

# Creation and Appreciation of “Nature and Man in One” and Chinese Classic Beauty of Garden – Taking the Suzhou classic garden as an example

Huaizu Cui, Qingqing Hu

Jiangxi Engineering Vocational College, 330025, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China

**Abstract.** The ideology of “Nature and Man in One” from Taoism, one of the local schools that has the deepest influence on China, demonstrates an admiration and appraisal for the nature and shows the thought that man and nature exist in harmony. The ideology “Nature and Man in One” is a basic principle for ancient people to deal with the relation between man and nature, and also provides a corresponding basis and reflects the wisdom of ancestors. The modern society has also provided a reference for harmonious and sustained development of man and nature. Chinese classic garden is an artistic works from the ancient craftsmen. As a representative of Chinese classic garden, Suzhou Garden complies with the philosophical concept “Nature and Man in One” to arrange the mountains and rivers. This article makes a deep analysis on the influence of Taoism cultural deposits on the arrangement of Chinese classic garden based on the connotation of “Nature and Man in One” ideology.

**Keywords.** nature and Man in One; classic garden; Suzhou Garden; Taoism ideology

The arrangement of Chinese classic garden is a demonstration of ancients’ wisdom. In a higher hierarchy of philosophy, it records the development history of Chinese architectural culture. As a good representative of philosophy and aesthetics, the classic garden art has a broad and profound basic idea. The ideology “Nature and Man in One” is not only the essence of traditional culture, but also the composition principle with which our Chinese ancient buildings complied. Suzhou Garden, a representative of Chinese classic garden, is elegant in building types and reveals the ideological connotation and artistic rules with its profound cultural deposits. It is trying to provide a conducive inspiration for the artistic design of modern environment.

## 1 Overview of the ideology and spirit “Nature and Man in One”

### 1.1 Overview of the ideological connotation “Nature and Man in One”

The ideology “Nature and Man in One” originates from Pre-Qin Dynasty with low productivity. In the social conditions then, people fully admired and awed the nature, thinking the nature is a sole power to dominate the world’s creatures. So, “nature” was the center admired by ancient people. They thought they could communicate with the gods to be blessed through a fixed method. Chinese traditional Taoism ideology maintains “Nature and Man in One” and “Imitation of

Nature”, thinking the universe is in harmony, and man is the belonging of nature. In the opinion of Taoism ideology, the sky is nature, and the man is a part of nature. Zhuangzi said: “With man, it is nature; with nature, it is also nature”. The man and nature are in one. But as a result of various morality and codes produced by the man, they are limited and lose its original natural properties, thus to be inharmonious with the nature. “Nature and Man in One” is to free the humanity, to let it return to nature and reach a spiritual state of “universe and me in one”.

“Nature and Man in One” lays emphasis on harmony of man and nature, thinking the man’s activity shall comply with the natural rules, only by which they can achieve an ideal status. It shows a dialectical relationship between man and nature. Nature and Man in One comprises a unity of opposites for the most fundamental contradictions in human society, and advocates an ideal state where the man and nature exist in a mutual dependence manner.

## **1.2 Garden conception expression in “Nature and Man in One” ideology**

In Chinese traditional culture, the arrangement of mountains and rivers is an important component, and it shows Chinese philosophical wisdom by its profound moral principle and multiple rules. Our Chinese garden art includes the mysterious customs and cultures, as well as indicates the ideology of “Nature and Man in One”. The natural view of mountains and rivers, through development and reformation, demonstrates the true image of the big nature in a more fascinating manner, which highlights a aesthetic expression. In the early stage, the admiration and awe of people to the nature was gradual converted to an artistic pursuit. The view of mountains and rivers is not only what people may truly pursue, but also a carrier for emotional and intentional expression. As a representative of Chinese classic garden, Suzhou Garden shows the wisdom collection of Chinese ancient laborers and is a national splendid legacy.

Our Chinese classic garden art is closely related to the Taoism ideology, such as the arrangement of hill stones in the garden. It is not to show a concrete image, but to pursue a kind of spiritual state and emphasize the connotative expression. In the garden, the well-arranged hill stones, flourishing trees and floating fog, all in half reality, offer a special tranquility to the garden space, which is also a permanent pursuit of natural beauty for the Taoism ideology.

## **2 Arrangement of Chinese classic garden under the ideology “Nature and Man in One”**

### **2.1 Composition rules for classic garden**

Under the ideology “Nature and Man in One”, our Chinese classic garden has constructed the mountains and rivers in the highest degree, and in practice, the core of “Nature and Man in One” consists in the compatibility of man and environment. The construction of the garden shall be unified with the natural environment. And the construction arrangement, size, terrain and other aspects of the garden shall be adapted to the environment and flexible enough to enable the people to feel the harmony and the Chinese garden culture without any strange feelings about the artificial design. All of these represent the ideology of “Nature and Man in One”. Influenced by Taoism, people are fond of natural things, and claim to recover themselves and cultivate their minds in the nature. In the ancient period, people would connect the individual personality with the landscape in the nature. These are the examples indicating the people entrust their emotions in the mountains and rivers, and spiritually integrate with them. The admiration and appraise to the nature is also a subject in our Chinese classic garden art.

There are mainly two aspects to present the composition rules of classic garden. Firstly, the arrangement of hill stones must be perfectly unique, and can still have a feeling of natural construction in vision though they have been artificially treated. Every garden arrangement cannot be without hill stones, which is a bond to connect the sky and ground, and a main framework for

garden composition. The ancient people endowed the rigid and heavy stones and mountains with persistent and vigorous intention, expressing their admiration for the dogged vitality. In the process of garden construction, the hill stones are one of the four basic elements, and a representation of their composition in natural rules. The carefully cut and polished hill stones can still show a natural plainness, indicating a perfect combination of artificiality and nature, as well as integration with the philosophical ideology “Nature and Man in One”. In the Taoism, the environment in the mountain is related to immortality pursuit. It shall create a tranquil feeling to realize the existence and meaning of Taoism, and meanwhile focus the realized Taoism into the customs and cultures. The Chinese classic garden art is famous in the world for its exquisite arrangement, beautiful spiritual state, unique style and profound cultural deposit that indicates the philosophical wisdom of ancestors.

Secondly, it is the arrangement of water in the classic garden. In the Taoism, the water is a mostly supported classic and natural thing. Most of the Taoism’s natures are expressed by the natural laws of water, and its connotation is a concentrated expression of Taoism. For example, “The greatest benevolence is like water” said by Laozi is the best appraisal for the water. The image of water includes “empty” and also “existent”. The dialectical ideologies for both are mutually converted, and they are the representatives of image for the essence of Taoism. In the classic garden design, the arrangement and design of water are essential. In the perspective of geomancy, the water is related to the initial purpose of garden construction, and the dominant element of garden. In the Chinese traditional culture, the mountain is relative to the water. The mountain belongs to yang, the water to yin, but they exist dependently. This is the dialectical yin-yang opinion in Taoism. They reinforce and meanwhile counteract with each other. The hardness of hill stones flatters the softness and tolerance of water, and the grace of water shows the vigor of hill stones. Therefore, in the arrangement design of classic garden, the ideology “Nature and Man in One” focuses on the equality of mountains and rivers. The mountain creates a static beauty for the garden, and the water controls the dynamic beauty. As an essential element for garden art, the water is from nature and, through reformation it complies with the natural rules, further demonstrating the softness of water that flows around the garden.

## **2.2 Arrangement mode of classic garden**

The influence of the ideology “Nature and Man in One” on the arrangement mode of classic garden mainly shows the traditional aesthetic conception and constructs a unique-style landscape culture by integration of aesthetic elements. Some people assimilate the Chinese classic garden to a 3D drawing and soundless poem which shares name with Chinese traditional arts. And it fully shows the internal aesthetic elements. Influenced by the ideology “Nature and Man in One”, the arrangement mode of classic garden has a very close association with the landscape painting. Most garden designers work as painters, and they are good at scenery setting and design of landscape. The gardens they designed will be splendid landscape drawings in all aspects. The Taoism and the arrangement mode of classic garden are mutually affected and infiltrated. The garden design incorporates the drawing to have a unique style and also demonstrates our Chinese traditional cultural arts before the world. As the Chinese landscape paintings focus on the organizational rules, the reasonable arrangement of landscape is the key for painting and for garden construction, and the garden construction is not an exception. The arrangement of mountains and rivers shall be compliant with the local geographical environment and conducted based on the actual conditions. Meanwhile, the classic garden focuses on rules and images, laying emphasis on the ideological connotation of dialectical unification. In the framework of garden, a variety of landscapes coordinate with each other. So in the perspective of “Nature and Man in One”, the beauty of Chinese classic garden is established just based on the reality, virtuality, exposure, concealing and other dialectical dependence relations of landscape elements.

## **3 Representation of the ideology “Nature and Man in One” in Suzhou Classic Garden**

### **3.1 Representation of the ideology “Nature and Man in One” in Suzhou Garden**

The garden art has a generality and popularity in the ancient time. Either the nobles or common people would create their own gardens within the scope of ability, except for some differences in scale and form. Chinese ancient gardens include many private ones, of which the landscape arrangement and cultural deposits are very typical. Suzhou Garden is a classic in the classic gardens. Its arrangement is as natural as possible, presenting the application of Chinese philosophical culture essence in the garden art.

Suzhou Classic Garden has a long history. Early in the Spring and Autumn Period the sixth century B.C., there was a record about it. The private garden first documented in the history was the Pijiang Garden in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. Through the garden construction activities throughout the history, Suzhou Garden has many famous gardens, and reached its peak in the Ming and Qing Dynasty. Suzhou has become one of the most prosperous regions in China with various private gardens around the ancient cities. The garden art welcomed its peak from 16th to 18th century. Currently, there are tens of thousands of Suzhou Classic Gardens kept well, so Suzhou got a reputation as an “earthly paradise”.

The space formation of Suzhou Garden is influenced by the ideology “Nature and Man in One”, which to a great extent provides a rational basis for the space design and closely connects to the nature in the design process. Every detail therein seems to be constructed naturally without any trace of artificiality. Confucianism and Taoism have different interpretations for “Nature and Man in One”, but their core opinions are uniform, namely the ideology that man and nature exist in a harmonious dependence manner. The design concept of Suzhou Garden, departing from the western narrow sense of world view “people-oriented humanism”, considers the man as an indivisible part of nature based on the traditional aesthetics. Its spatial features are from the same source as the ideology “Nature and Man in One”.

### **3.2 Arrangement of Suzhou Garden**

The spatial arrangement of Suzhou Garden complies with the view of “Nature and Man in One and Imitation of Nature”. In the macro perspective of the whole garden, the most obvious feature is the smooth curve that breaks the traditional building rules taking the central axis as the basis. Instead, it uses a well-planned arrangement mode to show the beauty of garden art. For example, the buildings in the middle part of Liu Garden and the position design of Celestial Hall of Five Peaks and Linquanqishuo Hall avoid the arrangement in the central axis and select a design in southeast and northwest direction. There are many exquisite, eye-confusing but delightful courtyards and buildings that enhance the beauty of each other. The plants growing in Suzhou Garden also include the aesthetic elements. Compared to the western garden art, our Chinese classic garden pursues a natural beauty, but the western principle focuses on a regular geometrical beauty. The flowers and grasses in Suzhou Garden have a natural posture, and form a delightful contrast with the hill stones and running water, all of which comprise a landscape and natural atmosphere of mountain forest with different sizes, intervals, colors and lights. For example, the 2nd island in the middle of Humble Administrator's Garden uses deciduous tree to match the evergreen, wildly forming a pleasant contrast with the flourishing bamboo forest on the earth slope and the reeds along the pool. They set off on a wide area of water, forming a unique landscape effect of mountain forest.

The natural rule “Nature and Man in One” demonstrated by Suzhou Garden is very obvious. In the elemental composition of space, the arrangement based on image is incorporated with the nature to the greatest extent. Although located in the city, Suzhou Garden cannot use much material from the natural resources. Most of the natural landscapes are simulated by artificial

mountains and river, the overlapping of hill stones, the design of running water and the planning of plants present a natural pleasure and romance.

### 3.3 Spatial division of Suzhou Garden

The internal buildings in Suzhou Garden are also coordinated with the natural environment. The internal space of buildings and the external space of garden make up a harmonious isomorphic relation. In the macro perspective, they also flatter the garden as a whole. The sky and ground as the big background environment, the spatial division shall be natural and able to show the landscapes in the garden. All things there shall be in harmony to present the Chinese traditional beauty of natural mountains and rivers. Even in the design of garden, the buildings are mutually related rather than independent. They are inseparably interconnected with the landscapes of the whole Suzhou Garden. The inside-to-outside spatial division concept creates a communication and connections between the indoor spatial arrangement and the outdoor natural environment.

As a representative of Chinese classic garden, Suzhou Garden also contains a dialectical ideology. Its general formation and element allocation are interrelated. It has a variety of composition mode and gets rid of everything-in-view design concept. The scenery arrangement is more compliant with the Chinese traditional cultural and psychological features, and presents a spatial arrangement of “a sudden glimpse of hope in the dark mist of bewilderment”, which to the greatest extent demonstrates the intentional feature. Therefore, the space elements of Suzhou Garden often reveal a complex contradiction state which is intensified in some ways to form a tension of spatial performance and an endless sense of space to unify the contradictions.

## 4 Conclusion

In the Chinese traditional culture, the relation of man and nature is a permanent philosophical topic in which the ideology “Nature and Man in One” infiltrates into all aspects, especially its influence on the Chinese classic garden art. Based on the ideology of “Nature and Man in One”, this article focuses on the analysis of the influence of the ideology “Nature and Man in One” from Taoism on the spatial arrangement, landscape arrangement and aesthetic value in the Chinese classic garden art. By taking the Suzhou Garden as an example, it also discusses the spiritual expression of garden construction under the influence of the ideology “Nature and Man in One”, and analyzes the philosophical concept in the design of Suzhou Garden. Then, it makes a deep research on the garden art and Taoism ideology by putting them in the same space and time, bringing the research from a physical state to a spiritual status, which provides a reference for our research on the Chinese classic gardens.

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