



An Interdisciplinary Workshop

**“Living an Epoch with Nature:
Plants and Spatial Representations in the Ming-Qing Transition”**

(Online, June 7 and 9, 2022, Heidelberg University)



“Faces of Nature in Seventeenth-Century China”

(A collage of images from speakers' papers)

Idea and Organization: Yizhou Wang and Yingzhi Zhao

Supported by the Heidelberg project “Epochal Lifeworlds: Man, Nature and Technology in Narratives of Crisis and Change” at the Joint Center for Advanced Studies “Worldmaking from a Global Perspective: A Dialogue with China”

Registration: If you are interested in attending the event, please write to emily.tsui@hcts.uni-heidelberg.de. You will receive a link to attend the meeting.

WORLD 建構：
世界 MAKING



Ideas and Concepts

This interdisciplinary workshop focuses on the representations of plants and space and the discourses on human-nature interactions during the Ming-Qing transition of seventeenth-century China. Seventeenth-century China witnessed growing attention to various conflicts, crises, and epochal transformations against the backdrop of political turmoil, dynastic transition, social turbulence, environmental changes, and natural calamities. It is a period especially appropriate to be examined through the lens of space, due to the change of sociopolitical structure that displaced literati from their physical and spiritual homes, and the concomitant shift of aesthetic and cultural values. We adopt space as one of the interpretive frameworks to respond to the characteristics of the period and to facilitate interdisciplinary dialogues. As a cultural construct, nature is the site of psychic projection of humans. The antithesis between nature conceived as a pristine sanctuary and human ingenuity that molds nature to express human concerns is a theme that threads through our work. From the diverse perspectives of art history, literary studies, cultural history, history of knowledge, and philosophy, our speakers discuss how the individual artists, poets, and intellectuals confronted the challenges and interacted with the real or imaginary natural environments through their painting and writing about plants and space in the Ming-Qing transition.

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Program

Day 1. June 7, 2022

15: 30 – 18: 30 (Berlin)

14: 30 – 17: 30 (London) / 21: 30 – 00: 30 (Beijing) /

9: 30 – 12: 30 (Boston) / 8: 30 – 11: 30 (Chicago) / 6: 30 – 9: 30 (Los Angeles)

15: 30 – 15: 40 Introduction (Yingzhi Zhao and Yizhou Wang)

15: 40 – 16: 40 **Keynote Lecture 1**

Anne Burkus-Chasson (Associate Professor, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign):
Completing Heaven's Intention: Qi Biaoja's Daily Records on Building a Garden at Yushan

16: 40 – 16: 50 Break

16: 50 – 18: 00 **Panel 1. Transplanting Human Emotions/Thoughts into Plants**

(Moderator: Yingzhi Zhao/Yizhou Wang)

- **Yizhou Wang** (PhD Candidate/Research Fellow, Heidelberg University):
The Orchid Knows: A Reassessment of Courtesan-Concubine Gu Mei through Her Paintings and Sisterhood
- **Ruiying Gao** (PhD Candidate, The University of Kansas):
Collecting Nature on Paper? *Materia Medica* Images in the Seventeenth Century
- **Mengxi Zhao** (PhD Candidate, Heidelberg University):
***Materia Medica*, Wild Herbs, and Fine Vegetables: Conceptualizing Famine Plants in Ming Relief Manuals**

18: 00 – 18: 30 Q&A and Discussion (Discussant: **Alison Hardie**)



Day 2. June 9, 2022

14: 30 – 17: 50 (Berlin)

13: 30 – 16: 50 (London) / 20: 30 – 23: 50 (Beijing) /

8: 30 – 13: 50 (Boston) / 7: 30 – 12: 50 (Chicago) / 5: 30 – 8: 50 (Los Angeles)

14: 30 – 15: 30 **Keynote Lecture 2**

Alison Hardie (Honorary Research Fellow, University of Leeds):

‘Creating Something Magical’: Interaction between Nature and Author in the Work of Ruan Dacheng

15: 30 – 15: 40 Break

15: 40 – 16: 50 **Panel 2. Envisioning Landscape and Space**

(Moderator: Yizhou Wang)

- **Yingzhi Zhao** (Independent scholar; PhD, Harvard University):

Tree Nest, Boat Chamber, and Returning to Simplicity Studio: Dialectics of Artifice and Simplicity

- **Chen Zhang** (Independent scholar; PhD, Harvard University):

Aerial Visions: Heaven, Nature, and Poetic Subjectivity in Wang Fuzhi’s Poetry

- **Yi Chen** (CAPAS Research Fellow, Heidelberg University):

Bada Shanren: Two World-Shaping Plant-Scapes

16: 50 – 17: 50 Q&A and Discussion (Discussant: **Anne Burkus-Chasson**)

Conclusion



Individual Abstracts

Keynote Lecture 1

Completing Heaven's Intention: Qi Biaoqia's Daily Records on Building a Garden at Yushan

Anne BURKUS-CHASSON (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)

Abstract

This talk is about the emotions evoked in a celebrated garden named Yushan 寓山 (Sojourn Mountain). Built by the distinguished official and writer Qi Biaoqia 祁彪佳 (1603-1645) while he was in retreat in the picturesque region of Shaoxing 紹興, Yushan occupied Qi Biaoqia for a decade between 1635 and 1645. The garden, which no longer exists, has been extensively researched, but the feelings that Qi recorded in his diary, both as he built the garden and as he lived among the sceneries that he fashioned there, have not been examined. This is surprising, for the excitement of *qing* 情 has long been associated with late Ming (1522-1644) society. My objective here is to link the ordinary emotions that Qi delineated in his diary with the complex spaces, both material and immaterial, that composed the garden. In the interest of time, I discuss only four of the garden spaces I have identified: Between Heaven and Earth; Civility; Distracted Eyes; and Geomantic Energy. Contending that these spaces were constructed to cultivate specific emotions, I endeavor to suggest ways to articulate a historical subjectivity shared among elite gardeners and garden-viewers of the late Ming. Ironically, the extreme, and even violent, manipulation of the natural environment required to build the garden's socially sanctioned spaces primarily cultivated an emotion of “delight” (*le* 樂). The degradation of the region's natural environment, which at times disrupted the garden's construction, was something to work around. The sight of a neglected garden, by contrast, caused him to sigh.

Anne Burkus-Chasson is an Associate Professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She teaches and researches late imperial Chinese art, especially painting and woodblock-printed books. She is the author of *Through a Forest of Chancellors: Fugitive*



Histories in Liu Yuan's Lingyan'ge, an Illustrated Book from Seventeenth-Century Suzhou (Harvard, 2010). She is currently working on a manuscript entitled “Chen Hongshou and the Illustrated Book.” The theoretical issue that has long directed her work revolves around representation, notably self-representation, the shifting relations between word and image, and the material structures of the thread-bound book. In her most recent work, she has delved into the history of emotions and the environmental humanities.

Keynote Lecture 2

‘Creating Something Magical’: Interaction between Nature and Author in the Work of Ruan Dacheng

Alison HARDIE 夏麗森 (University of Leeds)

Abstract

The bad reputation of Ruan Dacheng 阮大鍼 the politician and ‘treacherous minister’ has obscured the quality of his literary work. His plays are recognised but his poetry is largely unstudied and his literary criticism almost completely unknown. As a poet, Ruan was extremely sensitive to natural phenomena, and in this paper I will discuss what his literary work reveals of his approach to the interaction between nature and author. According to his view, not only do landscape, plants, animals, and weather phenomena inspire the author: in some way the true poet also exerts an influence on nature. Ruan’s clearest statements of this view come in his surviving work of literary criticism, *Poetry Talks from Stone Nest* 石巢詩話, but it is instantiated in his poetic work, both in his major poetry collection *Poems from the Hall of Chanting What Is in my Heart* 詠懷堂詩集 and in the lyric parts of his dramas, and is even reflected in some of the illustrations which he commissioned for his first surviving drama, *Spring Lantern Riddles or Ten Cases of Mistaken Identity* 十錯認春燈謎記.

Alison Hardie is an Honorary Research Fellow of Leeds University, having retired in 2015 as a Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies. She holds degrees in Classics from the University of Oxford and in Chinese from the University of Edinburgh, and a doctorate from the University



of Sussex. She translated Ji Cheng’s seventeenth-century garden manual, *The Craft of Gardens* (1988, repr. 2012), revised the third edition of Maggie Keswick’s *The Chinese Garden: History, Art and Architecture* (2003), and edited *The Dumbarton Oaks Anthology of Chinese Garden Literature* (2020). She has published and lectured widely on Chinese gardens and other aspects of culture for both academic and non-specialist audiences. Her monograph *The Many Faces of Ruan Dacheng: Poet, Playwright, Politician in Seventeenth-Century China* was published by Hong Kong University Press in March 2022. She is currently completing a short, illustrated book on the social history of Chinese gardens.

Panel 1. Transplanting Human Emotions/Thoughts into Plants

Paper 1.

The Orchid Knows: A Reassessment of Courtesan-Concubine Gu Mei through Her Paintings and Sisterhood

Yizhou WANG 汪一舟 (Heidelberg University)

Abstract

The renowned late Ming courtesans were often elevated as the righteous, heroic, and virtuous women in the narratives during the Ming-Qing transition and later periods. However, the talented Nanjing courtesan Gu Mei 顧眉 (1619-1664, also 顧媚) was disreputable for her doubtful moral integrity in the writings by men, particularly for she was accused of causing the turncoat behavior of her husband, the eminent scholar-official Gong Dingzi 龔鼎孳. Compared with the other celebrated courtesan artists, e.g., Ma Shouzhen 馬守貞 and Xue Susu 薛素素, in current scholarship, Gu Mei and her paintings have not received much attention. This research aims at bringing a perspective counter to the dominant discourse about her by tracing her own “voices” from her paintings and her “conversations” with other women, either courtesans or gentry-class women, on the painting surface across time and space. The orchid was the favorite subject in paintings by Ming courtesans for multiple reasons in terms of layered symbolic meanings and practical matters. Gu was well-known for her orchid paintings.



Scholars suggest that painting the orchids was courtesans’ sensual performance for their patrons or clients during the literary gatherings. This article focuses on Gu’s orchid paintings made when she became a concubine and was no longer in demand to paint for professional reasons. It argues that Gu transformed the sensual orchid into a radical and political expression, of which the meaning was strengthened through the sisterhood and literary exchanges with her female friends and echoed by the collecting and inscription activities among literary women in its afterlife.

Yizhou Wang is a PhD candidate in Chinese art history at the Institute for East Asian Art History, Heidelberg University, and a research fellow (2022) of the project “Epochal Lifeworlds: Humans, Nature and Technology in Narratives of Crisis and Change” at the Joint Center for Advanced Studies “Worldmaking from a Global Perspective: A Dialogue with China”. She was a visiting research associate at Kyoto University and Tokyo University from 2018 to 2019. She received her M.Litt. in Arts of China from the University of Glasgow and BA from the University of Nottingham Ningbo. She worked at the Calligraphy and Painting Department of the Palace Museum Beijing in 2014. Yizhou has published peer-reviewed articles or presented conference papers on Chinese paintings about courtesans, female artists, plant representations, late Ming woodblock illustrations, Sino-Japanese art interactions, and early-twentieth-century Chinese and Korean photography.

Paper 2.

Collecting Nature on Paper? *Materia Medica* Images in the Seventeenth Century

Ruiying GAO 高瑞迎 (University of Kansas)

Abstract

In the seventeenth century of China, illustrated *materia medica* (bencao) 本草 works became increasingly salient among the educated elite in the Jiangnan area. How does *materia medica*, a significant yet overlooked subject, inform us about their ideas and experiences of the natural world? This paper discusses this question through two hand-illustrated treatises: *Jinshi*



kunchong caomu zhuang 金石昆蟲草木狀 and *Bencao tupu* 本草圖譜. The dynamics of copying and editing as well as interplays between images and texts in the two works provide insight into how *materia medica* was exploited as a pictorial genre for different discussions about human-nature interactions in the seventeenth century. On the one hand, I acknowledge that *materia medica* images represented their creators and consumers’ symbolic possession of the material world and thus served as a maker of their social distinction. On the other hand, I expand this interpretation by shedding light on the perpetuated tradition of making images of *materia medica* as an intellectual practice in order to demonstrate how human’s appropriate relationship with nature was addressed and negotiated in seventeenth-century China.

Ruiying Gao is a PhD candidate in the Kress Foundation Department of Art History at the University of Kansas. She received her BA in art history with First Class Honours from the University of Hong Kong and MA from Columbia University. In addition to her speciality in Chinese painting, Ruiying’s research interests also include the history of the book, Chinese bronze culture, and Japanese ukiyo-e prints. Her dissertation investigates how *materia medica* images in Ming China were used for political, intellectual, and commercial agendas by different social groups.

Paper 3.

Materia Medica, Wild Herbs, and Fine Vegetables: Conceptualizing Edible Plants in Ming Relief Manuals

Mengxi ZHAO 趙檬錫 (Heidelberg University)

Abstract

Much scholarship on historical discussions on famine foods concentrates on their wilderness and emergency uses. Yet a closer look at Ming famine relief manuals complicates their authors’ understandings of edible plants in times of scarcity, which were referred to by various phrases including material medica, wild herbs and fine vegetables. By scrutinizing the texts and images in *Jiuhuang bencao* 救荒本草 (Materia Medica for Famine Relief), *Yecai pu*



野菜譜 (Album of Wild Herbs) and *Yecai bolu* 野菜博錄 (Extensive Record of Wild Vegetables), this paper aims to recount the conceptualization of famine foods in late imperial China, highlighting how the fluid category was shaped by social and cultural dynamics and exerted influence on human-nature interactions. The paper will first give an introduction to the manuals, analyzing the compilers’ intention and identifying their targeted readership. Second, it will investigate the scope of plants in each manual, and explain the diverse selection criteria. Third, it will specify what information was considered relevant and how such information was textualized and visualized. The paper will demonstrate that the boundaries between food and non-food, famine food and regular food were blurred, being constantly negotiated, redefined, and abandoned in a changing world.

Mengxi Zhao is a doctoral student in the Graduate Programme for Transcultural Studies (GPTS) at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS) at Heidelberg University. She received her BA in Philosophy from Peking University and her MA in Transcultural Studies from Heidelberg University. From 2019 to 2020, she was a research associate at Kyoto University, and from March to August 2021, she was a visiting predoctoral fellow at the MPIWG. Her ongoing dissertation project investigates the production, circulation, and reception of famine plant manuals—a genre that discusses edible plants for consumption in times of scarcity—both as texts and artifacts in early modern East Asia.

Panel 2. Envisioning Landscape and Space

Paper 1.

Tree Nest, Boat Chamber, and Returning to Simplicity Studio: Dialectics of Artifice and Simplicity

Yingzhi ZHAO 趙穎之 (Independent Scholar)



Abstract

Mao Xiang's 冒襄 (1611–93) self-fashioning in terms of architectural sites exemplified cultural values of the late Ming and their changes after the dynastic transition. Tree-Nest, a pavilion built on the tree, revealed how the ideal of reclusion was given a twist to accommodate the contemporary fascination with the marvelous. The antithesis and synthesis of reclusion and late Ming aesthetics was captured in *pu* 樸 and *qiao* 巧, two concepts that feature prominently in the writings on Tree-Nest 樸巢. After it was destroyed during the dynastic transition, Mao rebuilt his garden to reflect on his accidental survival and spiritual rebirth after Ming collapse. The cultural values implicit in the two concepts thread through the construction and representation of his post-conquest sites thanks to their broad semantic range: *qiao* denotes not only artifice, but also its opposite—coincidence, devoid of plan and ingenuity; besides natural simplicity designated by the tree, *pu* connotes origin and the Way. The delicate balance between precariousness and security in the design of Boat Chamber visualized his contemplation on the contingent nature of life. Studio of Returning to Simplicity 還樸齋 embraced the Daoist values symbolized by the tree in accordance with the *Laozi*: “Reversal/Return is the movement of the Way.” The configuration of the two concepts in Mao's sites suggests their significance in the context of sociopolitical upheaval. The dialectics of *qiao* and *pu* underwent a transformation from the dynamics of artifice and simplicity to the awareness of regenerating life and restoring the origin of culture.

Yingzhi Zhao held BA and MA from the Department of Chinese Literature and Culture at Fudan University, and PhD from the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University. She has published peer-reviewed articles on Chinese literature and culture; and her research has received grants from Research Grants Council of Hong Kong and Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection. Currently she is an independent scholar revising her book manuscript on the imagination and representation of garden and landscape in the literature and culture of the Ming–Qing transition. She is soon to embark on a new project that investigates the rise of historicism in late imperial Chinese culture.



Paper 2.

Aerial Visions: Heaven, Nature, and Poetic Subjectivity in Wang Fuzhi’s Poetry

Chen ZHANG 章琛 (Independent Scholar)

Abstract

Wang Fuzhi as a poet is strongly drawn to the celestial space. This space captures the spiritual, at times even the mystic aspect, in the way aerial imagery is presented in his poems. Wang’s poetic descriptions of the natural landscape capture the world’s movements in a dynamic play of vibrant colors, aerial forms in subtly traced movements, and an open light-infused space. The poet cognizes this space in the natural world in the form of a clear sky or the sky merging with an expansive water surface, while the space correlates to his mindscape, a “field of consciousness” (*shitian* 識田) where shadowy thoughts and feelings stir.

The way celestial space is imagined and its relation to the poet and the landscape establish the structure of poetic subjectivity for Wang Fuzhi: Man is the poet in solitude, and much of his attention as observer, interpreter, and most importantly, as a sentient being is focused on Heaven and its workings. By defining poetic subjectivity in this way, Wang distances himself from the practice of “writing poetry as history” prevalent in his time and seeks to transcend the historical-temporal frame that is symbiotic with traumatic experience. By virtue of its independence from human time, natural space is able to provide the final sanctuary.

Chen Zhang completed her PhD dissertation on Southern Song poetry at Harvard University in 2017. She is now an independent scholar focusing on classical poetry (*shi*) and song lyric (*ci*) in the Song, and Wang Fuzhi’s poetry and poetics in the Ming-Qing transition. Her broad research question is to trace the representation of types of emotions in the different poetic genres from the Song to early Qing, as a way of exploring what drives literary creation and literary history. Her publications on Wang Fuzhi include the papers: 〈機鋒與神理：王夫之《遣興詩》及其詩學意義初探〉 and 〈空靈無待與充然情至：從《擬阮步兵詠懷》看王夫之詩論與創作的關係〉. She is currently completing a monograph, forthcoming in 2023, on the history of Southern Song *ci* lyric told through the contemporaneously curated collective anthologies.



Paper 3.

Bada Shanren: Two World-Shaping Plant-Scapes

Yi CHEN 陳怡 (Heidelberg University)

Abstract

The *-scape* in landscape derives from a root that implies both agency and comprehension, and through that, a viewer. This echoes a distinction made in Chinese art: landscape is a genre for the mind (*xieyi* 寫意), whereas still-lives are the genre of the skillful brush (*gongbi* 工筆). Of course, images of plants, flowers, and birds can not bear anything like the significance of misty peaks. Or can they?

Let us consider this question through two paintings by Bada Shanren (born Zhu Da 朱耷, 1626–1705) who was born as a prince in a minor line of the Ming imperial house. This, however, became an existential liability when Ming fell to Qing in 1644. Seeking refuge in a Buddhist temple, where he stayed for thirty-two years, Bada was not only able to survive but to express himself as a painter, calligrapher and poet – though contemporary biographers describe symptoms of madness.

The inimitably expressive style in which Bada captured the most mundane objects – a single taro root or stone perhaps – brought him posthumous fame. The two works we will explore were painted around 1688: a large hand-scroll of various plants (《花卉圖卷》) and a painting called “Moon and Melon” (《瓜月圖》). A scroll painting is a characteristic medium of the landscape genre where it usually holds a vast horizon. Here we see a taro root, a melon, some flowers, a stone, and a few sprigs of bamboo. The medium however is indeed appropriate: Bada’s work becomes vast at a higher level, when each individual object evokes a world of everyday experience, captured as *human* experience, not as an abstract, conceived ideal. Similarly, a single animated brush stroke by his hand that locates the moon into “Moon and Melon” manifests a perfect convergence of mind and brush that cuts across the confinements of form and convention.

Bada Shanren shapes a world from small things; this is world-shaping indeed, to borrow a word of Martin Heidegger (“*das Welt-bildende*”), and in doing so he expresses an essentially human gesture. His plants form plant-scapes no less exalted than the highest peaks. In their



phenomenality they capture the very meaning of the *-scape* in landscape: the implicit participation of the indomitable human mind.

Yi Chen is a research fellow at Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS) at Heidelberg University. She received her first PhD in Philosophy from Fudan University, China in 2001, and then her second PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Toronto in 2015. She was an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Bond University, Australia from 2017 to 2020. Her specialized fields include Comparative Philosophy and Philosophy of Comparison, Phenomenology and Hermeneutics, Chinese Philosophy and Literature, and Japanese Aesthetics.