

Suzhou (China)

No 813bis

Identification

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| <i>Nomination</i> | The classical gardens of Suzhou (extension) |
| <i>Location</i> | Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province |
| <i>State Party</i> | People's Republic of China |
| <i>Date</i> | 6 January 1999 |

Justification by State Party

Four of the classical gardens of Suzhou (the Humble Administrator's Garden, the Lingering Garden, the Garden of the Master of the Nets, and the Mountain Villa with Embracing Beauty) were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1997 [under **criteria i, ii, iii, iv, and v**]. Five of the other gardens in Suzhou (the Canglang Pavilion, the Lion Forest Garden, the Garden of Cultivation, the Couple's Garden Retreat, and the Retreat and Reflection Garden), which were laid out in different periods of history with distinct characteristics and which have been well preserved, are also exceptional specimens of the classical garden.

The gardens of Suzhou have been acknowledged as masterpieces of Chinese garden art. In them the perfect integration of art, nature, and philosophy is without parallel. At its meeting in 1997 the World Heritage Committee considered that the four inscribed gardens failed to represent the full value of the Chinese garden and suggested that others might be added to achieve this objective.

The five gardens that have been selected for this proposal for extension are inside and outside the ancient city of Suzhou. They were designed and constructed in successive periods – Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing – and display pronounced differences their nature representative of distinct periods of history and artistic achievements. They were visited by many eminent people – rulers, artists, poets, philosophers – and have influenced the design of gardens in many other parts of China.

[Abridged from the text supplied by the State Party in the nomination dossier.]

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, these gardens constitute a group of *sites*. They also conform with the definition of the *clearly defined landscape designed and*

created intentionally by man as set out in paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

History and Description

History

The *Canglang Pavilion* was built on the order of the Northern Song poet Su Sunqin in the early 11th century, on the site of an earlier, destroyed garden. During the Yuan and Ming Dynasties (1279-1644) it became the Mystical Concealment Temple. Over succeeding centuries it was repeatedly restored, a tradition maintained by the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The *Lion Forest Garden* was created by a group of Zen Buddhist disciples of the famous Abbot Tianni in 1342, during the Yuan Dynasty, as the Budhi Orthodox Monastery. It acquired its present name because of a group of grotesque rocks and a bamboo forest, referring obliquely to a Buddhist legend. The garden, which attracted scholars and artists, was detached from the temple in the 17th century. Purchased by an industrialist in 1918, it was donated to the state after the foundation of the PRC.

The *Garden of Cultivation* was laid out during the Ming Dynasty, in the 16th century. Before receiving its present name, it was known first as Zui Ying Hall and then the Herb Garden.

The origins of the *Couple's Garden Retreat* date back to the Qing Dynasty, in the early 18th century. Here an important governor invited the famous painter Gu Yun to build a garden house. It was flanked by gardens on either side, hence its present name. The East Garden was restored and opened to the public in 1965 and the buildings and the West Garden in 1990-94.

The *Retreat and Reflection Garden* is the work of the famous painter Yuan Long, who built it in 1885-87. It takes its name from its original owner, a disgraced military commander, for whom it signified, in his words, "Advance, to dedicate my loyalty to the service of my country; Retreat, to reflect on mending my ways."

Description

The *Canglang Pavilion* features a range of man-made mountains in its interior and waterscapes outside. It is reached across a zigzag stone bridge, when the mountains, covered with old trees and bamboo, suddenly become visible. The square pavilion stands on top of one of the mountains, inscribed with an appropriate text. Most of the other structures in the garden, some twenty in all, were rebuilt in the Qing Dynasty; they are artfully disposed around the mountains and connected by a roofed walkway. A double corridor alongside the canal to the north provides dramatic links between the external waterscapes and the internal mountain landscape through more than a hundred latticed windows.

The *Lion Forest Garden* features a series of man-made mountains with various buildings, disposed around the lake, together with an artificial waterfall on steep cliffs. The 14th century mountains are still clearly visible. The woodland cover of the craggy mountains is pierced by winding paths and there are many caves and grotesque rocks. There are 22

buildings in the garden, the most impressive of which is the Hall of Peace and Happiness, a masterpiece of the Mandarin Duck style of hall.

A quarter of the total area of the *Garden of Cultivation* is occupied by the central pond, which has a mountain landscape to the south and a group of buildings, to the north. The two sides are linked to east and west by roofed open galleries. It is very typical, both in its layout and in the design of its thirteen buildings, of the classical Ming Dynasty garden.

The structures at the centre of the *Couple's Garden Retreat* consist of four aligned buildings. The East Garden is dominated by a dramatically realistic mountain of yellow stone which rises from a pool. The pool is flanked by several attractive Ming style buildings. The style of the West Garden is more subdued, its limestone hills pierced by interlinking caves and tunnels.

Changing vistas characterize the *Retreat and Reflection Garden*. The group of buildings is linked with the garden proper located to the east by a boat-shaped guesthouse. Once again, the central feature of the garden is the pool, surrounded by a series of elegant buildings, the most striking of which is the double-tiered Celestial Bridge. The Gathering Beauty Pavilion overlooks the entire garden from the north-west corner.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Like the gardens already inscribed on the World Heritage List, the five that make up the proposal for extension are protected by a series of statutes, stemming from the Constitution of the PRC and including the Law of Cultural Relics Protection, the City Planning Law, the Environmental Protection Law, and the Penal Law. The Cultural Relics Protection Law operates through a number of sets of regulations, and these are reinforced by other regulations relating to fire prevention, prevention of noise pollution, etc.

Since 1982 Suzhou has been one of the designated Historical and Cultural Cities of the PRC. It has an urban master plan within which the gardens are placed in the highest category, requiring Class A protection; this includes the delineation of three levels of protection area around each: these amply comply with the requirements of the World Heritage Committee for buffer zones. There are special Regulations for the Preservation and Administration of the Classical Gardens of Suzhou, promulgated in 1996.

The Canglang Pavilion, the Lion Forest Garden, and the Retreat and Reflection Garden have been protected cultural relics of the People's Government of Jiangsu Province since 1982, and the other two gardens making up this proposal for extension were added in 1995.

Suzhou is also a key city for environmental protection in China, and the control of environmental pollution is stringent, which benefits the classical gardens in particular. Complete protection is afforded by these measures to the gardens and to their immediate environs.

Management

All the gardens are the property of the People's Republic of China.

Overall responsibility for National Cultural Relics lies with the National Administration for Cultural Heritage of the PRC. At national level the Ministry of Construction is responsible for overseeing all interventions. Management is delegated down to provincial level, in this case to the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Culture and the Jiangsu Provincial Committee for Construction, and then further to their equivalents within the Suzhou municipal administration. Day-to-day management has been in the hands of the Suzhou Municipal Administrative Bureau of Gardens since it was set up in 1952.

The Suzhou Classical Garden Construction Company is an autonomous group, created in 1980, with special expertise in this field.

A management plan has been drawn up, within the framework of the existing legislation and regulations. This lays down precise requirements regarding the protection, funding, monitoring, maintenance, manning, administration, and educational role of the gardens. This forms part of the Overall City Plan for Suzhou, which also includes a Tourism Development Plan, which has special provisions relating to the presentation and use of the classical gardens.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Since their creation, the gardens have undergone many vicissitudes. Following the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 they have been given special consideration by government at all levels. Major rehabilitation and restoration campaigns began almost immediately, and the gardens were opened to the public between 1954 and 1994.

There is currently a comprehensive monitoring plan in operation, with provision for routine maintenance and programmed conservation projects for each of the gardens. This work is the responsibility of the Suzhou Municipal Administrative Bureau of Gardens.

Authenticity

In its evaluation of the four gardens inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1997, ICOMOS commented "Great care has been taken to ensure that the gardens have retained their original appearance. They have, of course, undergone many modifications and metamorphoses during their long histories, and the form to which they have been restored is that of the mid 20th century. It has been possible to achieve a high level of authenticity because of the exhaustive documentation of the gardens of Suzhou over some two hundred years." These observations are equally valid for the five gardens proposed for the extension.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Suzhou in January 2000. The gardens were also visited by ICOMOS experts in September 1998.

Qualities

The Chinese landscape garden is one of the pinnacles of this form of applied art. It combines a number of artistic and horticultural forms and techniques to achieve a harmonious blend of nature and artifice to create evocative miniature landscapes for urban dwellers. In this sense it is at the opposite end of the scale from the large-scale gardens of Europe and other parts of Asia. [*ICOMOS evaluation of original nomination, 1997.*]

Comparative analysis

The gardens of Suzhou, acknowledged to be the heart of Chinese classical garden design, are masterpieces of the genre. There is no comparable group anywhere else in the region.

Brief description

Classical Chinese garden design, which seeks to recreate natural landscapes in miniature, is nowhere better illustrated than in the nine gardens in the historic city of Suzhou. They are generally acknowledged to be masterpieces of the genre. Dating from the 11th-19th centuries, the gardens reflect the profound metaphysical importance of natural beauty in Chinese culture in their meticulous design. [*Adaptation of text in Brief Descriptions of Sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, WHC.99/15.*]

Recommendation

That this extension be *approved*.

ICOMOS, September 2000