

A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Garden Culture: From the Perspective of Garden Elements

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Abstract. Gardens refer to natural environments and places where people play through certain artistic design methods. There are completely different concepts and expressions in gardening methods between China and the West. This article mainly conducts an in-depth comparative study of Chinese and Western garden culture from the perspective of garden elements. The article first outlines the development process of Chinese and Western garden culture and analyzes the influence of multiple factors such as historical development and ideological culture on its style formation. Then, by comparing and analyzing the landscape elements of Chinese and Western gardens, the article reveals the differences and characteristics between the two in design concepts, spatial layout, artistic decoration, and other aspects. Finally, based on existing literature, the article summarizes the phenomenon of the integration of Chinese and Western garden cultures and explores the trend of how Chinese and Western garden cultures can learn from each other, integrate, and innovate in the context of globalization.

Keywords: Comparison of Gardens; Garden Art; Chinese and Western Gardens

1. Introduction

As an important carrier of human culture, the style and characteristics of gardens are deeply influenced by historical development and ideological culture [1]. Chinese and Western garden cultures, as two major garden cultural systems, have their own characteristics and influence each other. This article will delve into the comparative study of Chinese and Western garden cultures from the perspective of landscape elements in gardens.

Review and summarize the development process of Chinese and Western garden culture, and analyze the influence of multiple factors such as historical development and ideological culture on its style formation. By comparing and analyzing the landscape elements of Chinese and Western gardens, the differences and characteristics in design concepts, spatial layout, artistic decoration, and other aspects between the two are revealed. Finally, research and summarize the phenomenon of the integration of Chinese and Western garden cultures, and explore the trend of how Chinese and Western garden cultures can learn from each other, integrate, and innovate in the context of globalization. This article provides readers with a new perspective to understand and appreciate the charm of Chinese and Western gardens.

2. Overview of Chinese and Western Garden Culture

2.1. Basic Characteristics of Chinese and Western Garden Culture

The origin and evolution of gardens are vivid manifestations of human exploration and pursuit of beauty.

Chinese classical garden is a landscape-style garden created by literati, painters, and gardeners. Its basic feature is to pursue the natural charm of "although created by humans, it seems to bloom from heaven" [1]. The characteristic of Chinese gardens lies in their emphasis on natural harmony. This concept is reflected in the pursuit of the design concept of "harmony between heaven and man", aiming to imitate and extract nature, so that people can feel the charm of nature in gardens.

In this traditional Chinese garden art space, natural landscapes become the core of landscape composition due to their irregular existence, while different buildings are meticulously arranged to provide viewing points and create a cultural atmosphere. Plants complement the free embellishments of mountains and rivers, and the road twists and turns, achieving a state of harmonious integration of the natural environment and aesthetic ideals as a whole.

Western gardens are a concrete manifestation of ancient Greek philosophical ideas and the pursuit of the "rules of formal beauty" for artificial beauty. Its core feature is to overcome the shortcomings of natural beauty and achieve a perfect state. Western gardens emphasize geometric shapes and symmetrical layouts, emphasizing order and rules. All scenery is meticulously calculated and arranged, and every detail showcases human control and conquest of nature.

2.2. Origin and Development of Chinese Garden Culture

Chinese garden culture originated from sacrificial activities during the Yin and Shang dynasties when gardens were only used for production, not for viewing. With the development of society, gardens have gradually evolved into playgrounds and political activities for nobles and palaces, using natural terrain as the foundation and starting to build high platforms and plant green plants. During the spring and autumn period and the Warring States period, gardens became the residence and playground for nobles and nobles, and garden art began to sprout.

During the Qin and Han dynasties, Chinese gardens began to develop and be constructed, with significant improvements in scale and form, mainly concentrated in royal palace gardens and private gardens. The combination of natural landscape and gardening techniques formed the typical characteristics of Chinese gardens. During the Wei, Jin, Northern, and Southern Dynasties, the art of gardens underwent a transformation, and people began to place their emotions in mountains, rivers, and countryside. Gardens were integrated with the art and culture of the time, forming gardens that pursued artistic conception by combining mountains and water.

The quell of war and economic recovery during the Sui and Tang dynasties promoted the prosperity of art and culture. Gardens placed more emphasis on emotions and scenery, creating emotional resonance with people, and reflecting the ideological concepts of Confucianism and Taoism in garden design techniques [2].

During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, Chinese garden art reached its peak, with a grand scale, exquisite design, diverse forms, and rich styles. Representative works such as the Summer Palace in Beijing and the Humble Administrator's Garden in Suzhou. Regionally, there have also been distinct features of royal gardens in the north and private gardens in the south.

Since modern times, although influenced by Western culture, Chinese garden art has generally maintained its traditional characteristics. While inheriting tradition, modern gardens have also incorporated modern elements, making garden art more diverse and colorful. Modern gardens are no longer exclusively enjoyed by royalty, nobles, and landlords, but can also be viewed and used by ordinary citizens. Gardens have opened up a new path for contemporary cultural education.

2.3. Origin and Development of Western Garden Culture

The origin of Western garden culture can be traced back to the four ancient civilizations, among which ancient Greek culture had a profound impact on European civilization. Early gardens were not only used for planting and enclosure but also as sacred places for worship. The gardens of ancient Greece were mainly used as sacred forests around temples, while the gardens of ancient Rome placed more emphasis on practicality and aesthetics, resulting in a large area and numerous buildings, resembling a large estate-style garden in a garden city.

During the Middle Ages, European gardens were deeply influenced by religion, especially Christianity. The design of gardens is closely related to religious life, and garden architecture began to take on castle-like shapes, emphasizing the design of symmetry and geometric shapes, reflecting people's respect for religion and order at that time [3]. During this period, gardens were mainly located

in monasteries, used for growing herbs and vegetables, and also became a place for monks to meditate and pray.

During the Renaissance, garden art reached a climax in Italy. Driven by humanism, the graphic design of the garden remains neat and symmetrical, but construction has begun based on the terrain, adding terraces to make the overall garden more orderly. Gardens have also become a display platform for art, often decorated with elements such as sculptures and fountains.

In the 17th century, French garden art was represented at the peak by the gardens of the Palace of Versailles. This type of garden emphasizes symmetry and geometric shape, reflecting the idea of absolutism. In the 18th century, British garden art began to emerge, and during this period, garden design emphasized nature and romance, reflecting the ideas of romanticism. This design, known as a "landscape garden," focuses on lakes, grasslands, and trees, emphasizing harmony with nature [4].

In the 19th century, the park movement emerged in Europe and America, and public gardens emerged. These parks not only maintain the ornamental nature of the gardens themselves but also provide a large number of practical leisure and entertainment places for citizens [5]. Since the 20th century, Western garden art has not only inherited tradition but also incorporated elements of modernism and postmodernism, such as emphasizing functionality and environmental protection. These changes that keep up with the times reflect the needs and values of modern society.

3. Comparative Analysis of Landscape Elements in Chinese and Western Gardens

3.1. Comparison of Spatial Layout

Chinese classical gardens are influenced by the thoughts of Taoism and Confucianism, with the main idea of conforming to all things and pursuing the "unity of heaven and man" in all aspects. The spatial layout of gardens emphasizes natural harmony and flexibility. Respect for nature is a prerequisite in garden design, fully reflecting the natural landscape of mountains and rivers. At the same time, in order to make people feel a rhythmic change and development during the tourism process. The spatial layout of Chinese gardens never adopts a flat and straightforward layout that allows people to have a clear view but cleverly uses the layout technique of "borrowing scenery, setting off, staggered, and circuitous", making the garden space rich in layers and infinitely variable. The layout of the entire garden reproduces randomness and contingency, and even many landscapes intentionally use techniques such as "concealment, concealment, leakage, and transparency", which often brings new discoveries and surprises during the tourism process, with a poetic atmosphere of "a village with hidden willows and bright flowers".

The layout of Chinese classical gardens also varies from north to south in different regions. The northern royal gardens highlight the nobility of the royal family with their grand scale and rigorous layout. Giant single buildings and rich architectural communities, with clear primary and secondary relationships, carefully designed multi-axis relationships, and great emphasis on building according to mountain terrain and water flow. The pursuit of artistic conception in southern gardens mostly combines the thoughts of literati and places emotions on nature. The layout of the garden reflects a light and graceful style, like a place where people can live in seclusion and comfort [6].

Western gardens emphasize order and rules with their symmetrical geometric layout and clear axes. This type of garden design emphasizes emphasis, clear relationships, and clear boundaries and spatial boundaries. In the layout of Western garden design, the application of geometry and mathematics is ubiquitous, serving as the fundamental tools for constructing and understanding space in Western gardens. Designers create various shapes and structures through precise calculations and measurements, thus forming unique garden landscapes. These shapes and structures not only enhance the aesthetic value of gardens but also enrich people's visual and psychological experiences. Among them, the application of perspective is particularly clever. Designers can create infinite visual effects in limited space, making people feel as if they are in a vast natural environment when appreciating garden landscapes.

In addition, the spatial layout of Western gardens often revolves around one or more obvious axes, along which various buildings and decorations are arranged, giving the garden a strong sense of direction. At the same time, it also emphasizes the continuity and unity of the landscape, forming a complete and unified landscape system for the entire garden.

3.2. Comparison of Plant Configuration

The plant layout in Chinese gardens follows natural laws and is planted based on the adaptability and growth habits of plants to the environment. Each arrangement of plants has its specific significance, either incorporating Confucian and Taoist ideas or expressing emotions through plants [7]. For example, the pine, bamboo, plum, and lotus loved by literati throughout history are plants that embody the noble character. At the same time, Chinese garden design also emphasizes the traditional cultural concept of "changing according to time". In terms of plant selection, horticulturists will adjust according to the changes in seasons and scenery, in order to demonstrate the aesthetic concept of "all seasons have scenery" and the profound foundation of Chinese traditional culture.

Western landscape design still adheres to the principles of pure geometric structure and maintains a rational approach to horticultural creation. In the design and layout of plants, emphasis is placed on their volume, color blocks, and layering. In addition, influenced by the imperial power of the Western European continent, the flowers, plants, and trees in the garden were artificially constructed with very regular geometric shapes such as rectangles and spheres, further demonstrating the perfect integration of science and horticulture [8].

3.3. Comparison of Water Body Design

The water body design of Chinese gardens emphasizes natural harmony, and water bodies are often the main components of gardens. Through lakes, streams, waterfalls, and other forms, the diversity and variability of water are demonstrated. In the process of landscaping, different methods were used to create the diversity of water features in the garden based on the local needs of the garden the mountain building, and water management. The winding and tortuous shapes, the location of the water landscape, and other elements can block each other in the garden, creating a rich water landscape in the space, and bringing different artistic conceptions and fun to the experience [9].

The water body design of Western gardens focuses on artistic decoration and aesthetics, and water landscape design is generally dynamic, with various forms such as fountains, waterfalls, and canals showcasing the beauty and artistic sense of water. The Western water management techniques still embody "artificial beauty", with both canals and fountains presenting a regular and rigorous form, without any obstruction around them. They emphasize the expression of form, giving people a broad perspective, grandeur, and the feeling of conquering nature [10].

3.4. Comparison of Lighting

The common feature of Chinese and Western garden lighting is that it highlights key landscapes in the garden through the arrangement and adjustment of lighting, such as ancient trees, rockeries, pavilions in China, or sculptures, fountains, etc. in the West.

In traditional Chinese gardens, lighting technology is mainly used to create an atmosphere and highlight the landscape. Chinese garden lighting design emphasizes the contrast between light and shadow, as well as the harmonious unity of light and environment. Chinese garden lighting often uses hidden or semi-hidden lighting to simulate natural light and create a hazy and peaceful atmosphere. In traditional Western gardens, lighting technology mainly relies on the outline of garden buildings for lighting and places greater emphasis on practicality. Western garden lighting designs typically use bright lighting to provide sufficient lighting and ensure that the garden can be clearly viewed at night. At the same time, Western garden lighting also utilizes the color and intensity of the light to create a rich and colorful visual effect, highlighting the beauty of the building's outline while increasing its decoration.

4. Discussion on the Reasons for the Differences in Landscape Culture between China and the West

4.1. Impact of Natural Environment

The differences in garden culture between China and the West first stem from the differences in the natural environment.

The wide span of climate diversity between the north and south of China has made Chinese garden art pay more attention to seasonal changes and climate factors, such as reflecting seasonal changes through plant selection and layout. The climate in Europe is relatively stable, which makes European garden art pay more attention to spatial division and the application of logical sense. China's terrain and landforms are diverse, including high mountains, plains, hills, etc., which makes Chinese garden art pay more attention to the utilization and imitation of terrain, such as imitating natural landscapes through rockeries and water features. The terrain in Europe is relatively flat, which makes European garden art focus on the ultimate pursuit of symmetry and rules. China has a rich variety of plant species, and there are many unique plant species in different regions, which makes Chinese garden art pay more attention to the selection and configuration of plants. However, there are relatively few plant species in Europe, which makes European garden art pay more attention to plant pruning and shape design.

4.2. Social and Cultural Impact

Social culture is an important factor in the formation of cultural differences between Chinese and Western gardens. In ancient Chinese society, Confucianism emphasized the concept of "harmony". Therefore, Chinese gardens pursued the harmonious unity of nature and human beings, emphasized the flexibility and variation of spatial layout, and were adept at using symbols and fables, making gardens rich in cultural and philosophical connotations. Western society, influenced by ancient Greek and Roman culture, emphasizes rationality and order. Western philosophical thinking emphasizes rationality and logic, which is reflected in garden art as a preference for geometric shapes and symmetrical layouts. In gardens, from top to bottom, even the ever-changing combinations cannot be separated from the constraints of laws.

Religion and belief are also important factors affecting the cultural differences between Chinese and Western gardens.

In medieval Europe, the gardens of monasteries and churches were considered sacred places, and horticultural art was used to express reverence and gratitude towards God. Based on faith, people tend to prefer plants related to the Bible in their selection of horticultural plants. For example, roses are considered flowers symbolizing the Virgin Mary and are often used in the gardens of churches and monasteries [11]. In China, under the influence of Taoism and Buddhism, which emphasize the harmony between humans and nature, garden art places more emphasis on imitating and borrowing from nature, reflecting a natural and harmonious beauty. Chinese landscape painting and ancient poetry are imbued with the atmosphere of natural beauty and artistic conception. This aesthetic concept is widely used in garden art, especially in the plant image and imagery used in the plant design of gardens. For example, plum blossoms, bamboo, pine trees, etc. all convey the noble demeanor and character of the garden owner.

In terms of the social system, feudal Chinese garden art often served as a private garden for the royal or noble families, emphasizing the display of the owner's power and status. In the West, early garden art was also a patent of the nobility, but with the development of society, public gardens gradually emerged, focusing on meeting the leisure needs of the public.

5. The Integration and Development of Chinese and Western Garden Culture

5.1. The Development of Chinese Gardens under the Influence of the West

With the cultural and trade exchanges between China and the West, missionaries and merchants entered China. Before the Opium War, China was influenced by Western culture, and Western decorative techniques gradually appeared in Chinese garden architecture, such as the "European Palaces" of the Yuanmingyuan, which was first built in China to imitate Western styles. This is the early stage of the integration of Chinese and Western gardens. From the Opium War period of 1840 to 1912 to the early establishment of the Republic of China, China was forced to completely open its doors, and Western architectural styles began to infiltrate China's coastal areas, such as the Shanghai Bund Park. Subsequently, a large number of garden villas with a blend of Chinese and Western styles emerged. During the Republic of China period, the development of Western-style gardens reached its peak in China. The materials, tones, patterns, furnishings, layout, etc. have all undergone changes. Visually, it is more relaxed, colorful, and bright. Beijing still retains traditional Chinese gardens as it is not influenced by Western concessions. Some coastal cities influenced by the West have preserved and integrated Western art and gardening techniques, forming gardens that blend Chinese and Western art [12].

5.2. The Development of Western Landscape Architecture under the Influence of China

The Western understanding of Chinese gardens began after missionaries entered China. In addition, the spread of Chinese gardens in the West is also due to merchants' understanding of items brought from China to the West, such as handicrafts, paintings, etc. The style of Chinese gardens is completely different from that of the West, which has aroused the interest of Western garden designers and has also been praised by people of various classes. They began to gradually abandon geometric gardens and try to pursue a natural landscape garden style - introducing rockeries and stacked stones. Like the "Blue and White Porcelain Palace" of Versailles Palace. The exterior decoration is based on the "Glass Pagoda of Bao'en Temple in Nanjing, China" and is deeply loved by the French. From the 17th to 18th centuries, the Chinese style developed comprehensively in Europe, and the Chinese gardening concept had a widespread impact on European gardens [12].

The exchange, mutual learning, and mutual influence between China and the West in landscape design have formed a new type of integrated Chinese and Western gardens.

6. Conclusion

The cultural differences between China and the West have created different styles of garden landscapes. Chinese gardens are more like allowing viewers to enter the painting. Gardeners use various garden design techniques to present different connotations and artistic conceptions of garden elements. Western gardens, on the other hand, resemble the dreamy scenes presented in Western artworks, with colors and layouts giving people a strong visual effect. Both Chinese and Western gardens are great works of art created under human civilization. It should explore and inherit through comparison, and combine innovation and development with the pursuit of different eras.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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