from Fujian, cotton from north China, and precious metal from overseas. By the mid-sixteenth century, Suzhou had a strong market economy. Suzhou did not rely on marketing its surpluses but rather on marketing commodities (including services) – goods provided to make a profit. Production of commodities led to a great variety of jobs compared to the traditional Confucian society. Besides farmers, landlords, craftsmen, and scholars, there were logistics planners, transportation providers, bankers and creditors, entertainers, and last but not least, the merchants. Everyone, including the wealthy merchants, played a key role in the economy and wealth of the city. Wealth was no longer concentrated in the hands of a few aristocrats or landlords. The traditional social class system could no longer hold on in Suzhou.

Wealth could buy not only necessities but also superfluous things, such as luxury items, tasteful objects, and cultural prestige. The word literati simply meant “learned men wenren (文人 or 讀書人).” Regardless of their wealth, those who

26 Ibid. 2 – 5.
studied the Confucian classics were considered as literati. Although it was not a requirement to be rich to be a member of the literati in the Ming dynasty, being rich would allow one to concentrate on his studies. In fact, according to Marmé, many scholars or learned men who came from established families had to give up their studies and practice trade in order to finance their households.\(^{27}\) Because of the change in economic conditions in the Ming dynasty, being a scholar was a luxury. This phenomenon also indicated that the roles of merchants and scholars were mixed and scholars found that it was acceptable to be merchants and engaged in business. Scholars could become merchants to finance their households; merchants could study and pass the examinations or acquire scholarly taste with their wealth, thus the classes between merchant and literati were not as clear-cut as before and the boundaries easily shifted. This highly permeable class boundary caused high status anxiety among literati and elites.

Clunas points out in his book *Superfluous Things* that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the makeup of this social group of elites in Suzhou was very

\(^{27}\) Ibid. 154-86.
complicated. The elites were composed not only of aristocrats, literati, and scholar-officials but also wealthy families of landlords and merchants. All of them had wealth to buy similar sorts of luxury items.\textsuperscript{28} Within this group, there were complex comparisons between the wealthy and the not-so-wealthy, between those who came from literati families and those who did not, and between those who passed the exam and those who did not.

Because of the high social mobility and the more permeable boundaries between social groups, literati in Suzhou no longer had an edge over others in terms of economic power, political power, and sometimes even cultural power. Hence, this strong status anxiety existed for the literati compared with other elites. In order for literati to react against this anxiety, it was necessary to display their cultural power through “taste.” Clunas also compared sixteenth- and seventeenth-century China with Europe and he concluded that:

\begin{quote}
Perhaps one of the most striking recurrences of a broad cultural pattern in both China and early modern Europe is...
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{28} Clunas, \textit{Superfluous Things}. 
what might be called ‘the invention of taste’. For if the unequal distribution of cultural resources is necessary to the stratification of society, as Bourdieu has argued, and if those cultural resources are all full commodities, available to all who possess the relevant economic resources, what is to prevent the cultural and economic hierarchies collapsing into each other, till the rich are the cultured, and the cultured are the rich? Here, taste comes into play, as an essential legitimator of consumption and an ordering principle which prevents the otherwise inevitable-seeming triumph of market forces.\(^{29}\)

Taste, a display of cultural power, came into play only when the elites were comparing themselves with one another. When everyone could afford to buy the same item, it would not be what one had that made the difference, but how one used or displayed the item (taste). A wealthy man, who wore the best silk, lived in

\(^{29}\) Ibid. 171.
the biggest house, used the best furniture, was easily distinguishable from a farmer who probably had never seen a silk garment in his life. However, a wealthy man, who wore the best silk, lived in the largest house, and used the best furniture, looked similar to any scholar of the literati class. Taste was now useful to differentiate the two when the comparison was close. Those who had taste had a higher social status. Defining taste was a strategy used by the Suzhou literati to safeguard their slightly higher status. Acquiring a literati taste was the strategy used by Suzhou elites (merchants) to gain status.

Since virtue was a key attribute of high status, “taste” associated with virtue was considered to have a higher status. Or the “taste” of a person respected for virtue was also considered high in status. Taste could be presented in a certain way to display sets of objects (including writings) or ways to use the objects. Taste with virtue could be represented by the construction of a garden, the tangible materials used to construct the garden, and intangible value which brought added importance to the materials.
2.4. LITERATI TASTE AND GARDEN CULTURE IN THE MING DYNASTY

The notion of constructing a garden already reflected upon one’s taste with virtue. Owning a garden was associated with the literati ideal of serving the righteous government and an official went into reclusion when the government was corrupted. 30

The literati class fully rose to the top of the four-class system in the Song dynasty (960 – 1279) when the imperial official examination system was established. In the Song dynasty, the literati class was brought to a very prestigious level, only exceeded by the aristocrats. They held the political and cultural power. Through studying Confucian classics, any man was able to take the local and imperial examinations. If one passed the examination, one could rise to hold political power in the society. In the Yuan dynasty, the Mongol rulers abolished the examination system and restructured the class system. Many scholars, like Qian Xuan 錢選 (1235-1305), adopted a reclusive lifestyle because the Mongolian

government was not considered virtuous, and also because there was basically no way for them to serve the government.

In the Ming dynasty, the traditional class system and the examination system were reinstated after they had been abolished by the Yuan rulers. Literati became the highest tier of the society once again. These scholars would serve the country as officials by passing the local and imperial official examinations. Occasionally, official Censors would consider the virtue of a learned man and offer him a position in the court. In theory, because the Ming dynasty was ruled by a Han-Chinese family, it would be virtuous to serve the Ming emperors. However, literati were not as highly respected by the Ming rulers. The Ming founder, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398), distrusted literati. Zhu came from a very poor and uneducated background; he was once a monk and a bandit, an outcast of the class system. He was concerned that the literati despised his humble beginnings. When he became emperor, he established policies to abolish the position of the prime minister 丞相 and centralize the power in the emperor. The early Ming emperors were renowned for their cruelty to the literati. Ming politics were dominated by government
corruption and the constant power play of eunuchs. Ming scholar officials were constantly worried about being persecuted. It was common that officials were ordered to be beaten with batons or ordered into exile to the outskirts of the country.

In general, Ming government officials usually served briefly in the government then retired in Suzhou or Jiangnan. Instead of serving the government, the notion that they retired from the unrighteous government showed they were the most virtuous and gained them high honor and glory.\textsuperscript{31}

The Confucian idea was that a learned scholar should serve only the righteous emperor (or an emperor with virtue) and should withdraw from the society when the government was immoral or corrupt 天下有道則現，無道則隱.\textsuperscript{32} The Taoists revere nature and emphasize the oneness between heaven and men (天人合一).

Merging with nature and forgetting about personal feelings allowed a scholar to achieve the highest goal of life.\textsuperscript{33} The famous scholar official Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427) of the Jin Dynasty (265-420 CE) expressed his joy of resigning his

\begin{thebibliography}{1}
\bibitem{31} Li Guangbi 李光璧, \textit{Ming Qing shilue} 明清史略 [A Brief History of the Ming and Qing Dynasties]. (Hunan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1957). 27-32
\bibitem{32} Cheng, \textit{Ancient Chinese Architecture: Private Gardens}. 116.
\bibitem{33} Ibid. 129.
\end{thebibliography}
post and returning to the nature/countryside in his essay Return to the Native Field 《歸去來辭》. This act of giving up his salary for a reclusive simple life was considered “pure and lofty” 清高, an essential quality of a learned man.

The idea of reclusion, combined with the reality of forced retirement by the government, formed the garden culture in the Ming dynasty. In mid-Ming, reclusion did not mean to live in the countryside and cultivate a farm. Rather, reclusion could mean either serving as a minor official at the court and being reclusive at heart, or retiring to a huge garden residence after officialdom. The garden was said to be a microcosm of nature where the retired scholar could lose himself while enjoying the glamorous urban lifestyle of Suzhou at the same time.

A garden was seen as a symbol of reclusion, a virtuous action that brought honor and status to the owner. However, Clunas points out that gardens were also storage of wealth in the sixteenth century, and by the seventeenth century, the late Ming dynasty, a Suzhou garden was simply “a hermit’s life available for cash.”

Although the idea of reclusion was not considered by the owners as an important

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34 Clunas, Fruitful Sites. 60-103, 173.
aspect of their gardens, reclusion that reflected one’s virtue, which was a key attribute of status, was still used as a means of “packaging” to raise the status of the garden. The association of virtue was a mean to add value to the tangible materials of the garden.
CHAPTER 3. THE INTANGIBLE VALUE OF THE GARDEN

As I mentioned before, a righteous official with virtue could go into reclusion in his own garden as if he became a hermit in the wilderness. Retiring in a garden would have represented one’s lofty character, one’s undisclosed grievances, and one’s unfulfilled dreams if he were banished from the court or were relegated to a lower position. But it is discussed in detail by Clunas that this was no longer the case during the late Ming dynasty. Suzhou, being a commercial city in the late Ming dynasty with many successful businessmen, would have had many of those wealthy enough to build a garden for their own enjoyment as well as for their display of wealth.

If one did not have any grievances or unfulfilled dreams or did not have any relationship with the court, how could one show that his garden embodied the loftiness of a recluse, which was a crucial element to one’s virtue, and important attribute of status? One way to increase the status was by directly associating one’s garden with virtuous literati. The strategy involved getting the endorsement of the famous person. We can find examples from today’s advertising world. For example,
Skechers and Nike are both famous shoe manufacturers. The materials they use to make shoes are slightly different but in general they are similar. However, the shoes of Skechers and Nike are perceived differently because of their “branding” and their associations. For example, Nike chooses to be associated with professional sports figures, such as Michael Jordan, while Skechers chooses to be associated with a teenage idol, Britney Spears.

One of the representatives of this kind of endorsement in Suzhou in the Ming dynasty was the Wen Zhengming’s endorsement of Zhuozheng yuan. Zhuozheng yuan’s status and the status of the garden owner were raised through the association with Wen Zhengming’s name, writings, and paintings.

Zhuozheng yuan was built by a retired censor Wang Xianchen who was neither particularly successful in his career nor particularly famous as a scholar official. His garden residence was located inside Lou Men 娄门 and built on the site of the defunct Dahong Temple 大弘寺 during the reign of Emperor Zhengde 正德 (1506-1521).  

Zhuozheng yuan was associated with the literati culture largely because of its association with the great literati painter Wen Zhengming. Although Wen Zhengming was said to have participated in the planning of the garden, the most solid evidence for his involvement in the garden residence is that Wen Zhengming prepared an album leaf to celebrate this residence in 1533. The album leaf had thirty-one paintings, each with Wen's detailed inscription. Wen later also painted another album leaf of eight paintings and inscriptions of Zhuozheng yuan in 1551. The two sets of album leaves were supposedly a manifestation of Wang's emotion from retiring to protest against the corrupted government.\(^{36}\) In other words, Wen saw the garden residence itself as evidence of Wang's pure and lofty character, and Wen further visualized these characters and promoted these ideas in his writings and paintings.

3.1. NAMING

Wen promoted the lofty character of the owner of Zhuozheng yuan by associating the name of the garden with Pan Yue 潘岳, a scholar in the Western

Jin dynasty. The name Zhuo-zheng-yuan is made up of three Chinese characters. “Yuan 园” means “garden,” “zhuo 拙” means “not skillful, clumsy or artless,” and “zheng 政” means “politics or administration.” This seems to mean that the owner of the garden, Wang, was not skillful in politics and unsuccessful in the power struggle within the corrupt government because of his high moral standard. But the origin of the name was more important. The name was taken from a prose work of Pan Yue, a scholar in the Western Jin dynasty. Pan Yue wrote in his poem *Idly-staying at Home*:

> I built a room and a garden…… and sold some vegetables to provide for my daily needs, this is how an artless person administers his life.

“築室種樹……灌園鬻蔬，以供朝夕之膳，此亦拙(Zhuo)者之為政(Zheng)也.”

But Pan Yue’s work was associated with the reclusive life-style of Tao Yuanming, the recluse scholar who was famous for giving up his salary as an official and

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choosing a poor and simple life in the countryside, planting his own vegetables. He writes:

I maintained an artless/simple life and returned to the

country/nature/countryside

“守拙(Zhuo)歸田園”38

Understanding the name of the Zhuozheng yuan required one to be familiar with the classical literature. By this multi-layered association of the name – Zhuozheng yuan with Pan Yue’s and Tao Yuanming’s essays, Wen addressed his target audience to an elite group of learned men.

The other name Wen often referred to was Canglang 滄浪, the name of the pond in the center, the physical heart, of Zhuozheng yuan. Canglang was associated with the poem Yu Fu 《楚辭・漁父》. The poet writes:

When the Canglang water is clear, I can wash the ribbons of my official cap in it. When the Canglang water is muddy, I can wash my feet in it

38 Fang Peihe 方佩和 and Qian Yi 錢怡. Yuanlin jingdian 園林經典 [Classical Gardens]. (Hongzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 1999). 78
In other words, one would serve the government when it was righteous and withdraw when it was corrupt. Again, only those who have studied the classics would be able to decode the layers of meaning of Canglang.

3.2. PAINTING

Clunas, in *Fruitful Sites*, points out that Wen never aimed to portray the garden as it was. First, Wen chose to paint in an album format, which divided the garden into separate views rather than giving us the panoramic spatial sense of the whole garden that could be seen in a handscroll format. Second, Wen’s painting focused mainly on the interior rather than on the exterior view of the garden. So, it was impossible to sense the relationship between the garden and the city. Third, Wen painted the scenes from a very high viewpoint to show the broad mindset of the owners, while at the same time he exaggerated the sense of space of the real garden.40

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39 Stuart, “Ming Dynasty Gardens Reconstructed in Words and Images.” 170.
The exaggeration was aimed to emphasize the lofty aspect of the garden rather than try to document the actual appearance of the garden. For example, in the illustration of Yi yuan tai 意遠台 (Figure 1), Wen painted the Canglang Pond as large as a lake to emphasize its allegorical meaning.\(^{41}\)

\[\text{Figure 1. Wen Zhengming, Yi yuan tai.}\] \(^{42}\)

However, today when one visits Zhuozheng yuan, there was a scenic spot called the Xiao Canglang 小滄浪 (Little Surging Wave Water Court). The Xiao Canglang was much smaller than the Canglang Pond painted on the album leaf. Even the

\(^{41}\) Stuart, "Ming Dynasty Gardens Reconstructed in Words and Images." 171.

\(^{42}\) Clunas, Fruitful Sites. 26.
main body of water of today’s Zhuozheng yuan was very small and could not match the size and the scope of the Canglang Pond painted by Wen Zhengming.

Figure 2. Birds eye view of Xiao Canglang of today’s Zhuozheng yuan

Today’s Zhuozheng yuan has been restored and renovated by different owners at different periods of time. So, the Canglang seen by Wen might be different from the water elements today. However, the scope of Canglang was still exaggerated by Wen when we compare Wen’s painting to the reconstructed image of Zhuozheng yuan based on Wen’s painting by Zhang Shan.  

44 Photograph taken at site.
Furthermore, in both albums of 1533 and 1551, Wen always portrayed human activities. Some of these activities in the garden were specifically written by Wen in the inscriptions of the painting. For example, in the Huai Wo 槐幄 (Locust Pavilion) illustration of the 1551 album, Wen painted three men sitting under the Huai trees enjoying a conversation. In the inscription, Wen writes about literary contests:

Below the pavilion a tall locust tree falls over the wall,

Mist on the cold leaves wets my clothes.

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46 Ibid.
The scattered flowers are sparse but their scent travels far,

The cool shade falls all around, of lasting benefit to the world,

The literary contests of the eighth moon recall past doings,

When the honors of the three ministers were entrusted to the candidates.

Since I became old I have not dreamt of Nan-k’o (of receiving high office),

Alone I move my bed to lie in the cool of the evening.

The Locust Pavilion, the year hsin-hai (1551), autumn, the ninth, month, the twentieth day. Wen Cheng-ming (Wen Zhengming in pin yin) wrote.

(trans. Roderick Whitfield)\(^\text{47}\)

In another illustration of the Xiang Yun Wu 湘筠塢 (Bamboo Bank), Wen depicted two men and their servants. His inscription follows:

Bamboos are planted around the low mound

Forming a bank of bamboo around the edge.

In full summer it already seems to be autumn,

So deep is the wood, one cannot tell when it is noon.

In its midst is one who has abandoned the world,

Enjoying himself with a chin (琴, qin in pinyin) and a goblet [of wine].

48 Ibid. 180.
When a wind stirs he wakes too from drunkenness
To sit and listen to the rain on bamboo leaves.

The Hsiang-yun Bank is south of the Peach-blossom rill and
north of the Huai-yu pavilion. It is planted all around with
bamboos and is especially quiet and secluded. Cheng-ming.

(trans. Roderick Whitfield)\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid. 177.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
It is not certain whether these activities did happen at the spot that Wen pointed out. However, these literati activities such as drinking wine, playing zither, or contesting poems were portrayed as the activities of “taste” in the garden. This literati “taste” of the garden was imposed onto the location by Wen’s paintings and writings of the different scenic spots of the garden.

3.3. ENDORSEMENT OF WEN ZHENGMING

Wen emphasized and promoted the lofty meaning of the garden in his writings and illustrations. However, the most influential factor in promoting the meaning of the garden was that he, not just any painter, wrote and painted about it.

A look at our twenty-first century advertising world will help to explain this point. For example when Nike associated their products with Michael Jordan in commercials, Jordan’s athletic quality was immediately projected onto the product. To take this concept further, one of the products was even named “Air Jordan.”

Not only did Wen paint and exaggerate the lofty quality of Zhuozheng yuan, but his personal literati image was also projected onto the paintings. As previously discussed, Wen’s contemporaries considered him a true scholar with virtue. Wen
did not paint for money. His painting and writing were considered as true self-expression, although we know also that he would have received reciprocal gifts for his paintings. Wen once wrote to a friend expressing his frustration at being asked to write poems or paint paintings by other officials when he was in Beijing. He said that the impersonal writing of elegant letters and prose to fulfill requests could not be considered as literature.  

In case of Wen’s endorsement of Zhuozheng yuan and his painting it, what reciprocation he received from Wang was unknown. However, Wang and Wen had a tangled relationship in their social lives. For example, Wang wrote the tomb inscription for Wen’s father and Wen named Wang’s son. All these events would have involved gift giving and reciprocal gifts.  

Although Wen used his paintings to exchange for gifts or favors, in my opinion Zhuozheng yuan was a place that Wen would consider worth painting under his literati moral standard, the location that he wanted to with which associate his qualities.

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51 Clapp, Wen Cheng-Ming: The Ming Artist and Antiquity. 2.
52 Clunas, Elegant Debts. 46-47.
In summary, inviting literati to write and paint about one’s garden was a common strategy used by garden owners to increase the status of the garden. A garden was given more authority when associated with the literati culture and the owner gained higher status. Writings and paintings about the garden, in conjunction with the layout design and material used, formed a total package of the status of the garden.
Chapter 3 discussed the strategy of literati endorsement employed by many garden owners to increase the status of their gardens. In addition, status can be presented in the form of economic, cultural, and political power. In constructing the garden, the tangible items required economic resources. The cost already represented the economic power of the owner. Moreover, the materials could bring prestige by association with virtue and literati taste.

Different materials were used to construct a garden house. Wood was used for the supporting framework of the house, for windows and doors, and for the furniture. Bricks were used for the walls. Tiles were used for flooring and roofing. Stones were used to place the structure on the shores and create artificial mountains. Plants were placed in the garden. The ground needed to be prepared for the ponds and the architecture. All of this was labor intensive work involving planning and construction. Moreover, bringing together all the necessary materials selected from different areas of China required many resources.
The wooden framework was usually made of *shan mu* 杉木 (Chinese Fir, *Cunninghamia lanceolata*), *song mu* 松木 (Pine), and *nan mu* 楠木 (Phoebe zhennan). Furniture was typically made of *hong mu* 紅木 (*Adenanthera pavonina*), *zitan mu* 紫檀木 (*Sandalwood, Pterocarpus santalinus*) or *ju mu* 榉木 (Zelkova spach). The horizontal banner was usually made of *yinxing mu* 銀杏木 (*Ginkgo, Ginkgo biloba*). These woods usually came from other areas like Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi, Yunnan, and Sichuan. Most bricks came from Suzhou because there was an abundance of clay in the area. The granite used typically came from Jin Shan 金山; marble was usually from Xishan 西山; Taihu stones came from Lake Tai 太湖.*53*

In addition to the cost of the materials themselves, one had to be able to transport these materials from different areas to the construction site. They were usually transported through the canals and river network in Jiangnan. Kun Shan 昆山 was about one day of travel time, while Taihu was about two days of travel time.*54*

However, that did not include the complicated logistics of some of the transportation,

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*54* Ibid. 4.
such as moving a big piece of Taihu stone. Not only was the stone heavy, it had to be transported in one piece. One can imagine the difficulty of carrying a big stone through the city to the construction site. In the process, many bridges or walls might need to be knocked down. Gathering these materials in one spot meant that one was wealthy and had the power to mobilize a great amount of manpower and resources to transport them.

The planning and the logistics to organize materials at the construction site demonstrated the economic power of the owner, and contributed to the status of the garden. Individual materials for the gardens had to be presented in certain ways so as to provide a total representation of high status. Furthermore, for a garden owner to display status through his garden, it had to be accessible to visitors. The following chapters discuss in detail how different materials were used to reflect the economic cost involved, the additional value of each type of materials, and how the cost and value were impressed upon visitors.

\[^{55}\text{ See section 6.2}\]
CHAPTER 5. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Building a garden in Suzhou in order to demonstrate one’s power and status required first, a piece of land. Of all tangible materials money could buy, land came first. The size and location of the land and the neighborhood were important factors in the construction of the garden. In the garden design book Yuan ye, the first chapter dealing with construction is “Selection of the Site 相地.” The placement of the chapter indicates the importance of land in the construction. According to Ji Cheng, the author of Yuan ye, land would determine how the garden would look. Ji Cheng only gives us categories of land suitable for garden construction; however, not all land represented status. Some areas in Suzhou were considered more appropriate for gardens. More gardens could be found in the popular, more fashionable area. And when two gardens were built in the same area, guidebooks were used to distinguish one garden’s higher status from another.
5.1. LAND ACQUISITION – DISPLAY OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POWER

Whether before or after 1547, owning a piece of land required significant economic capital in Suzhou in the Ming dynasty. When Zhu Yuanzhang established the Ming Empire, he confiscated land from many Suzhou residents, forcing them to move away from the city because these residents did not support his military campaign. In the Ming dynasty, the land of Suzhou was, in theory, owned by the government. Private land ownership was rare. However, after 1547, for better management, the government simply put a tax on land and returned the land to private ownership.\textsuperscript{56}

The owner of Zhuozheng yuan, Wang Xianchen, obtained a piece of land and built his garden in 1517 in Suzhou.\textsuperscript{57} Zhuozheng yuan was located inside the city wall, close to Lou Men gate, and was built on the site of the defunct Dahong Temple during the reign of Emperor Zhengde.\textsuperscript{58}  

\textsuperscript{57} Clunas, \textit{Fruitful Sites.} 24.  
\textsuperscript{58} Liu Dunzhen 劉敦楨, \textit{Chinese Classical Gardens of Suzhou.} 89.
Gusu recorded that Dahong Temple was totally destroyed by fire before Wang built on the site.

There was no document to explain how he could obtain this defunct temple site. We can make some speculations. One, Wang could have rented the site from the government and paid the rent in terms of land tax. In theory, the bigger the piece of land, the more he needed to pay. Suzhou was taxed much higher than other areas in China. Hence, Wang had already demonstrated his economic power.

Or, two, he could have bought that piece of land from someone. This was not suggested in the Gusu zhi because the site was not used by anyone. Because the site was a piece of idle land, it was possible that Wang just earmarked the spot and claimed it. But if this were the case, the government would have interfered because in theory all land belonged to the government. How could Wang circumvent the law without straining some relationships?

59 Suzhou is part of Gusu.
60 Wu Kuan 吳寬 and Wang Ao 王鏊. Zhengde gusu zhi 正德姑蘇志 [Local Gazette of Guzu in the Zhengde Reign]. Ming Zhengde reign [1506] ed. 2 vols, In Tian yi ge cang Mingdai fangzhi xuan kan xubian 天一閣藏明代方志選刊續編. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji shudian, 1990). 624. “蕩盡” was the term used in the description of Dahong Temple after the fire. It literally means all was gone.
61 Huang, Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century Ming China. 99-100.
Or, three, he could have forced the temple occupants out. But this was disproved by Clunas on the grounds that the record of this story was much later, with no supporting evidence.\textsuperscript{62} This question remains unanswered because there is not enough evidence to prove any of the above assumptions. However Wang obtained that piece of land, Wang demonstrated his network and connections with the local government and powerful people.

In spite of the cost of the real estate and the social capital (networking and connections) required to obtain the land, according to Craig Clunas, Zhuozheng yuan was still a relatively low-risk investment under the tax system of mid-Ming. The garden residence should be viewed as a piece of land surrounded by walls, within which trees and plants under intensive farming could produce a steady supply of food and timber, that is, income.\textsuperscript{63} The stored economic value of the plants in the garden could be compared to purchasing antiques and art objects in that they represented large sums of cash which could be liquidated in a very short

\textsuperscript{62} Clunas, \textit{Fruitful Sites}. 210, note 27.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid. 38-46.
time. In other words, Zhuozheng yuan was also built for practical investment purposes. Although the trees and crops could provide income, the owner had first to accumulate some disposable income to allow him to construct such a garden and had to be willing to tie up cash in the property.

After 1547, Suzhou had a freer real estate market. Land could be bought for different usages. Such open trade of land sped up the breaking up of land into small units. Acquiring a piece of land in a prime location in Suzhou would be costly. Probably because the price of real estate was very high, it is not surprising to see that most of the gardens became smaller in size in Jiangnan (modern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang) and fell between one to ten mu 亩 acres (700 to 7,000 square meters). In the case of Zhuozheng yuan, another owner, Wang Xinyi 王心一, bought the eastern part in 1631. The real estate price in Suzhou seemed to be going up from the early sixteenth century to early seventeenth century. Thus, to

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64 Ibid. 38-46.
65 Ibid. 189 - 93.
67 Suzhou shi difang zhi bian zuan weiyuanhui bangongshi and Suzhou shi yuanlin guanli ju. Zhuo zheng yuan zhi gao 拙政園志稿 [Collection of Notes on Zhuozheng Yuan], In Suzhou shi zhi zhi liao zhuan ji. (Hong Kong1986). 10 insert.
own a piece of land after 1547 in itself demonstrated one’s economic power. Only those in the elite class could afford enough land to build a garden.

5.2. **JI CHENG’S CHOICE OF LAND**

In today’s real estate market, houses in different suburbs of the same city do not cost the same. The price varies according to the scenery, the neighborhood, or the convenience of the suburb. Families with similar demographic data and household income tend to gather in the same neighborhood. One strategy for the Suzhou elites to compete for status was to build their gardens in the “right, popular, or fashionable” neighborhood. What were the selection criteria in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Suzhou for a piece of land suitable for a garden? A look into Ji Cheng’s book *Yuan ye* may help us find the solution.

Ji Cheng begins his book with a discussion of the choice of construction site. He mentions some selection criteria. First, he mentions that there should be no limitation on the directions of the site. The “directions” here could mean many things. It could mean the cardinal directions, like north, south, east, and west, or it could mean the direction in relation to the residence. But direction was not the key
consideration. The important element was that there should be a sense of nature as a visitor entered. Ideally, the site should have mountains and a water source nearby. The site should be away from major roads. A village area (could also mean a villa) would be good because one could see the wilderness. A city area would be convenient. Developing new gardens from scratch would be easy to survey and plan. Restoring old gardens would also be suitable. In other words, almost all land could be suitable.

Ji Cheng continues to discuss different types of land. He ranks first *shanlin di* (forest land) because it was already in a natural state and did not require a lot of construction work. He then discusses sites in the *chengshi di* (city). In one paragraph, he specifies that the site should not be in the business districts, and the garden site should be in a quiet area of the city. Then he goes on to discuss sites in the *cunzhuang di* (land in the villages), *jiaoye di* (sites in

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the countryside), *pangzhai di* 傍宅地 (small areas behind or next to the residence) and *jianghu di* 江湖地 (sites near lakes and rivers).69

In Ji Cheng’s writing he mentions only that *shanlin di* is the best site. By doing so he implies that of sites in the city *chengshi di* would be the second best. Out of all the sites he mentions, almost all of them were good in some ways to build a garden, except in the business districts. In most cases, the name of the site itself was self-explanatory. However, at a glance the readers needed to consider the difference between forest land and wilderness, both of which suggest the proximity of nature. In the Chinese language, *shanlin* 山林 (forest) suggests an area with trees. Ji Cheng does not specify where the trees would be. While *jiaoye* 郊野 (wilderness) suggests the countryside, in Ji Cheng’s description, a good piece of forest land would provide a sense of nature. With minimum effort, one could turn forest land into a garden. On the other hand, Ji Cheng specifically quantified wilderness/countryside as a few *li* 里 (three *li* is approximately 1.6 kilometers) away from the city for convenience of travel to and from. Forest land would be very

close to and probably inside the city, while wilderness/countryside meant a few li away from the city. Compared to forest land, land in the wilderness/countryside was relegated by Ji Cheng to almost the end of the list. It appears that the ranking of land was based on how convenient to the city it was. No matter under which category, the site had to be relatively close to the city; less than a few li away.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, Ji Cheng’s book should be seen as a codification of conventions of the Ming garden construction practices. The most popular locations to construct a garden would be as close to the city as possible. If this is the case, the term garden “yuan” 园 means a piece of landscaping work done in the city in the late Ming dynasty. Moreover, we can conclude that the idea of garden construction was mainly a phenomenon or a consumption behavior for urban dwellers.

5.3. **WHERE WOULD THE SHANLIN DI BE IN SUZHOU?**

Yang Hongxun 楊鴻勛 gave examples of shanlin di, and chengshi di in Suzhou. Yang named Yongcui Shanzhuang 擁翠山莊 [The Mountain Lodge of Embracing Greenery] in Hu Qiu 虎丘 [Tiger Hill] as an example of a garden built on
shanlin di. And he named Liu Yuan [The Garden of the Liu's] as an example of a garden built on chengshi di. He did not give a detailed account on why he groups these gardens, but he did mention that Ji Cheng in Yuan ye considered shanlin di was closer to nature. We could only guess that Yang’s grouping was based on the fact that Hu Qiu was farther away from the city center and closer to nature, while Liu Yuan was closer to the city center. However, we could also look at shanlin di from an angle of popular/fashionable taste.

After 1500, most Suzhou elites moved from the Changzhou administrative region (the eastern side of the city) to Wu County (the western side of the city and outside the city walls to along the canal connecting Suzhou to Hu qiu (Tiger Hill). Clunas studied the gazetteers published in different periods and concluded that, by the gradual increase in the number of gardens in Wu County described in these publications, Changzhou became the less affluent side of the city.

Changzhou was inhabited by textile industries and workers. Changzhou could

70 Yang Hongxun 楊鴻勛, Jiangnan yuanlin lun. 319-24, 331.
72 Ibid.
be considered as a business/industrial district rather than a residential area. In other words, *shanlin di* probably meant the area west and northwest of Suzhou.

Figure 7. Map of Suzhou in Ming dynasty

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5.4. STATUS AND ACCESSIBILITY

Convenience for the owner of the garden house to travel to the city, mentioned by Ji Cheng, was a key criterion to select the land. If we look at today’s map we can see that Liu Yuan, built between 1522 and 1593, is located outside of the city wall. If we travel by car today on a paved road from the city center to Liu Yuan, it will take

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74 Liu Dunzhen 刘敦楨, *Chinese Classical Gardens of Suzhou*. 144.
75 Liu Dun-zhen in his book claimed that the garden was built during the reign of Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522 - 1566) while another publication claimed that the garden was built in 1593, during the reign of Wanli 萬歷.
approximately fifteen minutes. And from Liu Yuan to Hu Qiu, it will take another fifteen minutes. Of course, in the Ming dynasty, this would have taken longer while still being within the convenient zone, a few *li*, mentioned by Ji Cheng. In the Ming dynasty, if a visitor took an excursion to Hu Qiu from the city, he could leisurely go past many gardens and big houses in a day.

Another reason to select the convenient *shanlin di* may have been related to the accessibility and the guidebook culture of gardens. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, the garden became a commodity that could be owned by any wealthy man, including affluent merchants with no land. Unlike Wang Xianchen’s Zhuozheng yuan, the nature of the garden changed from storage of wealth to a pure display of wealth. Gardens were filled with exotic plants, rare rocks, and expensive decorations. Gardens also were made accessible to those who could afford to pay the doorkeeper. As a result, the accessibility of the gardens was a product of the competition for status and power. A garden was a manifestation of

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76 Clunas, *Fruitful Sites.* 90. This can be explained by the four Confucian classes, literati being the first, farmers second, craftsmen third, and merchants being the fourth. One way for wealthy merchants to go up the class ladder was to acquire land. They became a “farmer” class. See also: John Dardess, “A Ming Landscape: Settlement, Land Use, Labor, and Estheticism in Tai-ho County, Kiangsi,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49, no. 2 (1989). 295-364.
the owner’s wealth and taste to a wide audience. Logically, a garden would get more visitors if it was located at a convenient spot or among other gardens.

Guidebooks in form of biji (notes) or youji (travelogue) almost seemed to be a logical extension to the semi-open exhibitions of gardens. Based on the authors’ taste, guidebook writers selected gardens they liked and wrote a short paragraph of review. This writing seemed to be on a purely personal basis. But Clunas also pointed out that guidebooks like The Treatise on Superfluous Things were perhaps written partly for “patrons” (thus, glorifying the owners of objects, while the relationship was not a money transaction), and partly for the writer to gain self-credibility and reinforce his expertise in the connoisseurship.

As discussed earlier, Wen Zhengming’s writing and painting about Zhuozheng yuan brought fame to the garden, which in turn shows the status of the owner. Although these writings were framed as representations of appreciation of the garden, they possibly may also have functioned as a “press release,” as in today’s advertising

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77 Clunas, Fruitful Sites. 69-96.
78 ———, Superfluous Things. 8-38.
world. A press release was not aimed to be advertising but it served to provide information about the commodity.

In addition to the functions of glorifying the owner and establishing credits for the writers, these books or notes served a basic objective, that is, to be consumed and read, and hopefully cause the readers to visit the selected gardens. If a garden was made accessible to show off the owners' wealth, a guidebook could be used also as a means to promote the garden and induce visits to the gardens.

These guidebooks could be written for one's own garden or for someone else's. In whichever scenario, for the owner of the garden the writing would naturally help to advertise or promote how worthwhile a visit to the garden would be. For a writer of the biji guidebooks, the writing reinforced the taste-leader position, and he would also want the readers to visit and agree with his selections.

The primary target audiences should not be just anyone in the city, but those who were educated enough at least to understand the book, have spare time and money to travel, and be conscious about “taste.” In other words, these target audiences would probably be in the same social circles.
In short, the location of the garden should not only be convenient to the owners but also convenient to the visitors, who might also turn out to be a writer. Guidebooks written by prestigious literati stimulated more visits. More visits would, in turn, stimulate more writings about it, causing the garden to be the “talk of the town.” Talking about the objects implied recognizing the taste of the owner, agreeing with the writer, and showing one’s own taste. As a result, all three parties seemed to gain status in the exercise.

In conclusion, locating one’s garden in the fashionable district of Suzhou could help one to associate one’s status with the high level status of the residents in the neighborhood. The fashionable district was popular not only because of its proximity to nature but also because of its proximity to the city, making gardens easily accessible to visitors. However, in order to make one’s garden stand out within the competition, guidebooks were used to promote the gardens.
A good garden design recreated nature and formed a three-dimensional landscape painting with *shan* 山 (mountain) and *shui* 水 (water). Thus stones and water were essential to build mountains and lakes. Many writers, such as Maggie Keswick or Cao Lindi, have discussed the Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian influences on the symbolic meaning of recreating a miniature three-dimensional mind landscape in their backyard. In short, the *shan* and *shui* evoked the Isles of Immortals, the idea of balancing the *yin* (water) and *yang* (mountain) of the universe, probably reminiscent of the ancient myth of rivers being the blood vessels and mountains being the skeleton of the earth’s body.

*Shaishui* in the garden was for one to recluse in an imitated nature, a way to reflect one’s loftiness and gain high status. However, other aspects, such as the high cost of construction, could also give status to the stone and water of the landscape.

When a similar cost was paid for the same item, garden owners would employ the

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79 Landscape paintings in China are called Shanshui paintings - paintings of mountain and water.
strategy of association with the cultural past and ongoing aesthetic management in order to increase the “value” of the stone and water.

6.1. **SELECTION OF STONES**

Stone became an important construction material for elaborate rock arrangements in Suzhou gardens after about 1550.\(^{82}\) Ji Cheng dedicated a large portion of his book *Yuan ye* to discussing how to make mountains from stones and how to select different types of stone. Stones were an indispensable material in the construction of a garden in the late Ming dynasty and gave status to the garden.

Ji Cheng recorded in *Yuan ye* the most popular stones that garden owners purchased for their gardens were: *taihu shi* 太湖石 (stone of Great Lake of Lake Tai, Dongting Shan 洞庭山), *kunshan shi* 昆山石 (stone from modern Kunshan shi 昆山市, Ma’an Shan 馬鞍山), *yixing shi* 宜興石 (stone from modern Yixing shi 宜興市, Zhanggong Dong 張公洞), *longtan shi* 龍潭石 (stone from modern Nanjing 南京), *qinglongshan shi* 青龍山石 (stone from modern Nanjing 南京), *lingbi shi* 靈璧石 (stone from modern Fengyang shi 風陽市 Lingbi xian County 靈璧縣),

\(^{82}\) Clunas, *Fruitful Sites* 73-74.
xianshan shi 峴山石 (stone from modern Zhenjiang 鎮江), xuan shi 宣石 (stone from modern Anhui 安徽), hukou shi 湖口石 (stone from modern Jiujiang 九江), ying shi 英石 (stone from modern Guangdong 廣東), sanbing shi 散兵石 (stone from modern Chaohu 巢湖), huang shi 黃石 (stone from modern Suzhou 蘇州, Changzhou 常州, Zhenjiang 鎮江, along Changjiang 長江), jiu shi 舊石 (old stone), jinchuan shi 錦川石 (colorful stones of uncertain origin), huashigang 花石綱 (stone from the collection of Flower and Stone Network in the Song dynasty), and liuheshizi 六合石子 (small stones for flooring). 83

Wen Zhenheng, the author of Treatise on Superfluous Things had similar choices, but he ranks lingbi shi stone and kunshan shi stone first, because they would produce a clear sound when hit upon. Taihu stone followed. Wen Zhenheng also mentions the beauty of dali shi 大理石 (marble from today's Yunnan region 雲南) because of its cloud-like pattern resembling the landscape painting of the famous Song dynasty painter Mi Fu 米芾 (1051 – 1107). 83

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To gather these stones mentioned by Ji Cheng and Wen Zhenheng from different areas of China would demonstrate a certain degree of economic power of the garden owners. Taihu, Kunshan, Yixing, Nanjing, Zhenjiang, and Anhui were in the area of Jiangnan region (modern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang). Stones which came from farther away tended to be smaller in size. For example, the *ying shi* stones from Guangdong were probably transported by sea, and were smaller in size. According to Ji Cheng, *ying shi* stone was good for display on one’s desk. It seemed that the regional emphasis was partly because of the origin of the quarry and partly due to the ease of transportation. However, effort still was expected to be made to collect different stones at different regions.

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The owner/s of Liu Yuan, built between 1522 and 1593, collected a great variety of stones mentioned by Ji Cheng and Wen Zhenheng. Through the treatment of these stones, such as displaying them in prominent positions or as sculptural elements of the garden, one could perceive that stones were presented as aesthetic objects and it was important for these different types of stones to be

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85 Yang Hongxun 楊鴻勛, *Jiangnan yuanlin lun, 11.*

86 Liu Dun-zhen in his book claimed that the garden was built during the reign of Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522 – 1566) while another publication claimed that the garden was built in 1593, during the reign of Wanli 閔歷.
seen within the garden. In Liu Yuan, famous pieces of *taihu shi* stone, such as Guanyunfeng 冠雲峰 (Topping Cloud Peak), were displayed as sculptural elements in the center of a garden court. The *taihu shi* stone arrangement which resembled the five peaks of Mount Lu was prominently displayed in the court of Wu Feng Xian Guan 五峰仙館 (Immortal’s Gallery of Five Peaks). *Dali shi* 大理石 (Dali stones) were also frequently used as a decorative element inside the buildings. Echoing Wen Zhenheng’s appreciation of *dali shi* stones as a painting of Mi Fu, these stones were often presented as paintings on the wall. *Lingbi shi* 灵璧石 (Lingbi stones) can be found as a tabletop of the stone table inside Ke Ting (Ke Pavilion) 可亭 of Liu Yuan. When a visitor wandered in the garden, he certainly would not miss these stones, which were highly prized by the literati.
Figure 10. Guanyunfeng in Liu Yuan\textsuperscript{87}

Figure 11. Taihu stone arrangement in front of Wu Feng Xian Guan, Liu Yuan\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{87} Photograph taken at site.
Figure 12. Dali stone display, inside Wufeng Xianguan of Liu Yuan\textsuperscript{89}

Figure 13. Dali stone display, inside Xianyuan Tingyun of Liu Yuan\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{88} Photograph taken at site.
\textsuperscript{89} Photograph taken at site
\textsuperscript{90} Photograph taken at site
6.2. **COST OF STONES**

In the late Ming dynasty, stones became an object of luxury consumption and an object of status competition. Stones were certainly objects that displayed economic power. Ji Cheng expresses his view on stone in the chapter “Selecting Stone” in *Yuan ye*, the garden design manual. Although Ji Cheng discusses the aesthetic quality of each type of stones, he places his emphasis on the cost of acquiring and transporting them. He begins that chapter by saying:

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91 Photograph taken at site
92 Clunas, *Fruitful Sites*. 73-76.
To determine the origin of the stone, we need to question the
distance of the mountain. The stone itself has no value when it
is still in the mountain. It costs only the labor of mining the
stone from the quarry and the transportation. If it is convenient
to transport via boats to the construction site, it would still be
reasonable to do so even though the distance is a thousand \( \text{li} \); but when the location of the quarry is within a few days of
traveling time by land, it would not be a problem to have labor
transport the stones by “carrying” them.\(^{93}\) …

“夫識石之由來，詢山之遠近，石無山價，費只人工，跋躡搜巔，
崎嶇究路。便宜出水，雖遙千里何妨；日計在人，就近一肩
可矣.”\(^{94}\)

Then he explains that the different type of stones used would determine the type of
mountain created in the garden. Landscape of Ni Zan 倪贊 (c 1301 – 1374) or

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\(^{93}\) \text{Li} is a unit of distance. A thousand \text{li} does not literally mean 1000 \text{li} but a way to describe the
distance as very far.

\(^{94}\) Zhang Jiaji 張家驥. \text{Yuan ye quan yi}. 308.
Huang Zijiu 黃子久 (1269 – 1354)\textsuperscript{95} could be created through different arrangements of stones. To end the paragraph, he goes back again to the issue of cost. He writes:

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Nowadays people pay too much attention to fame and fortune, if some [stones] can be mined in a near distance, why should one bother to look far?
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“世上人多注重名利，就近可採何必遠求”\textsuperscript{96}

In this paragraph, Ji Cheng not only reports on the “taste” of a garden but also the consumption pattern of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Ming dynasty. From what Ji Cheng writes we can deduce that stones from “far away” would cost more mainly because of the mining and transportation cost, but stones from “far away” (more costly to transport) were favored by those who paid attention to “fame” and “fortune.”

\textsuperscript{95} Ni Zan and Huang Zijiu (also known as Huang Gongwang 黃公望) were famous painters in the Yuan dynasty.

\textsuperscript{96} Zhang Jiaji 張家驥. Yuan ye quan yi: 308.
Ji Cheng seemed to attack the extravagant consumption behavior by saying that there was not a need to search for stones from faraway places, but his claim was vague. Ji Cheng mentioned that it would not be a problem if the stone could be transported conveniently by boat. Distance suddenly became no issue if the object could be transported via the canal system. Suzhou was a commercial center mainly because of its location, being connected to different areas of the country by a network of canals. In other words, any kind of stone was appropriate to those in Suzhou who could afford to pay the price. However, not all stones had the same value or were worth a high price. Stones that did not bring additional value, fame, or status were probably not in demand.

_Taihu shi_ stone, being the first on Ji Cheng's list, may have been one of the most popular stones that could bring fame and status to Suzhou gardens. _Taihu shi_ stones were valued from the time of the Song dynasty because of their cloud-like shapes.\(^97\) According to Ji Cheng, _taihu shi_ stones could be found in Suzhou, at

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\(^{97}\) "Cloud-like shape" is used to describe the irregular shape and abstract form of the stone, as seen in one of the most famous Taihu stones Yulinglong in Yu Yuan, Shanghai.
the waterfront of Dongting Shan 洞庭山 (Mount Dongting\textsuperscript{98}). The rock was highly valued because of the natural curves and holes pierced by water and waves over a long period of time. Taihu shi stone was priced by the irregular shape and the holes. The more irregular and eroded it was, the more evidence of nature and the elemental force, hence, the more qi 氣 (the energy force in Taoism) it had.\textsuperscript{99}

Figure 15. The famous Taihu Stone – Yulinglong in Yu Yuan, Shanghai – was valued for its abstract form.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{98} Taihu, the great lake, was also associated with many stories of the immortals and many Song poets such as Fan Zhongyan. Three islands in Taihu were often associated with the islands of immortals: Fangzhang, Penglai and Yingzhou. Although there was no direct evidence connecting the value and the status of the stone with these immortal stories, these mythical and poetic associations might possibly have influenced the preference for the stone at this particular location.

\textsuperscript{99} Keswick, The Chinese Garden. 158.

\textsuperscript{100} Photograph taken at site.
Another reason for *taihu shi* stone's popularity as an object of status was because of its high economic value due to the high acquisition cost of this type of stone. To mine the *taihu shi* stone, the skilled miners were required to dive underwater and select a stone with good shape. The selected stone was then chiseled out underwater from the mass. A rope was tied through the holes of the stone which was then hauled and shipped. With such complicated procedures, it would not be difficult to imagine how much labor and money it took to mine a piece of *taihu shi* stone.

Size of the stones was a symbol of status. Like many other types of stones, *taihu shi* stones were priced by size. According to Ji Cheng, the larger the stone, the more expensive or valued it was. For example, the size of a four-foot-tall *lingbi shi* stone could cost over eight hundred pieces of gold according to Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567-1642), a Fujian writer. Xie commented that the size of the garden stone was an area for contest. Once, the city gate was partly demolished in order for a rock over thirty feet high to be moved into the Yanzhou Garden.

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102 Ibid.
of Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526 – 1590). He further commented that the use of this rock was not to re-create nature in the garden but to compete for massive splendors.\textsuperscript{103} Chapter 5 mentions that in late Ming, a garden was somewhat accessible to the public. If the owner purchased a thirty-foot-tall stone which required demolishing a city wall during the transporting of it, it would naturally become a topic of conversation in town. And if gardens were accessible to the public, naturally one would want to go to visit the garden and see this scene.

The rarity of stones also made them expensive. According to Ji Cheng, \textit{taihu shi} stone has been mined since "antiquity" and there was not much good stone left even in the late Ming dynasty.\textsuperscript{104} It was not only costly to mine; it was also rare to obtain a nice piece of stone. The high demand for \textit{taihu shi} stone in addition to the scarceness of supply made the cost of \textit{taihu shi} stone naturally high. According to Xie Zhaozhe a piece of fine \textit{taihu shi} stone could cost up to a hundred pieces of gold (approximately 3,750 grams), and a poor one would cost at least ten to twenty

\textsuperscript{103} Clunas, \textit{Fruitful Sites}. 74-75.
\textsuperscript{104} Zhang Jiaji 張家驥. \textit{Yuan ye quan yi}. 310.
pieces of gold. Xie recorded that such a big lingbi shi stone could only be found in the Song dynasty and would be impossible to obtain in the late Ming dynasty. “Impossibility to obtain” only seemed to make these stones more desirable. This consumption behavior towards stone was similar to those of diamonds today. Although most people are not able to buy or even see in their lifetime the 530-carat Star of Africa, the biggest diamond on earth and one of the British crown jewels, the average person would still be very proud and willing to show off a less than one-carat stone on their finger. Competition for the bigger, brighter, shinier continues, despite the fact that the diamond someone has is probably not the biggest and most expensive on earth. This phenomenon is also similar to today’s marketing strategy of “limited edition,” in that the supply is announced to be scarce to give additional “value” to the product.

The difficulty of obtaining nicely shaped and large stones also logically leads to another phenomenon, the trading of stone in the secondhand market. However, not all secondhand stones embodied status.

105 Clunas, Fruitful Sites, 74.
106 Cauchi, “Biggest diamond out of this world.”
6.3. **SECONDHAND STONES**

“Antiquity” could also bring status to a stone. Status was gained through the stone’s association with the past. Ji Cheng writes that two fashionable types of stone loved by *haoshizhe* 好事者 were *jiu shi* (literally means “old stones”) and stones from *huashigang* 花石綱 (stone from the collection of “Flower and Stone Network” in the Song dynasty).

Stones associated with famous people or named by famous people (probably literati) were considered to hold additional value. Ji Cheng’s description of *jiu shi* is:

> Those who took great interest in garden/stone, sometimes only consider the “brand names” of an item. They would take a lot of time and resources to search for *jiu shi*. These old stones could be those that were located in some famous gardens, or old stones that were named by someone famous, or stones that passed down a few generations. Are they

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107 Clunas, *Superfluous Things*. 86-87. The term literally means “those who take an interest in.” Here, I will translate the terms to those who are expert in this field (garden or stone) or connoisseurs in garden or stone.
really authentic *taihu shi* stone? If these stones were in a defunct garden and up for sale, they would spend a lot of money to purchase them as antique. … …

“世之好事，慕聞虛名，鑽求舊石，某名園某峰石，某名人題咏，某代傳至今，斯真太湖石也，今廢，欲待價而沽，不惜多金，售為古玩還可… ...”

The “fame” of a piece of old stone was associated with its history and mostly came from association with the “literati” culture. The tradition of stone appreciation was very popular in the Song dynasty by great painters and literati, such as Mi Fu, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), or Ye Mengde 葉夢得 (1077-1148). Suyuan shipu 《素園石譜》 [Stone Catalogue of the Su Garden], a book about stones written by a Ming writer Lin Youlin 林有麟 (17th century), reports that Su Shi wrote poems about the beauty of stones and spent hundreds of pieces of gold to purchase a small piece of stone with nine peaks. Ye Mengde liked the rock scenery of Xihu 西湖 (the West Lake) and named himself *Shilin Shanren* 石林山人 (the Hermit in the Forest of

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Rocks). And many stories were told about how once Mi Fu saw a rock and decided to become brothers with the rock. He addressed the rock as his elder brother. This behavior toward rocks was praised because of the loftiness of Mi Fu. Mi Fu did not address those who were wealthy and powerful as “elder brothers” but would rather befriend a piece of rock. Appreciation of rock was associated with the moral standard and virtue of the man. Moreover, this appreciation was recorded by carving the poem or writings of the rock onto the rock itself. Thus, old stones with similar associations not only brought aesthetic value to the garden but cultural value as well.

Within the category of old stones, stones associated with the Huashigang (Flower and Stone Network) were particularly valuable. The “Flower and Stone Network” was established in the Song Dynasty. Emperor Huizong 宋徽宗 of the Song Dynasty constructed Genyue 艮嶽 (the northeast mountain) inside his imperial park in the capital in Bianjing 汴京 (modern city of Kaifeng). In the process, a procurement system and transportation network called huashigang 花石綱 (the

109 Cao Lindi 曹林娣, Zhongguo Yuanlin Wenhua. 175.
Flowers and Stones Network) was established to search for and to deliver exotic plants and rocks to the capital city. This network was notorious for its corruption and the heavy burdens it put on common people. In many cases, these rare rocks and plants were confiscated from the common people to offer as tribute to the court.

The rocks and plants were mainly transported via the Grand Canal by boats to the capital and sometimes boulders were so big that bridges, gates, and city walls, had to be torn away. Some rocks were left along the way when they were being transported to the Song capital. In the late Ming dynasty, some of these rocks were moved into private gardens by haoshizhe. In these cases the stones were associated with the imperial taste of Emperor Huizong in the Song dynasty.

The stone Guanyunfeng (Topping Cloud Peak) in Liu Yuan (see Figure 10) in Suzhou was believed to be one of the stones remaining from the huashigang. The stone Yulinglong (see Figure 15) in Yu Yuan in Shanghai was recognized by the Ming literati Wang Shizhen as an antique stone.

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112 Cao Lindi 曹林娣. *Zhongguo Yuanlin Wenhua*. 176
Wang writes in *Yuyuan Ji* 《豫園記》 [Records of the Yu Garden], that this stone was a stone from the Tang dynasty.\(^\text{113}\) A writer of the Ming dynasty, Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610), writes about the stone *Ruiyunfeng* 瑞雲峰 (see Figure 16) in his book *Yuanting Jilue* 《園亭紀略》 (A Brief Account of Gardens and Pavilions). This piece of stone was originally located inside Liu Yuan. A carving on the stone read, “Offered by your official subject, Zhu Mian (the person who was responsible for managing the Flower and Stone Network), 臣朱勔進”\(^\text{114}\). Such carving was a clear indication of the pedigree of the stone that was considered beautiful already in the Song dynasty and was selected by the manager, Zhu Mian 朱勔 (1075-1126), of the famous “Flower and Stone Network” to be presented to the Song emperor.

\(^{\text{114}}\) Cao Lindi 曹林娣. *Zhongguo Yuanlin Wenhua*. 177.
These secondhand stones embodied not only the economic power (cost of acquisition) but also the expertise in cultural knowledge of the history of the stone. In both cases discussed above stones were valued because of their history by those who knew such associations. When Ji Cheng wrote about old stones and stones from the “Flower and Stone Network,” he mentioned that these stones were valued particularly by those who were haoshizhe. For example, if a wealthy layperson would like to buy a painting with a signature of Picasso, he probably would not be able to tell if the painting was authentic just by the signature. If the

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painting was an excellent forgery, even an expert would need to do some research on the body of work of Picasso during that period to determine the authenticity. In other words, a *haoshizhe* was an expert and needed to be able to research the history of the stone, to ensure, for example, whether the carving on the stone was the calligraphy of the claimed famous person such as Mi Fu. Connoisseurship played an important role here. As discussed above, the stone Ruiyunfeng was recognized by Yuan Hongdao, while the stone Yulinglong was recognized by Wang Shizhen. Yuan Hongdao and Wang Shizhen were literati of the late Ming dynasty. One can speculate that like writing about and painting the garden, a wealthy merchant could possibly “hire,” a *haoshizhe* to help him determine the antiquity of the stone, probably without engaging in a straightforward money transaction.

The phenomenon of *haoshizhe* once again reflected the literati anxiety about status and the guidebook culture of this time. Yuan and Wang not only recognized the stone but also wrote about these stones in *Yuanting jilue* and *Yuyuan ji*. At the same time, it also required the garden visitors to be able to recognize these cultural
associations of the stone. As a visitor, one way to get information for different famous stones was by reading these writings.

In short, the cost of stones demonstrated the economic power of the owners. Additional value of the stone was acquired through the association of the cultural past. Recognizing this association required connoisseurship in this field. Garden owners could possibly employ connoisseurs to help them in selecting the stone. When visitors went to gardens with antique stone, they were required to recognize this association of the cultural past. By recognizing this association as a visitor, one also gained status in the process.

6.4. STATUS IN WATER

In Suzhou almost all gardens had one or more water elements (including pond, river, waterfall, etc). That was mainly because Suzhou had an abundance of groundwater and rivers in the region, and water sources were easy to locate. According to Yang Hongxun 楊鴻勛, the water elements in gardens were constructed not only for symbolic reasons, such as being the yin element of the

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116 Suzhou yuanlin fazhan gufen youxian gongsi 蘇州園林發展股份有限公司 and Suzhou minzu jianzhu xuehui 蘇州民族建築學會. Suzhou guidian yuanlin yingzalu. 11.
universe or the paradise of the immortals, but also for many practical reasons. The
water helped control the humidity and temperature of the environment and helped
to create depth of gardens by reflecting the buildings and rock arrangements. Water
elements were usually in the form of ponds, rivers, streams, waterfalls, creeks, and
more. All were represented on a miniature or symbolic scale.\footnote{Yang Hongxun, Jiangnan yuanlin lun. 61-63.}

Water seemed to be a material that was relatively easy to obtain in Suzhou,
yet water could still represent status. If the visitor were walking in a garden with a
big pool of stagnant water generating a foul smell and serving as a breeding ground
of plankton and mosquitoes, how would that affect his or her experience in the
garden? Clear water was very important because it symbolized the “loftiness” of
the owner. It seems that the status, the cultural power, and economic power were
represented through the management and maintenance of the cleanness of the
water.
6.5. **COST OF WATER**

In some ways, I think the cost of obtaining water was similar to the cost of obtaining the stone. The water had no value when it was in the river or still underground; it cost money and resources to excavate the land and divert the water source into the garden. Although there was no record of the labor cost of excavating the land to locate the water source, it would be logical to assume economic resources were required to construct the water elements.

Ji Cheng did not write about water. However, when he described the selection of land, he mentioned that the ideal construction site had to be close to a water source. He said this probably because one had to consider the cost of diverting the water into the garden. Like stone, not all construction of water elements would bring fame or status, even if the construction cost was high. The key to status must have been the good management of water.

6.6. **GOOD MANAGEMENT WAS VALUABLE**

Our investigation should start with the description by Wen Zhenheng, the author of *Treatise on Superfluous Things*. He lists different types of water elements
in the garden in this order: guangchi 廣池 (broad pond), xiaochi 小池 (small pond), 
pubu 瀑布 (waterfall), zaojing 磚井 (dug well), tianquan 天泉 (rain from the sky), 
diquan 地泉 (underground water), liushui 流水 (running water from rivers and 
stream), and danquan 丹泉 (a spring that can produce the elixir of immortality).\textsuperscript{118}

In Wen Zhenheng’s description, only the first three were forms of water elements in 
the garden, others were actually water sources that could be diverted to or 
incorporated into the garden. Apart from springs that could produce the elixir of 
immortality, other water sources seemed to fulfill Ji Cheng’s criteria for choosing 
construction sites.

When Wen Zhenheng describes the forms of water, he gives standards for 
design and maintenance. For example, Wen Zhenheng says that broad ponds 
should be as broad as possible; he suggests plants and fish be placed in the pond. 
Or, the acoustic effect produced by waterfall was important. Wen Zhenheng says 
that water of a higher source should be diverted into the garden to create a waterfall.

\textsuperscript{118} Wen Zhenheng 文震亨. Zhangwuzhi 長物誌 [The Treatise on Superfluous Things]. (Jinan: 
Underneath the path of the downpouring water, a rock arrangement should be located, to create mist and sound as water splashes down.\textsuperscript{119}

In order to provide the effect mentioned by Wen Zhenheng, careful planning of construction as well as on-going management was required. Managing the water was not easy and probably involved large economic resources. Yang Hongxun describes some of the problems that required expertise in the management of water in order to maintain the freshness of the water and reduce the breeding of bacteria, algae, and mosquitoes. The water had to keep flowing, usually by linking to a natural water source like the river, to maintain the water quality. The flow of water should be kept unobstructed to control the water level in case of heavy rain. Fish were used to reduce the number of plankton in the waters. In many very broad ponds, such as the one in Zhuozheng yuan, wells were dug under the pond to connect the pond with underground water channels to maintain its clearness and freshness.\textsuperscript{120} In addition, we should keep in mind that intensive efforts were needed to keep the pond clear of falling leaves, control the population of the fish,

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid. 105.  
\textsuperscript{120} Yang Hongxun 楊鴻勛. *Jiangnan yuanlin lun*. 75.
and manage the growth of plants in the water. All of these involve high amounts of economic resources.

Keeping the water clear also reflected upon the cultural status of the owner. *qing* 清 "clear" and *zhuo* 濁 "murky" were often used in literature to analogize the "uprightness" and "corruption" in the society. A righteous official should only serve the upright government and should go into reclusion if the government was corrupted. This idea was reflected in the poem *Yu Fu* 《楚辭·漁父》\(^{121}\). The clearness of the water was very important to reflect the uprightness and virtue of the owner. As discussed in previous chapters, virtue was a very important attribute of status. If a visitor of Zhuozheng yuan came to the garden to see the pond named “Canglang Pond 沧浪”\(^{122}\) and wrote in detail by Wen Zhengming, he would expect to see water clear enough to “wash the ribbons of one’s official cap.” Hence, keeping the water clear was an important task to reinforce the upright image portrayed by the garden and its name.

\(^{121}\) When the Canglang water is clear, I can wash the ribbons of my official cap in it. When the Canglang water is muddy, I can wash my feet in it. “滄浪之水清兮, 可以濯吾纓。滄浪之水濁兮, 可以濯吾足”

\(^{122}\) The Canglang Pond is discussed in Chapter 3.2.
6.7. DESIRE OF THE UNOBTAINABLE

In describing the sources of water [zaojing 鑿井 (dug well), tianquan 天泉 (rain from the sky), diquan 地泉 (underground water), liushui 流水 (running water from rivers and streams,) and danquan 丹泉 (spring that can produce the elixir of immortality)], Wen Zhenheng frequently describes the aroma, the taste of the water, and whether the water was suitable for drinking. The most interesting part is the description of the danquan, water that was like the elixir of immortality. Wen Zhenheng writes:

In famous mountains and rivers, at the place where immortals practice, there is elixir in the water. The taste of the water is different from ordinary drinking water, but it could reduce sickness and extend life. This is natural elixir; it is difficult to obtain.

“名山大川，仙翁修煉之處，水中有丹，其味異常，能延年卻病，此自然之丹液，不易得也.”
Wen Zhenheng could have really meant that there was an elixir of immortality. However, it might be very difficult to find an elixir of immortality. Here again, the tactics of “limited editions” were used to create desire of the unobtainable. Wen Zhenheng does not specify which water or stream would be a location for immortals to practice. He only mentions that this type of water was out there but difficult to get. When he discusses the status of the stone, the existence of some stone that was difficult to obtain would create a greater desire for that kind of stone. It seems that the same thing applied to water.

In short the strategy garden owners used to add value to their water was to keep the water clear to represent the virtue of the owners. Moreover, if one’s water source could be associated with the elixir of immortality, one’s water would be more valued.

*Shan* and *shui* were not only used together to contrast with each other aesthetically and combined to recreate the immortal landscape, but they were also very similar in their way of portraying and displaying the economic and cultural power of the owner.
CHAPTER 7. FLOWERS AND PLANTS

A landscape is not complete without flowers and plants. In Suzhou during the Ming dynasty, plants were put in gardens to create a replica of nature. Plants often embodied different symbolic meanings to represent the loftiness of the owner. For example, pines symbolized longevity, endurance without bending. Bamboo, which could bend but would not break, symbolized a scholar’s holding on to a principle. However, Clunas expresses that symbolism was not the only concern of garden owners. Plants in the garden could also show storage of wealth and display of wealth.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, plants in the garden were grown as food, medicine, and cash crops. Clunas discusses in detail the plants in Zhuozheng yuan, built in c.1517. He takes the description from the writings of Wen Zhengming and analyzes the different plants grown in the Zhuozheng yuan. By comparing with the books about agronomy of that time, Clunas concludes that the plants in the

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garden were a form of storage of wealth, similar to the purchasing of antiques, which could be converted to cash easily.\(^{124}\)

Clunas does the same exercise and compares the book of agronomy and the book *Treatise on Superfluous Things*. He concludes that by the seventeenth century, plants in the garden were simply used to achieve an aesthetic result that has little relationship with food source or wealth storage. Plants became a pure display of status.\(^{125}\)

From Clunas’ analysis we can see that even within the two generations from Wen Zhengming to Wen Zhenheng (Wen Zhengming’s great-grandson), there was a constant shift of garden culture. This shift is not as easy to detect when studying objects such as stones and water elements, where changes of these elements within the garden required more effort. Due to the natural life cycle of plants and flowers, it would be easier to change the plantings within the garden. In Suzhou what plants were consider tasteful in the garden? And if many gardens had similar plants and flowers, which garden would be considered to have more status?

\(^{124}\) Clunas, *Fruitful Sites*. 38-59.

\(^{125}\) Ibid. 166-73.
Ji Cheng did not record any of his expertise on flowers and plants in his book, while Wen Zhenheng devoted a large part of his book to flowers and plants. Clunas discussed that Wen Zhenheng’s writings were a buying guide of flowers. Wen Zhenheng provided details of each type of plant in his book, the *Treatise on Superfluous Things*. He provides a long list of garden plants. In most cases he describes the plant and the species. He discusses which species and sometimes what arrangements are elegant or vulgar. From time to time, he lists some usage of plants as medicine. Only once, when he describes chrysanthemums, does he list the technical know-how of planting the flowers. Unlike a book designing the gardens to have flowers of four seasons, or concerning the growing of the plants, Wen Zhenheng only comments on which types of flowers to use or which arrangement of the flowers is elegant or vulgar. Clunas also points out that when Wang Xianchen built Zhuozheng yuan in c. 1517, Wen Zhengming (Wen Zhenheng’s great-grandfather) referenced the virtue of Wang by referring to past scholars like Pan Yu and Tao Yuanming, who farmed and grew their own

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126 Ibid. 171
vegetables. In Wen Zhenheng’s book, he does not even mention that it is appropriate for the owner to grow vegetables in the garden. By the seventeenth century, plants became gradually more and more a display of consumption power and were grown purely for aesthetic value.

In Wen Zhenheng’s writing, he simply lists what is elegant and what is vulgar. Wen Zhenheng’s tone and manner in writing is like that of a fashion critic who rates the dresses of the actresses after each year’s Oscar award. Wen Zhenheng just assumed for himself the authority of garden consumption expert.

Wen Zhenheng’s authority arose from his literati credentials partially accumulated through his family. Wen Zhenheng came from a literati family. Wen Zhenheng’s great-grandfather was Wen Zhengming, who was respected as a great scholar in the literati circle of his time. Wen Zhenheng’s father and uncles held official roles on regional and provincial levels. Wen Zhenheng’s brother passed the civil service examinations but soon retired from court politics dominated by eunuchs. His brother later became the grand secretary again in 1635. His brother was also

\(^{128}\) Clunas, *Fruitful Sites*, 169
the owner of the garden, today known as the Medicine Patch 藥圃, in the fashionable northwest part of the city. Wen Zhenheng himself was a leading figure of the literati circle in Suzhou. In 1626, he was the spokesperson of the Suzhou elites when the group protested against the seizure of an official, Zhou Shunchang, by the “Eastern Depot 東廠” controlled by the eunuch. Although Wen Zhenheng did not hold an official title, he did hold cultural and political power in Suzhou, and was probably well known in the country. It is Wen Zhenheng’s personal image that projected onto the writing of the Treatise on Superfluous Things.

Chapter 6 describes how many resources were involved in creating shan and shui. By comparison, plants did not seem to be difficult to acquire because the commercial flower-growing industry was very prosperous in Suzhou. Moreover, unlike shan and shui, plants were probably the easiest elements to be replaced. Naturally, plants and flowers grew and died and new plants were required to replenish the garden. It was possible to manage the plants and flowers in the garden seasonally, and change the plants to suit the “fashionable” tastes of the time

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129 ———, Superfluous Things. 20-23
as long as one could afford to do so. So, when everyone could afford these exotic plants, it would then be up to fashionable taste to dictate what was elegant. “Taste” did not mean just anyone’s taste, but the taste of the well-respected Suzhou literati, such as Wen Zhenheng (similar to a fashion critique). Reading Wen Zhenheng’s consumption manual and following his way of arranging flowers and plants would automatically associate the individual with Wen Zhenheng’s taste. Assuming this book was widely read by the elite circle, since gardens were somewhat accessible to the exclusive public, those haoshizhe who took great interest in gardens would recognize this taste.

As an analogy, if the famous fashion designer Alexander McQueen, wrote about his comments on spring/summer collections 2006, trendy celebrities or socialites might follow his tips and would recognize others who also followed McQueen’s fashion advice.

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130 McQueen, Alexander. 2006. Biography. “He [Alexander McQueen] was named British Designer of the Year four times in 1996, 1997, 2001 and 2003. In October 1996 he was appointed Chief Designer at the French Haute Couture House Givenchy where he worked until March 2001. In June 2003 he was awarded International Designer of the Year by The Council of Fashion Designer’s of America (CFDA) and in the same month honored with ‘A Most Excellent Commander of The British Empire’ (CBE) by her Majesty, the Queen. Alexander was also awarded British Menswear Designer of the Year in 2004.”
Once again, by association with big names, specific ways to arrange similar plants and flowers would help the owner to gain status both for himself and his gardens. This required a constant effort in management of the plants and flowers.
Many scholars agree that buildings played a major role in the landscape design of Suzhou gardens. These buildings include *ting* (pavilions), *tang* (halls), *xuan* (lounges surrounded by windows), *guan* (guest houses), *lou* (two-or three-story buildings), *ge* (two-story pavilions), *xie* (waterside pavilions), *fang* (landboats), and *lang* (corridors or covered walkways). Buildings in Suzhou garden design were important because the garden was supposed to be a three-dimensional landscape painting, and usually scholars were depicted inside a *ting* or *lou* in landscape painting. However, these buildings also served their basic function – to accommodate. Whether it was a room to study, a pavilion to rest, or a place to drink tea and entertain guests, the materials of the building itself communicated to the users the economic power of the garden owners.

Another function served by these buildings was to control the path of visitors wandering in the garden and to control the view of visitors to different scenes within the garden. As previously discussed, these gardens were semi-open to an
exclusive public and one strategy for garden owners to display their status was to use the buildings to manage views.

### 8.1. COMPONENTS OF THE BUILDING THAT DISPLAY WEALTH

The components of buildings in the gardens were similar to the courtyard residences of the garden owners. These buildings were mainly constructed on a wooden frame on a base. The roofs were covered with ceramic roof tiles, occasionally covered by thatch. Floor tiles were generally laid in decorative patterns. Stones were often used as the staircases. Windows, in the most luxurious buildings, were covered with 明瓦 (a kind of seashell). All these materials were used as components to construct the buildings. These materials also communicated to the users the economic power of the building.

#### 8.1.1. WOODEN STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK

Wood was used as a major construction material mainly for the structural supporting framework and interior partition and decoration. The wooden framework was usually made of 杉木, 松木, and 楠木. Furniture was
usually constructed of *hong mu* 紅木, *zitan mu* 紫檀木 or *ju mu* 櫸木. The horizontal banner was usually made of *yin xing mu* 銀杏木.\textsuperscript{131}

The fact that wood was used in the framework represented the status of the owner. In the Chinese tradition, residences of elites, aristocrats, and even emperors were built of wood. Ordinary people usually built their houses using mud-bricks. Even now, there is not a fully satisfactory explanation of why Chinese had such a preference for wood, especially in light of the fact that the Chinese had mastered the skill of masonry. One explanation was that wood represented life and growth. In the book *I-ching* 易經 [The Book of Change], the direction east and southeast belongs to the element of wood. East is the direction of the sunrise, which symbolizes the spring, new beginnings, and life. Wood, as a living element, was used in the construction of residences for living people.\textsuperscript{132} In the Ming dynasty, wood was only used for the framework and the walls were mainly constructed from bricks. This was probably due to wood’s rarity. In any case, buildings constructed from wood portrayed a higher status.

\textsuperscript{131} Xu Wensu 除文蘇. *Suzhou min ju*. 10 - 11.
\textsuperscript{132} Cao Lindi 曹林娣. *Zhongguo Yuanlin Wenhua*. 427.
Acquiring and transporting wood, just as transporting stones and water, cost money. For example, *nan mu* was often chosen for the main columns and ridgepoles.\(^{133}\) Since the wooden framework was load bearing, the wood had to be hard and dense. *Nan mu* was famous for its hardness and density. *Nan mu* grows in Hunan 湖南, Guangxi 廣西, Guizhou 貴州, Yunnan 雲南, and Sichuan 四川.\(^{134}\) It had to be transported from these regions to Suzhou.

*Nan mu* is priced also by its color, texture, and also by its rarity and its imperial association in the Ming dynasty. *Nan mu* grows so slowly that it takes hundreds of years to grow to a size suitable for lumber. During the Ming dynasty, *nan mu* was also used as the structural framework of the Forbidden City. (Some part of the wooden framework of the Forbidden City was made in *nan mu* and a different type of wood was used in the Qing dynasty).\(^{135}\)

Apart from the actual economic cost of the wood itself, getting the right wood involved complicated rituals that almost deified the wood. These complicated rituals

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\(^{133}\) *Ming Garden*, Video recording, 1983.

\(^{134}\) Wen Zhenheng 文震亨. *Zhangwuzhi* 張 Türkiye 11.

\(^{135}\) 古典家具收藏網. "楠木".
added intangible “value” to the material. There was a tradition in the Zhejiang
region that the owner of the house would go up to the mountain on the third day of
the first month to pick the right tree to be logged. Red paper would be stuck onto
the tree trunk. Then the owner of the house would need to pray and make an
offering to the local mountain god. When the tree was logged, the tree could not fall
directly onto the ground; it should not be allowed to roll on the ground; the bark of
the tree should not be shredded on the mountain, and no one should step across
the logged wood. More rituals would be performed in each step of processing for
the wood to be made into a ridgepole and the framework. For example, on the day
of raising the ridgepole, steam buns would be thrown down from the raised
ridgepole. Steam buns in Suzhou symbolized prosperity because the dough of the
buns needed to be raised. Hence, raising the ridgepole symbolized the prosperity
Although it hasn’t been proved that this would have been the exact tradition of the Suzhou garden owners in the late Ming dynasty, it is highly likely that some sort of rituals were required to log the wood and to transport it. Rituals were performed throughout the society, from the emperor to the ordinary citizen, and were considered very important. In the Great Ming Code 大明律, a whole chapter of Lilü 禮律 (Law of Rituals) was dedicated to punishment of those who did not perform correctly in rituals such as sacrifice, or offerings to ancestors, or responding correctly at the court.\textsuperscript{137} There was also a specific official position in the court to oversee that the rites and rituals were performed correctly on the auspicious hour 吉時 of the auspicious day 吉日. This position required specific skill and was not considered superstitious in the Ming dynasty. Moreover, Clunas also discussed that the shu shu 術數 (the study of numbers) was common among the literati in the Ming dynasty and it was considered an art to pick the auspicious location for dwellings.\textsuperscript{138} Shu shu was not only used to determine the shape or the directions

\textsuperscript{138} Clunas, Fruitful Sites. 117-89
of the location, it could also apply to selection of the time of day. Although one
would not get punished if they picked the wrong time and the wrong day to raise the
ridgepole, it was an important task and required a specialist in the whole process of
getting the right wood and raising the columns and ridgepole. Hence, the
acquisition and the transportation were not the only cost of the wood. The correct
performance of all the complicated rituals added “value” to the wood.

It appears that the elaborate nature of these rituals in the construction process
was a way to display the status of the garden owners. As an analogy, it is very
common today in a construction project to have a “topping-up” ceremony to mark
the completion of an important stage in the development. Usually, the press will be
invited to the ceremony. Through the press, the achievement of the project
developer is communicated to the public. Hence it seems that in the Ming dynasty,
elaborate rituals ensured the prosperity of the family and also served as an
announcement of the construction project and a display of achievement and
positive outlook of the family.
8.1.2. STONE STAIRCASES

Staircases were another way to display wealth to the visitor. Stones like *taihu shi* stone were sometimes used to make the staircases of the building. Sometimes stones were arranged like a mountain that led to the second floor of a *lou*, step by step. Once again, as discussed in Chapter 6, stones were placed in prominent positions. If a visitor wanted to enter a building, he had to walk up the stairs.

Figure 17. Stone staircases in Liu Yuan\(^{139}\)

\(^{139}\) Photograph taken at site
8.1.3. WINDOW

The material used to make windows could display wealth. Wen Zhenheng wrote in his book, *Treatise on Superfluous Things*, that his first choice of material for the window was *mingwa* 明瓦 over paper windows. *Mingwa* was a kind of seashell found in the costal area of Zhejiang. The diameter of the shell ranged between approximately six to ten centimeters. The shell is very thin and flat and was often sanded to fit onto windows, like glass. The effect of the shell was similar

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140 Photograph taken at site
to fitting sanded glass onto a window frame made of bamboo or wood. The cost of *mingwa* as a raw material was not known, but it was less expensive than glass, probably because glass was imported from overseas. However, fitting the ten-centimeter square pieces of *mingwa* onto the window frame required intensive labor.

### 8.1.4. FLOOR TILES

The color of the roof tiles and the kind of tiles used were strictly governed by the size and nature of the building. There was not a lot of variation in style or taste. This seemed logical because neither Ji Cheng's *Yuan ye* nor Wen Zhenheng’s *Treatise on Superfluous Things* had any coverage on the choice of roof tiles.

On the other hand, the workmanship of the patterning of the floor tiles seemed to display more information about the wealth and taste of the owner. Floor tiles were discussed in an individual section in Ji Cheng’s book. Ji Cheng recommends what

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143 Ibid.152.
kind of tiles and stones were to be used for different grounds and floor. Ji Cheng also recommends different patterns be used for different locations. Using the inappropriate type of stones to pave the grounds was considered vulgar.\textsuperscript{145}

Floor tiles were important for displaying wealth because of the precious stones used and also the labor cost in putting these stones into decorative patterns. The floor or the grounds provided a large and prominent exhibition space to display precious stones and the labor intensive effort. When a visitor came into the garden, it was much easier for him to look down at the floor than to look up at the roof to find precious stones and tiles.

Moreover, floor tiles could serve as visual indicators of zones, and indicate to the visitor what to expect in the area. For example, when a visitor entered the courtyard of Haitang Chun Wu 海棠指塢 (Spring Begonia Cove House) in Zhuozheng yuan, the floor pattern was paved in the pattern of flowers. This pattern was different from the floor pattern outside this courtyard. A visitor immediately received a visual impact as if he had stepped into the courtyard. In addition to

\textsuperscript{145} Zhang Jiaji 張家驥. \textit{Yuan ye quan yi.} 109-14, 281-87.
reading the name, Haitang Chun Wu 海棠指塢, and possibly seeing the plant, Spring Begonia, a visitor was given a total “package” of presentation of this courtyard of Spring Begonia. This “view management” within the garden was a very important device to display the status and wealth of the owner.

8.2. CONTROLLED MOVEMENT AND MANAGED VIEWS

Individual components, each valued differently, were put together into buildings like tang (hall), ting (pavilion), lang (corridor), lou (2- or 3-story building), or fang (landboats). Unlike the other elements in the garden, such as stone, water, 

146 Photograph taken at site.
and plants, the covered space created by different building components immediately had a function, that is, to accommodate people in performing activities. These buildings were designed to serve as a “grandstand” for viewing the materials of “status” in the garden.

When Ji Cheng discusses the selection of the location of the main building, the tang, he says:

In designing the layout of the garden, the main task is to determine the location and the direction of the main hall. The most important criterion is the view from the building; it would be nice if it faces south…

“凡園圃立基，定廳堂為主。先乎取景，妙在朝南…” 147

Contrary to the adherence to the north-south axis arrangement of a traditional courtyard house of the upper class, buildings in a garden were relatively freely layout. Ji Cheng places emphasis on the view rather than the south-facing direction. The main hall was the building to receive guests. Hence, Ji Cheng stresses that in

the layout of the garden, this would be the key position and has to be able to serve as a location to view the whole garden, including the stone display, the rock arrangement, the water scene, and the plants.

*Ting* 廳, *tang* 堂, *xuan* 軒, and *guan* 館 were interchangeable. The building YuanXiang Tang 遠香堂 (Distant Fragrance Hall) in Zhuozheng yuan, or the Linquan Jishuo zhi Guan 林泉耆碩之館 (House of Aged Giants of Groves and Springs) in Liu Yuan were designed as the main hall for viewing the most important spot in the garden, the main water element of Zhuozheng yuan and the Guanyunfeng 冠雲峰 (Topping Cloud Peak) of Liu Yuan. The water element of Zhuozheng yuan was a symbol of uprightness and Guanyunfeng was a very expensive Taihu stone.

*Lou* and *ge* were designed for a similar function, but this time one climbed up and looked down. For example, Jianshan Lou 見山樓 in Zhuozheng yuan provided an opposite view from the main hall, Yuanxiang Tang 遠香堂 (Distant Fragrance Hall), from a higher point looking down to the main body of water. Or Guanyun Lou

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冠雲樓 (Two-story Building of Topping Cloud) in Liu Yuan, which stood across the main hall, Linquan Jishuo zhi Guan 林泉耆碩之館 (House of Aged Giants of Groves and Springs), provided another view of the main feature of the garden, Guanyunfeng 冠雲峰 (Topping Cloud Peak).

Figure 20. View of Guanyunfeng from Linquan Jishuo zhi Guan with Guyun Lou at the back
Fang 舫 (landboats) were usually built next to the water. The name of this structure controlled the expectation and the behavior of the visitors. Fang means an imitation boat, so automatically, one would seek for the water or any symbolism of water.

Ting 亭 (pavilions) and lang 廊 (corridors) were designed to control views through the gardens. This was a key design feature of the garden.149 Ting forced the visitor to stop at the framed scene and lang controlled the path of viewing.

149 Ibid. 32-33.
As discussed before, most gardens in the Ming dynasty were accessible to an exclusive group of public audience. Stones were used in Suzhou gardens in construction of mountains and as sculptural display (the mountains being considered as large-scale sculptural displays). Water was used to contrast with stone and to portray the “clearness” and “loftiness” of the owner. And plants in vogue were placed in between. In whichever case, if one had spent so much money on stone or sometimes antique stones, water management, and landscaping, one would have naturally wanted to make sure such materials of status would be highlighted in the garden and that visitors would see them.

Buildings controlled the view of visitors to look at the expensive materials that represented fame and status. A designated path would ensure that visitors stopped at or passed by the expensive materials without missing them. Ting, lou provide a resting place for visitors to admire these expensive items from different views. The convention of controlled view in garden design of the late Ming dynasty could be explained by the need for displaying and highlighting these elements of status in the garden.
More hints were given to visitors by the naming of these buildings within the garden. In Liu Yuan, a building with a name of "Wufeng Xianguan, (Immortal’s Gallery of Five Peaks), 五峰仙館, was open to a courtyard with rock arrangements of five peaks that symbolized the five peaks of Mount Lu (see figure 11); a building with a name of “Yifeng Xuan, (Salute-to-the-Peak Lounge), 抚峰軒” directed visitors to look into another rock arrangement of Taihu stones; and the building of “Guanyun Lou, (Two-story Building of Topping Cloud) 冠雲樓” was a lookout for the Taihu stone named Guanyunfeng 冠雲峰 (Topping Cloud Peak). Or in Zhuozheng yuan, the “Wuzhu Youju, (the Secluded Residence of Paulownia and Bamboo) 梧竹幽居,” was pointing to the plants, paulownia and bamboo. The “HeXiang Simian Ting, (the Pavilion of Aroma of the Lotus from Four Sides) 荷香四面亭,” directly pointed the visitors toward the lotus.
Figure 22. A view to the stone arrangement from Yifeng Xuan\textsuperscript{150}

In addition the guidebooks also provided more information about the scene at each stop. For example, Wang Shizhen writes about his own Yizhou Garden:

Upon entering the door, there is a pavilion spreading its wings (before me). In front of the pavilion, there are arrays of beautiful bamboos. The bamboos surround the pavilion on the left, right, and back sides. If we have to name them, there would be at least ten species. The pavilion is

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid. 366.
decorated in green, to match the color of the bamboo. The
name of the pavilion is “This Gentleman”; I name it after
Wang Ziyou’s famous saying. On the left, there is a path
hidden in the middle of the bamboos. If a visitor stopped
here, he could take a rest if he were tired. There is a saying:
“In the pavilion, one cannot see the scorching sun in summer,
cool breezes came from four sides, one will stay here and
does not want to leave”; this is one example (of such a
place).

“入門而有亭翼然，前列美竹，左右及後三方悉環之，數其名，
將十種。亭之飾皆碧，以承竹映，而名之曰：‘此君’，取吾家
子猷語也。其左，竹中辟為路，客遊至此，倦可憩，所謂‘夏不
見畏日，輕涼四襲，逗不肯去’者，此亦其一也。”

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151 Chen Zhi 陈植 and Zhang Gongchi 张公弛, Zhongguo lidai mingyuan ji xuan zhu 中國歷代名園記
135.
In this paragraph, Wang Shizhen pointed out a bamboo scene of the pavilion, and some of the decorations and features. First, he specifically suggests that visitors should stay here to take a rest. Second, he describes to the visitors what the view should be. Visitors should see not only bamboos, but be able to recognize the different species of bamboos. Third, he provides the benefits of staying in the pavilion to cool off during the hot summer day. Finally, he even helps the visitors to decipher the name “this gentleman,” in case the visitor might not know that the name came from a saying that he got from Wang Ziyou’s praising of bamboo.

The building, the naming, and the guidebooks all directed the views of the visitors to what they should see and pointed out what the owner wanted to display. In conclusion, buildings could display wealth through the materials used and also though the managed views of the scenes of the garden controlled by the placement of the buildings. In conjunction with the naming, writings, and paintings of the garden they present a total “packaging” of the status of a garden.
CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION

Scholars have studied the different symbolic meanings of gardens. Gardens built in the Ming dynasty are usually described as aiming to produce a replica of nature in miniature through the arrangement of the landscape using stones, water, plants, and buildings. Gardens represented the harmony of heaven and earth and the merging of man and nature. All elements, such as stone, water, plants, and buildings had multiple layers of symbolic meanings. The symbolic meanings were always tied closely to the concept of reclusion – a virtue of the righteous officials.

Clunas points out another way to view these Suzhou gardens. By the late sixteenth century, the gardens in Suzhou had become a commodity and a display of social status and wealth. This paper further analyzes the strategies employed by garden owners to display status and wealth through the selection of tangible materials and the addition of intangible "value," which often are associated with virtue, on the tangible materials.

This display of social status could be found in the tangible materials used, such as land, stone, water, plants, and buildings. Apart from the economic cost of
acquisition, transportation, and construction, additional value was given to these materials by the different ways of “packaging” and presenting these materials.

Association with virtue, the cultural past, and with respected literati were the main strategies to increase the additional value of the materials. Associations could be done through guidebooks, paintings, naming, view management, and ongoing management of the tangible elements in the garden. For example, the whole garden could be endorsed by famous literati through their writings and paintings.

Stones were given additional value by their association with the past. Water was valued by its ongoing management. Plants and flowers were maintained continuously to keep up with the fashion. Buildings were used to control views such that visitors could view all the materials of high cost and value. All these would help to add value to the materials and raise status of the garden.
APPENDIX

- Huang Gongwang 黃公望 or Huang Zhijiu 黃子久 (1269 – 1354), Yuan Painter
- Ji Cheng (1582 – c 1642), author of Yuan ye
- Mi Fu 米芾 (1051 – 1107), Song Painter
- Ni Zan 倪瓚 (c 1301 – 1374), Yuan Painter
- Shitao 石濤 (1642 – 1707), Late Ming and Qing painter
- Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037 – 1101), Song poet
- Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470 – 1524), Ming poet and painter
- Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526 – 1590)
- Wang Xianchen 王獻臣 (dates unknown) official and patron, owners of Zhuozheng yuan
- Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470 – 1559), Ming poet and painter
- Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 (1585 – 1645), author of Treaties on Superfluous Things
- Xia Gui 夏圭 (dates unknown, active c. 1200 – 1250), Song painter
- Xie Zhaozhe (1567-1642)
- Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610)
- Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254 – 1322), Yuan official and painter
- Zhu Mian, 朱勔 Song official
- Yaun Ye, 《園冶》 dated c 1634
- Treaties on Superfluous Thing, 《長物志》 dated c 1615 – 1620
- Zhuozheng yuan, 拙政園 dated c. 1517
- Liu Yuan, 留園 dated c. 1522 – 1593
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