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Soundscape of classical Chinese garden

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Abstract With deep humanized connotation, the classical Chinese garden uses human intuitive sensation and personal poetic observation to express natural sound phenomena. It differs from the rational modern soundscape in western countries.

Keywords Chinese classical garden, soundscape, aesthetics

1 Introduction

As classical Chinese garden creates the most vivid view in the world, its acoustic environment is of perfect quality. Although in classical landscape essays there was no systematic illustration about acoustic theory and in realistic landscape construction there was no independent quantitative expression about acoustic controlling technique, it does not mean that classical landscape design lacks the conception and experience regarding sound environment. Conversely, the design of Chinese classical garden pays much attention to the creation of soundscape¹⁾ and places emphasis on it as one of the basic factors contributing to landscape creation. Due to the differences between eastern and western cultural tendency, our ancestors often emphasized the poetic essence with human sensation in landscape sound atmosphere, and tried to unite vision, hearing and other factors so that the environment could satisfy the mental and physical needs of people.

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2 Perception features of sound environment in context of intuition and overall thought

For thousands of years, our ancestors were always repeating traditional working patterns: seeding in spring, tilling in summer, harvesting in fall and storing in winter, through which they accumulated rich experiences in primitive agricultural production about the classification of crops, the selection of seeds, the distribution of arable lands, etc. As reliable sources for people to know the world, these experiences became more mature and stable with the passage of time. Therefore, traditional Chinese culture pays special attention to the inheritance of experience and the pursuit of consistence. This also forms intuitive thought of experiencing knowledge and actions, and the feature of overall grasping and understanding things.

Distinguishing from western scientific rationality of using lots of facts to analyze and logics to induce, this intuitive and overall thought tradition does not get to the bottom of the scientific theory behind the phenomenon; rather it pays attention to the intuitive grasp of natural laws. In classical landscape essays, there is no clear and quantitative expression of physical facts and the systematic inductions of views about acoustic phenomenon. Neither is there any specific or fixed concept and theory of acoustic science. A good case is the book entitled “*Construction of Garden (Yuan Ye)*” where poetic illustrations about the creation of soundscape can be found in different chapters, such as “In the forest cooers call for rains, and over the river horses neigh against winds”, “beautiful birds gather and deer herds run together”, and “Pine trees hidden in isolated places, the sound of tides are clear, cranes dance with paces” [1], which include subjective experience, analogy, symbol and other expressions of humanized context with cultural meanings. It is a kind of aesthetic appreciation based on intuitive acquisitive ability. In long-term practice, ancient Chinese people gradually formed a way to understand their living habitats through human nature and relationships, and tried their best to grasp the things and the ways of knowing outer

¹⁾ Soundscape: first put forward by the Canadian musician R. Murray Schafer in 1960s. It originally comes from landscape, and is a combination of Sound and Scape. Compared to Landscape, Soundscape means scenery captured by ear, that is, audio scenery.