

Bing HUANG: Altering the Visual Experience: Belveder con Pitti by Giusto Utens and a Chinese Drama Print adopts the Western Perspective

This poster sets up a comparison between a lunette showing Boboli Garden (1599), by the Flemish painter Giusto Utens, and a colored woodblock print that circulated in Suzhou (18th Century). The Chinese rarely used a single design principle for an entire garden, in contrast to Italians. Chinese gardens try to create an illusion. However, this Suzhou print suggests otherwise. There is no mystery about what you might encounter next; even the house's interiors are on view. The print claims to be a full illustration of a play entitled *The Tale of the Western Chamber*, with all of the scenes contained in a single house setting. The architectural space serves three types of purpose: theatrical, residential, and garden. The inscription clearly states, as a selling point, that the print used western perspective. With the help of this device, spaces are visually circumscribed and relatively autonomous. Garden designers in China had to cope with formidable constraints on land use. One technique common to both rural and urban garden sites was that of variation and segmentation to vary the impressions that the wanderer received. Chinese garden technique can be compared with the experience of small Renaissance cities, like Siena and Pienza. Their winding streets lead the spectator to discover a new structure at every step, making the actual experience of the urban fabric and garden optical rather than mathematical. The strategy of spatial articulation employed in this example also evokes a compositional technique that is specific to Chinese Gardens: the construction of a narrative through episodes. Before this print, the Chinese experienced a narrative painting by unrolling a scroll from right to left, one small segment at a time. With the introduction of western perspective, what you can see and what you should see is altered. Viewers had the freedom to turn their eyes towards any component or episode of the narrative. The print witnessed the transformation of what constituted an ideal viewing experience. The logic of this print design is better grasped by a moving spectator than from an ideal viewing point or vantage point. You are not only a beholder but also a wanderer in this garden.