



*A CLOSER LOOK*

## NATURE WITHIN WALLS

The Chinese Garden Court at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

A RESOURCE FOR EDUCATORS

## NATURE WITHIN WALLS

### The Chinese Garden Court at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

*The borrowed views are among the most important in a garden design. There are borrowings from distant scenes and from nearby scenes from above and from below, and borrowings at different seasons of the year. When touched by objects and emotions, our eyes are caught and our hearts leap. It is like a painting in which ideas are suggested beyond the brushstrokes.*

—Ji Cheng (born 1582), *Yuan Ye* (the earliest extant treatise from the Ming dynasty on Chinese architecture and garden design of the period)

This publication for teachers focuses on the Chinese Garden Court, one of the most pleasant and popular parts of the Museum's Asian art galleries. Its architectural elements, rock formations, plantings, and pond not only provide a peaceful environment but also offer visitors a window through which they can glimpse how nature was traditionally perceived in Chinese culture and how these ideas influenced the arts of this ancient civilization. The goal of this publication is to inspire young people and adults to look more closely at works of art—to discover that details are essential to understanding an artwork's meaning. This resource may be used as an introduction to looking at and interpreting the Chinese Garden Court or as a springboard for exploring how it reflects the culture in which it was made. While teachers and students may use these materials in the classroom, study and preparation are best rewarded by a visit to the Museum.

## FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The fabrication of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Astor Court and Ming Room in 1981 created the first authentic reconstruction of a Chinese garden in a North American museum. Museum trustee Brooke Astor's enthusiasm for the installation—inspired by her own childhood in China—has meant that visitors of all ages and backgrounds can enjoy this tranquil retreat and gain revealing insights into fundamental Chinese cultural concepts about art and nature. We hope the educational materials in this publication will help teachers and students gain further knowledge about the garden and Chinese civilization.

*Nature within Walls: The Chinese Garden Court* summarizes years of research, teaching, and thought by many colleagues at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Associate Museum Educator Elizabeth Hammer prepared the text, with the unstinting support of Maxwell K. Hearn, curator of Chinese paintings, who also played the key role in preparing the video tour on the accompanying CD-ROM. Judith G. Smith, administrator of the Department of Asian Art, attentively reviewed the text and layout and supplied many insightful suggestions. Felicia Blum, associate museum educator, prepared the classroom activities.

The Metropolitan's Education staff, drawing on years of teaching in the Chinese Garden Court, contributed substantially to the effort. Nicholas Ruocco, Stella Paul, and Deborah Howes supplied crucial advice and support, as did Edith Watts, Michael Norris, Rika Burnham, Alice Schwarz, Barbara Woods, Karen Ohland, and Rebecca Arkenberg. Teresa Russo, working with Jessica Glass, Marla Mitchnick, Paul Caro, Stephen Rotker, and Felix Cotto, produced the accompanying CD-ROM. Catherine Fukushima shepherded the project, Merantine Hens supervised editorial work, and Masha Turchinsky oversaw design and production. Emily Roth and Naomi Niles refined the bibliography. Barbara Bridgers, Bruce Schwarz, and Karen Willis of the Photograph Studio supplied additional photographs of the garden; Robert Goldman handled additional imaging. Pamela Reboy provided valuable research. Christine Scornavacca and Justine Cherry-Macklin of the Development Office also provided invaluable assistance. Joseph Cho and Stefanie Lew of Binocular created the handsome design.

Located in the heart of the Metropolitan Museum and of its Asian Art collection, the Chinese Garden Court is a great work of art that offers solitude and inspiration for the contemplation of art. We extend our sincerest thanks to The Freeman Foundation, which provided support for creating this publication. Their dedication to the broader understanding of Asian art and culture has been exemplary.

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Cover: The Chinese Garden Court, view toward the south wall

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Landscape paintings and garden design closely influenced each other. While professional garden designers were consulted, especially from the late Ming dynasty onward, scholar-gentlemen viewed the opportunity to design a garden as a stimulating creative endeavor. A noted garden designer and landscape painter, Ji Cheng, advised designers to “take the whitened wall as the painting paper, and paint it with rocks.” Similarly, many mountains in landscape paintings bear a closer resemblance to garden and table rocks than they do to peaks in nature.


## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This teacher resource examines the many components of the Museum's Chinese Garden Court. While this publication is intended primarily for social studies, history, literature, and art teachers of grades 5 through 12, educators of other disciplines and grade levels may find it useful. The various elements of the garden are most fully presented in the narrated video tour on the enclosed CD-ROM. The teacher may wish to review this tour before sharing it with students. This booklet provides background material about gardens and nature in Chinese culture for the educator's preparations. Also included are suggestions for topics of discussion and relevant activities for use in the classroom. This material is meant to draw students' attention to some of the key features of the garden and to help them understand how these details can embody fundamental cultural concepts. A glossary (words defined in the glossary are called out in the margins) and a list of bibliographic and other resources provide handy references. Of course, the garden cannot be fully appreciated without actually visiting it.

The Museum has produced two other resources about the Chinese Garden Court that the educator might find useful. Soon after the construction of the garden court in 1980, the Department of Asian Art published a *Bulletin* entitled "A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at The Metropolitan Museum of Art," which provides detailed information on the garden's components, its prototype in China, and the role gardens played as a source of imagery in the visual arts (see Resource section). Another useful resource that can help to prepare students for a visit to the Museum is the video *The Ming Garden*, which focuses on the construction of the Chinese Garden Court, including a description of the congenial collaboration between the Chinese craftsmen and the American builders.







The visitor to a Chinese garden is presented with numerous, ever-changing views of the garden that evoke the experience of traveling through a wilderness setting or viewing a landscape painting. Throughout the garden, terraces, doorways, and pavilions frame vistas for one to stop and contemplate, while natural stone steps mark transition points between the man-made architectural environment and the irregular and unpredictable world of nature.





## Nature and Chinese Gardens

### THE CHINESE GARDEN COURT IN THE MET

The Museum's Chinese Garden Court is based on a small seventeenth-century courtyard that is part of an actual garden, known as Wangshi Yuan or the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets, in Suzhou. In 1980, using this existing garden as a model, Chinese craftsmen created a replica in the Museum using man-made and natural elements crafted or found in China and assembled with traditional construction tools and methods. The building of the garden court was the first permanent cultural exchange between the United States and the People's Republic of China and was the first of a number of Chinese gardens to be built in North America.

SUZHOU

A garden was first built on the site of the present Wangshi Yuan in the twelfth century, but it has undergone many alterations since that time, and the Museum's version follows the simplicity and harmonious proportions that were implemented during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The main structural features of the courtyard are a half-pavilion (called Cold Spring Pavilion or Lengquan Ting, page 4) on the west wall and a meandering covered corridor along the east side (page 8). A small pool with goldfish called Deep Jade Green Spring (Hanbi Quan, page 12) is nestled among the rocks at the southwest corner. At the court's north end lies the Ming Room (Ming Xuan), with its south-facing porch. The entire garden is surrounded by a white wall (pages 10–11), which in its original setting kept out the hustle-and-bustle of the mundane world and created the sense of being in a quiet oasis. (The layout of the garden court is more fully described in the narrated tour on the enclosed CD-ROM.)

MING DYNASTY

An important element in Chinese garden design, the covered walkway guides visitors to the most interesting views, while providing a pleasant refuge from the rain or scorching sun.

The Museum's Chinese Garden Court was built with materials brought from China that are authentic to Ming-dynasty prototypes (page 13, top). Rare *nan* wood, a broad-leafed evergreen from southwestern China that is now a protected species, was used for the fifty hand-hewn columns that support the roofs of the structures. In earlier times this wood was used in large quantities for buildings







The bare white walls that enclose and isolate the garden are pierced by windows with lattice patterns made from low-fired ceramic tiles. Each design is different, adding yet more visual diversity to the garden. An interest in geometric patterns characterizes China's earliest works of art. These designs were found in the *Yuan Ye*, an early-seventeenth-century Ming-dynasty garden manual. Placing plants or rocks in the shallow spaces behind these windows is a traditional device for creating the illusion that further vistas lie beyond, even though the actual space between the window and the wall behind might be minimal.



Deep Jade Green Spring (Hanbi Quan) contains goldfish, which add color and liveliness.

because it was highly prized for its rich color, fine grain, and its ability to repel insects. The horizontal beams and some of the rafters of the garden court are made of fir; the curved rafters in the back of the Ming Room and the balustrades are constructed of camphor wood; and the room's window frames and lattice work are made of ginkgo wood. The ceramic floor and ceiling tiles were produced in a former imperial kiln outside Suzhou that was reopened for this project (page 13, bottom). The stonelike, bluish-gray color of the floor tiles is achieved by reducing the amount of oxygen in the kiln during the firing.

Particularly distinctive and prized are the ornamental Taihu rocks (page 14), which provide important focal points in the garden. Some of these rocks have been “piled up” to form “peaks,” others form a grotto for the pond and beds for the plantings. Because rocks and plantings are intended to evoke a wilderness landscape, blossoming plants are limited. Instead, the cycle of seasons is represented by specimen flowering plants in ceramic pots, which are moved into the garden as they come into bloom. Because the Museum's garden court is an interior space maintained at a constant temperature, trees—pines, maples, and plum—that need climatic changes to thrive are absent. But because Suzhou has a mild climate, most of the garden's plantings are also found there, including “bookmark grass” (mondo grass or *liriope*), which grows along the edges of the rocks, and the large banana plant, the tallest tree in the garden.

The hallmark of Chinese wood construction is its accomplished joinery, which has served as the basis for constructing both buildings and furniture since ancient times. To join two pieces of wood, carpenters carved projecting tenons for insertion into correspondingly shaped holes, or mortises. Glue was used only sparingly and nails not at all. When joins needed additional stability, wood pins or pegs were passed through the wooden members to hold them in place.



Drip-tiles draw rainwater into streams that run off the pointed ends. The authentic Ming design shows the stylized symbols for good fortune, long life, and wealth. Peaches, found on the concave tiles behind the triangular drip tiles, are also symbols of longevity, as they are associated with a legendary fruit that can make one immortal.





## NATURE IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

Since ancient times, Chinese culture has paid great attention to the natural world, and even very early philosophical and historical texts contain sophisticated conceptions about the nature of the cosmos. These ideas predate the formal development of the native belief systems of Daoism and Confucianism, and as part of the foundation of Chinese culture, they were incorporated into the fundamental tenets of these two philosophies. Similarly, these ideas strongly influenced Buddhism when it arrived in China in the first or second century A.D. Therefore, the ideas about nature described below, as well as their manifestation in Chinese gardens, are consistent with all three belief systems.

DAOISM

CONFUCIANISM

BUDDHISM

The natural world has long been conceived in Chinese thought as a self-generating complex arrangement of elements that are continuously changing and interacting. Uniting these disparate elements is the Dao, or the Way. Dao is the dominant principle by which all things exist, but it is not understood as a causal or governing force. Chinese philosophy tends to focus on the relationships between the various elements in nature rather than on what made or controls them.

DAO

Within this structure, each part of the universe is made up of complementary aspects known as yin and yang. Yin, which can be described as passive, dark, secretive, negative, weak, feminine, and cool, and yang, which is active, bright, revealed, positive, masculine, and hot, constantly interact and shift from one extreme to the other, giving rise to the rhythm of nature and unending change.

YIN-YANG

Traditional Chinese gardens were meant to offer a feeling of being in the larger natural world, so that the occupant could capture the sensations of wandering through the landscape. Compositions of garden rocks were viewed as mountain ranges and towering peaks; miniature trees and bushes suggested ancient trees and forests; and small ponds or springs represented mighty rivers and oceans. In other words, the garden presented the larger world of nature in microcosm. In keeping with this goal to recreate actual landscapes, masses of colorful cultivated blossoms, flowerbeds of regular geometric shape, and singular viewing points (such as the formal gardens of Versailles, for example) were all avoided. Instead, the many aspects of a Chinese garden are revealed one at a time. A garden's scenery is constantly altered by the shifting effects of light and the seasons, which form an important part of one's experience of a garden and help engage all the senses, not just sight. (Although the Museum's garden court is protected by a skylight, Chinese gardens are open to the air and, therefore, are affected by the weather.)

According to Daoist beliefs, man is a crucial component of the natural world and is advised to follow the flow of nature's rhythms. Daoism also teaches that

"Scholars' rocks" refer to fantastic stones that, because of their distinctive shape, texture, and color, were deemed appropriate for display in the scholar's studio. By the Tang dynasty, three principal aesthetic criteria had been identified for judging these stones as well as the larger examples featured in gardens: leanness (*shou*), perforations (*tou*), and surface texture (*zhou*). These criteria led to a preference for stones that were vertically oriented—often with a top-heavy shape—riddled with cavities and holes, and richly textured with furrows, dimples, or striations.

people should maintain a close relationship with nature for optimal moral and physical health. The interdependence of man and nature is expressed in Chinese gardens by the presence of pavilions and walkways among the plants, rocks, and water. Similarly, Chinese gardens formed an integral part of an enclosed family compound that included residential buildings, kitchens, studios, and storage rooms for multiple generations of a family—people could step into or glimpse the beauty of nature at any moment in their daily routine.

#### FENGSHUI

#### QI

Chinese gardens were arranged in accordance with a set of principles for siting structures and interpreting landscape configurations—known as fengshui or geomancy. Thus, before a structure was to be built, a fengshui master would be engaged to identify a location and directional placement that would take advantage of the beneficial flow of *qi*, the enlivening energy of the cosmos. The structure and its accompanying natural elements were placed to conduct the earth's *qi* along the best possible course. The earth's *qi* influences the *qi* of people in ways that can either aid or harm their health, happiness, and fortune. (Traditional Chinese medicine is similarly concerned with the proper flow of *qi* within the body and achieving a harmonious balance among influential elements.)

One of the most important considerations in garden design is the harmonious arrangement of elements expressing different aspects of yin and yang. The juxtaposition and blending of opposites can be seen in the placement of irregularly shaped rocks next to smooth, rectangular clay tiles; soft moss growing on rough rocks; flowing water contained by a craggy grotto; and a dark forecourt that precedes entry into a sun-drenched central courtyard. The Chinese word for landscape, *shanshui*, embodies the juxtaposition of opposites joining the characters for mountain (*shan*) and water (*shui*).

#### SHANSHUI

Since at least the Han dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.), mountains have been thought of as the home of immortals and Daoist deities, as well as the point of communication between Earth and the heavens. The ideograph for immortal, 仙 (*xian*), is made up of a combination of the character for person, 人 (*ren*), and the character for mountain, 山 (*shan*). Bronze and ceramic conical incense burners depicting overlapping mountain peaks filled with small images of people and animals (when the object was used, it would have been surrounded by cloudlike billows of smoke) are early visualizations of this notion. (For an example, see the Museum's earthenware incense burner from the Eastern Han period ([25–220 A.D.], 65.74.2.) There are numerous legends in Chinese literature, most notably *Peach Blossom Spring* by the fifth-century poet Tao Yuanming (365–427 A.D.), that tell of hidden paradises accessible only through passageways in mountain grottoes. While immortal beings and paradises are associated primarily with Daoism, Buddhist texts also describe the heavenly abodes of some of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas (enlightened beings)

Eroded rocks were piled in horizontal arrangements to suggest mountain ranges. Typically, a tall vertical rock was placed to tower above the others as a dominant peak. This composition mimics the appearance of the character for mountain 山 (*shan*). Although garden rocks were usually not directly associated with a specific form, garden owners enjoyed imagining the shapes of animals, dragons, and other creatures in their contours. For example, the curators of the Department of Asian Art refer to the low rock on the right as “Snoopy.”





as mountainous islands. This mystical quality of mountain retreats inspired a preference in garden design for doorways that separated the garden from the everyday world; rocks with convoluted, fantastic shapes; and the practice of incorporating mythical references in the choice of names for gardens and their components.

## GARDENS IN CHINESE HISTORY

According to historical records of the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–256 B.C.), the earliest gardens in China were vast parks built by the aristocracy for pleasure and hunting. Han-dynasty texts mention a greater interest in the ownership of rare plants and animals, as well as an association between fantastic rocks and the mythical mountain paradises of immortals. Elaborate gardens continued to be built by members of the upper classes throughout China's dynastic history.

### SCHOLAR-GENTLEMEN

A smaller, more intimate type of garden, represented by the Museum's Chinese Garden Court, also developed in China. Gardens of this kind are associated with scholar-gentlemen, or literati, and have been celebrated in Chinese literature since the fourth century A.D. Paintings, poems, and historical books describe famous gardens of the literati, which were often considered a reflection of their owners' cultivation and aesthetic taste. The number of private gardens, especially in the region around Suzhou in southern China, grew steadily after the twelfth century. Both the temperate climate and the great agricultural and commercial wealth of the region encouraged members of the upper class to lavish their resources on the cultivation of gardens. During the period of the Mongol conquest in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, many literati in this region found official employment both disagreeable and hard to obtain and therefore sought a life exclusively devoted to self-cultivation and the arts. The garden became the focus of an alternative lifestyle that celebrated quiet contemplation and literary pursuits, often in the company of like-minded friends. This mode of life continued to flourish through the Ming period, when economic prosperity and expanding literacy made possible a new class of educated patrons.

## SCHOLAR-GENTLEMEN AND THEIR GARDENS

The influential social and political position of scholar-gentlemen frequently allowed them to accumulate wealth as well as prestige. Typically, however, these men derived most of their income from landholdings, rather than from government stipends. Many successful literati owned sizable estates that provided them



*Elegant Gathering in the Apricot Garden* (detail), Ming dynasty (1368–1644), 1437; after Xie Huan (ca. 1370–1450); handscroll: ink and colors on silk, 14¾ × 94¾ in. (37.5 × 240.7 cm); Purchase, The Dillon Fund Gift, 1989 (1989.141.3)

with a residence, gardens for leisurely activities, and an economic base. During times of leisure—either at the end of a busy day or during extended periods of retirement from official appointments—scholar-gentlemen retreated to their gardens to enjoy the company of friends, read quietly, relax in a natural setting, or engage in one of the Four Accomplishments. The Metropolitan Museum’s painting *Elegant Gathering in the Apricot Garden* by Xie Huan (1983.141.3; above) commemorates a gathering of influential fifteenth-century government ministers in which the participants are depicted surrounded by the accoutrements of these pastimes: painting, poetry, a chesslike game of strategy known as *weiqi* (pronounced way-chee, and called *go* in Japanese), and playing the zither (*qin*). Confucian teachings urged individuals to use such occasions to refresh their spirits and to cultivate their moral character. According to Confucian precepts, when the attentions and efforts of an upright individual were not directed outward for the benefit of others, they should be focused inward for self-cultivation, so that one would be better able to serve society in the future. Thus, gardens became an important locus for study and artistic pursuits, as well as for social gatherings. Gardens also embodied virtues extolled by Daoism, which advocated a renunciation of politics and human affairs in order to harmonize oneself with the cosmic rhythms of nature. (A scholar-gentleman’s formal education consisted of intensive study of Confucian classics, while Daoist and Buddhist tenets formed an important part of the culture in which he lived. Additionally, some individuals were devoted practitioners of one tradition or the other. For this reason, as well as a tendency in East Asia for different religions to blend and overlap, scholar-gentlemen were influenced simultaneously by a variety of beliefs.)

Gardens provided scholar-gentlemen a means, at least in part, of achieving these antithetical ideals of pursuing self-cultivation while fleeing from the “dust” of the world and living in reclusion in nature. Wandering along a garden’s walkways and gazing at its changing views, one could imagine oneself in a mountain retreat, either alone or in the company of convivial companions. The wish for a simple, rustic life appears frequently in Chinese literature and the visual arts.

#### FOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS







Ming Room



Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), *The Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician: The Banana Tree Railing*, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), 1551; leaf from an album: ink on paper, 10½ × 10¾ in. (26.2 × 27.3 cm); Gift of Douglas Dillon, 1979 (1979.458.1)

This emphasis on nature formed the foundation of the artistic preferences of the literati. In keeping with Confucian ethics, a proper gentleman should abhor ostentation and espouse a lifestyle informed by a close affinity with nature and the qualities of simplicity and elegance. As can be seen in the Ming Room of the Museum’s Chinese Garden Court (pages 20–21), the scholar-gentleman aesthetic favored wood furniture that retained its natural veneer; white walls; hanging scrolls of calligraphy or monochrome landscape painting (in the Ming Room fragile scrolls have been replaced with stone panels that resemble landscapes); and understated decorative objects.

The literati aesthetic also embodied an appreciation of the past, often regarding it as an ideal golden age. The collecting of antique bronze vessels or jades was one manifestation of this tendency. Another was the practice of attaching poetic names, which were often embedded with antique allusions, to components of the garden, including halls and pavilions as well as distinctive landscape elements. Steeped in classical learning, Chinese garden owners found great satisfaction in alluding to ancient poems, historical events, or legendary figures to stir the visitor’s imagination. In the Museum’s Chinese Garden Court, the moon



gate entrance bears an inscription in archaic seal script reading “In Search of Quietude” (Tan You). Over the doorway at the northeast end of the garden leading to the veranda in front of the Ming Room is written “Elegant Repose” (Ya Shi). The half-pavilion is entitled Cold Spring Pavilion (Lengquan Ting) and the Ming Room (Ming Xuan) is identified by a carved wood plaque inlaid with chips of coal that hangs above the couch at the center of the hall.

Many of the plants in a Chinese garden were selected for their symbolic meanings. Because it keeps its green leaves long into winter and bends but never breaks in a storm, bamboo came to symbolize a man of integrity, one who maintains his ideals even through adversity. Orchids were prized as elegant embodiments of the virtuous gentleman, their fragrance a metaphor for loyalty. Pine trees, which remain green through the winter, were esteemed as symbols of longevity, their old age made obvious if they had a gnarled appearance. The narrow-leafed mondo grass, a favorite in Chinese gardens and paintings, grew in profusion around the house of Zheng Kangcheng (127–200 A.D.), a famous scholar and teacher of Confucian classics. His neighbors referred to the grass as “Kangcheng’s bookmarks,” which evolved into the name “bookmark grass” (page 4, lower right corner).

As can be seen in the painting of a scholar seated in a pavilion (page 22) by Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), one of the foremost members of literati society of the sixteenth century, gardens frequently inspired paintings. Here a learned gentleman, at ease in loosened robes, pauses while reading and writing to gaze out of his studio at the verdant garden. On the page opposite this painting, Wen Zhengming wrote:

The new banana is more than ten feet tall;  
 After rain it is clean as though washed.  
 It does not dislike the high white wall,  
 It elegantly matches the curved red balustrade.  
 Cool autumn sounds come to my pillow,  
 Green morning colors are seen through the windows.  
 Let no one take to the heedless shears,  
 Leave it until its shade reaches my house.

Similar scenes can be found decorating ceramic, lacquer, and jade vessels, just as related sentiments and imagery inspired many poets throughout the centuries.

(Translation from  
 Roderick Whitfield  
 with Wen Fong, *In  
 Pursuit of Antiquity*  
 [Princeton: The Art  
 Museum, Princeton  
 University, 1969],  
 p. 67.)

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

### SUGGESTED DISCUSSION POINTS

To be used with illustrations of the Chinese Garden Court or on a field trip to the Museum.

- Discuss the materials used in the construction of the garden court.
- In a Chinese garden, the use of patterns is an important feature designed to interest the viewer. Locate and identify the patterns in the garden court, then discuss their role in the overall design and concept of the garden.
- If you visit the Museum, locate the various places in the garden court where Chinese inscriptions form part of the decoration. Discuss how the writing styles differ and what they add to the garden's appeal.
- If you were standing in the garden court, how would you experience the five senses of smelling, hearing, tasting, feeling, and looking?
- The juxtaposition of opposites, or yin-yang, is an important feature of the garden court. How many opposites can you identify?
- Having looked at the garden, imagine what emotions a Ming-dynasty scholar-gentleman, as well as a contemporary visitor, would experience in the garden court. Discuss what activities, such as moon-viewing, might have taken place in the garden.
- Ask the students to compare the design of the garden court to those of other gardens (or parks) that they may have visited.

## CLASSROOM EXERCISES

- According to Ji Cheng, the author of the *Yuan Ye* (a treatise on gardens completed in 1634), in a city garden, one could “live as a hermit even in the middle of a marketplace . . . all noise is shut out when the gates are closed.” Ask the students to recall and write about a special place, visited often or perhaps just once, where they were able to block out the noise and bustle of the day and find peace.
- The world of nature, real or imaginary, is a recurring theme in Chinese literature. In the poet Tao Yuanming’s legend *Peach Blossom Spring*, a fisherman loses his way and comes upon a grove of peach trees, “lining each bank for hundreds of paces. No tree of any other kind stood among them, but there were fragrant flowers, delicate and lovely to the eye, and the air was filled with drifting peach-bloom.” *Peach Blossom Spring* is a story in which the writer used people and actual images from nature to create an imaginary plot. Using the garden court as a setting, ask the students to write an imaginary story or poem using the following elements: a poet, a rock, a cup of tea, and a thunderstorm. (See the CD-ROM for a synopsis of the story.)
- Wood, stone, and clay are the primary building materials in the garden court. The presence of water, green plants, and the uniquely shaped Taihu rocks complete the environment. Ask the students to take on the role of garden architect and to design and draw a plan for an original walled garden using the natural elements of wood, stone, clay, and water. This can be a collaborative exercise with two or three students working on a single plan.
- The garden court offers the visitor a variety of different viewpoints: a meandering walkway, a raised terrace, and a covered pavilion. Scale, or the relative size of objects one to another or to the viewer, is an important element in garden design. Often, the garden’s rocks, rising above the flat tile courtyard, are viewed imaginatively as if they were mountains rising out of the ocean or a sea of clouds. Set against a white wall, the garden’s elements might also be likened to a handscroll composition. Ask the students to draw a group of rocks as if it were a mountain or an island, or to recompose the garden as if it were a landscape in a horizontal scroll painting.



## GLOSSARY

**BUDDHISM:** one of the major religions of the world, it was founded by Prince Siddhartha in northern India in the fifth century B.C. when, after achieving enlightenment, he became the Buddha Shakyamuni (563–483 B.C.). The basic tenets of Buddhism are that life is impermanent, illusory, and filled with suffering, conditions caused by desire and ignorance. The cessation of suffering (nirvana) is achieved when all desires and emotional attachments are extinguished. Buddhism was transmitted to China in the first or second century A.D. from Central Asia and became widespread by the fifth century.

**CONFUCIANISM:** philosophical, social, and political doctrine based on the teachings of Confucius (Kongzi or Kongfuzi, ca. 551–479 B.C.) and his early followers. Through the writings attributed to these men, Confucianism offered a code of proper social conduct motivated by virtue and tempered by humanism.

**DAO:** (pronounced daow, but often romanized as Tao) “the Way” or “the Way of the Universe,” Dao is a fundamental term in Chinese philosophy for the unchangeable, transcendent source of all existence. This principle—encompassing action and nonaction, void and matter, knowledge and ignorance—remains constant as all else changes.

**DAOISM:** (also romanized as Taoism) refers to one of China’s three dominant philosophical systems. Daoism, which is native to China, encompasses various ancient practices and schools of thought ignored or rejected by Confucianism. In addition to those philosophical components credited to Laozi (fifth century B.C.) and Zhuangzi (ca. 369–286 B.C.), which advocate passive acquiescence to the Dao, literally “the Way,” and close association with nature, Daoism also took on components of shamanism, magic, alchemy, medicine, various primitive cults, and organized religion.

**FENGSHUI:** (pronounced fuhng-shooay) sometimes referred to as geomancy, fengshui is made up of the Chinese characters for wind and water and functions to identify optimal sitings and orientations for cities and structures such as houses or tombs. The practice of fengshui dates to at least the second century B.C. Fengshui adherents envision the earth as resembling the human body in that it has channels through which the earth’s vital energy flows. Using manuals and their own intuition, fengshui practitioners offer advice on the location and orientations of buildings so that they benefit from this energy.

**FOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** the arts that every educated individual was expected to either practice or at least appreciate. They include painting, calligraphy, music (especially the zitherlike *qin* [*koto* in Japanese]), and the game of strategy known as *weiqi* (*go* in Japanese).

**MING DYNASTY (1368–1644):** During the early years of the Ming dynasty, the central Chinese bureaucracy was rebuilt and the imperial institutions reestablished after the disruptive period of Mongol rule under the Yuan dynasty (1272–1368). This era was also a time of rapid economic and commercial expansion in southern China, which gave rise to new cultural centers, expanded private patronage, and increased literacy. During the later years of the Ming, the court weakened and lost control of the country, which erupted in numerous rebellions.

**QI:** (pronounced chee) literally “breath,” *qi* refers to the vital, creative force that, according to ancient Chinese thought, energizes the cosmos, the earth, and living beings.

**SCHOLAR-GENTLEMEN; LITERATI:** Scholar-gentlemen fully emerged as an elite class in China during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Their rigorous classical education prepared them for careers in government service, and their official positions often enabled them to accumulate land and wealth. Although it was possible to attain official appointments by sponsorship, most were chosen through the civil service examination system, which tested candidates at the local, provincial, and national levels.

**SHANSHUI:** (pronounced shahn-shooay) the characters meaning mountain and water that when juxtaposed are understood to mean “landscape.” In Chinese paintings prior to the eighth century, such natural elements as trees, hills, and rocks were relatively small in scale and arranged to create a stagelike setting for narrative scenes. By the tenth century, however, landscapes had become the dominant pictorial subject, imbued with complex philosophical ideas, including Neo-Confucian concepts of natural order.

**SUZHOU:** (pronounced soo-joe) situated to the west of Shanghai, the leading cultural and economic center during the Ming dynasty. Known for its silk textiles, hardwood furniture, and jade ornaments, it was also the home of many influential scholars and artists, some of whom built notable gardens.

**YIN-YANG:** (pronounced yin-yahng) one of the fundamental metaphysical concepts in China and first described in the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*, also romanized as *I-ching*). Yin and yang are the two opposing polar manifestations of the Dao, and their continuous change and interaction give rise to all things. As each pole reaches its extreme, it invariably begins to develop into its opposite. Each pole has numerous characteristics: yin is associated with the feminine, darkness, softness, water, passivity, the moon, the tiger, the color black, and north; yang includes the masculine, brightness, activity, the sun, fire, the dragon, the color red, and south.

## RESOURCES

### SUGGESTED READING

Keswick, Maggie. *The Chinese Garden: History, Art, and Architecture*. 3d. rev. ed. Alison Hardie. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Li, Chu-Tsing, and James C. Y. Watt, eds. *The Chinese Scholar's Studio: Artistic Life in the Late Ming Period*. New York: The Asia Society Galleries, 1987.

Morris, Edwin T. *The Gardens of China: History, Art, and Meanings*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983.

Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong. "A Chinese Garden Court: The Astor Court at The Metropolitan Museum of Art," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (Winter 1980/81).

Wang, Joseph C. *The Chinese Garden*. Images of Asia series. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

### VIDEOGRAPHY

*Ming Garden*. 28 min. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1983.

*Mountains and Water: Exploring the Chinese Handscroll*. 19 min. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2000.

### CHINESE GARDENS IN THE NEW YORK AREA

China Institute in America, 125 East 65th Street, New York, (212) 744-8181; [www.chinainstitute.org](http://www.chinainstitute.org)

The New York Chinese Scholar's Garden at the Botanical Garden of Staten Island, 1000 Richmond Terrace, Staten Island, (718) 273-8200; [www.sibg.org](http://www.sibg.org)

### WEB SITES

Asia Society: [www.askasia.org](http://www.askasia.org)

East Asian Studies Initiative: <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art: [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)  
(See especially the Explore and Learn section and the *Timeline of Art History*)

Washington University, "A Visual Sourcebook of Chinese Civilization":  
<http://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv>



