Influence of Shamanism, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism on development of traditional Chinese gardens

D S Tceluiko

Architecture and Urbanistic Department, Pacific National University, 136, Tihookeanskaya St., Khabarovsk 680035, Russia

E-mail: dima123117@gmail.com

Abstract. The article is devoted to the influence of Eastern religions: shamanism, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism on landscape art in China. The influence of each particular religion on traditional gardens was considered. The paper considers an indirect effect of the gardens. Shamanism is the most ancient religion originated in China. The first mystical parks appeared on the site of shrines or sacred land and intended for religious ceremonies. Taoism gave a way to organize space in traditional gardens - Fengshui. Many parks are the prototypes of the gardens of the Taoist legends and tales. Along with Buddhism in China a huge number of temples were built, and each temple has a garden. Confucianism is directly related to urban planning and traditional Chinese house. Each religion left its mark in the traditional Chinese garden.

1. Introduction

The birth of the traditional Chinese garden occurred a several thousand years ago. In the period of development of landscape art, painting, calligraphy, philosophy and religion had the greatest cultural influence on it. Shamanism, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism were the fundamental religions practiced by the inhabitants of China. In different historical periods, each ideology had a different impact on architecture. All the listed confessions had similar features among themselves, for example, they all respected the natural and native beauty of the surrounding world. Therefore, all areas of architecture in ancient times tried to reproduce traditional landscapes when designing gardens.

2. Chinese garden

Traditional gardens of China have been formed throughout the history of the country. Some types of gardens were formed simultaneously with religion, which was popular in historical period (fig. 1). New types of gardens used the traditions of older gardens, thus, in the garden complexes of the Ming and Qing dynasties, it is possible to find traces of the first mystical parks and ritual sites of the Shang and Zhou dynasties [1,2].

3. Shamanism

During the dynasties of the Shang and Zhou, there were three main types of garden complexes: imperial garden, hunting grounds and mystical park [1,3].

Mystical parks were located on temple territories or especially revered places, often such spaces were located in mountain ranges, which according to legends, were the abode of the inhabitants of the heavens. Located on the highest point of the mountain, with the help of a trance, the ancient shamans
associated with deities. Such a garden was an attribute of power and a sign of the sacredness of the territory. In the mystical parks, the shamans conducted various dives in trance, initiations and other religious rites. The most common type of gardens received in the kingdom of Chu, located in southern China [1]. According to legend, the mythical kings, had two dragons in the ponds of their parks. The rulers of the ancient Chinese kingdoms created parks with sacrificial animals and rare animals. It was a reminder of the sacred bonds that bind man and the animal world in primitive religion [3].

---

**4. Taoism**

During the time of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) were popular: Taoist alchemy, the search for pills of immortality and the cult of the celestials Xian’s, who were immortal, according to legend. Therefore, in the imperial gardens recreated the landscape, which could attract celestials: special mountains were built (analogs of the Penglai mountains) - habitat of Xian’s, bronze mirrors were installed to collect moon dew - food for the Xian’s, on the slopes of the mountains, “magical” li-n-ji mushrooms were sown, and even bronze statues of the immortal were set [4, 5, 6].

The comment of the ancient chronicler, about the park of the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang, reflects the desire of the Chinese to make the garden space rich and diverse: «Every five steps - a gazebo, every ten - a pavilion, galleries bizarrely bend, towers rush up...» [2]. At the same time, the pond, usually located at the foot of the mountain, became an obligatory accessory of the garden. Perhaps this was an echo of the ancient ideas about the World Mountain and the World Ocean, which in China has become a steady symbol of the universe [7, 8].

In the 4th century BC, the fairy tale of Shan Hai Jing (classic of mountains and seas) described a peak called Penglai Mountain, located on one of the three islands in the eastern part of the Bohai Sea, between China and Korea, which was the home of eight immortals. On this island were palaces of gold and silver, with precious stones in the trees. There was no pain and winter, wine glasses were always filled with fruit, bowls full of rice, after eating which could gain immortality. Ancient Taoist legend is often used in gardens [7].

In 221 BC, Ying Zheng conquered other competing states and united China into the Qin Empire. He heard the legend of the island of immortals and sent his agents to find the islands and get the elixir of eternal life, but the search was not successful. In his palace, not far from the capital Xianyang, he created a garden with a large lake called Lanchi Gong or a lake of orchids. On an island in the lake, he

---

**Figure 1.** The chronological analysis of the types of gardens.
created a copy of Mount Penglai, symbolizing his search for paradise. After his death, the Qin Empire fell in 206 BC, the capital and the garden were completely destroyed, but the legend continues to inspire the creators of Chinese gardens. In many gardens it is possible to find groups of islands, or one island with an artificial mountain, which is an island of eight immortals [1].

When designing the garden, the Taoist practice of symbolic organization of space - feng shui - was actively used. Using this exercise, you can choose the “best” place for building a house or burial, the “correct” functional breakdown and orientation of the site, including its garden and park part [7]. The main goal is to activate and control the flow of positive Qi energy and fight against the negative energy of Sha (fig. 2). The most popular means for organizing space are the Bagua trigrams and Loshu square [7-10].

![Figure 2. An example of the use Bagua trigrams in Lingering garden. Suzhou.](image)

An important element of the Chinese garden were stone slides. Their construction Li Yu called "special science and ingenious art." The arrangement of elements is built not only according to the laws of composition, but also ancient philosophical and religious teachings are reflected in the stone hill. Often, stone slides were collected in unusual contours and stylized as different seasons. A mountain of stones with a yellow tinge could represent a hill dotted with leaves in autumn, a hill of
white stones symbolized a snow-capped peak, etc. In the artificial mountains, caves were often staged - the cloisters of the holy celestials [3,11].

At the beginning of the 17th century, a special catalog was compiled listing more than a hundred varieties of decorative stones suitable for garden compositions. In a separate group can be attributed the stones raised from the bottom of Lake Taihu. These were boulders of unusual shape with many holes and a surface fancifully emanating from the waves. Because of their unusual appearance, these stones were considered divine, but some boulders were further processed. In the outlines of these stones, there is a clear similarity with the sacred calligraphy of the Taoists. The presence of "pure stone" has a beneficial effect: the hardness of the stone teaches the spirit to be a stone stronghold. Silicon monoliths from Kunshan Mountain in Jiangsu Province were no less popular type of garden stones. They were established among the flower compositions, since it was believed that they could give their heat to the plants [7,8].

Throughout the entire period of existence, Taoist science was actively developed, and Taoist alchemy experienced a period of flourishing experiments in search of the pill of immortality. Landscape art for Taoism was not only a model, but also a symbol of the universe.

5. Buddhism
During the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD), Buddhism penetrated into China and quickly spread throughout the country, and the active construction of temples and religious complexes began. From 495, Luoyang became the capital of the northern Wei dynasty. At that time there were more than 1,300 temples in the city, and each temple had its own small garden. The parks located at the temples were filled with flowering trees, rare plants, pavilions and gazebos. This type of landscape objects largely originated from mystical parks. When designing, the place and the environment are carefully chosen, depending on the religious orientation of the temple. The monks used this territory for meditation. In some temple gardens they grew beautiful and rare plants. During flowering, they attracted a large number of people. Usually, the temple garden consisted of three parts: the front, the interior and the backyard. Pavilions were located along the entire perimeter. During the meditations, the monks consumed a large amount of tea, in connection with which, in the garden one could often find tea tree or tea bushes. Osmatus was a very popular plant, his flowers were actively used to flavor tea and to obtain essential oils. The garden was attended by a large variety of trees, many of which were very rare, and some specimens were brought from other countries [11,12].

Buddhism became very popular in China, in addition to monks, representatives of the middle and upper classes of society were also fond of it, as a result, Buddhism was also used in “gardens of poets and scholars”, both in individual religious buildings (chapels, smoking rooms) and elements borrowed from temple architecture. Many government officials quit their jobs and started gardening, where they could hide from the outside world and focus on nature and literature. The creators of the parks accepted the mountains and rivers as their main bodies. One example of such a garden is Jingu Yuan (金谷园), or the Golden Valley Garden, built by Shi Chong (249-300 AD), an aristocrat and former judicial official, who in 296 completed the construction of his garden ten kilometers northeast of Luoyang [13,14].

6. Confucianism
In imperial China, Confucianism was not always the main religion. Also, Confucianism had the principles of organization of the state and society over two thousand years in almost unchanged form. Confucianism regulated all areas of life and culture, created a system of rules for all manifestations of human life, gave rise to many laws in the field of education, the study of history, music, poetry, painting and architecture, enshrining the traditional system [14, 15].

Confucianism creates a city that reflects the idea of the correct structure of the universe and order. A striking example of this is the Forbidden City in Beijing (Fig. 4). It has the following features:

- Focus on the cardinal points;
- Square in plan, surrounded by a wall;
- Symmetry of the city with the palace or important administrative building as the center of the axis, symbolizing the centralized power of the emperor;
- All roads form a rigid grid;
- The palace is surrounded by a wall, closing it from the whole city;
- The walls and the moat surrounding the city gave protection against enemies, while the walls of the palace and residential blocks became a barrier in the social hierarchy.

The layout of the capital greatly influenced the layout of all types of gardens. This is most clearly seen in the imperial gardens. But the similarity can be seen in private gardens, they adopted such an important element as the main axis, the south-north direction.

Influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, the traditional Chinese house garden siheyuan (四合院) was created (si (四) - four directions of the world: east and west, south and north; he (合) - the environment, the yuan (院) - the garden, in this case the yard with the garden). For many centuries, general architectural and town planning rules were worked out, which were applied everywhere [1,14].

7. Conclusion
Religions have made a huge contribution to the landscape architecture of China. They are one of the fundamental knowledges when studying gardens. Each of the four religions: shamanism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism influenced the traditional gardens of China to varying degrees at different times, with the result that each confession has a specific place in the garden.

The first landscape gardening complexes - ritual hunting grounds and mystical parks were created under the influence of traditional cults and shamanism, having local differences depending on the territories.

With the development of Taoism, not only as a philosophy, but also as a religion, active development began in garden and park complexes. The main contribution of Taoism was in the principle of perception of nature. In the understanding of Laozi and Chuangzi, nature is beautiful not because of its existence, but because it is able to demonstrate that Tao "does everything without acting." Nature intentionally pursues nothing, but makes it happen like no other can. Chinese gardens are honored and persecuted nature, but they do not copy the shape of the beauty of nature. They explore Tao and the cause hidden in nature. They did not try to copy it, but tried to understand its structure and reproduce it with the help of spatial tools, such as Bagua trigrams, Loshu squares, etc. That is why the Taoist view of nature is extremely important for the development of ancient literature and the formation of ancient art and national characteristics.

During the reign of Qin Dynasty, Confucianism became the main religion in China, spreading its influence in all spheres of life, including landscaping. Confucius scholars supplemented the ideological system of Confucianism by adopting Taoist ideas about the universe as an ontology and that "everything comes from Tao". Gardens become a place where natural and human beginnings are combined, new buildings and functions appear in the garden.

During the Tang Dynasty, Buddhism became very popular in China. The large construction of temples with inner gardens contributed to borrowing culture to other types of parks. With the advent of Buddhism, religious, recreational and educational functions, as well as botany and meditation, began to actively develop in the garden.

Religions have become not only part of the garden, having their own types of buildings, statues and sculptures, influencing the layout and functional zoning, but also creating their own types of parks - temple gardens. By studying the traditional gardens of China, in each park and garden complex you can find the influence of each of the four religions.
References

[1] Luchkova V I 2011 *The history of the Chinese city. Town-planning, architecture, landscape art* (Khabarovsk: Pacific National Univ. Publ.)

[2] Jun T 1983 *A History of Gardening* (Beijing: China Agriculture and building Press)

[3] Keswick M 2003 *The Chinese Garden. History, Art and Architecture* (Harvard: Harvard University Press)

[5] Zhou W 1999 *Classical Garden of China* (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press)

[6] Qingxi L 2003 *Classical gardens and parks of China* (Intercontinental Publishing House of China (in Russian). Beijing)

[7] Vasilyev L S 1983 *Religions of the East* (Moscow)

[8] Malyavin V V 2003 *Twilight Tao. Chinese culture on the threshold of the New Age* (Moscow)

[9] Warring P 2003 *Feng shui home and garden* (Moscow: Eksmo)

[10] Melnikov I 2017 *Feng Shui. Basic principles* (Moscow: Liters)

[11] Vasilyev K V 1998 *The origins of Chinese civilization* (Moscow: Oriental literature Publ.)

[12] David H E 1986 *Creating a Chinese Garden* (London : Croom Helm Ltd)

[13] Cheng J 2012 *The Craft of Gardens: The Classic Chinese Text on Garden Design* (Shanghai: Shanghai Press)

[14] Chao C S 1989 *Aspects of traditional Chinese houses and garden* (Sydney: Published by University of Sydney)

[15] Johnston R S 1991 *Scholar gardens of China: a study and analysis of the spatial design of the Chinese private garden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)