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
The structures at the centre of the design of its thirteen buildings, of the classical Ming Dynasty galleries. It is very typical, both in its layout and in the design of its thirteen buildings, of the classical Ming Dynasty garden.

The two sides are linked to east and west by roofed open 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 of which is the double-tiered Celestial Bridge. The gathering 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