



Entangled landscapes

Re-thinking the landscape exchange between China and Europe in the 16th-18th centuries

Location: Institute of Art History, University of Zurich, Switzerland

Date: 10th May-12th May 2013

The exchange of landscape culture between China and Europe in the 16th-18th centuries has received considerable attention in terms of its cultural qualities and significance. The expression of this cultural exchange includes art (e.g. drawings, prints, architecture, landscape architecture, and sculptures), literature (e.g. letters, travelogues, and novels) and material culture (e.g. porcelain and furniture). Traditional scholarship examines these objects as static and fixed in their narrow disciplinary specialty rather than considering them within a multidisciplinary contextual matrix. Some emerging conceptions and understandings of culture and landscape shed new light on the exchange of landscape culture. 'Entangled histories', for example, does not consider cultures as separated entities with fixed boundaries, but rather cultures as being constituted by intertwined processes of interaction, translation and hybridization within interconnected societies. Meanwhile, landscape is increasingly being understood as not a mere pictorial representation, but 'an instrument of cultural power,' a cultural practice 'by which social and subjective identities are formed.' In both Chinese and European traditions, landscape has complex relations with notions such as nature and land – territory, nation, and state. Both landscape traditions have been investigated within multidisciplinary (social, cultural, economic and political) perspectives.

Against this background, the symposium proposes to re-think the landscape exchange between China and Europe during the 16th-18th centuries within an 'entangled landscapes' approach. By using this term, we do not understand the cross-cultural Chinese-European landscape representations as a mere artistic exchange between two isolated 'islands'. Rather, we consider these landscape representations being used to manifest and perform interactions among different cultures, religions, and powers within their cultural, social and political contexts. The 'entanglement' of these cross-cultural landscapes is traceable in aspects such as the appropriation of representational methods, the hybridization of landscape styles, and the negotiation of aesthetic concepts. The main goal of the symposium is to achieve a deeper understanding of Chinese-European landscape exchange through examination of these three often complex aspects.



Landscape exchange has taken place between China and Europe on occasions provided by trade, Christian missions and diplomacy (ceremonials), which are inseparable from their backgrounds such as economic expansion, the circulation of knowledge, the transfer of technologies (e.g. scientific technologies and technologies of governance), and the negotiation of ideologies and power structures. We are interested in analyzing these landscape entanglements (appropriation of representational methods, transplantation of styles, and negotiation of concepts) in relation to the above backgrounds, as well as face-to-face interaction and dynamics between the discourse of arts and social, economic and political practices. As examples, 'linear perspective' as a landscape representational method was adopted by early Qing court artists to promote the Manchu emperor's statecraft (in terms of morality, science and epistemology); 'the Chinese style of gardening' was advocated by the English/British elite in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century to promote the physiocrats' economy and enlightened polity; and concepts like 'the grotesque' were indicative of the nature, as well as the results, of crises, conflicts and cultural clashes.

By addressing such topics, our objectives are to understand: 1. how different perceptions of landscape, nature, and land by the people of China and Europe constructed the representations of cross-cultural landscapes; and conversely, how the representation of cross-cultural landscapes influenced Chinese and European perceptions of landscape, nature and land. 2. how different national, social and individual identities were formed through the appropriation, transplantation and negotiation of landscape representations; and conversely, how transcultural landscapes were influenced by these different identities.

We invite keystone papers from historians, geographers, architects, philologists and other researchers interested in the historical, cultural and political importance of cross-cultural landscapes. Through this symposium, we hope to explore and discuss different theoretical, empirical and methodological perspectives of landscape representation between Europe and China across disciplines and national boundaries. In summary, we seek not only a more thorough understanding of the exchange of landscape culture, but also a deeper understanding of the formation of cultural identities in China and Europe, and the relation between China and Europe during the 16th-18th centuries.

University of Zurich
URPP Asia and Europe

Dr. Yue Zhuang