Syracuse University
SURFACE

Architecture Senior Theses
School of Architecture Dissertations and Theses

Spring 2017

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

Taiming Chen
Yiwei Wu

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/architecture_theses

Part of the Architecture Commons

Recommended Citation
https://surface.syr.edu/architecture_theses/387

This Thesis, Senior is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Architecture Dissertations and Theses at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Architecture Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.
RECONSTRUCT THE MISSING NARRATIVE

Rethinking Contemporary Chinese Architecture Through Ancient Landscape Paintings

Taiming Chen + Yiwei Wu
This 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.
INTRODUCTION

1. NARRATIVE
2. MISSING
3. RECONSTRUCT
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 pavilion 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”......

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.
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 Bridge bows as if to drink the water, Its shadow is projected under the sunset as if to turn the wave. Don’t disappoint the place where sages seclude. Bring the scrolls and teach children to read.  

Hall Like a Villa is in Humble Administrator’s Garden, the former house for Tang Dynasty poet Lu Luxiang. Though located in the town, it 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. It is enviable that the secular world has no horse or people, It is unbelievable that the town has mountains and forests. 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. Shangqin and Duke have already gone away, Who can live in reclusion as they do?  

Tower for Dreaming of Reclusion is above the Surging Wave Pond, Its south side facing the Hall Like a Villa, At its top, you see various mountains outside of Suzhou town. I once begged for a dream in Jiuli Lake, and received the character “Reclusion” in the dream..... That mountain and water in the dream has already faded away, So I built the high tower to escape and hide myself. Leaning formerly has house in Wu Lake, Yuanming’s house of reclusion is not desolated yet. In the dream I come to realized positions and riches are only an illusion, In the life of reclusion who knows how far the life has been gone? Recalling the past, where on earth is the capital for the emperor? Leaning on the baluster, I only see the dim mountains in the dusk.  

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 Bridge bows as if to drink the water, Its shadow is projected under the sunset as if to turn the wave. Don’t disappoint the place where sages seclude. Bring the scrolls and teach children to read.  

Tower for Dreaming of Reclusion is above the Surging Wave Pond, Its south side facing the Hall Like a Villa, At its top, you see various mountains outside of Suzhou town. I once begged for a dream in Jiuli Lake, and received the character “Reclusion” in the dream..... That mountain and water in the dream has already faded away, So I built the high tower to escape and hide myself. Leaning formerly has house in Wu Lake, Yuanming’s house of reclusion is not desolated yet. In the dream I come to realized positions and riches are only an illusion, In the life of reclusion who knows how far the life has been gone? Recalling the past, where on earth is the capital for the emperor? Leaning on the baluster, I only see the dim mountains in the dusk.  

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.
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.

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.
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.

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.

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.
II. METHODOLOGY
ARCHITECTURE

1. BERNARD TSCHUMI
   MANHATTAN TRANSCRIPT / PARC DE LA VILETTE

2. WANG SHU
   NINGBO MUSEUM / CERAMIC HOUSE
   XIANGSHAN CAMPUS

3. THOMAS HILLIER
   URBAN THEATER
SEQUENCE

1. DIAGRAM OF MOVEMENT

2. SEQUENTIAL PATH

3. PROGRAMS FROM EVENTS

4. SPACES

All Figures: Reprinted from Manhattan Transcript, by Bernard Tschumi.
Unidentical pieces laying on grids as icons to lead custom sequences

Gardens with themes and programs

Creating the sequence from landscape paintings involves steps from extracting path, defining programs based on scenes, and designing the corresponding spaces.
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
万壑松风图

Figure 36. Immortal Mountains with a Cave
仙山玉洞图

Figure 37. The Riverbank
溪岸图
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

Figure 38. Contemplating on a Donkey Ride Home
Figure 39. Mountain Retreat

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

DIVERSITY
Far distance: Different Things
Near Distance: Experience
Figure 40. Yoshino River in Yamato Province (Woodblock print), by Ando Hiroshige

Figure 41. Architect’s Transcription

RIVER = SEGREGATION

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.
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 FIELD CHAPEL

3. BRUNO TAUT
GLASHAUS

4. DANIEL LIBESKIND
JEWISH MUSEUM
Turrell created an environment for visitor 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.

To address the spiritual and artistic ideal, Taut made an innovative “installation” that will provoke thoughts and give inspiration for art, architecture, and even cultural change.
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.
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.
Handicraft art (ceramic/woodshop/ seal cutting)

Spinning

Batik

Planting/Tea-leaf picking

PROGRAMS

1. Following alongside the sunken space, people arrive 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. 沿着小路进入，过一座小桥，看到一位渔夫正撑着小船驶来。
2. 一位旅行者和他的仆人骑着驴过桥。
3. 路边的山石陡峭，树木繁茂，藤蔓交错。
4. 远处的宫殿似乎在云雾中若隐若现。
5. 山脚下是另一个与此相似的建筑群，被用作夏季避暑山庄。
6. 一位独行的挑夫过桥，一队骡马从山中下山。

SUMMER MOUNTAINS
NORTH SONG QU DING

ORIGINAL NARRATIVE

1. 我们从一艘渔船开始，那里的大船已经系好，驶向岸边。
2. 在前景的第一个山脊的左边，一个旅行者和他的仆人正骑着驴在穿越一座小桥。
3. 山腰的树木高大而复杂，藤蔓从一棵树垂到另一棵树。
4. 远处宫殿的轮廓似乎在雾中变得模糊。
5. 在左下方，由瀑布隔开但可以通过山前的同一路线到达，是另一个建筑群，用作夏季避暑山庄。
6. 在画卷的末端，一个独行的挑夫过桥，一队骡马从山中下山。
1. **坐禅求道 (冥想室)** A person come to meditate and apprehend the spirit of Tao in the meditation space.

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

3. **品藏文玩, 谈玄务虚** Leaving the pavilion, the person follows the narrow path, where he appreciate curios and talk with fellows.

4. **即兴创作 (曲水流觞)** The person approaches to the stream, where he improvises and creates his own pieces based on an ancient method.

5. **闭门读书, 习字作画** 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. **琴棋书画** The person continues the journey until arriving at a quiet corner. He enjoys one of his hobbies, such as lyre-playing or chess.

---

**ORGINAL 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.
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

THEMES

MAKING

SEEKING

THINKING
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.

A vast land was hidden behind, with studios for ceramics, seal-cutting, woodshop, and spinning for people to participate.
NARRATIVE ITINERARY 1
THEME: STUDY / CREATING
1. Meditation Spaces
Original Narrative: Scholar’s Cottage
“The scholar withdrew and lived in a thatched cottage with rear farming land”.  

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”.  

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.”

METHODOLOGY
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).

METHODOLOGY
Two Scale:
Hidden behind the front elevation, there is a space with a lot of hidden values and experiences.

---

13 Richard M. Bamhart, Along the Border of Heaven, 148.
14 Richard M. Bamhart, Along the Border of Heaven, 148.
5. Resource Library
Original Narrative: Magnificent Building Clusters
“The scholar and his friends visited magnificent building clusters”. 15

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

METHODOLOGY
Multi-focal 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.

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 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.

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

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

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

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

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

Feeling refreshed, people walk along a path, appreciating folk performances and purchasing snacks and toys at stands.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Introduction

Architectural Precedent

Films

Braester, Yomi, and James Tweedie. 2010. Cinema at the city’s edge: Film and urban networks in east asia. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Phenomenological Art / Architecture

Landscape Paintings