

# *The Embodiment of Buro's Psychological Distance in the Art of Chinese Classical Gardening——Take the Master-of-the-Nets Garden in Suzhou as an Example*

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**Abstract:** The psychological distance Buro proposed is a proposition with important theories value and practical meaning in the aesthetic field, which mainly claims that the aesthete should appreciate the object with disinterestedness, pure, and purposeless attitude. Such thought possesses inherent consistency with the spirit of Chinese aesthetic tradition, therefore, Chinese gardens classical, as a representative of a comprehensive art of time and space, it also presents psychological distance thought inevitably. This paper explores three approaches of realizing psychological distance in a classical garden and takes the classical master-of-the-nets garden as an example to demonstrate the approaches of realizing psychological distance in garden art.

## 1. Introduction

Buro (1880-1934), a Cambridge University professor, formulated the psychological distance firstly which subsequently influenced many aestheticians and the aesthetics theories construction in the field of aesthetics[1]. The significance of this theory is that Buro pointed out it should keep proper psychological distance with the object during the appreciating and creating beauty process, which means that the aesthete should appreciate the object with disinterestedness, pure, and purposeless attitude[2]. Buro's psychological distance accords with the spirit of Chinese arts, for instance, “The fasting of the mind”, “Sit and Forget”, “Inspecting the world from the way”, proposed by Chuang-tzu, which has consistency in Buro's psychological distance intrinsically and these propositions advocate to perceive the world with a vain quiet and spaciousness heart beyond the utilitarian[3].

Being a typical comprehensive art of time and space, the classical Chinese garden conveys the spirit of traditional Chinese art. Hence the psychological distance is also embodied most vividly. This paper concludes three approaches of realizing psychological distance in the classical garden that to create “scenery-borrowing”, “the artistic conception of literature”, “A picturesque and surrealistic scenery”, and take the classical master-of-the-nets garden as an example to analyze the garden's landscape and demonstrate how psychological distance was created in the classical garden specifically.

## 2. Realizing Psychological Distance in Classical Garden Approaches

### 2.1. The “Scenery-borrowing” in Classical Chinese Garden

“Scenery-borrowing” is a significant traditional landscape technique in classical gardens, that remains people under the non-utility aesthetic state which key lie in one word that is “borrow”. Because of “borrow”, it not available and so that produces the distance with utility. Such distance refers to a psychological distance, not a physical distance, which means that “Absence makes the heart grow fonder”. The technique of classical garden “Scenery-borrowing” is the conscious to operate this kind of “psychological distance”. Lie in a nutshell, the scenery which has borrowed is not a practical scene, which also promotes the visitors to produce unusual feelings and realize the unusual things.

The “Scenery-borrowing” in Chinese classical gardens can be divided into “borrowing reality scenery” and “borrowing virtual scenery”, and “borrowing virtual scenery” is easier to create the psychological distance Buro proposed. The so-called “borrow virtual scene” means that invisible or untouchable virtual scene as the object of understanding. Such as borrow shadow scenery, sound scenery, fragrant scenery, and so on. These virtual sceneries can not be occupied and practical, only for pure appreciation.

### 2.2. The Artistic Conception of Literature in Classical Chinese Garden

Ancient gardens in our country are also called Title gardens, which shows the importance of the poems and proses contained in the plaques and couplets in classical gardens. Distinctive metre and rhythm garden poem, recited by the traveler unconsciously, its implicit expression enlightens our natural association and makes the natural scenery personified and idealized. The artistic conception of literature brings the viewer an ethereal heart and an unusual world.

There are several proses in gardens forms of landscape organization: plaque, couplet, cliff stone, and poem stripe stone, which not only enriches the scenery but also expands the artistic conception. Beautiful poems rising more scholarliness so that bringing elegant atmosphere and making people become poetic. Moreover, poems can also highlight the mind of garden creation and good taste[4].For instance, Cao Xueqin in this plot that “To have poetic couplet in the grand garden” taking advantage of the character Jia Zheng’s words that “there are abundant pavilions in the great landscape, if the poem without title, even with flowers and mountains still can not add substance”. It emphasizes that poems can enlighten the whole scenery.

In short, the traveler also benefits from the inspiration of poems to produce association and overflow their scenic feeling, meanwhile, the scenery they gained has exceeded the present scenery, thus scenery they observed has been sublimating from the reality back to the virtual scenery and guiding people into it.

### 2.3. Picturesque and Surrealistic Scenery in Classical Chinese Garden

When ancient gardeners built the gardens, they often made the scenery like in the painting through a series of gardening techniques, which is the primary reason that the viewer no longer considers the practical function of these gardens. Li Yu, whose unique window bar design concept also reflects this point, he believes that “the same object is also the same thing, before designing this window, it is only an object; once this window occurs, everyone can critic it and regard it as the painting[5].” Li’s exposition subtly points out one thing is that garden art has a very strong practical function, while painting art is non-practical art. Therefore, gardeners consciously design these gardens to bring the artistic inspiration to people and give them a sense of separation from the earthly world,

then escape from the utilitarian secular real life, meanwhile, the appreciating psychology is different from the usual psychology, then produces the “psychological distance” with the scenery they appreciate.

There are many ways to realize garden painting, however, the primary way is that the construction of frame and white wall. The enframed scenery refers to use the doors and windows, columns, hanging under the corridor, trees, and wood branches to form a border that demonstrates the whole garden scenery as like people appreciate an inlaid landscape painting in the frame. The presence or absence of border, or the quality of the design directly related to the emergence of leisure and elegance emotion. Another way to produce people’s artistic inspiration is that the application of white powder wall which regards the rocky and flowers as primary painting elements, and placed it in front of the line of sight so that making it stand vividly revealed on the paper directly, that is, so-called “regard the powder wall as paper and the stone as painting”.

### 3. How the Psychological Distance Reflects in the Master-of-the-Nets Garden in Suzhou Specifically?

#### 3.1. The “Scenery-borrowing” in the Master-of-the-Nets Garden

There are many “virtual scenery-borrow” in the master-of-the-nets garden, which hides in time and space, such as the sound, fragrant, and image scenery. The scenery-borrow can be seen everywhere in the garden of master-of-the-nets, as like “the Duck Shooting Corridor” is looking around “the Moon Come with Breeze Pavilion” (Figure 1). The gardener skillfully uses plants to guide people’s sight and brings the “the Moon Come with Breeze Pavilion” image scenery pavilion into the viewer's vision that formulating a wonderful painting. However, such beautiful scenery follows the climate to hide or occur, as the saying “It can be only appreciated distantly but not touched blasphemously”, only for appreciation, not practicability.



Figure 1: The enframed scenery: the shadow of “the moon come with breeze pavilion”.

Utilizing the sense of smell and borrowing the typical attractions of the fragrance scenery, “the Small Hill and Osmanthus Fragrance Pavilion”, its name means that there are hills and planting cassia tree in front of the house, since when the autumn breezing with the overflowing fragrance attracting visitors stop for there; “The Peony Study” is the scenery borrowed the sound, the north side of the small patio slightly stacked stone and planted with banbusa multiplex, wintersweet, tenjiku, Chinese banana, and supplemented by a couplet to illustrate the virtual scene, which means

that: bright emerald birds settled in the nest, spring clouds warm; broad-leaved banana cover the window, the night rain cool chill. Which this scene depicts the banana in the night rain beat under the banana, fully mobilized people's sense of hearing[6].

### 3.2. The Artistic Conception of Literature in the Master-of-the-Nets Garden

The creation of “The Artistic Conception of Literature”, which represents the possibility of guiding people to enter the scenery and enlightens the natural the viewer’s association, it can make viewers no longer adhere to the concrete objective thing and outside the cognition mode of the subject-object dichotomy, to produce psychological distance from the thing they appreciate and make the viewer detach from the shallow appreciation.

The typical scenery “Waiting for Tide”, which indicated by “The Artistic Conception of Literature” in the Master-of-the-Nets Garden(Figure 2), located at the entrance of the banquet area in the southern part of the Master-of-the-Nets Garden, with a standing stone on the bank of a water stream carved “Waiting for Tide”, it means that “waiting for the tide stream out of the sea”. The standing stone below the water ravine has a fifty centimeters square granite gate to remind people that once open gate, the tide will come rushing[7]. The narrow ravine and pocket bridges seem infinitely large because of the inscription, drowning their spirit in the travel that can not feel its small, but infinity. Due to the viewer's implication and inspiration of “The Artistic Conception of Literature”, which produces the psychological distance between the viewer and the ornamental object, then the viewers no longer with a practical vision. If visitors did not create a psychological distance and viewed the scene from a utilitarian perspective, they would be stuck in the fact that the gate is only fifty centimeters wide, which would not be the true meaning of the painting.

Therefore, “The Artistic Conception of Literature”, which indicates the scenery interest where you travel, producing psychological distance between people and ornamental things and guiding people to appreciate the unusual sides of scenery.

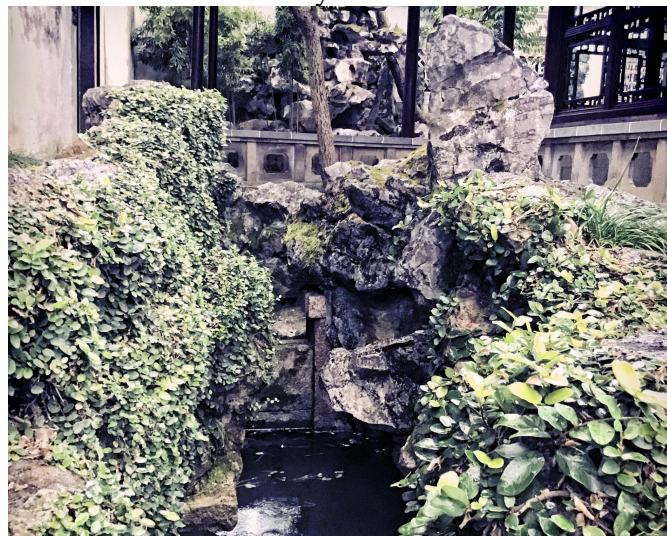


Figure 2: Scenery: waiting for tide.



### 3.3. Picturesque and Surrealistic Scenery in the Master-of-the-Nets Garden

As mentioned above, there are two main ways to create a picturesque scene in Chinese classical gardens, namely, the setting of enframed scenery and the borrowing of white walls, which can be seen everywhere in the Master-of-the-Nets Garden.



Figure 3: “A outside bamboo pavilion.”

There are plenty of scenic spots in the Master-of-the-Nets Garden enframed scenery, such as the above-mentioned “the Duck Shooting Corridor” is looking around “the Moon Come with Breeze Pavilion” (Figure 1) which uses the branches of trees to design the frame and guide sight. In addition, there are quite a few spots in the garden that use doors and windows as frames, for instance: “A Outside Bamboo Pavilion” (Figure 3), which uses a round hole door as frame including flowers and trees, forming a natural picture.

Furthermore, the application of whitewashed walls in the Master-of-the-Nets Garden is also mature enough to create a picturesque atmosphere, such as the “the Cold Spring Pavilion” in the western part of the garden (Figure 4). There is a stone wall in the pavilion, shaped like a winged eagle, placed before the white wall, on both sides of the colonnade like a picture frame, looking like an ink painting. Therefore, the viewer can only appreciate the pictorial flowers, trees and rocks in front of them, but not considering the utilitarian reality.



Figure 4: “The cold spring pavilion.”

## 4. Conclusion

In a word, in classical gardens, gardeners primary through the “Scenery-borrowing”, “Artistic conception of literature”, “A picturesque and surrealistic scenery” to guide the viewer into the position of psychological distance, and step into the super utilitarian aesthetic status to appreciate the garden purely.

“Scenery-borrowing”, due to its scenery can not possess or practical, guiding people into the virtual scenery and holding the pure appreciation attitude. “A picturesque and surrealistic scenery”, which is to make visitors forget about the actual existence of objects and utilitarian existence, only regard the flowers, trees and rocks as the picture to appreciate; “Artistic conception of literature”, aims to bring interest to the viewer rather than adhere to the immediate material phase, guiding viewer to the attractive scenery. As one of the classical and significant representatives of classical garden art, these three ways demonstrated in the Master-of-the-Nets Garden vividly.

“Scenery-borrowing”, “Artistic conception of literature”, “A picturesque and surrealistic scenery” in Chinese classical garden art , which is a interpretation of psychological distance for gardens. Therefore, classical Chinese gardens reflect the profundity of traditional Chinese culture, which still has an important practical significance for the development of Eastern and Western culture and art nowadays, the spiritual wealth it contains, this urgent needs the world scholars to probe it from different angles deeply.

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