

Institution: University of Leeds

Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages

Title of case study: Chinese garden history and culture: enhancing cross-cultural understanding and professional practice

1. Summary of the impact

Hardie's extensive research on Chinese gardens - objects of major public interest and cultural landscapes rich in social and symbolic meaning - has been widely disseminated through her national and international profile as a speaker. Highlighting the importance of gardens and their theoretical and empirical study across museum, gallery and academic spheres, the research has formed the basis for collaborations with York Art Gallery and Yorkshire Museum Gardens and led to displays in the Gardens that were seen by over 800,000 visitors. Significantly deepening public knowledge and understanding of the garden in China, the research has also influenced the practice of museum professionals.

2. Underpinning research

Hardie's expertise on Chinese gardens, their social uses, and the symbolic and cultural significance of Chinese garden plants derives from her extensive research on Chinese garden history over many years. Research carried out since she came to Leeds in 2006 as Lecturer, then Senior Lecturer (2008), in Chinese Studies has focused on the social uses of gardens in the Chinese cultural tradition, particularly for self-representation. Through her critical analysis of regional characteristics, gendered elements, religious and philosophical symbolism, Hardie identified a significant shift in garden aesthetics at the beginning of the 17th century, which she attributed to the spread of new philosophical ideas that also affected developments in literary expression and landscape painting at the time (Output 1).

Hardie has demonstrated how certain aesthetic modes have been employed to position the garden owner in relation to socio-political and artistic affiliations. In a number of publications, she has shed important light on the use of garden culture for self-representation by both elite women and courtesans in the late Ming dynasty period (late 16th – early 17th centuries) (2), as well as the employment of regional styles and references in garden design to indicate regional loyalties (3, 4). One study provides a unique interpretation of the regional, philosophical and religious symbolism of a particular 17th century garden in relation to its owner's self-representation, thus revealing its socio-historical significance (4). Key themes of the research, which inform Hardie's public lectures and underpin her collaborations with museum professionals, include the symbolism of plants and other garden features (4), regional and temporal variations in garden style (1, 3), and the use of gardens for self-representation (2, 3, 4).

3. References to the research

1. 'The transition in garden style in late-Ming China (Mingdai wanqi Zhongguo yuanlin sheji de zhuanxing)', *Landscape Architecture (Fengjing yuanlin)* 2010, no.5, pp.134-141. *Listed*

Impact case study (REF3b)

in REF2

2. 'Washing the Wutong Tree: Garden Culture as an Expression of Women's Gentility in the Late Ming', in Daria Berg & Chloe Starr ed., *The Quest for Gentility in China: Negotiations beyond gender and class*, Routledge, London, 2007. Available on request
3. "'Massive structure" or "spacious naturalness"? Aesthetic choices in gardens of the Wang families in Taicang', *Ming Studies*, no.55, Spring 2007. Available on request
4. 'Think Globally, Build Locally: Syncretism and Symbolism in the Garden of Sitting in Reclusion', *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, vol.26, no.4, Oct-Dec 2006. Available on request

Indicators of research quality:

All publications were peer-reviewed, and outputs **1**, **3** and **4** were published in leading scholarly journals. All have been submitted for RAE 2008 or REF.

4. Details of the impact

Through public lectures, consultancy and collaborations with York Art Gallery and Yorkshire Museum Gardens, Hardie's research has led to enhanced public understanding of Chinese attitudes to gardens and the complex religious and philosophical symbolism that is fundamental to their gardening practice. The research has had a substantial impact on gallery and museum professionals and members of the public, highlighting regional variations, the importance of the garden in Chinese history and culture, and the ways in which Chinese gardens offer illuminating insights into Chinese culture and cultural difference.

The research has been highly significant for the public and professional understanding of China and its history of garden culture through public engagement activities and specific collaborations:

i. Popular publications and public lectures

Hardie's research has reached national and international audiences through public lectures and publications:

- Her keynote speech 'Chinese Gardens – New Views and New Directions' at the 'Infinite Worlds' conference celebrating the 10th anniversary of Lan Su Yuan Chinese Garden in Portland, Oregon, April 2010, was attended by landscape professionals and members of the local Chinese community who are donors to or volunteers in the garden, as well as by academics; her presentation on the making of Chinese gardens, as a Senior Fellow in Garden and Landscape Studies at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington D.C. (affiliated to Harvard) at the annual Garden and Landscape Studies symposium in May 2011, was attended by professional garden and landscape designers, artists and members of the public
- The new edition (January 2012) of her translation of Ji Cheng's 17th century treatise *The Craft of Gardens (Yuanye)* (1,034 copies sold to date from a print run of 1,500), the success of which led the publishers to commission Hardie to produce a small illustrated volume, *Chinese Garden Pleasures: An Appreciation* (Shanghai: Better Link Press), with a print-run of 3,200; this consists of an introductory essay and translations (mostly by Hardie herself) of prose and poetry on traditional garden activities. It is aimed primarily at the

international tourist market in China. [A]

Through this public engagement, Hardie has exposed Western non-specialists to the Chinese garden tradition, and enabled them to place it within the context of the development of garden culture as a whole. By understanding the nature of Chinese gardens, they develop an awareness of the commonalities of the Eastern and Western garden traditions, thus fostering a deeper cross-cultural understanding. This activity has also led to significant collaborations.

ii. Consultancy and collaborations leading to enhanced public understanding

In 2010, Hardie was invited by the York Museums Trust (YMT) to deliver a public talk and act as consultant for the creation of a 'Chinese Garden Trail', in order to extend and complement the British Museum touring exhibition 'China – Journey to the East' at York Art Gallery. The talk was well attended and reported in the *York Gallery Newsletter*: 'a fascinating illustrated summer evening lecture to a sizeable audience' [B], and the planning of the Chinese Garden was incorporated into the *Museum Gardens Plan: A Garden for York 2010-2015*. [C]

The Chinese Garden Trail consisted of a series of placards to be displayed in the Museum Gardens, adjacent to the Gallery, highlighting Chinese plants: 'The gardens are used by many thousands of people every day. (...) We wanted interesting delightful facts and insights that illuminated the overall role that gardens play in Chinese society.' [D] Hardie advised on the choice of plants and wrote the text for all the information placards and trail leaflet.

The placards, on display from June to October 2010 and giving the English and Chinese names of the plants and information on their significance in Chinese culture, were seen by over 800,000 visitors to the Gardens [E], who either in part or in its entirety followed the Chinese garden plants trail guided by the leaflet (F: print run: 10,000+ and distributed to tourist information centres, hotels, guest houses and city attractions,[D]) giving the visitors to the Garden some understanding of the cultural significance of Chinese garden plants, and making them aware of the importance of plants from China in British horticulture.

The success of the Chinese Garden Trail led to further changes: 'The China Garden trail was so successful that we thought it would be good to have a permanent one' [G]. Hardie was consulted on how to design the garden in such a way that would attract visitors of all ages and encourage activity and interaction, especially with young people, [to] get them involved and doing something in the garden. York Museums Trust decided to install a permanent Chinese-inspired garden area, with permanent placards, and also to include an activity for families.' [C] At Hardie's suggestion this included a 'meander' or *qushui*, a watercourse found in traditional Chinese gardens (a feature that evolved from a 4th century Chinese pastime involving the floating of wine-cups down the stream whilst participants composed poetry) [E]. Her recommendation of specific plants was also incorporated into YMT's plans for this Chinese-inspired garden, leading to the expansion of this area of the garden and informed changes to its content [H].

iii. Consultancy and collaborations leading to changes in professional practice

Thanks to Hardie's work, YMT had for the first time experimented with high quality, focused interpretation in the Gardens. [J]

'Dr Hardie's knowledge shared with the Head Gardener and garden guides has added to their own professional knowledge and helped them give visitors more information on the plants in the gardens by drawing attention to the impact of Chinese garden design on UK gardening and the significance of certain trees and shrubs in Chinese gardening. Dr Hardie's advice also changed YMT's original plans for an Oriental Border by highlighting plants that must be included. As a result this area of the garden became larger than originally planned and

significantly changed in content.' [J]

'It is fair to say that much of the success of these projects has been down to the knowledge of and help from the university. Without expert knowledge, the trail would never have happened, the garden interpretation has hugely benefitted and the idea for the meander would never have crossed our minds.' [D]

The impact has therefore been to increase public use and enjoyment of the Yorkshire Museum Gardens, thus contributing to quality of life and health, while providing cultural benefits through public awareness and understanding of Chinese garden history and culture. In shedding light on the importance of Chinese garden plants to the British horticultural tradition, this work has also informed professional practice for gardeners and curators alike.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Alison Hardie, *Chinese Garden Pleasures: An Appreciation*, Shanghai: Better Link Press, (ISBN: 978-1-60220-145-3). Published USA October 2013, UK 15 Nov 2013 [title page 2014]. Available on request.
- B. <http://www.friendsofyorkartgallery.co.uk/fyag-news-jul10.pdf>. Accessed 4 November 2013.
- C. <http://www.yorkshiremuseum.org.uk/assets/gardens/plan%20for%20museum%20garden%20s.pdf>, pp. 28-29. Accessed 4 November 2013.
- D. Director of Knowledge and Learning, York Museums Trust: *Chinese Garden Trail project report, Chinese Garden Trail and border in the Yorkshire Museum Gardens: Report*, November 2011. Available on request.
- E. Email from Director of Knowledge and Learning, 03/11/2010. Available on request.
- F. *Journey to the East Garden Trail*, Museum Gardens, York/ *China Journey to the East*, York Art Gallery, May 2010.
- G. Email from Director of Knowledge and Learning, 28/10/2011. Available on request.
- H. For evidence of the ongoing installation of the Chinese-inspired meander, see photographs and diagram, available on request.
- I. The most recent edition of the map and guide to the Yorkshire Museum Gardens highlights the Chinese plants (location no. 6: Oriental border): http://www.yorkshiremuseum.org.uk/assets/ymt_museum%20gardens%20leaflet.pdf
- J. Director of Knowledge and Learning, Statement July 2012. Available on request