Space structure features of the Couple’s retreat garden in the context of traditional private gardens of Suzhou

D S Teeluiko
Pacific National University, 136, Tihookeanskaya St., Khabarovsk, 680035, Russia

E-mail: dima123117@gmail.com

Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of the Couple’s retreat garden’s spatial elements. The paper considers the history of the territory formation. One of the most important personalities in the history of the garden is Shen Bincheng. It was he who made the estate in the way we know it today. The garden was created under the influence of the Qing Dynasty culture. However, it is very different from other “classical” gardens of the Suzhou city and the Jiangnan region. The planning structure of the garden has been studied in detail. It consists of three sections: Western garden, central district and Eastern garden. The object under consideration is unique, since the garden part is divided into two zones in it, each of which is not large in the area and the center of each site is a stone mountain. The The Couple’s retreat garden can be more attributed to landscape gardens, which are created for the observation from the outside and are not intended for various kinds of interactivity.

1. Introduction
The Couple’s retreat garden, sometimes called the Twin Garden or the Garden for couples, is located in Suzhou, on the eastern edge of the old city and on all sides except the western one, is surrounded by water channels with high white garden walls and promenades. This garden is more closely connected with canals than another garden of Suzhou. It was founded during the reign of Emperor Shunzhi (1638-1661) of the Qing Dynasty, but subsequently changed its planning structure [1, 2].

The Couple’s retreat garden covers an area of about 8,000 m². The length of the garden is 110 meters from east to west and 78 meters from the North to the South. The uniqueness of this example comes primarily from its location.

2. History of a garden
The history of the Couple’s retreat garden is long, like many gardens in Suzhou, it changed owners, was destroyed and was completely rebuilt. Ou Garden (耦园), which was originally named Shè yuán (涉园), was built by Lu Jin, an official from Baolin, during the reign of Emperor Shunzhi (1638-1661) of the Qing Dynasty. The garden was named after Xiaoyulin, the author of Tao Yuanming, dedicated to landscape culture. The park was small in size. It housed several pavilions, halls and many plants. Later, one of its famous owners was calligrapher Guo Fengliang [3].

At the beginning of the XIX century, the garden was destroyed by the military. In 1874, the land was bought by the former governor of Anhui Province, Shen Bincheng. He left work due to health problems, and his wife by that time had already retired, which contributed to the study of landscape culture and the construction of the garden. After buying an abandoned estate, the couple hired the
artist Gu Yu to create a project, but based on an existing site. The project provides for the expansion of the territory and the addition of another green area. In 1876, the construction was completed, and the estate acquired the form in which we still know it. During this period, the garden is called The Couple’s retreat garden. Later, the couple lived there for eight years. After Shen Bincheng, there were many new owners, some also retired to the park with their families and tried to preserve the original appearance of the garden. In 1932, a part of the premises was rented to create a college for girls [4].

In 1941, Liu Guojun, an industrialist from Changzhou, bought a garden and spent several years repairing it. Since 1956, some premises of the estate were used as an industrial workshop, warehouse, hostel and kindergarten. All this undoubtedly had a negative impact both on architecture and on the landscape part of the entire complex [5, 6].

In 1960, the territory was transferred to the administration of Suzhou City. In 1963, it was listed as a protected cultural monument in Suzhou. 60,000 yuan was spent on repairs and on May 1, 1965, the Eastern garden was open to visitors. At this time in the West Garden is the office of the construction company, and later college. In 1967, after the Cultural Revolution, The Couple’s retreat garden, like other classic Suzhou gardens, was closed for more than 10 years. During this period, the estate became a dormitory for workers. In 1968, it was renamed the Eastern Garden (城东花园).

In 1980, the municipality made major repairs to restore the eastern part of the garden, which was opened in 1982. In 1993, the municipal government allocated 6.8 million for a complete reconstruction of the entire complex, which ended in 1999. The original name of the garden was also returned. In November 2000, the Garden was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a continuation of Suzhou’s classic gardens.

3. Garden space
The garden’s history is invariably connected with its planning structure, referring to the period when Shen Bincheng was the owner of the garden, the Couple’s retreat garden became part of the history and culture of both the Jiannan region and part of the culture of China as a whole.

The object under research is unique because its garden part is divided into two zones, each of which is not large in its area and the center of each plot is the mountain rock (Fig. 1). That speaks of the desire of the creators of the garden to create a small enclosed space, focused on solitude with nature. It should be noted that with the complete reconstruction of the estate, it was possible to make one large space of the garden, or several small ones located nearby, as is the case in most private gardens in the Jiannan region. But two small plots were created, located on different sides of the territory, which is not found in the Suzhou “classical gardens” [6, 7].

![Figure 1. Elements of the Couple’s retreat garden](image)
One of the main planning features is associated with the location of the garden, on three sides it is surrounded by canals, and only on one side is urban development, a feature of this district of the city is the lack of historical high buildings. Therefore, the methods of borrowing a species are not used in the garden, and all scenario views are built on internal compositions. For example, the Humble administrator’s garden uses The North Pagoda (北寺塔), located a few blocks from the garden, for scenic views. The exception is the eastern garden, where the eastern wall has openings in the wall through which you can see the canal and cityscapes [8].

Due to the large fragmentation of the sites, both gardens are perceived as a small space in comparison with the Humble administrator’s garden and the Lion grove garden and even with a garden of a similar era - the Garden of harmony. Nevertheless, the total area of 0.8 hectares (8,400 m²), which is approximately equal to the area of and the Lion grove garden, the Garden of cultivation and the Garden of harmony. Despite the visual absence of a large green area, a high percentage of open space in the garden is 51% (Fig. 2). For example, in the Garden of cultivation, this ratio is 57% [8, 9].

![Figure 2. Communication in the residential and garden plots](image)

In this garden, galleries are practically not a separate architectural element and serve as the border only in the south of the eastern garden between the zones. In other cases, they pass along the building, being a kind of buffer zone between the building and the green zone. Therefore, in this case, the galleries were not considered as a separate spatial element, which is such in all other gardens of the city of Suzhou. Most of the elements have high connectivity, and all are part of the same route.

In the study, all the considered species points are static, that is, this is the place where the perception of the surrounding landscape is implied from one point. Dynamic perception, to which it is in this garden, that a large number of galleries and transitions belong, is not considered. Nevertheless, the bridge in the eastern part of the garden, which, according to the idea, is a dynamic viewpoint, makes a large number of people stay on it. Being located in the center of the bridge, two types open: north and south. Since it is from this bridge that you can best consider the combination of architectural and natural elements of the garden, which is certainly a feature of the twin garden. But also, the bridge itself is a unique element of other view scenes [1, 10].
A large number of viewpoints have a wide viewing angle. These are both the open pavilions amongst the mountains and water pavilion, the closed Moon viewing pavilion and individual sections of the galleries. Each section of the garden can be seen only on the hills, where a circular view opens. The whole territory can be divided into 3 sections: the Central zone, the Western garden and the Eastern garden. A feature of the layout is that from the eastern part it is possible to get to the western one without going through any premises. The developed system of galleries and open spaces makes it possible to move around the territory constantly in the open air [4, 5, 11].

The central zone is represented mainly by buildings and several small internal gardens. It can be a paved area with several plants in pots or a full green area with trees, bushes and stone compositions. In the southeast there is a large green area, which is walled up and has several passages to the Eastern garden. Here you can see a completely different park style, different from the whole garden. This is especially evident in paving paths and a low bamboo fence along the paths. Neatly trimmed lawns and well-groomed trees give the impression of a new garden space, in contrast to the traditional one, for example, in the Master of nets garden. Nevertheless, similar fences and paving are found in other tasks of the Jiannan region: the Humble administration garden and the Garden of Joy in Shanghai. The lawn can also be found in parts of the gardens where the dwarf trees or stone compositions are located. In the area under consideration, there are also small shrubs, and stones from the Lake Taihu, and the small stone compositions, but the combination of all of the above elements and their location on the site is unique [12].

In the central zone there are: Couple's retreat hall, the carrying wine hall, Building hall, Eternal spring hall, The library tower, Balcony of no frippery and many small spaces. All buildings are made in a single architectural style, reflecting the era of the garden. The construction is low-rise. Most of the buildings have one floor.

4. Eastern garden
This territory has always been the main area in the garden. In the XX century, only this part was used as a tourist and cultural object, while the Western Garden was desolated. The garden area is approximately 2000 m². The main element is the Yellowstone rock, it consists of several small peaks, each of which has its own name. It is located on the banks of a small pond of all the buildings in this zone it is possible to see the rock. The plot is fenced on all sides by galleries (Fig. 3), only in the east in the form of a garden border the outer walls protrude [7, 8].

The main architectural elements are: the collecting fragrance hall, the studio of returned ink slab, Moon viewing pavilion, Wistaria decorated land boat, Helmet couple’s pillow of the waves, the mylovable pavilion, Balcony of no frippery, Amongst the mountains and water pavilion (Fig. 4), Kuixing pavilion and Listening to the boats tower (Taosim practicing tower). The platforms located in the north and west of the garden are also an unusual element for the private gardens in Jiangnan.

**Figure 3.** Gallery in the garden

**Figure 4.** Amongst the mountains and water pavilion
An unusual factor is that almost every element has the same number of connections with others, almost all buildings are enclosed in a single walking route and have at least two connections, with the exception of the Listening to the boats tower (Taosim practicing tower), which can be reached only through Kuixing pavilion.

5. Western garden
The total area of this garden, much smaller than the East, it is approximately equal to 800 m². In the east, the border is the outer wall of the garden, on the other three sides the zone is surrounded by galleries and residential buildings. The whole garden can be divided into two sections: northern and southern. The north one is located between the library tower and Old house with woven curtains, there are several compositions of lake stones in combination with plants. The southern section is located between Old house with woven curtains and Hall of nobility. In the center of the garden, there is a rock (fig. 5). There are walking paths and several viewing platforms on it. Through the entire rock a wall, that divides the species space of the site, passes [13].

Due to the complete absence of internal buildings in the garden, this garden can be attributed to the landscape, there are quite a few similar gardens in the garden of twin solitude. Nevertheless, this site has been divided into several parts and has different landscapes from different points (seven species points). Unlike a small garden space inside a Chinese manor, the Western Garden is in transit and has some interactive elements, in the form of cliffs with viewing platforms. But despite the similarities, the Western Garden is very different from the classical garden of Suzhou, in contrast to the Eastern Garden.

6. Summary
The garden was created under the influence of the culture of the Qing Dynasty. However, it is very different from other “classical” gardens of the city of Suzhou and the Jiannan region. Due to its duality, which is obvious both in the name and in the layout, two sections of the garden distinguish this object as “non-classical” in its layout. A large number of passages through the galleries and buildings, complete visual isolation and the absence of any internal and external high-altitude landmarks make the twin garden no less confusing than other Suzhou gardens.

When studying the spatial structure of the garden, it is possible to see an almost complete absence of places for privacy in the garden. In every Suzhou garden, there are the architectural elements that have one connection and are located on dominant places of relief. In the garden of the Couple’s solitude, almost all elements are in transit. All this also gives the reason to perceive the open areas as large places for meditation, and the living quarters and galleries as transits between them.

The green area, located in the southwest of the Eastern garden, differs in style from the traditional style. Also, new stylistic trends can be traced both in the decor of buildings, and in the design of scenic openings in the walls.
Speaking of the traditional Suzhou garden, several morphotypes can be distinguished: for official meetings, for solitude and meditation, etc. In the studied object there is no clear distinction between the functions that can be seen in the spatial structure. All this makes it possible to say that the garden of the Couple’s solitude can be more attributed to landscape gardens, which are created for the observation from the outside and are not intended for various kinds of interactivity. Nevertheless, there are internal pavilions, paths, bridges and platforms that form their own viewpoints in the eastern part.

References
[1] Xiaoming D 2002 Cultural Heritage: The Old City of Suzhou (Guwuxuan Publishing House, China)
[2] Qingxi L 2003 Classical gardens and parks of China (Intercontinental Publishing House of China (in Russian), Beijing)
[3] Perspectives on Garden Histories 1999. Information on http://web.archive.org/web/20071012090349/http://www.doaks.org/Perspectives/perspec10.pdf
[4] Jun T 1983 A History of Gardening (China Agriculture and building Press, Beijing)
[5] Stewart R J 1991 Scholar gardens of China: a study and analysis of the spatial design of the Chinese private garden (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)
[6] Chao C S 1989 Aspects of traditional Chinese houses and garden (Published by University of Sydney, Sydney)
[7] Tceluiko D S 2019 Influence of Shamanism, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism on development of traditional Chinese gardens IOP Conf. Ser.: Mater. Sci. Eng. 687 055041. Information on https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1757-899X/687/5/055041/pdf
[8] Ou Garden in Suzhou 2014. Information on https://web.archive.org/web/20160303182422/http://arts.cultural-china.com/en/85Arts3743.html
[9] Tceluiko D S 2020 Garden space. Morphotypes of private gardens of Jiangnan region IOP Conf. Ser.: Mater. Sci. Eng 775 012058. Information on https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1757-899X/775/1/012058/pdf
[10] Cheng L 1999 Ancient Chinese Architecture: Private Gardens (Springer-Verlag/Wein, New York)
[11] Xiaoming D 2002 Cultural Heritage: The Old City of Suzhou (Guwuxuan Publishing House, China)
[12] Chaoxiong F Yiguang F 2007 The Classical Gardens of Suzhou (New World Press, China)
[13] Zhou W 2008 The History of Chinese Classical Gardens (Tsinghua University Press, Beijing)