

From Monastic practices to garden practices, a transition of garden history from Yuan Dynasty to Ming dynasty

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Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation looks at interactions between Buddhist and garden practices in China's Jiangnan region during the Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. Through selected cases across this region, this study analyzes how the garden type experienced shifts in meaning, function and ownership practices in response to social, economic and hydrological changes. Based on an examination of this garden network, my work tries to uncover the shifting relationship between the state, gentry society and monasteries and the tension between the Jiangnan area and the imperial capital at Beijing. This work also seeks to understand how economic and political change affected the region's hydrologic topography.

My research relies on a number of historic primary sources, including gazetteers, texts, maps, and Chinese paintings. Methodologically, my work is influenced by the fields of art history and sociology. Resituating garden sites within their social contexts and urban environments reveals the Jiangnan garden type to be unusually complex while challenging existing assumptions regarding Chinese gardens as little more than the private retreats of the era's literati—a discourse constructed in the last half of 20th century. By establishing new scholarly perspective on the garden, I hope to enrich our understanding of the nature of landscape design and cultural production during the Yuan-Ming periods.

Keyword: garden studies, Buddhism practices, gentry society, political power, urban-scape