Reconstruct the Missing Narrative: Rethinking Contemporary Chinese Architecture Through Ancient Landscape Paintings

Taiming Chen
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RECONSTRUCT THE MISSING NARRATIVE
Rethinking Contemporary Chinese Architecture Through Ancient Landscape Paintings

Taiming Chen + Yiwei Wu
The thesis addresses the issue of lacking self-identity and missing narrative under contemporary Chinese architecture discipline. Using ancient landscape paintings as design source, this project aims to create an environment that provides personal experience and exclusive meaning from a participant’s point of view instead of an omniscient view.

Paintings are selected from different dynasties and artists, but all based on one important cultural theme: Reclusion. Thus, the reconstructed narrative would provide a tranquil environment for inhabitant to have a temporary retreatment from the city life through making, seeking and thinking.
I. INTRODUCTION

1. NARRATIVE
2. MISSING
3. RECONSTRUCT
Narrative

Designing ancient garden based on landscape paintings and poems began to thrive from Song Dynasty. The inherited narrative is a medium to create an environment that provides personal experience and elusive meaning from a participant’s point of view instead of an omniscient view.

In the southbank a hall was built, named “Hall Like a Villa”.

To its north side above the water was a little bridge called “Little Flying Rainbow”.

I crossed it, walked toward north then west, and saw a pavillion called “Little Surging Waves”. Lots of bamboos were standing opposite to its south side as a screen.

Passing through the bamboos along the bank, there is a huge stone called “purifying Will Place”, where I could sit and play the water.

Here, water turned its way toward north, and it was so vast as if it were a lake. Lots of willows stood at the west bank, called “Willow Band”...

Continuing walking toward east, I arrived at the back of “Tower for Dreaming of Reclusion”.

There, several huge pine trees stood and generated soft sound when wind was blowing. This place was “Listening to Windblown Pines Place”....

Figure 1. Plan of Zhuozheng (Humble Administrator’s) Garden, Southern Song Dynasty. Retrieved from https://goo.gl/3AuqEg.

Figure 2. Hall Like A Villa

Figure 3. Little Flying Rainbow

Figure 4. Little Surging Waves

Figure 5. Tower for Dreaming of Reclusion

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

1. Wen Zhengming, 王氏拙政园记, Notes of Wang’s Humble Administrator’s Garden.

Figure 2-5: Reprinted from 拙政园三十一景, Album of Thirty-One Views, by Wen Zhengming.

Figure 6-9: Scenic Spots of Zhuozheng Garden. Retrieved from http://www.szzzy.cn/Home/Default.

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[0x0]Figure 8
[160x199]Narrative
[83x166]Designing ancient garden based on landscape paintings and poems began to thrive from Song Dynasty. The inherited narrative is a medium to create an environment that provides personal experience and elusive meaning from a participant’s point of view instead of an omniscient view.

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Figure 6-9: Scenic Spots of Zhuozheng Garden. Retrieved from http://www.szzzy.cn/Home/Default.
Little Flying Rainbow Bridge is in front of the Tower for Dreaming of Reclusion, to the north of the Hall Like a Villa, Crossing the Surging Wave Pond.

The Bridge bows as if to drink the water, Its shadow is projected under the sunset as if to turn the wave.

Despite the gloomy water and mountain, the rainy season is not arrived, Why is the Azure Dragon suddenly flying?

I know you are trying to assist in governing the country, To lead the way across the cold stream.

The shiny and gorgeous baluster reflects the sky, The magnificent towers are hidden behind the mist.

The bright moon illuminates the endless land, The lotus in my hand shines upon the autumn water.

Hall Like a Villa is in Humble Administrator’s Garden, the former house for Tang Dynasty poet Lu Luwang. Though located in the town, it is has lots of silent mountains and forests.

Once Pi Qiumei said of this house “Without going outside of the town, it is vast as if it were a villa in the suburb.” So it is named, “Hall Like a Villa”.

Streams, bridge, and the color of spring grass, Wood fence, thatched cottage, with afternoon crowing of the cock.

Don’t disappoint the place where sages seclude. Bring the scrolls and teach children to read.

There is water in the garden, covering several hectares, similar to Su Zimei’s Surging Wave Pond, so I built a pavilion at middle, called “Little Surging Waves”.

Likewise, the little pavilion sits alongside the water, Still, the blue water circles around the middle column.

Aren’t there fresh wind and bright moon with you when you go to fishing? There are also children singing that water washing cloth.

Everywhere has river and lake to put your mood, After hundred of years bird and fish will already forget that feeling.

Shen Nong and Duke have already gone away, Who can live in reclusion as they did?

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In contemporary context, as international style prevails, the narrative quality from ancient garden has stopped developing. Concepts and theories were brought up to revive the narrative quality, as it is essential to Chinese architecture’s distinct identity.
Shan-Shui City

Shan-shui city, a spatial planning concept was proposed in contemporary China to construct the “architecture landscape city” by integrating aesthetics and ideas from landscape paintings, poetry, and gardening design.

I.M. Pei creates the narrative sequence by referring to ancient Chinese gardens. However, certain landscape elements such as artificial mountains are directly plugged in, which people cannot experience through.

Wang Shu revives the atmospheric and narrative quality based on landscape painting. However, the interior and the exterior narratives are separated.

Figure 10. Suzhou Museum. Retrieved from https://goo.gl/p57892.
Figure 11-14: Suzhou Museum. Retrieved from https://goo.gl/Kl5xzt.
In this thesis, we will use landscape paintings as our design source to revive the narrative quality. We will use the methodology developed from the research to deconstruct the selected landscape paintings, transform them into a narrative, and then reconstruct the narrative into architecture.

By extracting events, atmosphere, and spirits from original painting narratives, and by borrowing the principles of paintings to transform them into sequences, we will set up architectural narratives in contemporary context for people to experience.

Ma Qingyun used various vernacular materials to guide the narrative sequence.

However, no landscape scenarios are incorporated into the sequence.

Ma Yansong used the parametric method to construct both architectural and landscape scenarios.

However, architectural scenarios are merely formally imitated as mountains without consideration of spatial narratives.

Reconstruct
II. METHODOLOGY
ARCHITECTURE

1. BERNARD TSCUMI
MANHATTAN TRANSCRIPT / PARC DE LA VILETTE

2. WANG SHU
NINGBO MUSEUM / CERAMIC HOUSE
XIANGSHAN CAMPUS

3. THOMAS HILLIER
URBAN THEATER
1. DIAGRAM OF MOVEMENT

2. SEQUENTIAL PATH

3. PROGRAMS FROM EVENTS

4. SPACES

All Figures: Reprinted from Manhattan Transcripts, by Bernard Tschumi.
SEQUENCE

Creating the sequence from landscape paintings involves steps from extracting path, defining programs based on scenes, and designing the corresponding spaces.

Painting → Path → Events → Spaces

Figure 30-33: Parc de la Vilette. Retrieved from https://goo.gl/CfBxut.

Figure 30-33: Axon of Parc de la Vilette. Retrieved from https://goo.gl/fXifC.
TWO SCALES

Scale 1: Facade
Scale 2: “Going Into”

MOUNTAIN VS. CAVE

Mountain: Outside, Body Form
Cave: Inside, Interior Space

DIALOG

Built form & Nature
People & Nature

Figure 35. Wind in Pines Among a Myriad Valleys

Figure 36. Immortal Mountains with a Cave

Figure 37. The Riverbank
ATMOSPHERE

Visual realization of conditions in landscape paintings as a way to revive atmospheric quality of narrative and phenomenology

Two Scales
Mountain vs. Cave
Dialog
Mountain vs. Valley
Diversity

Form

Material

Spatial Relationship

DIVERSITY
Far distance: Different Things
Near Distance: Experience

MOUNTAIN VS. VALLEY
Mountain: Solid, Mass
Valley: Void, Circulation

Figure 38. Contemplating on a Donkey Ride Home

Figure 39. Mountain Retreat

Figure 40. Mountain Retreat
Figure 40. Yoshino River in Yamato Province (Woodblock print), by Ando Hiroshige

Figure 41. Architect’s Transcription

RIVER = SEGREGATION

Figure 42

PRINCESS = A KNITTED MEMBRANE
COWHERD = PERIMETER GRASS PARKLAND

The membrane extends towards the outer parkland.
EMPEROR = ORIGAMI LUNGS
The lungs are physical barriers that manipulate the knitted skin to represent conservative attitude toward love.

UNCONDITIONAL PIETY = STRINGS
The manipulations are articulated by pulley systems.

METAPHOR
A set of architectural language as a way to express the metaphors behind a drawing to address the current cultural and social issues.

Objects
Meanings
= Architectural Language
II. METHODOLOGY

FILM

1. PLAY TIME
   JACQUES TATI

2. 2046
   WONG KAR-WAI

3. IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE
   WONG KAR-WAI

4. REAR WINDOW
   ALFRED HITCHCOCK

5. KAILI BLUES
   BI GAN
Clues are used in Play Time to direct audience through the spaces and help locate oneself. Clues such as elevator, or escalator appeared in current scene, then following scene at a different location to indicate the protagonist’s movement and sequence.
The director used intentional framing in the movie *2046*. The framing is not only unconventional, but also addresses different focal points. Frame and void together constructed the atmosphere of the movie and emotions of the protagonists.
Same spaces like staircase, hallway, room door, restaurant are showing in the movie with different protagonists, events in different times. The familiarity of the spaces allows viewer to juxtapose the tone and emotion as well as the space itself, which leads to the metaphor of the space. For example, the staircase is a vertical maze indicates the hesitation; hallway indicates the segregation.
MULTI-FOCAL POINTS

As each protagonist’s life is exhibiting through the windows, Hitchcock divided the action of different players but presented them all at once. He created new connections across seemingly unconnected actions for both the viewer and the protagonist.
Fragments of moments are showing in the movie, which seem confusing. However, the arrangement of shots combined formed an intellectual meaning. This meaning does not exist within the individual shots, but only shows when they are juxtaposed. Montage as a technique allows audiences to find different clues and form different story lines, which leads to the autonomy of the narrative. In contrast of the rest of the movie, there is a 42 minutes long shot, within which protagonists' movement carved out the spaces.
II. METHODOLOGY
PHENOMENOLOGY

1. JAMES TURRELL
RODEN CRATER

2. PETER ZUMTHOR
BRUDER KLAUS FEILD CHAPEL

3. BRUNO TAUT
GLASHAUS

4. DANIEL LIBESKIND
JEWISH MUSEUM
Turrell created an environment for visitors to observe the nature, to think about their very existence, to contemplate their relationship with nature.

"The path followed by the mind across a multiplicity of phenomena, far apart in time and space, gathered in a certain sequence into a single meaningful concept ... It is hard to imagine a montage sequence for an architectural ensemble more subtly composed, shot by shot, than the one that our legs create by walking among the buildings."

—Sergei M. Eisenstein. Montage And Architecture.
Zumthor made the material and the construction process important aspects of this project. There is a montage sequence as one walking inside the chapel. Cross symbol appears from exterior facade to interior decoration, as a symbol of those lost during the Holocaust.
III. PAINTING ANALYSIS

Criteria for Selecting Paintings based on previous research:

- The work should depict a sequence formed of diverse scenes or events.
- The work should be a combination of landscape and architecture that contains human activities.
- The work should contain various elements of landscape, such as mountain, water, cave, trees, etc.
- The work should express important metaphors or spirits from traditional Chinese culture.
- The work should inherit certain quality of atmosphere and phenomenology.
- The selection will sort out paintings of different narratives and different metaphors.

1. 溪岸图 | 董源 · 五代
   THE RIVERBANK | Dong Yuan · Five Dynasty

2. 夏山图 | 屈鼎 · 北宋
   SUMMER MOUNTAINS | Qu Ding · North Song

3. 溪山图 | 徐贲 · 元末
   STREAMS AND MOUNTAINS | Xu Ben · Yuan

4. 江山秋色图 | 赵伯驹 · 北宋
   AUTUMN COLORS OVER RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS | Zhao Boju · North Song
PROGRAMS

1. Following alongside the sunken space, people arrives at a handicraft art studio where they experience art of ceramics and seal-cutting.

2. Beside the studio is a platform for woodshop that provide people with another way of enjoying handicrafting.

3. The place for spinning is at the central land, a more quiet zone.

4, 5. The narrow passageway that connects to the end of the riverbank is a continuous space for planting and tea-leaf picking.

6. An alternate route is a place for batik, where people rely on water source to create their art.

ORIGINAL NARRATIVE

1. The scholar, wearing a gown and sitting on a chair, leans on the baluster of the house with his wife and child to view the approaching storm.

2. The cowboy riding a cow is peeping into the courtyard through bamboos beside the river.

3. A woman in the courtyard is preparing for dinner; several others are placing the plates.

4, 5. Six pedestrians are rushing on their way back home. One of them is wearing straw rain cape.

6. Beside the steep cliff is a waterfall that runs into the river. It is connected to a misty valley far away by a winding path.
1. 渔猎 The journey begins with a narrow entrance leading to an open field, with a place to experience the activities of fishing.

2. 茶馆 Walking forward, numerous activities are hidden behind “landscape” to be explored. A tea house sits above a sunken space where people have tea ceremony.

3. 集市/庙会/古玩交易 After tea ceremony, a lively market is ahead on the platform, where people hang around and exchange curios.

4. 坐禅求道 Leaving the market, people find their way up through a small passageway to the temples, surrounded by “landscape” at the highest place.

5. 酒楼 Walking down the steps, people arrive at a place for eating, drinking, and social. Scholars write poems, while businessmen have conversations.

6. 民俗游艺竞技 Feeling refreshed, people walk along a path, appreciating folk performances and purchasing snacks and toys at stands.
1. A person come to meditate and apprehend the spirit of Tao in the meditation space.

2. By following the spatial clues, the person enter a pavilion to sit and appreciate tea and wine.

3. Leaving the pavilion, the person follows the narrow path, where he appreciate curios and talk with fellows.

4. The person approaches to the stream, where he improvises and creates his own pieces based on an ancient method.

5. Walking along the stream and then climbing up, the person reaches the library / study space where he can quietly read, and study calligraphy and paintings.

6. The person continues the journey until arriving at a quiet corner. He enjoys one of his hobbies, such as lyre-playing or chess.

ORIGINAL NARRATIVE

1. A boy of the mountains come to the house of the scholar, bring a poem by his master, and ask for a painting in exchange.

2. The scholar and his friends drink and write poetic inscriptions in the pavilion.

3. There is a small path that leads the scholar to the stream.

4. Paddling on Tiao stream, the scholar hears the apes crowing.

5. The scholar visit the mountains with splendid buildings, where shadows of spring fill the valleys.

6. At the top of the waterfall, the scholar watches the clouds.

MAKING THINKING

Verdant trees and yellow canaries, mountains are everywhere. Aimlessly I return from the stream after watching the clouds.

Filling the valleys are shadows of spring, lining the stream, green moss. Only where violet mists arise are there openings in the cliffs.

A boy of the mountains, bearing an urgent message, inside the gate. He has come to bring a poem by his master and ask for a painting in exchange.

The scholar, who resides in mountain home, sits beside the tall pines. The scholar is happy that there is a small path leading to the stream.

Don't care too much about how far you are like the fisherman, All you need to do is to follow the path.

My dream and my soul can not go back to the illusory path. All the scenery in my eyes is just dust and dirt.

I view mountains inside the painting and look for old inscriptions. More than a half of this splendid mountain is Tiao Stream.

Why would I paddle and float in the autumn wind, Don’t dispel the apes and let them crow to me.
AUTUMN COLORS OVER RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS
NORTH SONG  ZHAO BOJU

江山秋色图  北宋 赵伯驹
Mountain = Separation = Frame
Water = Connection = Sunken Space
(Courtyard, Green Space, Platform)

Trees = Leading Clue = Columns
Cave = Physical Path = Entrance to Sunken Space
Valley = Visual Connection = Gap Space
IV. NARRATIVE
Narrative Space

Meditation space

Tea and wine appreciate

Library / Study space

Play chess, music, calligraphy, painting

Wenwan appreciate, talk and do nothing

Improvisation

Handicraft art (ceramic, woodshop, seal cutting)

Spinning, Batik

Planting, Tea-leaf picking

Entrance, Exit

Narrative Path

Connection between Narratives

Frame

Sunken Space

Platform
Hasn’t been inspired for long, the artist found himself not able to produce any new work. Tired of his lifeless surroundings, he walked along the street aimlessly. Out of a sudden, he saw something vibrant behind a weird hole of a stone wall. A series of curtains seemed to form a path for him. A “mentor” greeted him, guiding him into the world of “thinking.” The moment when he stepped out of the house, he felt astray. There seemed to be no path, but just columns and walls. At a moment when he turned around, a pavilion appeared behind a wall. A guy knocked his door, inviting him with wine and tea. From the other side of the pavilion he saw a strange space protruding out. “Should I check that out?” He slipped himself into the narrow bar of space, flanked by rows of curios. It was a massive space that stood behind the narrow bar. He saw a cup floating through the water strip. Wherever that cup stopped, the person beside would improvise an artwork. “What a fun exercise!” Following the strip of water, he arrived at an elegant cave, where three little buildings stood, one after another. It was such a quiet and secluded place for reading, studying, and creating works. At this quiet corner, with sound of a surrounding stream, he met with some fellow artists, who enjoyed this place as their temporary studios for their creation.

Led by that stream, the artist saw people picking tea leaves behind a series of frames. He would like to pass through, but ended up at a batik studio. It was a more lively area than before. People seemed to come purposefully for “making.” Batik drapes were hung along the bank for him to appreciate, until he saw studios floating above the river.

EPILOGUE
A path guided him out of the handicraft art making, where he could finally participate in tea-leave picking. At the point of the intersection, the artist followed the platform to cross the sunken space, and arrived at the field for fishing. Everyone seemed to be “seeking” activities as part of his/her own lifestyle in this much busier area. A ramp connected with fishing platforms guided him to a tea room floating above the river. He wandered along the corridor, watching people and their activities away along the bank. A tiny sunken space at one end brought him into a quiet, almost hidden cluster of buildings. People sought for and picked one from all those different sizes and types of rooms to meditate. A cave-like passageway was connected to a more lively cluster. There he met some fellow artists and chatted as a group with snack and drink. A bridge extended from the cave, leading him into a strip of land, where some performed and created artworks, while others watching. Among those spots, he felt one was prepared for him. He improvised his artwork, as if he were performing. The artist approached to the end of this land, the time to re-enter the ordinary life. He could have hardly imagine a place like this before he came. To him it was a retreat, where he temporarily did not need to deal with daily life. In this land, he was always guided to new places and activities awaiting. It was also a freedom. He could always choose the scenes he would like to approach to. It was worth coming back as well, as there were always alternates that he saw but had not experienced yet.

PROLOGUE
A vast land was hidden behind, with studios for ceramics, seal-cutting, woodshop, and spinning for people to participate.
1. Meditation Spaces

Original Narrative: Scholar’s Cottage
“The scholar withdrew and lived in a thatched cottage with rear farming land”. 11

METHODOLOGY

Intentional Framing:
A series of framings lead people from one space to another.

Dialog:
Visual and physical interactions between built form, nature, and people.


2. Meeting Room

Original Narrative: Pavilion
“The scholar met friends and inscribed poems in the pavilion”. 12

METHODOLOGY

Clue:
A series of similar objects act as clues for people to experience through and approach to the main space.

3. Exchange Space
Original Narrative: Bridge
“The scholar started the journey in natural landscape with his friends”. 13

Montage:
When two juxtaposed spaces combine, a meaning is formed. Here, people go back and forth between discussion and creation to exchange ideas.

Metaphor:
Bridge is a space of connection, a space for exchanging.

4. Creative Studio
Original Narrative: Hidden Stream
“They heard apes crow along the hidden stream” (as an inspiration for their poems). 14

METHODOLOGY

Two Scale:
Hidden behind the front elevation, there is a space with a lot of hidden values and experiences.
5. Resource Library
Original Narrative: Magnificent Building Clusters
“The scholar and his friends visited magnificent building clusters”. 15

Multi-focus Points / Repetitive Indication:
a series of buildings with identical form but different details makes people explore and discover one that fits them the most.

Mountain / Cave:
Mountain implies building form, cave represents interior space. Here, it contains libraries of different resources.

6. Gallery
Original Narrative: Waterfall
“The journey ended with appreciating waterfalls at the mountain top”. 16

Mountain / Cave:
Mountain implies building form, cave represents interior space. Here, it is a gallery space for people to appreciate the creative works.

The person continues the journey until arriving at a quiet corner. He enjoys one of his hobbies, such as lyre-playing or chess.

By following the spatial clues, the person enter a pavilion to sit and appreciate tea and wine.

Leaving the pavilion, the person follows the narrow path, where he appreciate curios and talk with fellows.

The person approaches to the stream, where he improvises and creates his own pieces based on an ancient method.

Walking along the stream and then climbing up, the person reaches the library/study space where he can quietly read, and study calligraphy and paintings.

The person comes to meditate and apprehend the spirit of Tao in the meditation space.

The person continues the journey until arriving at a quiet corner. He enjoys one of his hobbies, such as lyre-playing or chess.
An alternate route is a place for batik, where people rely on water source to create their art.

Following alongside the sunken space, people arrives at a handicraft art studio where they experience art of ceramics and seal-cutting.

Beside the studio is a platform for woodshop that provide people with another way of enjoying handicrafting.

The place for spinning is at the central land, a more quiet zone.

The narrow passageway that connects to the end of the riverbank is a continuous space for planting and tea-leaf picking.
An alternate route is a place for batik, where people rely on water source to create their art.

Following alongside the sunken space, people arrive at a handicraft art studio where they experience art of ceramics and seal-cutting.

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The narrow passageway that connects to the end of the riverbank is a continuous space for planting and tea-leaf picking.
1. 渔猎
The journey begins with a narrow entrance leading to an open field, with a place to experience the activities of fishing.

2. 茶馆
Walking forward, numerous activities are hidden behind “landscape” to be explored. A tea house sits above a sunken space where people have tea ceremony.

3. 集市/庙会/古玩交易
After tea ceremony, a lively market is ahead on the platform, where people hang around and exchange curios.

4. 坐禅求道
Leaving the market, people find their way up through a small passageway to the temples, surrounded by “landscape” at the highest place.

5. 步移
Walking down the steps, people arrive at a place for eating, drinking, and social. Scholars write poems, while businessmen have conversations.

6. 民俗游艺竞技
Feeling refreshed, people walk along a path, appreciating folk performances and purchasing snacks and toys at stands.
Leaving the market, people find their way up through a small passageway to the temples, surrounded by "landscape" at the highest place.

Walking forward, numerous activities are hidden behind "landscape" to be explored. A tea house sits above a sunken space where people have tea ceremony.

After tea ceremony, a lively market is ahead on the platform, where people hang around and exchange curios.

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