

## **Chinese Aesthetics 审美**

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### *Classical Chinese Garden*

Influenced by the idea of attaining harmony between human beings and nature in Chinese philosophy, the aesthetic presences of Chinese art is simplicity and natural purity. Chinese aesthetics see recovering one's original purity and simplicity as the highest state of beauty. Chinese classical garden is a good example that represents Chinese aesthetic. It recreates natural landscapes in miniature. The style has evolved for more than three thousand years, and includes both the vast gardens of the Chinese emperors and smaller gardens built by scholars, poets, and former government officials. A typical classical Chinese garden is enclosed by a wall and has one or more ponds, a rock garden, trees and flowers, and an assortment of halls and pavilions within the garden, connected by winding paths and zig-zag galleries. While walking in the garden, visitors can enjoy a series of carefully-composed scenes unrolling like a scroll of landscape paintings

### Questions

1. Why did the men of letters and the retired civil servants construct the gardens?
2. How were cultural spirit, aesthetics and Taoist philosophy embodied in Classical Chinese gardens?
3. What are the differences you may find from classical Chinese garden and the gardens in western countries?

### *Traditional Chinese Painting*

Chinese traditional painting bears its own characteristics and has formed a style of its own. The mainstay of traditional Chinese painting is landscapes in which emphasis was placed on the spiritual qualities of the painting and on the ability of the artist to reveal the inner harmony of man and nature, as perceived according to Taoist and Buddhist concepts.

A unique genre of traditional Chinese painting is ink and wash. It uses little or no color but applies black ink in different shades to white paper or silk. Chinese artists have a special, fervent love for the black-and-white world. According to Chinese philosophy, external splendor and prosperity cannot necessarily represent the truth of the world. The common-looking black-and-white world well expresses people's yearning for a pure and simple world. Technically, Chinese painting is not restricted by the focal point in its perspective.

### Questions

1. Fan Kuan was a Chinese landscape painter of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) considered among the great masters of the tenth and eleventh centuries. One of his best known works is *Travelers among Mountains and Streams*, a large hanging scroll. What philosophical ideal is established in this painting?
2. How was Chinese painting techniques exemplified in the picture *A Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival* (清明上河图), painted by Zhang Zeduan, one of the Song Dynasty's greatest artists?
3. What are the differences between Chinese traditional painting and oil painting in the west?

### *Chinese Architecture*

Chinese ancient architecture represents a profound influence of Fengshui (风水) which emphasizes the harmonious unity of human beings with nature. Ancient Chinese architecture, no matter the royal palace or folk residence is mainly timberwork. The main structure is located on the central axis of a court while less-important structures are located to the left and right. The whole layout is symmetrical. Compared with

European architectural style which is open and shut, a Chinese courtyard is like a hand scroll of painting which can be unfolded little by little. The scenery is different in each courtyard. Even in moving several steps within the court yard, you will be surprised at the changing of prospects.

#### Questions

1. In the Forbidden City these are three halls, the Hall of Supreme Harmony (太和殿), the Hall of Central Harmony (中和殿), and the Hall of Preserving Harmony (保和殿). It means that three kinds of harmony were pursued. What are they?
2. There are four architectural styles in Chinese civil residence, Siheyuan in Beijing, the folk residence in ancient town of Lijiang, Yunnan Province, the civil residence of white walls and black tiles in southern part of Anhui Province, and the residence of serene water world in Xitang town, south of lower reaches of Yangtze River. What are the beauties they represent? And what ideal that ancient Chinese people pursued can be found in these civil residences?
3. The Beijing National Stadium and National Aquatics Centre, well-known as Bird's Nest(鸟巢) and Water Cube(水立方), are the Beijing Olympic Games' landmark buildings, which embodies the Chinese national spirit, traditional culture and modern science and technology. Why was the Aquatics Centre designed in cubic shape while Bird's Nest in a circle? What philosophic concepts does each of them represent?

#### Essay

2. China is located in the eastern part of Asia. Geographically, it is separated from other parts of the world by the ocean in the east and south, deserts and snow-capped mountains in the west and north. As a result, ancient Chinese people developed their own living style, customs, and aesthetics. What is the uniqueness you have found in this culture? What interest you most? Why?

#### Reading

Dingmin Wu, *A Panoramic View of Chinese Culture*, Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2010

Lang Ye & Zhu Liangzhi, *Insights into Chinese Culture*, Foreign Language Teaching and Research press, Beijing, 2008

Ebrey Patricia Buckley, *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, 2nd Ed, 1993