Design With Nature: The Practice and Theory of Two Chinese Intellectual Architects of the Eighth Century

Shimeng Sun

Abstract
An old tradition of designing with nature had existed for thousands of years in ancient China. In order to achieve ideal living environment, people believed that they should use, repair, and improve the nature in an active but abstemious way, and a complete system of design theories and techniques gradually developed. The intellectual architects, in particular, pioneered the practical and theoretical developments, especially those in Tang dynasty made extraordinary contributions. Among them, Yuan Jie (元结) and Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元) were particularly outstanding. They had different experiences but similar achievements in Yongzhou area, which was a remote, less-developed region but with beautiful landscapes. In this paper, the planning and design practices of these two intellectual architects were examined and compared. Their principles and methods of Design With Nature were summarized. Also, the historical influence of their works and its contemporary value were briefly discussed at last.

Keywords
Design With Nature, intellectual architects, Liu Zongyuan, Yuan Jie, Yongzhou

Searching for a better way to create a living environment in nature has been one of the primary tasks for architects and urban planners over the last few decades, especially as a result of rapid urban sprawl and the ruthless destruction to nature. In the 1960s, McHarg’s Design With Nature brought an ecological view to the traditional field of planning and design in the Western world. He declared that we should design with nature to express the potential harmony of man-nature, because nature is not antagonistic to the city or to man but indispensable ingredients of a humane environment (McHarg 1969: 5). He noticed that the empirical ecological values embodied within the ancient history and culture of Japan. However, the tradition of “Design With Nature” was indeed formed much earlier in ancient China.

With deep understanding and great respect to nature, the ancient Chinese believed that they should use, repair, and improve the natural environment in an active but abstemious way, so as to create an ideal living environment. Practices were widely guided by the above concept and a complete system of theory and methodology was gradually formed. This tradition of Design With Nature had already existed for thousands of years, however, it was severely overlooked due to the subversive impact of Western

---

Correspondent Author:
Shimeng Sun, 200, School of Architecture, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China
E-mail: ssm2@mail.tsinghua.edu.cn
culture and technology in the last century. Only until recent years, due to the growing man-made damage to nature and the increasing cultural confidence, the Chinese finally “rediscovered” the treasures hidden in ancient tradition and wisdom.

Intellectual architects were, in actuality, pioneers in the practice and theoretical development of Design With Nature in ancient China. Understanding this allows us to reconsider the above tradition. In particular, the intellectuals of the Tang dynasty (618-907) played an important role in terms of both the amount of practice and profundity of theoretical thinking that they carried out. These intellectuals inherited an aesthetic appreciation of nature from their predecessors in the Wei-Jin period, and also their rich experience accumulated during the development of Southern China. The increasing population of this group and the formation of their particular lifestyle and cultural aspiration all contributed to the practice of Design With Nature in this period, both economically and culturally.

Instead of discussing this in a macro view, the author would rather give some concrete examples of intellectual architects who were active between the eighth and nineth centuries, focusing on “how” and “why” they planned and designed with nature. Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元 773-819) and Yuan Jie (元结 719-772) are two of such notable figures. Despite his fame as the pioneer of Guwen Movement and a tragic politician relegated to a provincial position, Liu Zongyuan was also a prolific architect and theorist. He widely participated in planning and design in his 10-year exile in Yongzhou (永州), where the rich landscape significantly contributed to and enhanced his practice. Yuan Jie, 54 years older than Liu, was remembered much as a passionate litterateur and a loyal official who once participated in putting down the An-Shi Rebellion. He was the governor of Daozhou (道州), and led the planning and design in this region with great creativity and intensive fondness for the landscape. His work could have deeply affected Liu 40 years later, and they were both important representatives of Tang dynasty intellectual architects who believed in and practiced Design With Nature. Most importantly, their practices and theories continued to influence other intellectuals through their literatures.

In this paper, the two architects’ practices in Yongzhou region will be introduced first. Their representative works of the same scale will be examined then in detail, in order to summarize their common design principles and theories. Their influence on later intellectual architects will then be briefly discussed. Finally, this age-old tradition and its contemporary value will be summarized in conclusion.

**YUAN JIE AND LIU ZONGYUAN’S PLANNING AND DESIGN IN YONGZHOU**

*Yongzhou in the Eighth Century: An “Experimental Field” for the Intellectual Architects*

Before discussing Yuan and Liu’s planning and design practice, it is necessary to briefly introduce their “experimental field”—Yongzhou region. In this paper, it refers to a region containing both Yongzhou and Daozhou in the Tang dynasty (see Figure 1). It lies in today’s southern Hunan Province, touching upon Guangdong and Guangxi provinces to the south. Being distant and inaccessible from Central China, this region was sparsely populated and less developed at that time. Also, it was a typical option where the government appointed relegated officials. However, a significant portion of these relegated officials were still loyal and talent intellectuals. They brought advanced ideas and techniques from Central China to these remote regions, and greatly improved the living environment there.

Despite its disadvantaged location, Yongzhou was endowed with excellent natural environment. Three
Figure 1. Yongzhou and Daozhou in the Tang Dynasty.

huge mountains, including Mengzhu and Dupang Ridges, which are the west two of the Five Ridges, divide Yongzhou into two basins. The Xiao River (潇水) and Xiang River (湘水) run through most of this region. Limestone cliffs, caves, spring and streams were particularly rich here. These diverse landscape, completely different from those of Central China, deeply fascinated the officials and visitors who came here. Some of them even determined to settle down forever. The landscape also inspired the intellectual architects, and provided perfect resource for their Design With Nature. Among these architects, Yuan Jie and Liu Zongyuan were particularly outstanding.

Yuan Jie’s Practice as a Prefectural Cishi

Yuan Jie was appointed Daozhou Cishi (刺史) when he was 45 years old in 763 AD. In his three-year term of office as the governor, his planning and design practice included two main parts:

First, he focused on the construction of public infrastructure. When he initially arrived in Daozhou,
the region had just experienced a horrible invasion by the Western barbarians. The city was destroyed, and people lost their homes. Yuan presided over the post-war reconstruction immediately, such as building houses and dividing the farmlands (Ouyang 1975: 4686). After that, he planned and built the Shun Temple (舜祠) as an important place and facility for education and public moralization (Yuan 1960: 127). The ancient emperor Shun, who is believed dead and buried at the Jiuyi Mountain in Daozhou, is considered as a moral paragon in ancient China.

Second, as a litterateur with strong interest in landscapes, he traveled across the region to discover and build sceneries. He discovered Han Ting and Yanghua Rock in Jianghua County, Wazun Rock, You Stream, Seven Springs, Shiyu Lake, Wuru Rock around Daozhou city, Chaoyang Rock around Yongzhou city, and many other sceneries around Wu Stream (浯溪) in Qiyang County (Yuan 1960: 136-159). He loved the landscape so much that he could not bear seeing their existence in the wilderness without a name. Some of his namings were full of special moral meanings, which could be regarded as an important approach for moral education. For example, he named five springs after five virtues, including benefit (惠), loyalty (忠), filial piety (孝), honesty (直), and uprightness (方), so as to remind people of these virtues (Yuan 1960: 147). After discovering natural sceneries, he also made further designs to enhance these places. Taking You Stream (右溪) for example, it used to be an ordinary stream beside the west city wall. Yuan dredged the channel, cleared the bank, built pavilions along the stream, and planted pine and vanilla, at last, he gave the name You according to its location with regard to the city (Yuan 1960: 146). In the end, a new public river park was created out of a wasteland.

**Liu Zongyuan’s Practice as a Prefectural Sima**

Liu Zongyuan earned his fame in literature and politics when he was young. At the age of 32, he participated in Yongzhen Reform (永贞变革) as a key member, but failed in the end. As a result, he was relegated to Yongzhou Sima (司马), a position without the real power. Days in Yongzhou seemed endless and miserable at the beginning, but he was gradually falling in love with the wonderful landscape there, and finally found inner peace.

As a sinecure Sima, Liu was not responsible for city planning or infrastructure construction, but he was very interested in these public affairs. He wrote many articles on projects designed by his friends, such as the government office by Wei Cishi, the WanShi Garden by Cui Cishi, the Three-Pavilion Park by Xue in Yongzhou, and the public school and Confucius Temple by Xue Cishi in Daozhou (see Figure 2). Their planning and design ideas were emphatically discussed in his articles.

Liu also designed his own habitation. When he initially arrived in Yongzhou, he lodged in the west wing of Longxing Temple (龙兴寺). That room lacked of daylight but had excellent view westwards. Therefore, Liu opened up a window in the west wall, and built a pavilion (轩) outside. With the little change, he improved the lighting situation and borrowed distant mountains and rivers as scenery (Liu 1979: 751). Since then, he started to enjoy the fun of design. Later, he moved to Fahua Temple (法华寺) which located on the top of a hill. Liu cleaned up the messy plants on the west hillside to create a broad vision (Liu 1979: 749). In the fifth year of demotion to Yongzhou, he finally accepted the reality and decided to build his own house there. He selected the site and made the plan all by himself, following his ideal of living environment (see Figure 2).

With keen insight and imagination, Liu Zongyuan also discovered new sceneries in Yongzhou. The most notable ones would be the eight sceneries located in the west of Xiao River (see Figure 2). He recorded the whole discovery process in a group of prose—*The Eight Essays of Yongzhou* (永州八记). This collection has such an important position in the history of
Chinese classical literature that the eight sceneries even became symbols of Yongzhou landscape.

**TWO REPRESENTATIVE WORKS OF “DESIGN WITH NATURE” BY YUAN JIE AND LIU ZONGYUAN**

To further examine their ideas and methods of Design With Nature, we need two typical and comparable examples. The best ones are the designs for their own residence gardens (宅园) located in Yongzhou.

**Yuan Jie’s Design of The Three-WU (三吾) Residence Garden**

Yuan Jie had a dream of living in seclusion after retirement, one of the reason was his deep fondness
for landscape. He had been looking for an ideal place during his tenure as Daozhou Cishi, and finally he found the Wu Stream in Qiyang County.

It is a little stream flowing northwards into the Xiang River. On the east bank of the stream, there stands a hill with steep cliffs along the river, which Yuan called “Guaishi” (怪石). It is about 200 meters in length and 30-40 meters in height. At that time, Xiao River was the only path going northward from Daozhou. And Guaishi was very outstanding while sailing in the river (see Figure 3). More than once, Yuan must have visited the stream and hill, and was deeply attracted by its natural beauty. He highly praised it in a poem, “located east of the Xiang River in Northern Yongzhou, the Wu Stream has the most beautiful landscape in the whole Hunan Province” (Yuan 1960: 46). Around 766 AD, Yuan finally made the decision to settle down here.

His planning, designing, and building of the residence garden lasted for five to six years. The process could be logically divided into the following four basic steps:

Step 1: highlighting the Three-WU as the framework for the overall design (see Figure 4). Three-WU refers to the Wu Stream, Wu Platform (峿台), and Wu Pavilion (峿廡), which were Yuan’s initial discoveries and creations for his residence garden. Firstly, he named the stream WU (浯). Then he climbed the hill, and found the best spot to overlook the river and distant landscape, which is the east and highest end of the hill. There he made a platform and named it another WU (峿). Between the stream and the hill, there was another little hill, much smaller in size, but more vertical in form. With the stream on the left, the hill on the right, and the river in the front, Yuan loved this unique position of the little hill, and built a pavilion right on the top. Again, he named it WU (峿). By adding different radicals—mountain (山), water (水), and roof (广)—to the original WU (峿), which means Mine in Chinese, Yuan created three new characters. Thus, the three new WUs embodied the special meaning of My stream, My platform, and My pavilion. It shows that Yuan loved these scenes so much that he proudly declared his ownership over them. But from another aspect, Three-WU also belongs to anyone who reads it or sees it, just like a gift from Yuan to each and every visitor.

Step 2: plaining buildings in the vicinity of three WU. Yuan built his own house—the Middle House (中堂) in front of “Guaishi” Hill, facing south, taking the hill as the barrier against the river. On a relatively flat ground halfway up the hill, he built another house for the guests, facing east. He named it the Right House (右堂), according to its relative position to the Middle House.

Step 3: discovering scenery and designing the garden. Yuan continued to discover and name sceneries around the houses, such as the East Cliff, Rocky Screen, Rocky Gate, Cold Spring, etc. However, he still paid much attention to the Guaishi Hill, especially the flat ground half way up, where he built the Right House. Climbing rocky stairs from the southwest foot of the hill, he found this ground. It was narrow and tortuous with rocks and plants scattered all over. He planted more pine and bamboo, and built pavilions at proper spots to reinforce the sense of tortuosity. On the other side of the hill where he built the Wu Platform, Yuan was pursuing a sense of broadness. The contrast of these two extreme spacial sensations on the same hill was exactly the highlight of Yuan’s design.

Step 4: inscribing literature in the natural landscape. This is the final yet very important step. Yuan wrote articles for all his designs to record the discovery and creation process, also to eulogize the moral spirits extracted from natural landscape. He intentionally selected specific rocky walls to inscribe these writings. The rocks were hard enough and uniquely shaped to resist the weathering (see Figure 5). His best work was the Da Tang Zhong Xing Song (大 唐中兴颂) carved on the most visible cliff wall of
the hill, facing the river. This is an eulogy about the resurgence of Tang dynasty, written before his arrival in Daozhou. This cliff wall, perfect for the inscription, probably helped Yuan make the decision to settle down here. This cliff inscription finally became an immortal masterpiece in history, owing to its excellent literature, calligraphy, and the aesthetic nature of the rock, furthermore, for its perfect integration of humanity and nature.

Liu Zongyuan’s Design of The Eight-YU (八愚) Residence Garden

As stated above, Liu Zongyuan decided to build his own house after five years of lodging in temples. Same as Yuan, he followed a stream to find his ideal site. It was a little stream flowing eastward into the Xiao River, directly facing the west gate of Yongzhou City. About one kilometer upstream from the estuary, Liu found the perfect site (Liu 1979: 642).
Liu planned eight essential elements to compose his ideal living environment: stream, hill, spring, ditch, pond, hall, pavilion, and island. He named all of them with YU. Therefore, the residence garden got the name Eight-YU. The first four elements were all of natural existence, and were elaborately selected by Liu as the fundamental condition of the design. Then, he built a pond to reserve the spring water. Around the pond, he built a hall to the east and a pavilion to the south. He even created a small island in the middle of the pond. Adding a variety of plants, an interesting residence garden finally came to shape (Liu 1979: 642) (see Figure 6).

Furthermore, Liu discovered eight sceneries within walking distance from his house. In his mind, the eight sceneries and Eight-YU composed a complete living environment. And their relationship resembled that between the city and the scattering scenic spots in its outskirts. From here, Liu Zongyuan took a further step beyond Yuan Jie’s work.

THE COMMON PRINCIPLES OF THEIR DESIGN WITH NATURE

Comparing the above two examples, which were about 40 years apart in time and 50 kilometers away in space, we could certainly find some common principles from their planning and design:

Firstly, the sites were elaborately selected close to the stream and against the hill. In both cases, the stream and hill were regarded as the basic condition for an ideal site, and became two of the most important elements of the whole design. At a functional level, stream provides water for life, and implies convenient transport; while hill and surrounding high ground provide protection against flood, invasion, and bad weather, serving as a natural barrier for the living environment. At a symbolic level, hill and stream are the embodiment of the specific Chinese concept, “Shan-Shui” (山水), on a smaller scale. Shan-Shui refers to a vivacious world made up of human’s life ideals, instead of a wild and emotionless nature. When separated, the concept of Shan and Shui was also given specific human characters due to their physical properties: Shui (river or stream) incorruptness, nourishment, and consolation, while Shan (mountain or hill) for firmness, transcendence, and broad-mindedness. Because of these symbolic meanings, mountain and water (or hill and stream on a smaller scale) are well-beloved by Chinese intellectuals from ancient times to this day, and always emerged in their designs of ideal living environments.

Secondly, the structural models for the ideal living environment were established as expressed in the designs. Both the Three-WU and Eight-YU were abstract structures of living environment created by the architects. In Yuan Jie’s Three-WU structure, the stream, platform, and pavilion symbolized Shui, Shan, and House, respectively, and their relationship suggest the ideal of living in the landscape. Forty years later, more elements and more complicated relationship appeared in Liu Zongyuan’s Eight-YU structure. The eight elements could be classified into four basic aspects of living environment: Shan (hill), Shui (stream, spring, and ditch), house (hall), and garden (pond, island, and pavilion). Shan and Shui symbolize the natural environment, while house and garden are the artificial environments, to which Liu paid much more attention. His structure also presents more space levels. For instance, the hall and pavilion show a small-scale dwelling environment. When adding the pond, island, spring, and ditch, it becomes a medium-scale activity environment. The eight elements altogether indicate a large-scale survival environment (see Table 1 and Figure 6).

Thirdly, the designs were based on and for enhancing features of the natural environment. Nature was respected as the basis and foundation for the whole design in both examples. The architects’ creation was aimed at promoting nature’s unique strength and for repairing certain defects through restrained man-made efforts, but certainly without large-scale constructions.
Lastly, specific meanings were implanted into the natural environment through naming and inscribing. To the ancient Chinese intellectuals, planning and design living environments were considered as a practical approach to express their ideas about life and art, same as writing, versing, and painting. Through writing and inscribing their thoughts into the landscape, a meaningful place was made out of the silent and ordinary nature. For example, the cliff inscription of *Da Tang Zhong Xing Song* in the east of
Wu Stream is still visible today. It constantly tells the story of Yuan, his time and his faith. Through the inscription, the figure and his spirit permanently exist within a specific natural environment.

Liu Zongyuan might have been affected by Yuan Jie’s work and idea from the latter’s writings 40 years later (although there exists no clear evidence that Liu had ever visited Yuan’s garden). Similarly, the above common principles might have been studied by later intellectual architects and employed in their designs, owing to the wide spread of their writings. Thus formed the design tradition among ancient intellectual architects.

LIU ZONGYUAN’S THEORY OF DESIGN

Compared with Yuan Jie, Liu Zongyuan is more of a theorist. Based on his planning and design experience in Yongzhou from both his friends’ and his own works, Liu made further thinking about certain theoretical issues, and recorded these ideas in his articles. Although these articles mainly focused on politics and literature, his insight into planning and design could not be concealed. Liu’s design theory had been summarized in an earlier article from about 40 pieces of his writings (Sun 2012). His main ideas are now briefly stated as follows.

Regarding his attitude toward artificial construction within nature, he believed that:

1. Man should use and improve the natural environment to achieve a better living environment. In his view, all the planning and design practice from both his friends and his own followed a basic procedure: discover-clean up-repair-embellish;

2. The artificial construction should pursue the ecological harmony of man-nature. In his words, “to follow the natural landform, preserve its unique feature, and minimize human labor” (Liu 1979: 732). He advocated keeping the original beauty and richness of nature, that is, “flourishing the forests without planting, and enriching the biodiversity without breeding” (Liu 1979: 737), which corresponded with the modern ecological concepts;

3. Man could and should improve the natural environment at the spiritual and moral levels. He once wrote that, “in the place where a gentleman builds and lives, the mountain might be higher, the water seems broader, and the architecture seems more splendid without decoration” (Liu 1979: 723). It indicates that the human spirit plays an important role in improving the natural environment. In turn, wonderful landscape edifies the man as well.

He also proposed specific principles and methods about planning and design, such as:

1. A suitable natural environment is extremely important for human settlements. Firstly, the site should be close to water and established on high ground. Secondly, there should be enough open space and attractive features. Of course, certain conditions should be avoided, for example, desolate places are unsuitable for living;

2. The high position in a living environment has great functional and aesthetic significance, so it should be highlighted in the whole planning and design;

3. The planners and architects should make full use of the natural features of the site to create a better environment, which is “following the landform to achieve scenery” (Liu 1979: 751). If there are beautiful sceneries somewhere around the site, they should be artfully borrowed as a distant component of the whole environment, just like his design at Longxing Temple;

4. Liu summarized different spatial experiences into two opposite type, “Kuang” (旷) and “Ao” (奥). If one climbs up to the mountaintop and experiences the broad open space, he feels the joy of Kuang. If he walks down to the valley or deep in a lush forest, he experiences the narrowness and tortuousness of space, which is the joy of Ao (Liu 1979: 738). Liu believed that different spacial experiences should be strengthened through proper design, rather than to deny the natural tastes;
(5) Liu believed that man’s communication with nature is multi-dimensioned, not only in visual but also in auditory, tactile, olfactory, emotional, and spiritual ways. The architect should employ a variety of methods to enrich the experiences of environment. For example, in Liu’s design at Gumu Pond, he simply elevated the spring, so as to achieve an amplified brawl (audition), extended white water-flow (vision), splash (touch), and cool breath (olfactory) at the same time. Then, he raised the platform and lengthened it into the middle of the lake, making the visitors further involved in the well-designed environment. Sound, color, image, smell, as well as the weather and the visitor’s subjective imagination, overall composed a dramatic place full of artistic conception. From here, we could say that Liu is indeed a master of design with extraordinary perception and great skills;

(6) He also believed that the unique insight of the architects, as well as their imagination and skills, is all central to the design. He once said that, “Nature couldn’t tell its beauty. It is the man who discovers and enhances the nature, and makes it a wonderful place” (Liu 1979: 729). These ideas about the architects are indeed quite advanced 1,200 years ago.

**THE HISTORICAL INFLUENCE OF YUAN JIE AND LIU ZONGYUAN’S PRACTICE AND THEORY**

In essence, Yuan Jie and Liu Zongyuan’s practices in Yongzhou attempted to find a mode of planning and design in a specific area with rich and beautiful landscape. Their designs were apparently considered as the paradigm for the later architects in Yongzhou area (Liu and Qian 1992). Almost all of the following designs made by the intellectuals, there are specific connections with Yuan and Liu’s methods. For example, another notable relegated official in Yongzhou, Wang Zao (汪藻 1079-1154), built his own house on the west city wall, facing directly to the Yu Stream across Xiao River (Liu and Qian 1992: 538). This location, on top of the city wall and by the river, was obviously a response to the siting principle as proposed in the works of Yuan and Liu. Another example was Song Rong (宋溶)’s creation of new
Three-WU beside Wu Stream. Song lived in the eighteenth century, and once served as the governor of Qiyang County. His new Three-WU, Wu Rock, Wu Pond, and Wu House (Gui 2004: 92) obviously imitated Yuan Jie’s original structure.

Even in the entire history of planning and design in ancient China, Yuan and Liu’s Design With Nature was certainly a notable event. They might be the first to have extracted conceptual structures of ideal living environment, and to produce preliminary theories of Design With Nature. Owing to their personal charisma and literary attainments, their works and thoughts were so widespread that few intellectuals after Tang dynasty were unaware of their designs in Yongzhou. Some scholars even pointed out that the tradition of choosing Local Eight-Sceneries (八景), which has prevailed in China since the Southern Song dynasty, could have originated from Liu Zongyuan’s discovery of Eight Sceneries in Yongzhou. This more or less suggests the two’s influence. Some historians believe that a mature theory of landscape architecture had not been developed until Ji Cheng’s book of Yuan Ye (园冶) in the seventeenth century, however, a majority of relevant theories have obviously been produced by Yuan Jie and Liu Zongyuan during their stay in Yongzhou.

CONCLUSIONS

In retrospect of the planning and design of the eighth to ninth century from today’s perspective, the techniques applied are indeed outdated, but the concept of Design With Nature continues to be valuable and relevant.

The philosophical basis of the above two architects’ design with nature was a mixture of Confucianism and Taoism. It was a firm belief that humans have the ability and responsibility to help advance and humanize the wild nature. This essentially reflected the deep love and faith toward life in Chinese culture. Because of this love and faith, the intellectual architects treasured the natural landscape, and dreamed of living in harmony with it. Therefore, we see that Yuan Jie and Liu Zongyuan devoted themselves to the practice of planning and design with nature. And the characteristics of their practice and theory can be summarized as:

(1) Selecting specific natural environments with rich resources, ideal landscape, and beautiful sceneries;

(2) Making the best use of the natural terrain, elevation, orientation, and scenery in planning and design, to strengthen the unique feature of the environment;

(3) Discovering and creating sceneries with deep affection and compassion, and considering this as a integral part of the whole design;

(4) Planting human ideas into nature through inscription, so as to turn the wild nature into a meaningful place;

(5) Establishing a structural model of ideal living environment, and applying this model in their planning and design practice.

Today, it has been a consensus that humans should change their relationship with nature, after tasting the bitterness of nature’s revenge for our own evil-doings. Moreover, change should not be made only at the technique level, but also in concept and value. In China, we should be happy that this conceptual transformation is already emerging in recent national policies. The ecological civilization strategy was officially proposed in the Government Work Report in 2007, and a much more concrete target was set in the Central Work Conference on Urbanization in 2013, that “We should plan and build cities with great respect and conformance to nature, protect its unique landscape structure and design closely with it, so that its inhabitant could see the mountain and river, and remember the sense of home” (People’s Daily 2013).

It is time we need to look back at our old tradition of Design With Nature, a tradition that had existed for
thousands of years. We need to “rediscover” the
treasure of its valuable concepts, theories, and
methods. The discussion of the above two intellectual
architects’ work is only an attempt to interpret the old
tradition. Through these examples, we could learn
their attitude toward natural and artificial
environments, we could see their ideal of living in the
landscape, and their theories and methods of design to
achieve it. These ancient intellectual architects were
not restricted in the narrow field of designing
buildings; however, they considered “how to create a
better living environment in and with the nature” as
the mission. They therefore considered the entire
designing process with a broad vision. Their concerns
about the man-nature relationship, and their creation
born out of wisdom and affection, were particularly
worthy of great respect and further studies by
contemporary architects, as we all face the same
man-nature issues.

Funding

This paper is supported by the National Natural Science
Foundation of China (No. 51378272) and the Postdoctoral
Science Foundation of China (No. 2014M550737).

Note

1. This paper is revised on the basis of the author’s speech at
the 25th UIA (International Union of Architects) World
Congress (2014, Durban) of the same title.

References

People Press.
Li, X.-X. and R.-X. Zhao, eds. 2013. 永州国宝 (National
Treasure in Hunan Province). Changsha: Hunan Arts
Publishing House.
Yong Zhou Fu Zhi). Beijing: Bibliographic Literature Press.
Liu, Z.-Y. 1979. 柳宗元集 (Liu Zong Yuan Ji). Beijing:
Zhonghua Book Company.
History Press.
Book Company.
People’s Daily. 2013. “中央城镇化工作会议在北京举行”
(The Central Urbanization Work Conference Held in
Sun, S.-M. 2012. “中国古代文人的人居环境设计思想初探
—以柳宗元永州实践为例” (A Preliminary Exploration on
Liu Zongyuan’s Ideology of Human Settlements Design: A
Case Study on His Practice in YongZhou). Journal of
Urban and Regional Planning 5(2):204-223.
Yuan, J. 1960. 元次山集 (Yuan Ci Shan Ji). Beijing:
Zhonghua Book Company.

Bio

Shimeng Sun, Ph.D., assistant researcher, School of
Architecture, Tsinghua University, China; research fields:
history of cities, Chinese traditional planning and design, and
regional architecture.