

Travel records (游记 *youji*) for gardens as source for researching officials' private lives in 11th-century China

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Abstract. This article deals with the 11th century travel records (*youji*) for the gardens in Luoyang. These texts were usually ordered by owners of gardens and were written by famous authors. According to *youji* materials, a Chinese garden can be presented as a part of nature, a source of pleasure, or a shelter for a hermit, so the article is divided into these three parts. Through the descriptions of gardens in *youji*, not only the craft of gardening, but also the way of life and private life of garden owners can be examined.

As a special type of literature, travel records (*youji*) were defined relatively late. Actually, until the time of the Qing Dynasty, compilers of literary anthologies put works that now are called *youji* in the category *records* (记 *ji*) or *records about various things* (杂记 *zaji*). One of the earliest *youji* collections, *Records about travelling to famous mountains from antiquity till nowadays* (古今游名山记) was made by He Zhenqing in the Ming period (1368–1644) (Mei Xinlin, Yu Zhanghua 2004, 2). Works of various genres such as letters, forewords, odes, and epigraphic inscriptions were included in this anthology. There were records not only about travelling to famous mountains, but also about travelling to reservoirs and about spending time in gardens. Why were some texts about gardens included in the *youji* anthologies?¹ On one hand, this could be explained by the meaning of the hieroglyph 游 *you*. In Chinese tradition, *you* is not only actual travelling, but also mental travelling. Spending time in a garden could be regarded a kind of mental travelling. On the other hand, a Chinese garden was considered a model of nature; in such case staying in a garden was real travelling among mountains and streams.

The most famous *youji* are the travel diaries of Fan Chengda (1126–1193) (Hargett, 2007; Serebriakov, 2004) and Xu Xiake (1587–1641). Modern Chinese researchers Mei Xinlin and Yu Zhanghua define *youji* as travel literature (Mei Xinlin, Yu Zhanghua 2004, 3), so it can be works of any genre. In such case, *youji* is not a genre, but one of the thematic trends in Chinese literature. The first extensive collection with some *youji* texts was translated into English by Richard E. Strassberg in his

¹ For example, we can find it in the first *youji* collection, 游志 (Wang Liqun 2007, 149–50), and in the modern *Anthology of Chinese Travel Literature in Prose* (ACTL).

book *Inscribed landscapes: Travel writing from Imperial China* (Strassberg 1994). James M. Hargett focused on Song Dynasty travel records (Hargett 1985), especially Su Shi's (1037–1101) and Fan Chengda's works. Some Northern Song (960–1127) *youji* for gardens will be examined in this article. These texts were published in the *Anthology of Chinese Travel Literature in Prose* (further ACTL) and can be used as a source for studying garden design and the lifestyle of garden owners.

There are some *youji* texts about the best gardens in Luoyang. They give us the material for talking about gardens of the Northern Song period in Luoyang. All these gardens belonged to high officials, and some of them were laid out in the Tang period (618–906)—among them the Tang general Peidu's *Lake Garden*; Tang prime minister Niu Sengru's *Guiren Garden*; the *Garden of the Li Family*, which was founded by a famous general, the brother-in-arms of the first Song emperor Taizong; and the *Garden of Solitary Pleasure* of Sima Guang,² a historian and a leader of the opposition to Wang Anshi's New Policies, who after retirement lived in Luoyang. Most of the texts that were used dated to the 1070s. At that time, the main capital of the Chinese Empire was its eastern capital—Kaifeng. The basic features of the descriptions of this city that could be found in *youji* were shouts in the markets and the rumble of wagons. In Kaifeng there 'remain few places, where water purl, deep underbrush grows, birds fly, and fishes float' (Yang Jie, 77). At the same time many writers left equal evidence about the perfectly natural conditions of Luoyang and its environs (Li Gefei, 33; Ouyang Xiu 3, 54; Su Che, 39).

The tradition of Northern Song parks and gardens originated in the Tang period, when the art of park construction reached its perfection (Kriukov, Maliavin, Sofronov 1984, 91). The most famous were the gardens of Li Deyu, Duan Wenchan, and Niu Sengru. They were complex gardens, where natural and cultural principles were combined. Besides rich vegetation, everything for spending intellectual leisure time could be found there: storehouses for books, pavilions for calligraphy lessons, and various collections. In their gardens, noble men (君子 *junzi*) plucked pipa, composed poems, and so on. According to *youji* materials, a Chinese garden can be presented as a part of nature, a source of pleasure, or a shelter for a hermit.

The garden as a part of nature

Intercourse with nature is a traditional kind of leisure time for educated officials in Confucian China. It had played an important role in the spiritual culture since the Six Dynasties (3rd–4th centuries), and it was reflected in the Northern Song *youji*. *Youji*

² Sima Guang's *Record in the Garden of Solitary Pleasure* was translated by A. Hardie (Ji Cheng 1988, appendix).

are replete with ways of spending leisure time such as walking in the countryside with friends or travelling to famous mountains, caves, springs, Buddhist and Taoist monasteries, and so on. In Luoyang there were many high officials who could not travel without a retinue. This was settled by rite (Ouyang Xiu 1, 51). Numerous attendants, guards and servants made their journey very slow and difficult. That was one of the reasons why Luoyang aristocracy started to construct gardens in the town. At that time, the geographical conditions of the region were also favourable. In Luoyang a ‘house on a little piece of ground is enough for rising one’s head to see blue mountains, for lowering one’s head to hear running water; wonderful flowers and high bamboo are growing around’ (Su Che, 39). The people who lived there fully enjoyed their lives. Anyone there could admire the beauty of nature, but ‘only from pavilions in the gardens of most rich and noble families were views the most beautiful, the best under Heaven’ (ibid.). Garden plots were chosen for the best views. A Chinese garden is not only a piece of tilled ground, but also everything you can see from this place. The garden area was framed with landscape, not with a fence. A range of mountains on the horizon was included in the composition of the garden. It was a part of it; of course, it could also be a part of many other gardens. The garden was connected with the surrounding landscape; usually for these purposes a special terrace or tower to enjoy the surrounding views was built.

The exact meaning of the Chinese word *landscape* (山水 *shanshui*) is *mountains and streams*. Both these components are inseparable parts of landscape and garden. We can imagine a Chinese garden as a model of nature that is constructed on a piece of ground. Everything here is peculiar to nature. Luoyang’s mountains and streams were abundant and beautiful. From every garden, mountains could be seen. If there were no natural streams in the garden, artificial ponds and brooks were made. There was usually both still and flowing water in Chinese gardens.

A garden is a living construction. It is absolutely involved in all changes of nature, among them seasonal changes. The landscape of four seasons is not the same. ‘When spring comes, blossoming is in full swing; one’s eyes are dazzled by beautiful flowers. On a hot summer day ... all around is hidden in deep shadow of trees. In autumn water is calm and transparent; fishes are splashing in it. In winter leaves fall down and ridges of mountains can be seen all around. In every season, the garden changes, but the views always are beautiful; they cannot be completely described by words’ (Li Gefei, 33). The garden is constructed for its owner’s pleasure all year round.

The garden as a source of pleasure

The garden as a part of nature is a source of pleasure and energy. For Chinese writers, relaxation in the country was connected with the sense of joy that appeared there. In

their thoughts about joy, Chinese authors of the Song period often turned to Menzi. Ouang Xiu and Sima Guang were reflecting the same passage from Menzi's second section of Chapter One in their *youji* (Ouyang Xiu 2, 997, Sima Guang, 364). Menzi considered that only a worthy ruler could be pleased himself and could share his pleasure with people. A ruler's pleasure made his people pleased. Menzi underlined that only a worthy ruler could be pleased with nature. The internal qualities and real essence of a person are revealed by nature. It becomes traditional to share one's pleasure with people. Ouyang Xiu wrote that he considered his official duty spreading a ruler's virtue 德 *de* and sharing his pleasure with people. That was why he called the pavilion where he admired the landscape 'Absolute Pleasure' (丰乐 *fengle*). The people were pleased and they walked with their ruler in beautiful places (Ouyang Xiu 2, 997).

The ideas of solitude and the hermit tradition that were known in ancient China started to be popular in the period of the Northern and Southern States (218–580) and became widespread in society before the Song period. Such a style of life was shared with the work of officials. Confucian officials' leisure time included moments of solitude such as trips to places with beautiful scenery, monasteries, and mountains and rest in the garden. A garden was an area of virtual solitude, an escape to the world of nature inside the city walls and creation of boundless journeys on a small piece of ground. A garden, as well as a house, unveils the private life of noble men. Its private character was stressed by Sima Guang with the title of his garden—'Garden of Solitary Pleasure'. From this title we can see that the owner did not agree with Menzi, or he found an excuse for his solitary pleasure. He wrote that the joy of Confucius, Menzi, Yanzi had been the joy of sages; he did not have the strength or wisdom to reach such kind of pleasure. As for him, he agreed with Zhuangzi, who had said that bird's nests were not larger than one branch, a little mouse did not drink more than its stomach could hold, and a little thing was enough for satisfying one's needs. Such a little thing was particularly a joy for old Sima Guang. He preferred small Taoist pleasures once he was no longer serving. But someone confronted him: 'I heard that a noble man should share his joy with people. How could it be enough for you to experience joy alone?' Sima Guang thanked this person and answered him: 'I am a foolish old man; how could you compare me with noble men! I am afraid my joy is too meagre to share with others. Besides, the things I am enjoying are wild, remote and deserted. These things are rejected by people. If I suggested it, they probably wouldn't accept it, and should I force them? But if I find a person with whom to share my joy, I would invite him and show him my garden' (Sima Guang, 363–4). To share his joy, Sima Guang invited only like-minded persons. Exactly in this period (in the second half of the 11th century), individuality was formed in Chinese culture. Ouang Xiu wrote

about common joy and Sima Guang wrote about his own pleasure, but only after some decades, in the works of Su Dongpo, did an author's inner experience become the most valuable thing for him (Martynov 1983, 81). For noble men nature remained a source of pleasure. The younger brother of Su Dongpo, Su Che, characterizing the area of Luoyang, wrote that 'the best views of mountains and forests common people could enjoy here with the aristocracy. Nature made people glad and they need do nothing besides live in Luoyang' (Su Che, 39).

Sima Guang used self-humiliation to escape from common joy. He liberated himself for lonely pleasure. And then the 'bright moon was rising to the Heaven in its time, the pure wind was coming, there were no barriers or obstacles, his body was free, he was absolutely alone in his meditation, and he didn't know another joy between Heaven and Earth that could replace this state of mind' (Sima Guang, 364) and that could be compared with it. That is why Sima Guang called his garden Garden of Solitary Pleasure.

The garden as a shelter for a hermit

Sima Guang's pleasure was a pleasure of escaping from official life to fields and forests. Luoyang aristocracy was not like the famous poet Tao Yuanming; they remained in their official posts, and they imitated the escape to nature and a hermit's life in their gardens. Such a way of life became fashionable in high society. Officials restored their energy with nature in their gardens at the same time they stayed in the city. After several centuries, the same principles were expounded by Ji Cheng in his treatise *The Craft of Gardens* (Ji Cheng 1988). Ji Cheng also considered that if solitude could be reached nearby in a big town there was no need to go too far away (Maliavin 2003, 406). A garden became a place that was far from the daily urban style of life: 'In deep thickets and secluded places of the garden you don't have contact with the external world—as if you draw a line and were staying in far mountains or in deep forests' (Li Fu, 36). You are away from the fuss and bustle and in an area of calmness, peace and tranquillity. Occupations in the garden submitted to the rhythms of nature. The buildings in the garden were often named after their function. For example, Sima Guang used this principle. 'Hall for reading books', 'Studio for planting bamboo', 'Terrace for admiring mountains', 'Fisherman's hut', 'Arbour for watering flowers' (Sima Guang, 363–4)—while reading these titles, we can easily imagine how the owner spent his day. We can see how much time he spent in his garden (Sima Guang came to Luoyang and constructed his garden after retirement. During the period of 15 years he spent there, he wrote *The Comprehensive Mirror for the Aid of Government*). The garden and heritage became a style of life for Luoyang's officials. Usually, every garden had its own particularity, for example, the collection of strange stones in

Guiren Garden or the poems dedicated to the garden's owner and his ancestors in the garden of the Li family. We can use these collections and inscriptions in the garden to get information about its owners. It is known that in Luoyang the gardens belonged to families of high government and military officials and that they were inherited by their descendants. By the Song period, the aesthetic enjoyment of nature became traditional not only for the civil, but also for the military aristocracy.

Quoted material permits us to say that in the Northern Song period the art of gardening was popular in the western capital Luoyang and its environs. By the way, nowadays Luoyang is not such a favourable or prosperous place. It is famous for its flowers, especially peonies, which are considered the national flower of China. Chinese authors conceived gardens as a part of nature and as a hermitage in their stormy official life. Their gardens became sources of pleasure, as well as many other things. Despite many detailed descriptions of these gardens (arrangement of artificial streams and mountains, buildings, vegetation, etc.) in *youji* texts, the most important for us is the opportunity to see an unofficial side of noble men and understand the authors and garden owners through things they loved.

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