Course outline

Introduction

This course is focussed on the study of major gardens in Suzhou and draws on resources and perspectives derived from architectural history and theory, landscape theory, Chinese studies, comparative philosophy and social psychology. The gardens studied in this course are not understood in terms of a binary opposition of “house” and “garden”. Suzhou gardens are highly architectural settings in which manipulated topography and rockeries, plantings, and buildings and covered galleries are brought into close juxtaposition. In this context, “garden” is not an open landscaped area next to a “house”; rather, “garden” is a spatially dynamic zone in which architectural elements provide vantage points and some of the circulation routes.

Suzhou gardens are multi-sensory environments that do not give priority to the sense of vision. Aural, proprioceptive, and synesthetic aspects of experience are foregrounded in this tradition. For this reason, it is especially appropriate to study this subject by personal visits.

Much in the same manner that contemporary Japanese architects consider the gardens of Kyoto a point of reference and a source of inspiration, Chinese architects have focused on Suzhou gardens. Towards the end of this course, the ongoing relevance of ideas of Suzhou gardens will be studied in relation to some recent works by Chinese architects.

Programme objectives

The main critical premise of this programme is that conventional tools of representation common in architecture and landscape architecture such as photography and orthogonal drawings may have significant limitations in cross-cultural contexts. The first main objective of this programme acts on this premise by using photography reflexively to explore its limits for the study of Suzhou gardens. Aspects of these gardens that are resistant to photographic representation (e.g. aperspectival space, heterogeneity of spatial depth under specific daylighting conditions, multi-sensory environments, scalar ambiguity, labyrinthine spatial
arrangements) call for *in situ* study; they are explored using photographic techniques (working with aperspectival space) and written texts.

A second objective of this programme is to contextualize the students' experience of the Suzhou gardens using Chinese texts (either in the original language or in English translation) that communicate traditional horizons, values and experiences. A range of modern scholarly sources will be used to articulate viewpoints for interpreting classical Chinese texts. The intention is to foreground differences in focus, perception, priority and horizons between the students and the textual sources.

The third objective of this programme is to help students broaden their thinking beyond a personal or historical level of interest by presenting a series of discussions and encounters with contemporary Chinese architects who have taken up ideas of Suzhou gardens in their own work.

**Gardens to be studied**

- Zhuo Zheng Yuan
- Liu Yuan
- Yi Pu
- Huanxiu Shanzhuang
- Wang Shi Yuan
- Ou Yuan
- Yi Yuan
- Cang Lang Ting

**Major programme dates (to be confirmed)**

- First meeting in Hong Kong: 20 Jun 2015, 2-5 pm.
- Initial class discussions online: 20-27 June 2015
- There is an informal dinner for members of the class in Suzhou on 28 June, 5.40 pm sharp.
- First official meeting in Suzhou: 29 June 2015, 7 am.
- The class moves from Suzhou to Shanghai on 5 July 2015, midday.
- Programme ends with a dinner in Shanghai, 6 July 2015, 6-8.30 pm.
- Students will likely return to Hong Kong on 7 July 2015 unless they wish to extend their visit in China.
Assessment

The assessment scheme for ARCH5331 consists of the following components: (1) Photographs and essay, 50%; (2) Seminar presentation [photographic techniques], 20%; (3) Presentation in gardens [historical and cultural aspects], 15%. (4) class participation, 15%

Assumed knowledge

Basic ability to read architectural drawings. Previous training in an art or design-related studio setting. Basic photography, and knowledge of Photoshop and InDesign.

Bibliography

Three major bibliographies on Chinese gardens are especially relevant:


Specific Sources on Gardens

[*prescribed preliminary readings]*


Photographic techniques

Students are expected to research relevant sources on photographic techniques for themselves. The main recommended sources are:

Using email exchanges from 14 May onwards, an attempt will be made to ensure that no more than 2 students are reading the same book on collage techniques so that the seminar topics will be appropriately diverse.

Learning outcomes

At the conclusion of this programme, students should be able to:

1. Display an awareness of content knowledge of the major Suzhou gardens. Historical and cultural background. Analytic vocabulary and its cultural specificity. [Specific readings, site visits, essay]

2. Demonstrate an understanding of the limitations of photography and orthogonal drawings for the study of Suzhou gardens [photographic exercise, seminar presentation, essay]

3. Demonstrate an understanding of photographic techniques and their relevance to the exploration of specific aspects of Suzhou gardens [seminar presentation, photographic exercises and essay]

4. Draw on textual sources on Chinese culture and gardens to articulate issues of cultural difference [specific readings, essay]

5. Demonstrate a critical appreciation of the uptake of ideas of Suzhou gardens among contemporary Chinese architects [presentations, discussions]

6. Demonstrate a sense of situational awareness and risk management for living and working in a Chinese city [site visits, briefing]

Arrangements to be made by students for themselves

In general, students should make their own arrangements for:

- camera equipment: digital SLR camera or Lytro light field camera, tripods, spare batteries for camera
- laptop with relevant software installed
- all transportation between airports and hotels
• meals that are not organized centrally by teaching staff for the whole class.
• supply of all materials and equipment required for assignments
• buying maps of Suzhou and Shanghai
• printing copies of all previous emails about logistics of the class and bringing them to Suzhou (students who are not bringing their own laptops to Suzhou)
• purchase of sim cards for Chinese mobile phone service
• supply of adaptor plugs for electrical devices
• entering the main emergency contact numbers into their own mobile phones
• currency exchange