

## Chapter 2

# Disposition

The Yuanming Yuan imperial garden consisted of the most magnificent architectural works the Qing Empire ever created. It represents a glory in the Chinese cultural tradition and the pinnacle of Chinese garden arts.

The site on which the Yuanming Yuan was built is a plain rich in fresh water at the foot of the Jade Spring Hills near present-day Haidian, northwest of Beijing. The water from the Jade Spring has been described as cool and clear, to be admired as “pearls under moonlight” (*mingyue yeying qingguang yuan*) (Liu and Yu 1980, 297). The plentiful spring accounts for the abundant groundwater in Haidian and its neighborhood. In fact, “*dian*” means the place where water runs together (Jiang Yikui 1980, 69). Moreover, the terrain allowed a gigantic garden to achieve its maximum aesthetic effects. As the great modern Chinese architect Liang Sicheng summarizes, the Yuanming Yuan was essentially a design of hillocks and lakes with buildings, courts, chambers, pavilions, arbors, and other structures in between. Even though symmetry and balance were stressed, Liang goes on, greater emphasis was placed on variations and liveliness in accordance with topography to the extent of being unconventional. Although the garden, for Liang’s critical eyes, perhaps contained too many man-made structures, which jeopardized the beauty of the landscape, he has no doubt about its lively creativity (1985, 3:225, 231).

A more recent scholar has called the Yuanming Yuan “the garden of ten-thousand gardens” (*wanyuan zhi yuan*) in reference to its ingenious and judicious disposition on a large lake and near the tall West Hills in the neighborhood (Chen 1994, 5). Indeed, due to the excellent location, pleasant country homes appeared here as early as the Yuan Dynasty in the thirteenth century. By the sixteenth century, natural beauty made this region so attractive that the Marquis Li Wei of the Ming was inspired to construct the well-known Clear Flowery Garden (Qinghua Yuan), which had claims to be “the leading garden in the region” (*jingguo diyi mingyuan*). Shortly afterward, the distinguished calligrapher Mi Wanzhong built the equally famous Ladle Garden (Shao Yuan) in this area. Both celebrated gardens, according to the Peking University scholar Hou Renzhi, deteriorated during the transition from the Ming to the Qing (1991, 99).

The Qing rulers constructed gardens in the Haidian region all over again. As the three available maps show, the Yuanming Yuan contained vast lakes connected by a network of canals and winding waterways. From a bird's eye view, all of the structures in the garden appear to have been situated on islets or spits of land surrounded by artificial hills, terraces, hollow rocks, and blooming trees and shrubs. The specially named "scenes" (*jing*) comprised a series of independent and yet cohesive smaller gardens. And this huge park, as a Briton observed, "contained a vast variety of elegant little buildings" (Holmes 1798, 134).

In 1737, the second year of his reign, Qianlong instructed the distinguished court artists Castiglione, Tang Dai, Sun You, Shen Yuan, Zhang Wanbang, and Ding Guanpeng to draw a silk map of the Yuanming Yuan. Once completed, it was hung on the north wall of the Clear Sunshine Belvedere (Qinghui Ge). The belvedere was situated on the west side of the royal living room at the center of the Nine Continents. Its structure, a simple rectangle with elaborate motifs and decorations carved on the posts and beams by carpenters, fit beautifully in the landscape and among other surrounding structures. Noticeably, it had a large overhang to protect the inhabitants from foul weather and was carefully painted to protect it from decay. The right angles and axial symmetry reflected the sublime order. This was the place where the emperor and his companions enjoyed the quiet pleasures of composing poems, drawing pictures, and admiring the landscape (cf. Yu 1985, 2:1333–1334).

The famous Forty (Best) Views (*sishi jing*) of the Yuanming Yuan were completed and designated in 1744, of which twelve views, or scenes, were constructed after Qianlong became emperor in 1736. Even though Yongzheng had completed so many of the forty views, Qianlong continued to refurbish all the views extensively. The urbane Qianlong gave every one of the Forty Views a cultured name with an explanatory poem (*Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985). The emperor's practice was quite in line with what a refined scholar did for his private garden, that is, to use an elegant name and poetic theme to make manifest a pictorial image of the uniquely created scene. Moreover, the proud Qianlong commissioned the court artists Shen Yuan and Tang Dai and the calligrapher Wang You dun to produce a two-volume silk atlas, 2.6 ft high and 2.35 ft wide, to convey impressionistic images of all forty scenes.

This set of pictures and poems was taken away by the French during the war of 1860, and it subsequently found a home in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The French gave the Chinese a duplicate color set of the atlas in 1983 (*Yuanming Cangsang* 1991, 16; cf. Cai Shen zhi n.d., 135). The woodcut version of the same atlas signed by Sun Hu and Shen Yuan was published in the 1920s (Cheng 1928, 1).

Different parts of the garden were reached by various roads that deliberately made "various turnings and windings" (Attiret 1982, 9). There was perhaps a geomantic element in it. Perhaps the evil spirits, which would travel in a straight line, would be diverted by a winding course. But turnings and windings also were essential for creating surprises. A narrow, tortuous, and dark mountain road would seem to guide viewers into a dead end, but before long a broad space would open to

them. Suddenly they would be surprised by a view of elegant trees, blue sky, white cloud, flying birds, beautiful flowers, and a stream of water escaping down from higher ground into a pool. At that moment, they might even enjoy the clean and soft winds blowing from distant hills. Roads thus facilitated visitors' pleasure of admiring successively unfolding views from spot to spot. The element of surprise endorsed the art of mixing concealment (*cang*) and revelation (*lu*). The European buildings at the northern end of the Eternal Spring Garden would seem to be hidden from the Chinese architectural structures by walls and hills, with only tall roofs visible from distance. But concealment was not used simply to communicate that "nothing Western could mar the harmony of the main garden" (Thiriez 1998, 51); it was used to create surprises as well.

Unlike the technique of concealment used to completely hide elements in prose or in a poem, concealment in the garden means to bring forth a reserved and implicit expression, thus unfolding scenes that cannot be viewed in a single glance.<sup>1</sup> The British took note of the effect of intricacy and concealment when they visited the Yuanming Yuan at the end of the eighteenth century. "At Yuen-min-yuen (Yuanming Yuan)," it is said, "a flight wall was made to convey the idea of a magnificent building, when seen at a certain distance through the branches of a thicket" (Staunton 1799, 2:114).

In addition to roads, a network of canals linked to almost every corner of the garden served the same purpose of circulation. Numerous barges and boats traveled in the garden. The successive Qing emperors all preferred smooth boat traveling. To facilitate this service, the Yuanming Yuan employed an increasing number of sailors, boathouse keepers, and boat repairmen. Since all these people lived and worked in the garden, they formed the garden's "boat household" (*chuanhu*), one of many households in the service of the emperor and the royal family.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.1 Scenic Structures in the Original Yuanming Yuan

The original configuration of the imperial garden before the completion of the Sea of Blessing (Fu Hai) was square in shape. It consisted of three principal groups of man-made structures, namely, the administrative buildings, the royal residence compound, and a complex of rural scenes spreading along the central axis from south to north, in addition to numerous composite smaller enclosures scattered throughout the huge garden.

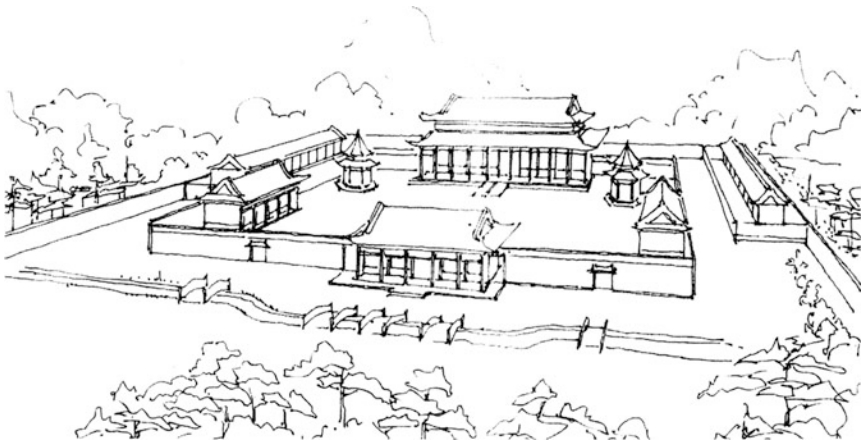
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<sup>1</sup>For Peng Yigang, concealment and revelation generally reflect differences between Chinese and Western cultures. While Chinese emphasize concealment, Westerners stress revelation. The art of concealment was fully developed in Chinese garden-making (1986, 23).

<sup>2</sup>An archive source dated for 1740 shows that the director of the Imperial Household Sanhe reported to the Qianlong Emperor concerning the cost of repairing the imperial barge named Flying Dragon (Feilong). The repair cost amounted to 9,238.6 taels of silver plus 713.82 taels for decorating and painting (YMYA 1991, 1:46–47).

The main entrance, facing south, was named the Grand Palace Gate (Da'gongmen); it was one of the garden's eighteen major gates. On top of the gate hung a wooden tablet with three large Chinese characters, *yuan ming yuan*, in the style of Kangxi's calligraphy. Centered in front of the Grand Palace Gate was a five-column-wide section of rooms used as office space for representatives from virtually all major government agencies, including the Grand Secretariat (Nei Ge), the six boards, Hanlin Academy, and the Bureau of the Clansmen (Zongren Fu). Beyond the main gate was the Inner Palace Gate, or the Gentlemen's Entrance (Churu Xianliang Men), guarded by a pair of gilt dragons across an arch bridge over a moat. On both sides of the entrance there were rooms for visitors to wait. This was the place where the emperor reviewed the annual archery contest of his troops (Yu 1985, 2:1325).

The grand Main Audience Hall (Zhengda Guangming Dian), the name of which means open-mindedness and magnanimousness appropriate to a great ruler, stood at a central position inside the Inner Palace Gate. This piece of architecture was a replica of the imperial audience hall called Great Harmony Hall (Taihe Dian) in the Forbidden City. It was "well adorned exteriorly with paint and gilding, and netted with iron wire under the fretted eaves to keep the birds off" (Yu 1985, 2:1326).



**Picture 2.1** Zhengda Guangming Dian (Main Audience Hall). Sketch by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

The hall had seven columns made of solid wood, 129 ft long and 63 ft wide, sitting on a 4-foot-high terrace of round stone pedestals, each 2 feet 9 inches in diameter. Inside, an "antithetical couplet" (*duilian*) written by Emperor Yongzheng himself was displayed on a pair of scrolls hanging on each side of the hall in symmetrical fashion. The building's floors were paved with *dalishi* (slabs of a white marble veined in black) 2 feet square and about 3 inches thick on a brick-lime foundation ascended by three sets of stone steps. In the front there was an open courtyard with two side halls (*piandian*) on each side, and in the back a rock hill

resembling a gigantic jade bamboo shoot in upright form. This hall was the place where the emperor met with his officials and foreign dignitaries as well as served banquets, in particular the grand banquets for such special occasions as the emperor's birthday, and the metropolitan examinations. In general, this administrative section, with the Main Audience Hall as its principal structure, is a large enclosure surrounded by walls. Looking out from inside one could catch the pleasant views of dark-foliaged trees and flowers mixed red with purple. With the rise of the imperial garden's political stature, this audience hall soon acquired two wings. The east wing provided office space for the grand councilors (*junji*), who made policy decisions on a daily basis, while the west wing was used as waiting rooms (Yu 1985, 2:1326; Swinhoe 1861, 294; cf. Malone 1934, 75–76). The Qianlong Emperor designated this place the first of his Forty Views.

To the east of the Main Audience Hall was the Diligent Court, or the Royal Office Room (Qinzheng Dian). It contained a large compound of halls, with the Baohe and Taihe Courts in the middle sandwiched by the Flush Spring Chamber (Fuchun Lou) in the back and the Fragrant Azure Grove (Fangbi Cong) in the front. This court was the place in which the Qing emperors summoned officials, read memorials, or ate simple meals; comparable with the Qianqing Palace in the Forbidden City. A large screen behind the throne in the main office room showed two big Chinese characters, *wu yi*, meaning not to indulge in pleasure (Yu 1985, 2:1330–1331; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 9; cf. Zhu and Li, comps. 1983, 2:55). This place provided the Qing emperors from Yongzheng onward with the administrative space to conduct state affairs. Qianlong designated it as the scene of the “Diligent and Talented Government” (Qinzheng Qinxian).

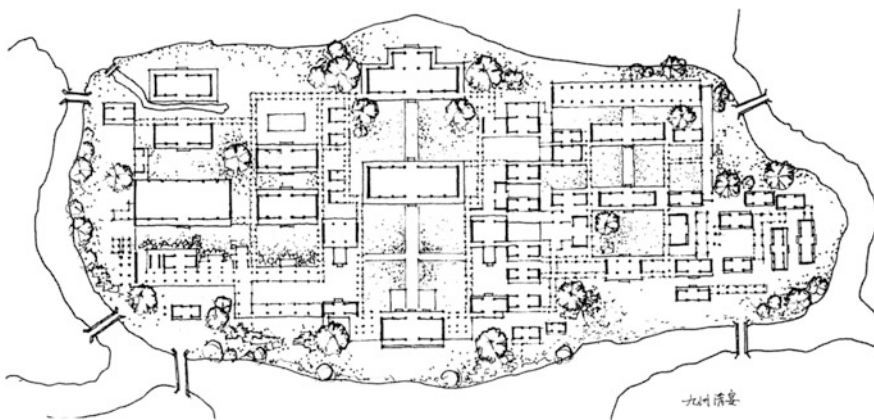
Behind this administrative section across the 7300 square meter Front Lake (Qian Hu) was the royal residential area called Nine Continents, consisting of nine islets, connected by bridges and encircling the 207 meters from east to west and 183 meters from north to south Rear Lake covering a surface of 37,900 square meters (Hou Hu).<sup>3</sup> The so-called Nine Continents, ostensibly from the Confucian *Book of History*, refer to the known world in ancient China (*Shujing* 1911, 2:1). The Yongzheng Emperor, who named this area, wanted to signify his universal empire surrounded by the seas and to symbolize “all under heaven” (*tianxia*) under peace and prosperity. I contest that neither Yongzheng nor Qianlong ever considered the miniature Nine Continents to be an example of the “last radiance of the setting sun” (*luori yuhui*) in the history of the imperial garden construction. I think that it is a misunderstanding for Wang Yi to assert that creating the immense universe in miniature unknowingly displayed the loss of a broad intellectual vista and a sign of the decline of the imperial grandeur (1990, 177–181). It is a remarkable art to “create a world in a pot.” Rather than losing a broad intellectual vista, such a design

<sup>3</sup>The sizes of Front Lake and Rear Lake are based on a recent measurement on the spot. The vast architectural complex called the Nine Continents in Peace, situated on the central islet of the nine islets, is one of the largest man-made structural units in the Yuanming Yuan. It served as His Majesty's main court before the completion of the Main Audience Hall. On these ruins, the Communists buried their fallen comrades in 1929. The tomb is visible to this day.

implies exactly the majestic worldview the imperial ruler entertained. It is in effect a vital aesthetic element in the Chinese garden art, which allows a small man-made structure to symbolize the immense nature, not just a part of the earth but also a part of the universe.

As a matter of fact, most classical Chinese gardens are enclosed within a limited area but with the clear intention of creating a sense of infinite space. The creation of spaciousness is the essence of garden art. Condensation that produces the effect of making the small look like the spacious is no doubt a refined technique. And the Nine Continents in the Yuanming Yuan are precisely the grand center of this magnificent imperial garden symbolizing the universal Chinese world. It is surely through symbolism that the feeling of grandness rather than smallness communicated.

The islet on the north-south axis in the Nine Continents accommodated three architectural units in a row from north to south, namely, the seven-column-wide Nine Continents in Peace Hall (Jiuzhou Qingyan), the Honoring Three Selflessnesses Court (Feng Sanwusi Dian), and the five-column-wide Yuanming Yuan court facing the Front Lake. The row of three courts laid on the central axis with the Grand Palace Gate. On the east side of these courts stood Family of Spring Between Heaven and Earth (Tiandi Yijiachun) and the Benevolence Receiving Hall (Cheng'en Tang). The latter hall housed apartments for imperial ladies to live. On the west side of these three courts was the eminent Clear Sunshine Belvedere (Qinghui Ge) in which, on its northern wall, the map of the Yuanming Yuan was hung between 1737 and 1860. Sandwiched between two small lakes, the emperor's own bedroom was also located in this vast compound, which Qianlong designated as the Nine Continents in Peace (Jiuzhou Qingyan) (Yu 1985, 2:1331–1332; Wang 1992, 21). This designation seems to suggest that the emperor wished to survey “all under heaven” in microcosm.



**Picture 2.2** Jiuzhou Qingyan showing Feng Sanwusi Dian (Honoring Three Selflessnesses Court) in the lower center. Plan by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

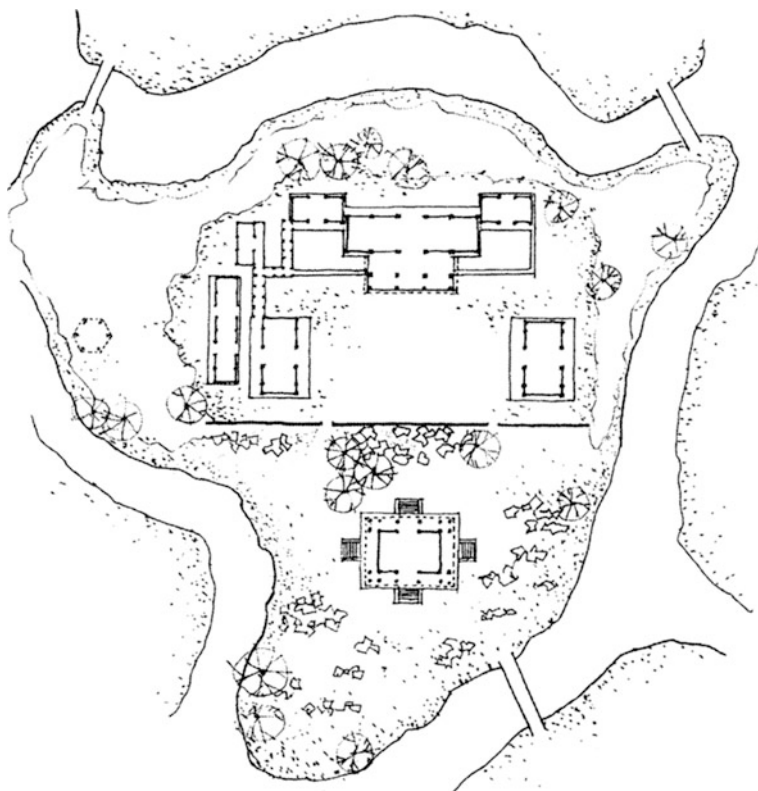
The imperial bedroom and seraglio in the Nine Continents were forbidden ground, and yet the European visitor Father Attiret was able to see them. He found there “all the most beautiful things that can be imagined as to furniture, ornaments, and paintings.... [There are] the most valuable sorts of wood; varnished works, of China and Japan; ancient vases of porcelain; silks, and cloth of gold and silver. They have there brought together, all that. Art and good taste could add to the riches of nature” (Attiret 1982, 23). In 1860, when the European invaders seized the garden, a British officer saw the royal living quarters where “a large niche in the wall, curtained over and covered with silk mattresses, served for the bed; and a sloping platform enabled His Majesty to mount into it.” Under a pillow, the Briton noticed “a small silk handkerchief with sundry writings in the vermilion pencil about the barbarians.” Near the bed on a table there were “pipes and other Chinese luxuries” (Swinhoe 1861, 298). This description at least reflects the setup of His Majesty’s bedroom during the Xianfeng Emperor’s time.

On the second islet of the Nine Continents sat the famous Peony Terrace (Mudan Tai), which Qianlong eventually designated the scene of the Engraved Moon and Unfolding Clouds (Louyue Kaiyun). Its main hall in the front was built using precious *nanmu* (*Phoebe nanmu*) timber with tiles in splendid green and gold, yielding a look of resplendence. The elegant-looking gallery behind the main hall was named the Imperial Orchid Fragrance (Yulanfen). Further back was an expansive complex of structures consisting of the Memorial Hall (Ji’en Tang) in the middle, the Nourishing Simplicity Study (Yangsuo Shuwu) to the west, and the Resting Cloud Chamber (Qiyun Lou) to the east (Yu 1985, 2:1336; *Yuanming Yuan Shishijing Tuyong* 1985, 13). The central theme of this scene was the peony. The great Song philosopher Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073) had designated this particular flower to symbolize riches and honor, and Kangxi identified ninety different kinds of peony in his imperial garden (Wu 1983, 278). Every blossom season, normally late spring, when hundreds of peonies came into bloom, the Qing emperors arrived at the terrace to observe the magnificent “embroidery view” against the background of enormous green pines. It is not at all surprising that Qianlong found the Peony Terrace his favorite place to compose poems.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The Qianlong Emperor wrote a large number of poems during his long life. His “imperial poems” (*yuzhi shi*) in twenty-eight “boxes” (*han*), 42,500 entries, are still in the possession of the palace museum in Shenyang. In 1976, the palace museum in Taipei published *Qing Gaozong Yuzhi Shiwen Quanji* (*The Complete Collection of Qianlong’s Essays and Poems*). For a good edition of selected Qianlong poems, see Sun Piren and Bu Weiyi, comps. 1987. For a poem attributed specifically to the Yuanming Yuan, see Sun and Bu 1987, 26.

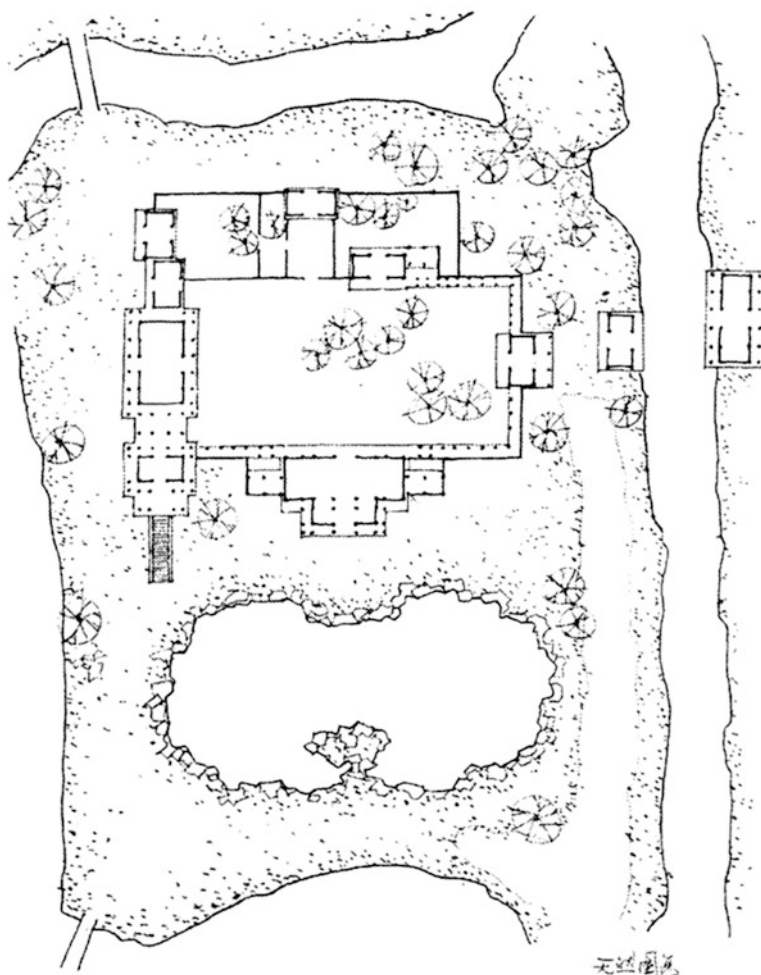




**Picture 2.3** Louyue Kaiyun (Engraved Moon and Unfolding Clouds) showing Ji'en Tang (the Memorial Hall) in the background. Plan by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

The remaining seven islets of the Nine Continents complete the circle in the following order. At the northeast corner of Rear Lake was the Natural Scenery (Tianran Tuhua), which is also the name of its principal structure standing in the middle with two wings. Its west side included a pavilion and a chamber, and its east side included the Five-Fortunes Hall (Wufu Tang). In front of this scenery extended a large courtyard featuring numerous phoenix trees in the midst of a bamboo grove.

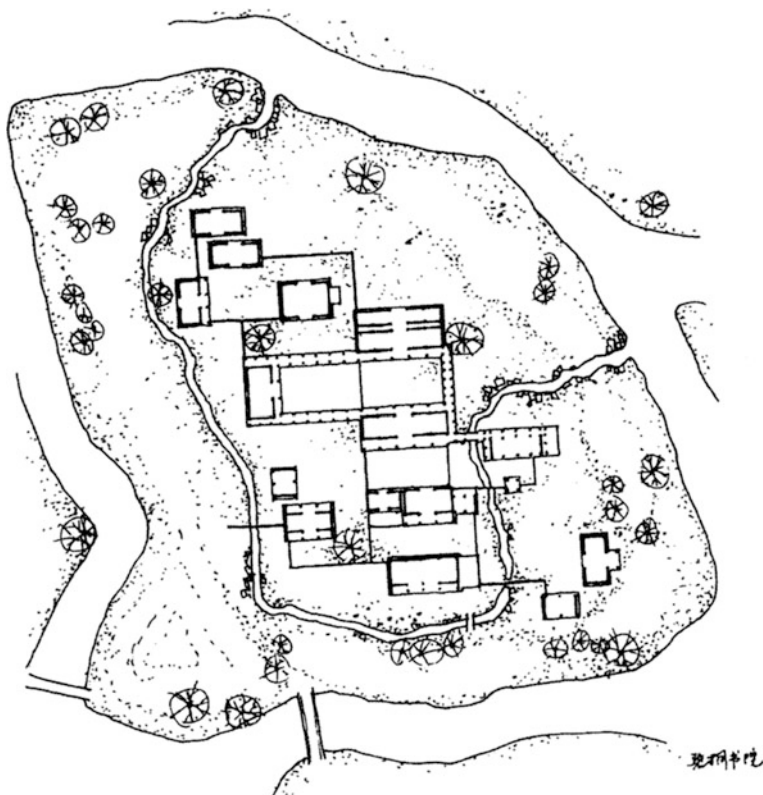




**Picture 2.4** Tianran Tuhua (Natural Scenery), with the principal structure in the middle facing a lake. Plan by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

Crossing a stream over a flat bridge from the site of the Five-Fortunes Hall, one arrived at the Blue Phoenix-Tree Academy (Bitong Shuyuan). Its main structure, facing south, included a three-column front house, a five-column main court, and a five-column rear court. Tidy Wutong trees grew on each side of the courtyards to provide long shade over the houses, which appeared to be hidden. Qianlong is said to have loved coming here to hear the sounds of rain, which inspired him to write poems. Westward from the academy was the Gentle Clouds Cover All (Ciyun Puhu). With the unique Bell Tower (Zhong Lou) at its back and slightly to the west, the three-column-wide main front court named the Happy Buddhist Ground (Huanxi Fochang) faced the Rear Lake to the south. To the north of the court,

beside a Daoist shrine, was a three-story chamber in which Avalokitesvara and Guan Gong, the legendary military hero, were worshipped. To the east of the main court stood the Court for the God of Rain (Longwang Dian) for worshipping the Yuanming Yuan's Dragon King named Zhaofu. The name Gentle Clouds Cover All obviously refers to the merciful protection over all souls (Yu 1985, 2:1337–1340).



**Picture 2.5** Bitong Shuyuan (Blue Phoenix-Tree Academy). Plan by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

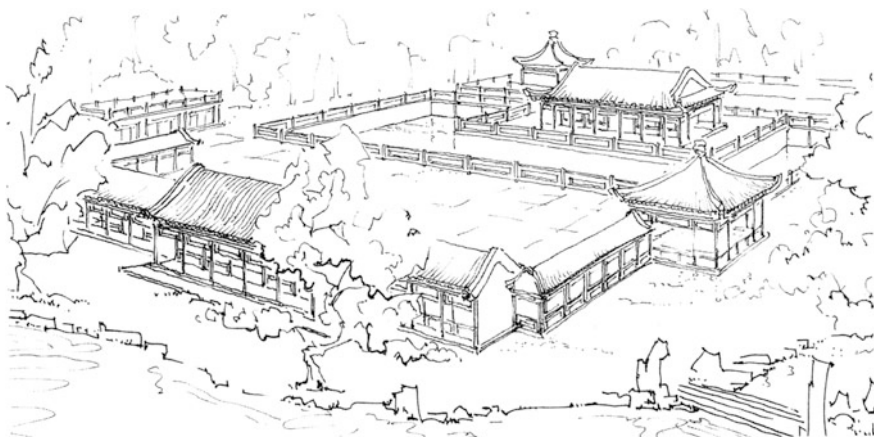
One left this religious land over a stone bridge westward to the Sky in Reflections (Shangxia Tianguang). Its main structure, a two-story chamber overlooking the Rear Lake, was a replica of the famous Yueyang Chamber (Yueyang Lou) at the Dongting Lake in the central Yangzi valley. On both sides of the chamber extended two narrow banks like rainbows, and at the middle of them stood a hexagonal arbor. Behind the chamber was a compound of smaller structures called the Silent Courtyard (Ping'an Yuan), where the Nine Continents made a southwest turn to the islet named the Apricot-Flower Villa (Xinghua Chunguan).



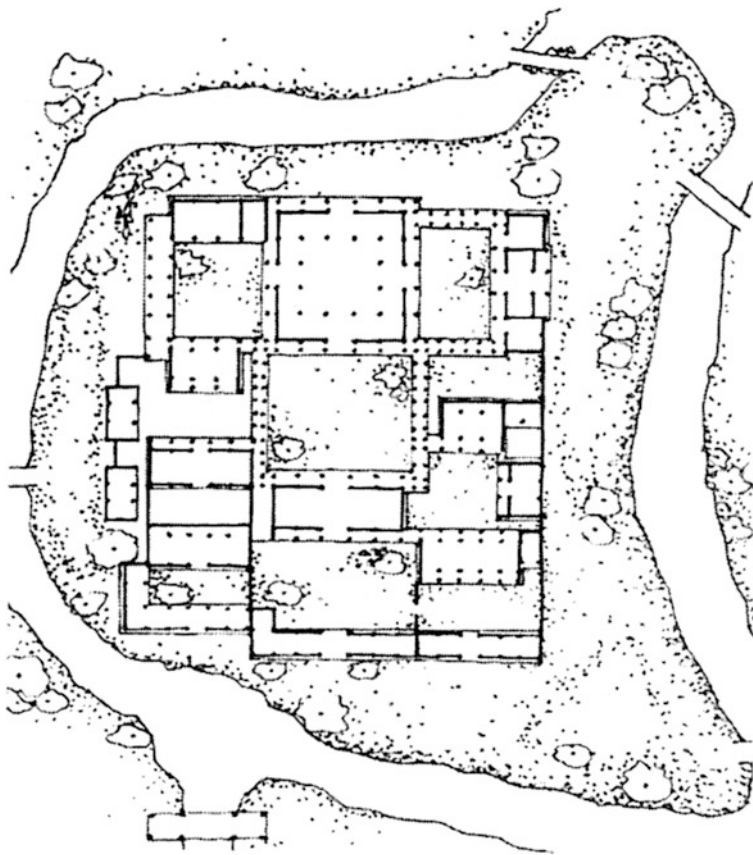
**Picture 2.6** Principal building on Shangxia Tianguang (Sky in Reflections). Sketch by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

The villa was composed of the Apricot Grove (Xinghua Cun), the Spring Rain Gallery (Chunyu Xuan), the Green Shady Hall (Cuiwei Tang), the Restrained Chapel (Yi Zhai), and the Water Reflection Chapel (Jingshui Zhai). Yongzheng had created this scene, while Qianlong embellished it and designated it as one of the Forty Views. Qianlong liked to come here in late spring when flowers blossomed, and he described the view as splendid as the “rosy rays of light” (Yu 1985, 3:1341).

The islet on which stood the Apricot-Flower Villa was connected to the Magnanimous World (Tantan Dangdang) by the Blue Wave Bridge (Bilan Qiao). Its front structure had three sections: the Pure Heart Hall (Suxin Tang) in the middle, the Knowing-Fish Arbor (Zhiyu Ting) to the northeast, and the Double Beauty Chapel (Shuangjia Zhai) to the northwest. Behind the front structure was the Splendid Wind and Moon (Guangfeng Jiyue). The unique feature of this scene was the square fish pond, which was very much to the pleasure of Qianlong who cited in a poem the saying of the great Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi: “See how the minnows are darting about! Such is the pleasure that fish enjoy.” (Wang Xianqian 1972, 108) South of this scene, the islet named the Harmony of the Past with the Present (Rugu Hanjin) sat at the southwest corner of the Rear Lake and connected by bridges to the main living quarters and to the Eternal Spring Fairy Hall (Changchun Xianguan). All galleries, chapels, and studios here were built in a large square lot connected by delightful winding corridors. In designating this scene, Qianlong quoted the great Tang poet Du Fu: “While I hold my contemporaries with no contempt, I have my affection for the ancients” (Yu 1985, 3:1341–1343; cf. *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 10–27). The scenes on the nine islets arguably constituted the best of the Forty Views.



**Picture 2.7** Tantan Dangdang (Magnanimous World). Sketch by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

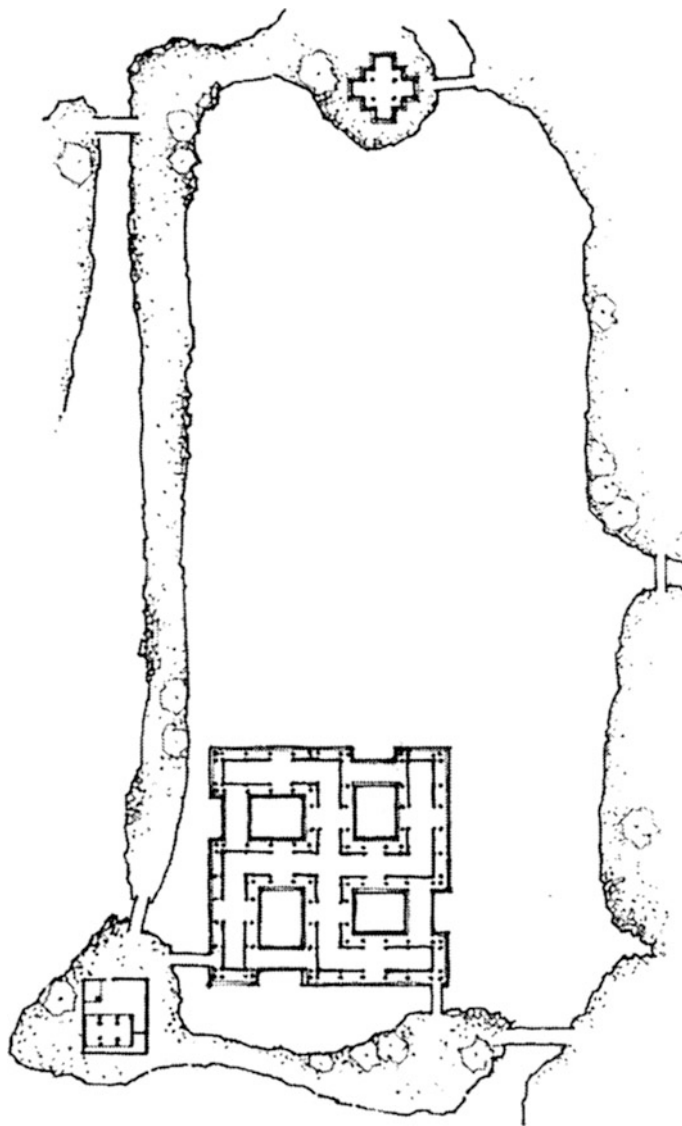


**Picture 2.8** Rugu Hanjin (Harmony of the Present with the Past). Plan by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

Across the Nine Continents to the west was the Swastika House. Qianlong designated it as the Universal Peace (Wanfang Anhe), with houses constructed in a swastika shape on a lake.<sup>5</sup> Cool in summer and warm in winter, the houses were built on a solid brick foundation surrounded by water. Here the Qianlong Emperor was especially fascinated by the inverted golden reflections of the swastika formation in the lake under the autumn moon. The golden reflections recalled the brilliant light of the Buddha (*Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 31). Other scenic sites with ostensible religious significance included the better-known Cloud-Living on the Moon Land (Yuedi Yunju), a secluded enclosure surrounded by short red walls and green pines and sitting at the northern end of the Drill Field. Its main building faced a stream in the front and was backed by a small hill. This was a favorite place for members of the royal family to perform their Buddhist worship (Yu 1985, 3:1347; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 37).

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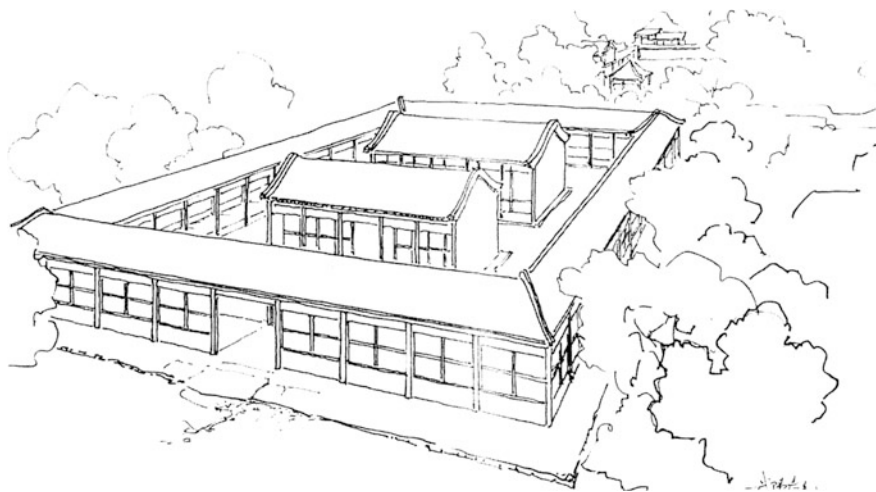
<sup>5</sup>Swastika House is one of numerous structures whose configuration is based on symbols, the folding thread-bound book, or such Chinese characters as *tian* (farm fields), *gong* (work), and *kou* (mouth).



**Picture 2.9** Wanfang Anhe showing Ping'an Yuan adjacent to the Swastika House. Plan by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

Just north of the Swastika House was the Peach-Blossom Cove (Taohua Wu). This scene recalls the famous legend invented by the third-century poet Tao Qian (372–427), also known as Tao Yuanming. In the legend, a fisherman loses his way and discovers a hidden paradise called the Peach-Blossom Cove in which people live happily without knowing the outside world. The fisherman returns home and

tells the story, but he cannot find the cove again. The lost cove has since inspired Chinese literati into utopian thoughts of a legendary happy land. The Peach-Blossom Cove contained a series of halls and galleries. The hall named Deep Source of Peach Blossom (Taoyuan Shenchu) at the northeast end (*Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 33) was created by Yongzheng, who was very pleased with the ingenious design and inscribed with his own calligraphy names for each chamber on the horizontal board.<sup>6</sup> Qianlong designated this cove Spring Beauty at Wuling (Wuling Chunse) and selected it as one of the Forty Views (Yu 1985, 3:1347–1348).

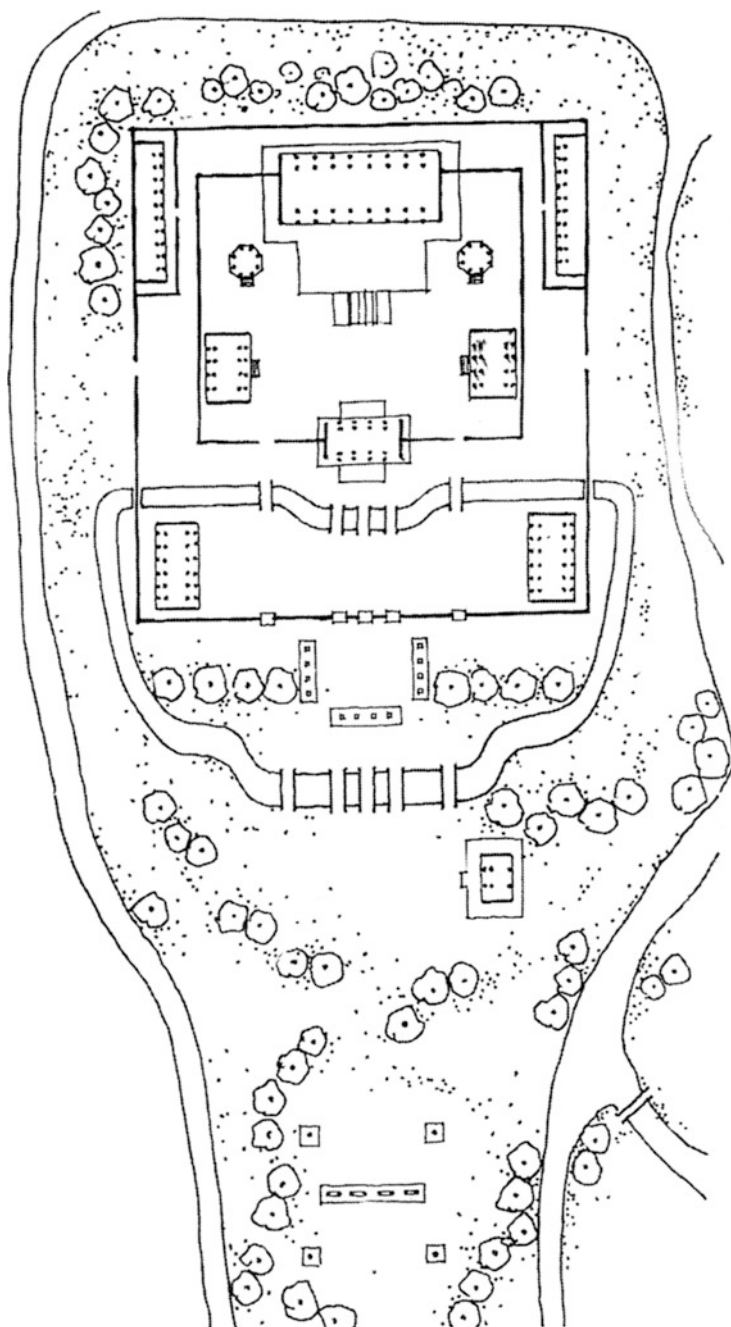


**Picture 2.10** The principal structure of Wuling Chunse (Spring Beauty at Wuling). Sketch by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

The Drill Field was located at the southwest corner of the original Yuanming Yuan. It featured a review stand and a large flat field for military exercises. Qianlong designated it as the High-Reaching Mountain and Outstretched River (Shangao Shuichang) (*Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 35). Across the Cloud-Living on the Moon Land and in the northwest corner, Qianlong spent 600,000 taels to complete the Ancestral Shrine in 1742. The main structure, called Blessing Palace (Anyou Gong), was set all the way back in the middle facing south (*Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 39).

<sup>6</sup>This cove is representative of those Yuanming Yuan structures designed and created on the basis of famous legends. It is an attempt to materialize an abstract mythology so as to increase excitement. Note that Wuling is the name of the place from where the legendary fisherman originally came.





**Picture 2.11** The Ancestral Shrine showing the Anyou Palace (*top*). Plan by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

Unlike most other structures in the garden, the construction materials of the Ancestral Shrine were mainly stone and marble. In the distance from the entrance, one could observe two pairs of “ornamental columns” (*huabiao*)<sup>7</sup> in front of the Memorial Archways (*paifang*), which was crowned with light yellow glazed tiles and eaves. The columns, each standing 20 ft high and about a 100 ft apart, were surrounded by four marble pillars carved with dragons, clouds, and flames alongside a marble balustrade and a stone animal. Five parallel marble bridges crossed a moat with three screen-shaped memorial arch ways that led to the palatial gates. Each bridge was guarded by two stone Chinese unicorns, or *kylin* (*qilin*, a Chinese unicorn symbolizing auspiciousness), approximately 174 cm tall on 98-cm-high stone platforms (cf. *YMYJ* 1984, 3:133). The gates led the way to the shrine’s tall, reddish outer wall, which was crowned with a yellow glazed tile roof. The inner wall was also red and covered by a yellow glazed tile roof. Inside the courtyard were the waiting rooms. The main gate stood on top of a splendid marble terrace ascended by marble stairs and balustrade, and a pair of bridges stretched across a moat. On both sides of a vast courtyard were guestrooms, two large incense burners, and a pair of pavilions with double roofs. The main shrine palace stood on a large marble terrace ascended by five stairways escorted by bronze animal figures. The central stairway, which was richly decorated with carved dragons, was reserved for the emperor’s use only. Qianlong designated it the Most Kindness and Eternal Blessing (Hongci Yonghu).

Inside the shrine, Qianlong placed the portraits and name tablets of Yongzheng and Kangxi to show his affection for his deceased forefathers. After Qianlong died, his own portrait and memorial tablet were placed here for remembrance and worshipping by his successor. The shrine, to which the Manchu royal family always attached great importance, would have been considered a truly exceptional structure in any type of garden (Yu 1985, 3:1351–1353; Zhaolian 1980, 391).

To the east of the Ancestral Shrine was the Faculty Club (Huifang Shuyuan). It consisted of such structures as the Expressing Excellence Gallery (Shuzao Xuan) in the front, the Conceiving Distance Chapel (Hanyuan Zhai) in the rear, the Relaxation Room (Sui’an Shi) to the west, and the Lofty Clouds Chamber (Zhuoyun Lou) to the east. Further east from the Faculty Club was the Half-Moon Gallery (Meiyue Xuan). South of the gallery between an arbor and a chamber stood an open-air structure, about three column wide, facing the uniquely designed scene called Traces of Snow on a Broken Bridge (Duanqiao Canxue) (cf. Yu 1985, 3:1354; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 41). The bridge was made of broken rocks in dozens of different shapes, some of which are still visible at the present-day ruin site.

Below the Faculty Club was a religious complex that emulated the famous Lamaist temple known as Yonghe Gong in Beijing. It had three sections: two rows of seven-column chambers connected by two hallways to the west; three rows of seven-column chambers in the middle; and the Good Omen Palace (Ruiying Gong)

<sup>7</sup>The so-called *huabiao* are tall ornamental columns erected in front of palaces and tombs. Several of the original columns from the Yuanming Yuan’s Ancestor’s Shrine can be found on the campus of the present-day Peking University.

comprising three Buddhist-style courts to the east. Qianlong designated this Buddhist compound the Dazzling Eaves under Heaven (Ritian Linyu) (cf. Yu 1985, 3:1355; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 43).

East of the religious complex was the largest scenic point, approximately twelve acres, with several magnificent pieces of architecture, including the nine-column principal structure surrounded by hills and brooks. One of the unique features of this scene was the great number of lotuses floating in shallow water. It is well known to Chinese literati that the great Song philosopher Zhou Dunyi (Zhou Lianxi) authored the celebrated essay “Passion for Lotus” (“Ailian Shuo”) to compare the lotus to gentlemen. Qianlong appreciated the essay and thus dubbed this scene the Scholar’s Wonderland (Lianxi Lechu) to indicate that he would be content to be surrounded by well-bred gentlemen.



**Picture 2.12** The main structure of Lianxi Lechu (Scholar’s Wonderland). Sketch by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

Walking further to the east in a bookish journey, we observe the Sounds of Wood and Water (Shuimu Mingse) with a Western-style water wheel pumping water into a room. The sounds of water, *sese*, *lingling*, echoing the rustling woods, helped the emperor attain a lofty realm which combines kindness with wisdom (cf. Yu 1985, 3:1362; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 49, 51).

Several rural scenes appeared around the northern end of the original Yuanming Yuan. The Yongzheng Emperor first created a farm in the garden to remind himself of the daily basis of rural China, where millions of subjects lived (Yu 1985, 3:1356).<sup>8</sup> His Majesty could observe from a pavilion how farm work was performed. Later he added to this rice field a silkworm farm and a brocade and dye mill. Ever since the Wei-Jin Period, between the third and fourth centuries, the Chinese literati continuously tried to find their own distinct character in the expression of garden design in general and flower arrangement and rock formation

<sup>8</sup>Incidentally, this rural scene is truly a village at the present time.

in particular. While some wanted to show their unique ambition, others wanted to demonstrate their stainless, magnanimous, or aloof personalities. Character and taste have long since been considered the “soul” of a garden and of its owner. Clearly mindful of his responsibility to diligently attend to government affairs and the people’s welfare, Yongzheng purposefully created a farm scene inside his beloved imperial garden to show his concern about the people as well as to underline his benevolent rule. It seems quite clear that the emperor used this theme to make a political claim to be a conscientious ruler of the majority farming population as well as to rehearse the self-serving Confucian moral ideology.

Qianlong designated five rural scenes. The one at the southeast neighborhood of the Sounds of Wood and Water (Shuimu Mingse) was dominated by a house in the shape of a gigantic Chinese ideogram, *tian*, meaning “rice field,” which the emperor dubbed Simple Life in Quietude (Danbo Ningjing), with the Rising Sunshine Chamber (Shuguang Lou) at its side. There were four other rural scenes. The Bountiful Farms (Duoji Ruyun) was a large rice field with a few small houses. The Orchid Fragrance over the Water (Yingshui Lanxiang) consisted of rice fields, weaving mills, and fishing ponds. The Fish-Leaping and Bird-Flying (Yuyue Yuanfei) contained numerous village huts surrounded by a stream. And the Northernmost Mountain Village (Beiyuan Shancun), originally known as Teaching Farming Gallery (Kenong Xuan), contained rows of small yet elegant chambers and villas on both sides of a narrow river (cf. Yu 1985, 3:1341–1375; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 45, 47, 53, 55, 57).

On the east side of the Northernmost Mountain Village arose the Sitting Rocks and the Winding Stream (Zuoshi Linliu), which included a replica of the celebrated Orchid Pavilion (Lan Ting) located at Shaoxing in Zhejiang Province. The Orchid Pavilion was the garden estate of the great East Jin calligrapher Wang Xizhi (321–379), who spent time there in the company of scholarly friends drinking wine, practicing calligraphy, and composing poems. When reciting poems outdoors, they sat on rocks and set their drinking cups in the nearby stream to see which cup would float downstream.<sup>9</sup> Qianlong, a poet in his own right, delighted in recreating Wang’s pleasure. Other structures to enrich the scene included the Clear Sound Pavilion (Qingyin Ge) and the All-Happy Garden (Tongle Yuan), where Qianlong dined frequently. Directly adjacent to this pavilion and garden was the Curving Courtyard and Lotus Pond (Quyuan Fenghe), modeled after the famed lotus view from Hangzhou’s West Lake. A nine-hole bridge (*jiukong qiao*) bisected the large rectangular pond. The three-mile-long left bank was also a replica of the famous Su

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<sup>9</sup>History records that in the spring of A.D. 353 the great calligrapher Wang Xizhi (321–379) and forty-two of his friends gathered at Kuaiji’s Orchid Pavilion in east Zhejiang Province. Qianlong recreated here the scene of this famous gathering. His Majesty’s 1779 inscription for this scene on a stone screen was taken away from the ruins in 1917 to the park later known as Sun Yat-sen Park in Beijing (Zhao 1981, 1:58). Qianlong’s Orchid Pavilion, like Wang Xizhi’s, was originally rectangular in shape; however, as the archive sources show, it was later rebuilt as an octagonal pavilion. A hexagonal thatched pavilion and a four-cornered bamboo pavilion were also added (YMYA 1991, 2:970).

Dongpo Bank in the West Lake (cf. *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 80–83; Yu 1985, 3:1376). These are the scenes that Qianlong brought back to the Yuanming Yuan from his southern tours.

The Majestic Sunset-Tinted Peaks of the West Hills (Xifeng Xiuse) was located at the northeast corner of the original Yuanming Yuan. It featured a sumptuous chamber designed especially for the Yongzheng Emperor to admire the sunset. The design was to bring the magnificent mountain view of sunsets into the broad and bright windows on the west side of the chamber, a good example of the “view borrowing” technique. In fact, as Yongzheng’s poem indicates, this design borrowed from the sunset view at the famed Mountain Lu (Lu Shan) in Jiangxi Province (Yu 1985, 3:1365; cf. commentaries in *Yuanming Yuan Tuyong* 1987). East of this viewing chamber was a larger structure named the Hanyuan Zhai surrounded by magnolia trees, which fill the air with fragrance when they blossom. Northeast of the chapel was the delightful Admiring Fish at the Flourish Haven (Huagang Guanyu), built to observe countless gold fish in a stream. At the foot of a nearby hill was the Cave of the Three Fairies (Sanxian Dong), which was large enough to accommodate two hundred persons (Yu 1985, 3:1365–1366; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 59). Qianlong gladly included this in his Forty Views.

Let us now turn our gaze to the southeastern edge of the garden entrance to find a small garden designated as the secluded Deep Vault of Heaven (Dongtian Shenchu). It was the campus of the royal school and comprised rows of elegant classrooms and dormitories concealed in a bamboo grove, orchids, and pine trees. Both Yongzheng and Qianlong attended school here when they were princes (cf. Qianlong’s 1744 poems in Yu 1985, 3:1378).<sup>10</sup>

On the other side of the entrance stood the Eternal Spring Fairy Hall (Changchun Xianguan), where Qianlong resided as crown prince for many years. It consisted of a three-column-wide front structure, a five-column-wide main building double the Green Shade Gallery (Lvying Xuan) in the rear, and a compound of galleries, studios, chapels, halls, and rooms to the west. After Prince Hongli had become Emperor Qianlong, he invited his beloved mother to live here (cf. Qianlong’s poem in *Yuanming Yuan Tuyong* 1987; *Qingshigao* 1976, 14:3862–3863, Chong Xian 1984, 240–262; Yu 1985, 3:1349–1350).

## 2.2 Scenes Surrounding the Lake

The second phase of construction in the Yuanming Yuan extended eastward to surround the largest lake of the garden, known as the Sea of Blessing (Fu Hai). The square lake was about 700 m on each side, which yielded the impression of a broad, extensive surface as well as a feeling of openness. The lake’s shore, which was supported by stone precipices, projected crumbling cliffs. There were steps leading to a half-moon shaped terrace, which in turn led to a tree-lined boulevard

<sup>10</sup>The Pleasant Gallery (Ruyi Guan) was specifically of service to foreign dignitaries.

embellished with colorful flowers. The open space around the lake was ideal for watching fireworks after sunset. When fireworks lit up the dark sky, lanterns of different colors and various shapes were normally hung on top of numerous buildings. Qianlong enjoyed sitting at the lakeside under the full moon. Attiret, who often accompanied the emperor on his boating trips, calculated the lake to be “very near five miles round” and considered it “one of the most beautiful parts in the whole pleasure ground” (Attiret 1982, 16). The calculation was obviously the priest’s impression rather than an accurate measurement. It is no doubt an artistic success to yield such a sense of extensiveness. The Yongzheng Emperor first called it a “sea” (*hai*), with the deliberate intention of exaggerating.

At the center of the lake was the Fairy’s Islet (Penglai Zhou), designed on the basis of a fairy tale drawn by the great Tang artist Li Sixun (651–716). Together with Wu Daozi, Li was one of the most accomplished painters in the tradition of Chinese landscape painting established since the Six Dynasties Period.<sup>11</sup> This technique gives landscape painting a three-dimensional prospect. The designer of the Fairy’s Islet evidently had in mind the surrounding topography and views, so that the whole landscape and architecture were dynamically adapted into the scenic environment. When designating his Forty Views, Qianlong called the Fairy’s Islet the Immortal Abode on the Fairy Terrace (Pengdao Yaotai).



**Picture 2.13** The principal structure of Pengdao Yaotai. Sketch by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

<sup>11</sup>Li Sixun’s fame in painting was recorded in the official history of the Tang Dynasty (Jiu Tangshu 1975, 7:2346).

The Fairy's Islet, rising 6 ft above the surface of the water, actually comprised three islets with the large one at the center named the Fairy Terrace (Xianren Chenglu Tai). Exactly square in shape, this terrace accommodated a dozen splendid chambers, principally the Reflection Pavilion (Jingzhong Ge) to the north, the Mind-Opening Chamber (Changjin Lou) to the east, and the World of Paradise (Jile Shijie), for the performance of either Buddhist or Daoist rites, to the west. The small islet to the southeast was called the Fairy Hill at the Sea (Yinghai Xianshan), while the Jade House on North Isle (Beidao Yuyu) was located to the northwest. The Fairy Terrace compound, which had four facades, each overlooking the large lake with "shining reflections of the colorful chambers," gave rise to a magnificent overall view (Yu 1985, 3:1371). Every man-made structure was half hidden in the midst of misty hills to project the image of a fairy tale. Fully charmed by this scene, which he referred to as the Big Rock, Father Attiret described it as having "inexpressible beauty and taste":

From it you have a view of all the palaces, scattered at proper distances round the shores of this sea; all the hills, that terminate about it; all the rivulets, which tend thither, either to discharge their waters into it, or to receive them from it; all the bridges, either at the mouths or ends of these rivulets; all the pavilions, and triumphal arches, that adorn any of these bridges; and all the groves, that are planted to separate and screen the different palaces, and to prevent the Inhabitants of them from being overlooked by one another.<sup>12</sup>

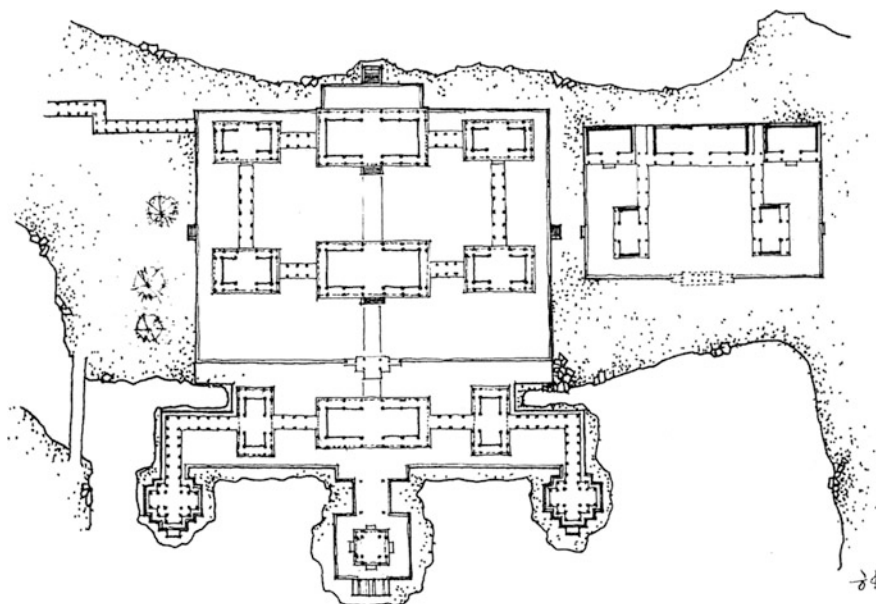
The Fairy Islet could only be reached by boat. Yongzheng regularly sailed on the lake with his favorite relatives and officials. His dragon barge was lavishly built. Normally a fleet of thirty boats followed the emperor's lead. Qianlong seemed to have enjoyed boating even more. He started the popular dragon boat race here to celebrate the Mid-May Festival Day (Duanwu Jie) annually (Zhaolian 1980, 378). Attiret also had the privilege to observe this particular festival with the emperor on the scene. He noted that numerous boats on the lake, either gilt or varnished, served different purposes: "sometimes, for taking the air; sometimes, for fishing; and sometimes, for jousts, and combats, and other diversions" (Attiret 1982, 20–21). In the summer of 1860, the Xianfeng Emperor had the pleasure of boating on the lake for the last time. Only four months later, the foreign invasion destroyed the garden (*Yuanming Cangsang* 1991, 11).

The most impressive structure surrounding the Sea of Blessing was the so-called A Wonderland in the Square Pot (Fanghu Shengjing), which the Qianlong Emperor completed in 1740. Situated at the northeast corner of the lake, with the Welcoming Warm Wind Arbor (Yingxun Ting) in front, was Wonderland's principal structure, a pair of chambers with gold glazed tiles. The Fine-Brocaded Chamber (Jinqi Lou) to the east and the Green Pyroxene Chamber (Feicui Lou) to the west stretched forward like two arms. Behind the two chambers rose a large enclosure surrounded by decorated gates and courtyards replete with pines, magnolias, common trees, and incense ornaments. In the front section of the enclosure, a colorful court was sandwiched by the Purple Cloud Chamber (Zixia Lou) to the east and the Blue Cloud Chamber (Biyun Lou) to the west.

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<sup>12</sup>Attiret 1982, 16–17.





**Picture 2.14** Fanghu Shengjing (Wonderland in the Square Pot). Plan by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu



**Picture 2.15** Yingxun Ting (Welcoming Warm Wind Arbor). Sketch by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

Surrounding the enclosure were the Flowery Chamber (Qionghua Lou) sandwiched by the Ample Luck Court (Qianxiang Dian) and the Abundant Fortune Pavilion (Wanfu Ge). To the east of the enclosure was the Pistillate Pearl Palace (Ruizhu Gong), and south of the palace was a shipyard and the Temple of the Dragon King (Longwang Miao). The pillars and beams of the numerous structures

in the Wonderland were painted in deep red with ornaments in green, white, and blue, which sharply distinguished the white marble from the blue water.

On the west side of the Wonderland was a scene borrowed from the West Lake of Hangzhou known as the Three Pools Reflecting the Moon (Santan Yinyue), which yielded the impression of three moons on the water surface. The overall design of this scenery clearly bore the elements of Daoist mystery. In fact, as Qianlong's own statement shows, the intention was to create a fairyland on earth so that finding a paradise overseas, as Qin Shi Huangdi had tried in vain to do, was absolutely unnecessary (Yu 1985, 3:1368–1369; cf. *YMYJ* 1983, 2:50).

To the west of the Wonderland laid the Calm Lake under Autumn Moon (Pinghu Qiuyue), one more replica from the West Lake of Hangzhou. Qianlong, who created the replica, enjoyed the bright and golden reflections on the lake on a clear mid-August full-moon night. If the emperor left here and walked westward, he would enter the Boundless Impartiality (Kuoran Dagong) at the northwest corner of the lake. This scenery consisted of a seven-column main structure also called the Boundless Impartiality; the All-Round Pretty Cottage (Huanxiu Shanfang); the Double Cranes Chapel (Shuanghe Zhai); the Lakeside Chamber (Linhu Lou), and a large pond. At the southern end of the lake's west shore stood the Bath in Virtue (Zaoshen Yude), which features the three-column Clear Void Gazebo (Chengyuan Xie) facing east with two smaller structures on its sides, namely, the Conceiving Pure Light (Han Qinghui) and the Conceiving Wonderful View (Han Miaoshi). North of the gazebo was first the Lookout Stand (Wangying Zhou) overlooking the lake then the Thick Willows Cover the Study (Shenliu Dushu Tang) (cf. Yu 1985, 3:1370–1371; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 64).



**Picture 2.16** The principal structure of Pinghu Qiuyue (Calm Lake under Autumn Moon). Sketch by Joseph C. Wang and Xinbai Yu

On the south shore of the lake was a large scene designated the Double Reflections and the Roaring Waterfall (Jiajing Mingqin), which Qianlong derived from Li Qinglian's poem to suggest two adjacent lakes as a pair of mirrors (Yu

1985, 3:1373). Indeed, between the large lake on the one side and a small inner lake on the other, a long narrow bank separated this artificially created scenery. Its main structure was a colorful pavilion standing on a long straight bank connecting two islets, one at each end, thus enclosing a space of water behind the bank. Reflections of the pavilion on both water surfaces produced a terrific view. South of the pavilion across a strip of water stood the Chamber of Distance (Juyuan Lou). On its south side, a straight bank seemed to have been hooked by a U-shaped bank.

The islet to the east side of the bank had an artificial hill with a waterfall. The roaring sounds of the falls could be heard from the nearby Nourishing Palace (Guangyu Gong), which was accompanied by the Luck-Gathering Court (Ningxiang Dian) to the south. East of the palace on a hill was the site of the famous bell duplicated from Mt. Nanping near the West Lake in Hangzhou, known as the Evening Bell at Nanping (Nanping Wanzhong). The duplicated bell was the exact shape and size of the original (Yu 1985, 3:1372; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 74). According to a legendary story, when the bell was first placed here, its sounds were not so loud as they should have been. An ingenious young craftsman in the Yuanming Yuan dug a deep well beside the bell, and the setup accelerated the vibration of the sounds. Then Qianlong heard the bell loud and clear from his living quarters on the Nine Continents (Peng and Zhang 1985, 134–136).

At the southeast corner of the lake was the scene designated as the Other Paradise (Bieyou Dongtian). Its main structure, about five columns wide and surrounded by a group of spotless villas, included the better-known Green Gathering Chamber (Nacui Lou) as well as the Pretty Water and Wood Chamber (Shuimu Qinghua) and the Appreciating Chapel (Shishang Zhai) (Yu 1985, 3:1372; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 72). On the east shore of the lake were the cottages designated by Qianlong as the Belle Villa (Jiexiu Shanfang). The principal structure, approximately three columns wide, was accompanied by the Green-View Arbor (Lancui Ting) below, the Cloud-Searching Chamber (Xunyun Lou) above, and the Smooth-as-Silk Chamber (Chenglian Lou) and the Pleasant Study (Yiran Shuwu) in the rear. With hills to its back, the Belle Villa was fully open to the lake, and this was where Qianlong was most pleased with the fog floating at sunrise and with the shady west hills at the sunset (Yu 1985, 3:1371–1372; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 70).

At the northern end of the east shore, a group of lakeside houses were designated Contemplation at the Lakeside (Hanxu Langjian). This elegant name, which was also the name for its principal structures, as in most of other designated names, alluded to a Tang poem that compared the clear lake to a penetrating mirror reflecting one's mind. The scenery contained a gallery called Sunset at the Thunder Hill (Leifeng Xizhao), in which the name board of "Hanxu Langjian" was hung. At its side, to the northwest, stood a square-shaped structure named the Springlike Kindness (Hui Ruchun), and the Cloud-Searching Gazebo (Xunyun Xie) together with the Orchid Courtyard (Yilan Ting) were to the northeast (Yu 1985, 3:1372, 1373; *Yuanming Yuan Sishijing Tuyong* 1985, 77).

All the scenic points around the large Sea of Blessing lake gave rise to a charming poetic atmosphere in which reality and fantasy were mixed. Reality (*shi*) refers to the accentuation of the structural substance, while fantasy (*xu*) derives from the mind, which creates the reality. Fantasy in Chinese garden art, however, is not completely abstract; rather, it is the intangible, implicit, and reserved elements in garden-making. If reality is form, fantasy is the content absent of transparent intelligibility. Thus, the interplay of reality and fantasy in the search for fantastic views is an epistemological prerequisite of any Chinese designer. In this sense, the specially designated Forty Views in the Yuanming Yuan provide an excellent model of such interplay.

Father Attiret came to see the Yuanming Yuan only a year before the designation of the Forty (Best) Views was complete. He saw “numerous pleasure houses” on “a vast compass of ground,” and the “raised hills from 20 to 60 foot high,” which formed many “little valleys.” The “valleys” in Attiret’s writing could well be the designated scenes. He also took note of many “clear streams” running into large or small lakes and a magnificent boat “78 foot long and 24 foot broad with a very handsome house raised” on one of the canals. He was impressed by the “different courts, open and closed porticos, parterres, gardens, and cascades, which when view’d all together, have an admirable effect upon the eyes.” The more than two hundred buildings, which constitute the Forty Views, convinced Attiret that he had never seen such pleasure grounds in Europe. He considered the Yuanming Yuan simply “a veritable paradise on earth” (Attiret 1982, 7–8).

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A Paradise Lost

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