

GROWING CHINESE INFLUENCES IN NEW ZEALAND: CHINESE GARDENS, IDENTITY AND MEANING

JAMES BEATTIE¹
University of Waikato

Elements of Chineseness are part of everyone's lives in New Zealand, not just those who are ethnically Chinese.²

Garden construction is a form of cultural construction.³

In New Zealand, elements of 'Chineseness' and gardens have been closely connected.⁴ Chinese history is now an integral part of parts of the New Zealand landscape thanks to the efforts of Chinese gold miners and later market.⁵ A remarkably early expression of this connection is provided by an 1869 newspaper report on the development of a Chinese garden by Chinese

¹ James Beattie (jbeattie@waikato.ac.nz) is Lecturer, Department of History, University of Waikato. He completed the editing for this volume while he was the Asia-New Zealand Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Otago. James specialises in environmental history, and is particularly fascinated by transnational and cross-cultural exchanges of scientific, health and environmental ideas, particularly in the nineteenth century, and has published a number of articles and chapters exploring these ideas. He is working on a book, provisionally titled *Empire and Environmental Anxiety, 1800-1920*, to be published by Palgrave Macmillan. He would like to acknowledge the help of many people, for which see final footnote.

² Brian Moloughney, 'Translating Culture: Rethinking New Zealand's Chineseness', in Charles Ferrall, Paul Millar and Keren Smith, eds., *East by South: China in the Australasian Imagination*, Wellington, 2005, 398.

³ Lou Qingxi, *Chinese Gardens*, translated by Zhang Lei and Yu Hong, n.p., 2003, 28.

⁴ See, for instance: Manying Ip, *Dragons on the Long White Cloud: The making of Chinese New Zealanders*, North Shore City, 1996; Manying Ip ed., *Evolving History, Evolving Identity: The Chinese in New Zealand*, Auckland, 2003; James Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past*, 4 Vols., Dunedin, 1993-9; *East by South*. For a delightful look at Chinese gardens and identity, see *Illustrious Energy*, directed by Leon Narbey, 1987.

⁵ Ng, *Windows*, Vol. 1, 1993, 320-22; Janine Smith, 'History Assignment: Lye Bow', Hocken Library, Misc-MS-1168.

in Wellington. Praising its makers' 'painsstaking industry' and noting that the efforts of Chinese 'in manufacture, gardening or agriculture, have always been ingenious and successful', the article concluded that 'many a profitable hint might be taken from their operations in either of these industries'.⁶ European settlers also brought with them, often unwittingly, at least some knowledge of Chinese design concepts through the vogue for Chinoiserie that had ushered in the remarkable garden revolution sparked by exploration and the arrival of Chinese plants and Chinese design concepts in the previous century.⁷

In this article I want to explore some recent manifestations of 'Chineseness' in New Zealand gardens, a discussion that will also touch on some aspects of 'New Zealandness' in China. I look at three different gardens, two in New Zealand and one in China, all of which centre on sister-city connections—between New Plymouth and Kunming, and Dunedin and Shanghai respectively. I am interested in asking how and why these connections developed, what these different garden designs symbolise about Chinese identity in New Zealand and New Zealand's identity with China, and what role and benefits these gardens are expected to confer on sister-city relationships. I argue that the idea of translation, in which an idea or object's meaning becomes re-interpreted and re-contextualised in a new setting, is a useful way of conceptualising of the development of gardens in New Zealand and China. But first I would like to discuss some aspects of the history and character of what we refer to as Chinese gardens.

Yuan and Their Development

In English, 'garden' is a noun commonly used to translate the Chinese word *yuan* 園. As is usual with such direct translations, the substitution of one word for another can create conceptual problems. As Stanislaus Fung notes, '*yuan* refers to open-air spaces as well as space under cover, and avoids the understanding of gardens as external spaces adjacent to houses'.⁸ Indeed, a

⁶ *Wellington Independent*, 17 April 1869, 2. My thanks to Esther Fung for sending me this remarkable piece.

⁷ John Dixon Hunt, *The Picturesque Garden in Europe*, London, 2002; Richard Aitken, *Gardenesque: A Celebration of Australian Gardening*, Carlton, Vic., 2004; Nicola Shulman, *A Rage for Rock Gardening: The Story of Reginald Farrer, Gardener, Writer and Plant Collector*, London, 2002; James Beattie, J. M. Heinzen and John P. Adam, 'Japanese Gardens in New Zealand: Translocation and Transculturation', *Journal of the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, forthcoming.

⁸ Stanislaus Fung, 'The interdisciplinary prospects of reading *Yuan Ye*', guest edited by Stanislaus Fung and John Makeham, *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes: An International Quarterly*, 18, 3 (July-September 1998), 211.

great variety of Chinese terms refer to what can be translated as ‘garden’⁹—important distinctions to bear in mind, because I will use the word garden as a synonym for *yuan*.

The great variety of gardens that developed in China reflects this region’s remarkably long cultural, intellectual and geographical history.¹⁰ Each reflected the particularity of region and state, along with different philosophies, rates of economic development and the variety of climates within the ever-changing area of what we today regard as China.¹¹ There was thus not one ‘Chinese garden’ style that prevailed; rather *yuan* varied by region and changed over time.

My discussion focuses principally on the emergence of what many scholars have termed ‘private’ gardens. Specifically I look at Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE) gardens of southern China. According to Craig Clunas, not only do they ‘continue to set the framework for all discussion of the subject down to the present’ but also, equally importantly, they have inspired most of the ‘Chinese gardens’ developed overseas.¹² Traditionally, private gardens have been represented as places of retreat from government and society for the scholar-officials who created them, but, as Clunas has shown in a recent revisionist work, this was often far from the case. In the Ming dynasty such gardens played important economic, social and political roles.¹³

A flourishing centre of garden culture throughout much of the Ming and Qing (1644-1911) periods was the fertile Yangzi basin area of Jiangnan. The area possessed abundant water supplies and hydraulic works. Its prosperity and dense population also impelled the flowering of arts and garden creativity. The region’s temperate and humid climate promoted the growth of evergreens and allowed for a great variety of plants to flourish. Moreover, since most of the Empire’s scholar-élite hailed from this region (as well as the first capital in the Ming, Nanjing, being located beside the Yangzi), it was a popular retirement area for officials.¹⁴ Economic expansion

⁹ Names for what are translated as gardens included ‘pond pavilion’ (*chi ting*), ‘thatched hall’ (*cao tang*) and ‘estate’ (*zhuang*). Craig Clunas, *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China*, Durham; London, 1996, 111.

¹⁰ During the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), recognised by many historians as the beginning of China’s two millennia of contiguous rule by a centralised state, gardens assumed important imperial functions. During the reign of Han Wudi (140 BCE-87 BCE), for instance, Shanglin Yuan (Upper Woods Garden) extended over an enormous area. Surrounded by a wall of roughly 130 to 160 kilometres in length, within its boundaries were a menagerie, plantations, lakes, agricultural plots, buildings, gardens and so on. Imperial gardens like these, as well as a variety of temple and private gardens, continued to develop over the next two millennia.

¹¹ For an environmental history of China, note Mark Elvin and Liu Ts’ui-jung, eds., *Sediments of Time: Environment and Society in Chinese History*, Cambridge, 1998; Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China*, New Haven and London, 2004.

¹² Clunas, *Fruitful Sites*, 176.

¹³ Clunas, *Fruitful Sites*.

¹⁴ Lou, *Chinese Gardens*, 30-1.

in Suzhou, one of the cities of Jiangnan, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries impacted in significant ways upon garden design and representation. As *yuan* assumed more importance as sites of conspicuous consumption, élite rhetoric emphasising their non-economic functions grew more strident. As Clunas notes: ‘The more the garden was actually penetrated by buying and selling, the shriller grew the claims that it was a place absolutely apart, absolutely unlike’ a productive field or orchard.¹⁵ Where previously agronomy and garden culture had connected in space and text, by the late sixteenth century and despite economic reality, the garden was consciously portrayed as a site apart from the wider commercial environment which created and sustained it. The garden was folded into the discourse of obsession evident in this period of increasing consumption, in which, as Clunas argues elsewhere, taste assumed the ‘essential legitimator of consumption and an ordering principle which prevent[ed] the otherwise inevitable-seeming triumph of market forces’.¹⁶

Qing images of Ming, and specifically Suzhou, garden culture, with an accent on gardens as places of retreat, have strongly shaped subsequent writers’ conception of what constitutes a ‘Chinese garden’. This is because Suzhou had an undoubted impact on the development of garden culture elsewhere in the Chinese Empire. Suzhou’s prosperity translated not only into rising demand for exotic flowers and, most probably, rock, but also, most crucially, promoted the development of gardens as sites of social competition. The rise of taste as an arbiter of aesthetic garden appreciation, and the garden as a site of withdrawal all owe their origin to gardens around this period at this particular time. After all, what was the use of pouring taels of silver into such sites if there was no audience to appreciate it?¹⁷ The image we have of such sites has thus been strongly influenced by the late sixteenth century gardens of Suzhou. In the hands of scholars relying on purely English-language sources, Suzhou’s garden have often become the ‘Chinese garden’. Presented in unproblematic terms, the garden becomes a concept that neither changes over time nor possesses variety.¹⁸ Part of the reason for this is that many of the gardens that survive today were largely altered or redesigned during the late Ming and Qing periods, thereby giving primacy to this period of ‘classical’ garden design. Many, too, were lost, a factor biasing gardens of this period and place.¹⁹

¹⁵ Clunas, *Fruitful Sites*, 107, 169.

¹⁶ Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China*, Cambridge, 1991, 171.

¹⁷ This is not to say that influences were all from the south to the north, as it has often been portrayed. Influences also worked the other way. Clunas, *Fruitful Sites*.

¹⁸ Hardie, ‘Introduction’, in Maggie Keswick *The Chinese Garden: History, Art and Architecture*, revised by Alison Hardie; contributions and conclusion by Charles Jencks, Cambridge, Mass., 2003, 6-12; Clunas, *Fruitful Sites*, 12-13.

¹⁹ The most famous ‘lost garden’, is perhaps Yuanming Yuan, sacked first by British and French troops in 1860 and then during the Boxer Uprising some forty years later, its rise and decline mirroring neatly that of the Qing. Young-Tsu Wong, *A Paradise Lost: The Imperial Garden Yuanming Yuan*, Honolulu, 2001.

Indeed, according to Clunas, Suzhou's garden fame is a relatively recent phenomenon dating from the late nineteenth century, although as the authors in this issue show, Suzhou has long assumed an importance as a site of a flowering commercial, artistic and garden culture.²⁰ Nevertheless, Suzhou's fame as a 'garden city' owes a great deal to a number of relatively recent historical and political events. Firstly, the violence and disruption of the Taiping Rebellion of the 1860s destroyed the splendour of Yangzhou's much-vaunted gardens, thereby focussing attention on Suzhou's garden culture. Secondly, the development of a railway between Shanghai and Suzhou opened up the latter to tourism. Thus by 1936 Suzhou had gained a reputation in Western literature as a 'garden city', an image eventually taken up with enthusiasm by Chinese scholars and public following the victory of the Communist Party (CP) and the concurrent emphasis it placed on nationalism.²¹ Recent domestic and overseas tourism has only added to the city's popularity, with many attracted to the area's gardens because of the designation of some of these on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List.²²

Thanks to the vagaries of history and politics, then, gardens from Suzhou have earned the sobriquet 'Classical Chinese Garden'. They have proved to be an important influence on many overseas designs, including those in New Zealand. Most famously, New York Metropolitan Museum's Ming Xuan ('Ming Lounge'), the first garden in the West to be designed in China and shipped out from there, is based on a corner of Suzhou's Wangshi Yuan ('Master-of-the-Fishing-Nets', henceforth Master of the Nets).²³ Because Suzhou and Jiangnan gardens form the inspiration for Dunedin's as well as other New Zealand Chinese gardens, I will describe in a little more detail some of ways in which these have been represented. As John Makeham has observed of Ming gardens, 'the border between philosophy and art in China has been a permeable one, allowing an unusually high degree of translatability between the two'.²⁴ Garden naming, including that of individual stones and scenes as well as their wider setting, proved especially important, particularly during periods of Confucian revival, since Confucius accorded significance to naming as a means of effecting social and political change. This practice dates from the Song, but arguably reached its zenith during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Names assigned to gardens

²⁰ See, Duncan Campbell and Cao Yongkang et al. in this volume.

²¹ Clunas, *Fruitful Sites*, 203-5. On the development of a national nature in China, note: Judith Shapiro, *Mao's War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China*, Cambridge and New York, 2001.

²² An initial four gardens were recognised in 1997, with a further five added in 2000. *Classical Gardens of Suzhou*, n.p., 2004.

²³ See, Duncan Campbell's article in this volume; Joseph Cho Wang, *The Chinese Garden*, Hong Kong, 1998, 60-1; *In a Chinese Garden: The Art & Architecture of the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden*, Vancouver, 1990.

²⁴ John Makeham, 'The Confucian Role of Names in Traditional Chinese Gardens', in 'Chinese Gardens', guest edited by Stanislaus Fung and John Makeham, *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes: An International Quarterly*, 18, 3 (July-September 1998), 187.

could reflect particular aspirations to power, longevity or learning as well as express subtle political protests, philosophical leanings or patrilineal claims.²⁵ I will now give a few examples of the ways in which these ideas have been translated spatially.

Philosopher Wang Yangming (1472-1528) called the pavilion in front of his study Gentleman Pavilion because it was surrounded by bamboo planted by himself. His naming was deliberate and centred around associations of bamboo with the four qualities connected with the gentleman: virtue, appropriateness, appropriate action and upright demeanour.²⁶ In another instance, according to Qian Dixin's *Record of the Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets* (1795), the garden's original owner, Song Zongyuan, 'took the name Master of the Fishing Nets both for himself and for his garden, thus giving expression of his desire for rustic reclusion and picking up also upon the sound of the original name of the lane along which his garden was found'.²⁷ Song's decision to choose for himself the same pseudonym (*hao*) as his garden was not uncommon among élite.²⁸ Poetry and names inscribed on *stele* and set within gardens to explicate particular views or to acknowledge the design of the garden taken from a particular poem were commonplace, enhancing both the reputation of the *yuan* and its owner.

Although names and poetry might remain, gardens themselves were generally ephemeral. As Duncan Campbell shows in this issue, Master of the Nets was first built in 1174 CE, but its design and structure altered many times, and only gained its present name in the 1760s.²⁹ Similarly, slightly before the Fishing Nets was taking shape, Yuan Mei built his 'Garden of Accommodation' in the 1740s on the site of a former garden that had fallen into disrepair some thirty years before.³⁰ In gardens like these, associations with their owners and, indeed, with eminent men of letters were paramount. From the sixteenth century in fact, it seems that representations of gardens in poetry and art were often accorded greater significance than the actual garden sites themselves. Artists made the garden, not the other way round. As the nineteenth century writer Qian Yong explained: 'The literary productions of brush and ink are more lasting than gardens'.³¹

One particular characteristic of gardens like these is their relatively small size, as Cao et al. show in this volume. This has given rise to an elaborate art of deception in which walls and corridors both separate and connect different scenes, offering variety of views and the perception of great

²⁵ Makeham, 'Confucian role', 192-3.

²⁶ Makeham, 'Confucian role', 194.

²⁷ Campbell, in this volume.

²⁸ Clunas, *Fruitful*, 145-56.

²⁹ *Classical Gardens*, 82-3.

³⁰ Stephen McDowall, 'In Lieu of Flowers: The Transformation of Space and Self in Yuan Mei's (1716-1798) Garden Records', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 3, 2 (September, 2001), 136-149.

³¹ Clunas, *Fruitful*, 35 and 38 (quote).

space. One author has likened the unfolding of scenes the visitor's experiences while moving through such 'classical' gardens to the unrolling of a handscroll. Indeed, the analogy here is important, for as in Chinese paintings, the garden evokes multiple vanishing points, unlike Western painting post-Renaissance which has made us accustomed to single vanishing points.³² Simplicity, contrast and independence are significant considerations in such sites, which, according to the doyen of Chinese gardens, the late Chen Congzhou, together form 'integrated works of art, lyrical and picturesque'.³³ Common polarities—emptiness and fullness, straightness and curvature, artificiality and naturalness—underline wholeness, as expressed in the classical Chinese concept of yin/yang, 'which rely on each other for adequate articulation'. For example, the principle of 'fullness in emptiness' might be exemplified by viewing a scene through a lattice-work window or by allowing rocks to fill a space.³⁴ Similarly, on the question of scale, elements within a garden function in their own right. Thus, rocks and mountains were both regarded as 'genuine' examples of mountains, rather than simply as derivations or copies of the original.³⁵ Combined with these concepts authors have identified a rich interplay of symbolism associated with plants, which for many Chinese today, like their ability to access Classical Chinese, is now lost.³⁶

I have dwelt at length on aspects of the history and design of Chinese gardens for two reasons.³⁷ Firstly, I want to make it clear that there is a great variety of *yuan*. This important point is a necessary corrective to the often ahistorical depiction of *yuan* as unchanging objects or representations. Secondly, it is important to learn of the historical development of these gardens in order to understand better something of the design techniques that have guided similar ones in New Zealand.

Chinese Gardens Outside China

In the late 1990s, a scholar of Chinese garden culture estimated that since 1979 some thirty-five Chinese gardens had been built outside China. The popularity of Chinese gardens in the West, he predicted, could well surpass

³² Wang, *Chinese Garden*, 39-40.

³³ Chen Congzhou, *On Chinese Gardens*, Shanghai, no date, 1.

³⁴ Makeham, 'Confucian role', 190.

³⁵ Ibid., 190-1.

³⁶ Peter Valder, *The Garden Plants of China*, Portland, Oregon, 1999, 41-50; Marianne Beuchert, 'Die Gärten Chinas', in *Die Geschichte der Gärten und Parks*, ed. Hans Sarkowicz, Frankfurt am Main, Leipzig, 2001, 52-65. On the loss of cultural understanding, note John Minford, 'The Chinese Garden: Death of a Symbol', guest edited by Stanislaus Fung and John Makeham, *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes: An International Quarterly*, 18, 3 (July-September 1998), 257-68.

³⁷ I have, quite deliberately, neglected its philosophical discussions.

the craze for Chinese gardens that swept Europe in the seventeenth century.³⁸ In New Zealand alone, and counting only Chinese gardens built by or for public authorities, I am aware of at least nine Chinese or Chinese-themed gardens that have either opened or are under construction as of August 2006 (Fig. 1).³⁹ An unknown number of Chinese-themed or influenced gardens are in private hands.

The small town of Hawera in the province of Taranaki was probably the site of New Zealand's first Chinese garden developed by a municipal authority. It was opened by the Republic of China's Ambassador to New Zealand in 1966 as a willow-pattern garden. Large moon gates mark the entrance of the garden, while inside are wall panels in white and blue relief extending the willow theme and extraordinary 'miniature [C]hinese figures on an ornamental bridge over a goldfish-filled pool'.⁴⁰ Probably the first Chinese 'ornamental' garden in New Zealand had taken shape along Ohiro Road, Wellington, almost exactly 100 years earlier. The *Wellington Independent* of 1869 reports that two Chinese had taken long-term lease of a piece of land with the intention of forming a 'tea garden'. According to it, 'every foot' of land 'seems to have been carefully turned over, and a convenient device has been made in the form of an artificial pond in the centre of the ground'.⁴¹ Sadly, the tea garden does not appear to have been developed more, or, at least, no further record of it remains. Tea gardens certainly gained in popularity in the latter nineteenth century in New Zealand and elsewhere, but these were more likely to reflect the growing popularity of Japanese gardening techniques than any necessary interest in Chinese ones.⁴²

A gap of nearly thirty years separates the development of the next Chinese garden on a municipal site. 'Osmanthus Chinese Garden' opened in Hastings in 1996 as a consequence of the sister-city relationship with the southern Chinese city of Guilin.⁴³ Designed by Zhao Jian and based on southern Chinese garden traditions, the garden incorporates a large pond, pavilions and a Friendship Bridge. Chinese and New Zealand plants are found in the garden and are designed to symbolise close sister-city relationship.⁴⁴ Another well-known garden from this part of the world is

³⁸ Wang, *Chinese Garden*, 61.

³⁹ In the South Island those include Dunedin, Oamaru, Christchurch and Nelson; in the North Island, Wellington, Hastings, Hawera, New Plymouth and Hamilton. As of July 2006 the following were either planned or under construction: Dunedin, Nelson, and Wellington.

⁴⁰ I thank the help of John Sargeant, Property and Facilities Manager and Fiona Greenhill, Tourism and Events Manager, both of the South Taranaki District Council, for providing me with information about this garden. For quotation and information, see A. P. C. Bromley, *Hawera District Centenary: An Outline of the Development of a New Zealand Community*, Hawera, 1981, 134.

⁴¹ *Wellington Independent*, 17 April 1869, 2.

⁴² See, Beattie, Heinzen and Adam, 'Japanese Gardens'.

⁴³ <http://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/hastings/sistercity.htm>, Accessed 20 August 2006.

⁴⁴ <http://hastingsdc.preview.intergen.net.nz/Recreation/parks.htm>, Accessed 21 August 2006.

Hamilton's 'Chinese Scholars' Garden'. Its origins also lie in a joint project emphasising New Zealand's relationship to China that involved a variety of bodies, including the Hamilton City Council and its sister-city, Wuxi, the local branch of the New Zealand Chinese Association and the New Zealand China Friendship Society. According to its website, the garden is representative of a Song period private garden.⁴⁵

Like the gardens of Hastings and Hamilton, 'classical' Chinese garden concepts also form the basis of the yet-to-be-built Dunedin and the proposed Wellington gardens. Together with New Plymouth's Kunming garden and its planned New Zealand garden in Kunming, these sites demonstrate the great variety of Chinese garden traditions, as well as the different ways that they can express Chinese and New Zealand identity. They also continue the manifestation of 'Chineseness' in New Zealand landscapes that began in the nineteenth century.

Dunedin Chinese Garden: Origins and Development

The idea of establishing a 'Chinese' garden in Dunedin arose in 1997 during the lead-up to the one-hundred and fiftieth celebrations of the foundation of Otago, when it was felt that a garden would be an appropriate marker of the Chinese contribution to that province's history.⁴⁶ That year, a 'Chinese Gardens Committee' was formed by Dr. James Ng, the Chair of the 'China Week' for the provincial commemorations.⁴⁷ A site adjacent to the railway line and located between the Dunedin Railway Station and Otago Settlers' Museum was earmarked for development. During China Week (4-11 March) in 1998, delegates from the Gardens Committee, Dunedin City Council and the vice-mayor of Shanghai, Dunedin's sister city, laid a foundation stone and witnessed Kai Tahu bless the site.⁴⁸ Fundraising among Dunedin's Chinese community began and soon architect Bruce Young, then based in Auckland, was commissioned to produce a preliminary design.⁴⁹

With fundraising progressing, experts from Shanghai Museum and, later, the Shanghai Construction and Decoration Company became involved as advisors during visits to Dunedin and Central Otago on a number of occasions over the next few years.⁵⁰ Such visits were important, notes

⁴⁵ See <http://www.hamiltongardens.co.nz/index.asp?PageID=2145837919>, Accessed 18 February 2006. For more, see Peter Sergel, *Inspiration in the Garden*, Auckland, 2004, 181-190.

⁴⁶ Peter Chin, 'Interview', Dunedin, 30 June 2005; Mick Field, 'Interview', Dunedin, 20 January 2006.

⁴⁷ 'A Distant Echo: Dunedin Chinese Gardens Trust', *City Talk* (March, 2001), 21.

⁴⁸ 'A Distant Echo', 20.

⁴⁹ Chin, 30 June; 'A Distant Echo', 22; Field 20 January.

⁵⁰ 'City Council-Shanghai Experts Help Garden Progress'

http://www.cityofdunedin.com/city/?page=feat_chinesegarden, Accessed 29 June 2005.

Dunedin Mayor Peter Chin, for they made the Shanghai experts aware of the significant role played by Chinese in the history of the province, as well as the many climatic and economic hardships they faced.⁵¹ In 2002, a design contract was signed, and further plans were drawn up by Cao Yongkang, Associate Professor in Theory and History of Architecture at Shanghai Jiaotong University, in consultation with Chinese ancient architecture specialist, Professor Tan Yufeng.⁵² Finally, in June 2006 the New Zealand Government announced its support for the project with a donation of \$3.75 million. With a sizeable sum of money already raised by the 'Gardens Committee', it is expected that construction will be completed and the gardens opened in early 2008.⁵³

From the outset, the involvement of the Shanghai Museum and Shanghai Construction and Decoration Company guided the development and character of Dunedin's garden. These agencies provided expert assistance and encouragement, from the provision of basic designs down to the prefabrication of garden structures and materials in Shanghai. For members of the Committee such input from China is of great significance. As one member explained, the 'need for authenticity in the garden' was to the fore in discussions with Shanghai's garden experts:

I was very concerned that we would do something that was amateurish and that would reflect European ideas of Oriental gardens. And, I knew enough about Chinese gardens that no European could ever build a Chinese garden. There is far too much history, far too much culture that we simply don't understand that goes into the[ir] making.⁵⁴

Another Committee member concurs. For him, authenticity is important since the garden 'really is a part of China coming out to New Zealand'. If anything, he explains, 'being outside of China' strengthens the cultural connections with China. He sees the garden honouring 'the past, in terms of asserting the influence of the Chinese goldminers', 'celebrating the present Chinese who are here and the part they play in Dunedin's economy and society', and 'signalling a way to the future'. Furthermore, he believes that the gardens will make an important spatial statement that 'shows that New Zealand is made up of not just Europeans' but also 'a lot of different people who have put in a lot of effort in making this country'.⁵⁵

Such open and public expressions of pride in the contribution of New Zealand's Chinese community are relatively recent. While initially

⁵¹ Chin.

⁵² Cao Yongkang and Tan Yufeng, 'Interview', Shanghai, 30 June 2006. See also, these authors' work in this volume.

⁵³ *Otago Daily Times* (ODT), 31 May 2006, 1. This was incorrectly reported as \$3.7m by the ODT.

⁵⁴ Field.

⁵⁵ Malcolm Wong, 'Interview', Dunedin, 28 April 2006.

welcomed in the 1860s as migrant goldminers, Chinese in New Zealand have often experienced less hospitable attitudes in this country. Most of these miners originated in Guangdong and came to New Zealand as sojourners, often from the goldfields of California (United States) and, later, Victoria (Australia). Although many Chinese returned, those who remained followed a pattern common to the Chinese diaspora. Once work on the goldfields dried up in the latter nineteenth century, many of those Chinese who remained earned a living as agricultural labourers or in family businesses such as market gardening and laundry. Later generations gradually moved into other occupations and, by the later half of the twentieth century, white collar professions. During this period, exclusionary policies put in place from 1881 began to check migration from China, which did not rapidly rise again until the late 1980s when a new wave of Chinese migrants, principally from Hong Kong and Taiwan, settled in New Zealand.⁵⁶

Although the degree of separateness of Chinese culture from colonial society has been overstated by some commentators, Chinese were noticeably different in speech and appearance, and as such were, and continue to be, subjected to racism of varying types and levels.⁵⁷ Negotiating identity and cultures therefore has been a challenging process for New Zealand's Chinese community, especially more recently with the emphasis in this country on biculturalism.⁵⁸ A recent conference, 'Going Bananas', addressed just such concerns. As the writer Tze Ming Mok noted, the title *Going Bananas* was particularly apt 'because it referred to an ongoing process' of 'compromises, negotiations and possibilities we are encountering along the road to our integration into what we can really only refer to, as white society'.⁵⁹

In this context, Chinese gardens are an important way for Chinese New Zealanders to assert their identity, as is apparent from the above quotation. This helps to explain the emphasis placed on 'authenticity' in the Dunedin

⁵⁶ See, James Ng, *Windows*, vols. 1-4; Ng, 'The Sojourner Experience: The Cantonese Goldseekers in New Zealand, 1865-1901', in *Unfolding History*, 5-30; Nigel Murphy, 'Joe Lum v. The Attorney General: The Politics of Exclusion', in *Unfolding History*, 48-67; Gilbert Wong, 'Is Sorry Enough?', in *Unfolding History*, 258-279.

⁵⁷ Brian Moloughney and John Stenhouse, "'Drug-besotted, sin-begotten fiends of filth:' New Zealanders and the Oriental Other, 1850-1920", *New Zealand Journal of History*, 33, 1 (April, 1999), 43-64.

⁵⁸ This is particularly so given the bi-cultural model of New Zealand's society which, as Brian Moloughney and Tony Ballantyne note, has effectively marginalised non-European and non-Maori groups, leaving us unaware until relatively recently of the cultural connections between Asia and New Zealand. Brian Moloughney and Tony Ballantyne, 'Asia in Murihiku: Towards a Transnational History of Colonial Culture', in Moloughney and Ballantyne, eds., *Disputed Facts: Histories for the New Century*, Dunedin, 2006.

⁵⁹ She also alluded to differences among the more recent and older generation of Chinese New Zealanders. Older generations, she charges, 'are very much at ease in referring to yourself as Bananas . . . or at least have no choice but to admit that you've arrived at the ultimate Banana endpoint of being Yellow on the outside, White on the inside'. In contrast, she preferred the phrase 'Going Bananas' to describe her continuing negotiation of identity. Tze Ming Mok, 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Banana', 'Forum 8: Living Together', talk given at *Going Bananas*, 5 June 2005.

Chinese Garden—understood in this sense, the garden forms a tangible connection back to China for later generations of Chinese New Zealanders for whom China might be a childhood memory or accessed through parents' or grandparents' stories. The founder of the Gardens Committee (now Chinese Gardens Trust) Dr. James Ng, for instance, has written movingly of his and his wife and family's visit to their family's ancestral hall and village. He recounts the strong emotional connections to his parents' home, and the excited anticipation of journeying there tempered by the realisation upon arrival that: 'I had returned to my father's and grandfather's world and discovered it was not my own'.⁶⁰

In the case of Dunedin's garden, direct connections and recognition of the ties between China and New Zealand's Chinese community are particularly significant affirmations of the on-going relationship between Chinese New Zealanders and China itself. Hence particular emphasis in Dunedin has been placed upon the garden as offering a tangible sign of the contribution and hardships faced by the first wave of Chinese migration to the Otago province in the nineteenth century. The garden is envisaged as providing a gateway to a planned goldfields heritage trail that will document the contribution and experiences of Chinese gold miners.⁶¹ The Descendants' Gallery, for instance, 'will contain displays on New Zealand Chinese and plaques acknowledging the donations made to the garden by ethnic Chinese and Europeans'.⁶²

For this and the other gardens, a particularly important consideration in accounting for their rise has been acceptance of a markedly more visible Chinese presence in New Zealand's culture, which of course the gardens further contribute to in raising. Previously characterised, whatever its actual accuracy, as 'model migrants', able to quietly assimilate and succeed without challenging any of the norms of its host country, Chinese are a far more visible presence in New Zealand society. This applies as much to political figures such as New Zealand's Member of Parliament Pansy Wong, as it does to the popularity of martial arts and martial arts films and Chinese food among non-Chinese New Zealanders, or the profile accorded to comedian and commentator, Raybon Kan.⁶³ Undoubtedly, the highly-publicised arrival of Asian migrants to New Zealand after 1987 and China's growing significance as a world economic power have provided additional motives. Indeed, China's growing world presence has given great impetus to the forging of sister-city relationships between New Zealand and Chinese cities. Of great significance, too, has been the recent and well publicised

⁶⁰ Eva Ng also visited her family's ancestral home on the first and second visit. Ng, *Windows*, vol 1, 37-56.

⁶¹ 'From a local point of view we see it as a tourism attraction for Dunedin, from a regional point of view we see it as a gateway linking the rest of the Chinese goldmining attractions'. Wong.

⁶² 'City Council-Shanghai Experts Help Garden Progress', http://www.cityofdunedin.com/city/?page=feat_chinesegarden, Accessed 29 June 2005.

⁶³ Moloughney, 'Translating Cultures'.

Government apology for the Poll Tax, while wider debates over ‘New Zealandness’ have also inevitably brought the topic of Chinese New Zealanders to the fore.⁶⁴

Dunedin: Authenticity and Design

How, then, have issues of identity and authenticity been translated spatially in Dunedin’s ‘Chinese Garden’? When visiting Shanghai in July 2006, I spoke to the designer of its garden, Associate Professor Cao Yongkang, and architecture specialist Professor Tan Yufeng.

As Cao explained, the particular design was influenced by the desire ‘to present Dunedin’s people and New Zealand’s [with] the authentic flavour of a Chinese garden’. In addition, designers had to take into consideration the relatively small-sized plot of land available for the site. Given these particularities, a ‘Chinese private garden of the lower Yangzi River’ was chosen ‘because in these areas the gardens are very small but very typical’. Design elements for Dunedin’s garden are drawn from the similarly small-sized Master of the Nets Garden. Both gardens, for instance, focus on a pond and offer similar spatial considerations.⁶⁵

Enabling the visitor to ‘see the bigger views inside a small space’ in Dunedin’s garden is another design concept drawn from the Master of the Nets, Suzhou. As in this Suzhou garden and others, Dunedin’s zigzag paths create the illusion of great space. Along with partitions, walls, windows and layered foliage, they produce ‘many layers of spatial feelings’ and countless views. Such a multi-layered approach combines with spatial variety and carefully controlled views (see Cao et al.’s article in this volume). The garden as a whole provides ‘several classical views’, most notably the entrance through the moon gate which, Cao explains, allows one to ‘see part of a view like a picture, with water, rocks and buildings inside’.⁶⁶

Reinforcing such a sense of ‘Chineseness’ in New Zealand has posed problems to its designers, particularly when considering the garden in its wider environment. As Cao acknowledges, a relatively common design feature of Chinese gardens is their incorporation of elements, including views, sounds and even smells, of the wider environment into their sites. As he points out, since such a concept assumes ‘a totally Chinese environment’ in the vicinity and given that Dunedin’s ‘environment is totally Westernised . . . to make the whole garden look authentic and [to retain] its original flavour, we actually [will have] built a very high’ wall encircling the garden. Moreover, tall trees behind the wall ‘should hide Western views, Western architecture’. All of this is done, explains Cao, so that ‘inside the garden we try to create a whole/pure atmosphere of [a] Chinese garden, not

⁶⁴ Wong, ‘Is Sorry Enough?’, 258-279.

⁶⁵ See Campbell, and Cao et al. in this volume.

⁶⁶ Cao, ‘Interview’, Shanghai.

[one of] Western architecture'. Blocking out elements of the surrounding area is one way of enabling visitors to experience a 'Chinese' garden. Another way is prefabricating it in Shanghai. While Dunedin contractors will prepare the site, its principal structures and many of its stones will be shipped out from China in over fifty containers.⁶⁷

Some might well question how this can be an 'authentic' garden given its location. Its designers emphasise that it is a garden that expresses 'the culture of ancient times in an ancient garden' developed 'in contemporary times'.⁶⁸ In other words, they stress that the garden has been designed by experts according to 'classical' garden principles. Indeed, as Cao observes in this issue, designers took great pains to ensure that the methods and design techniques reflected as accurately as possible the principles of Chinese gardens of this period. In this context, I think it is useful to steer discussion away from ideas of authenticity, which some associate unfavourably with imitation, to what David Porter has termed cultural translation, the 'processes by which one culture finds meaning in another'. This very process, as he observes with regard to the work of the eighteenth century Orientalist, William Chambers, entails 'adaptive strategies that are themselves potentially transformative'.⁶⁹ In Dunedin's case, these processes of translation are acknowledged by its designers and members of the Garden Trust.

As one Committee member notes, Chinese gardens differ significantly from European ones. Trying to convey 'their aesthetic' qualities and those of trees, water, fish which combine 'to make it all harmonized together' can be very difficult, he continues, but as another member adds, 'is a concept which we can't tell people' about but which 'they must experience' for themselves, by walking around the garden.⁷⁰ In other words, each person's engagement with the garden will differ. Some, observes Professor Tan, will relish it for its exotic qualities, while he is equally confident that there are others in the Dunedin community who will be able to appreciate many of its subtler aspects. After all, he points out, Chinese design elements have been incorporated into Western gardens since the fashion for 'Chinoiserie' in the eighteenth century, so a lot of the concepts will not be totally alien to a Western audience. Dunedin's Chinese community will also be able to help visitors appreciate aspects of its intention.⁷¹ Ultimately, '[p]eople will tell different stories' when they encounter the garden.⁷² Where one person 'would see peace', observes one committee member, another would see

⁶⁷ Cao. On its prefabrication, see 'City Council-Shanghai Experts Help Garden Progress', http://www.cityofdunedin.com/city/?page=feat_chinesegarden, Accessed 29 June 2005.

⁶⁸ Cao.

⁶⁹ David Porter, 'Beyond the Bounds of Truth: Cultural Translation and William Chambers's Chinese Garden', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 37 (2004), 56. I thank Duncan Campbell for bringing this important article to my attention.

⁷⁰ Wong.

⁷¹ Tan and Cao.

⁷² Field.

beauty, and yet another, ‘symbols of friendship’.⁷³ Indeed, in this sense, visitors to Dunedin’s garden will be no different from the many Chinese who today throng through Suzhou’s gardens and for whom many of the literary and poetic allusions are hidden.

In the words of Mayor Peter Chin, the garden has proved the ‘single uniting force in that sister-city relationship’.⁷⁴ This was especially important because Dunedin’s previous mayor, Sukhi Turner, was a notable critic of China’s human rights policy. The trust and personal relationships established during discussions over the development of the garden have given a ‘new stimulus’ to Dunedin’s sister-city relationship.⁷⁵ Its development has symbolised ‘how a sister-city relationship can work between such a small city like Dunedin and a large powerhouse like Shanghai, with 16 million people compared to Dunedin’s 120,000’.⁷⁶

The garden is anticipated to act as a touchstone for many other economic and cultural connections between China and the region, as well as the country as a whole. Regional, national and international tourism will hopefully increase as a consequence. The garden’s central position next to the Railway Station and Early Settlers’ Museum is expected to ‘bring people into the centre of the city’, thereby benefiting local businesses. Its anticipated role as the entranceway to a planned ‘Goldfields Heritage Trail’ will also increase regional tourism. One of the groups attracted will hopefully be China’s growing middle-class while, on a broader scale, it is predicted to help cement important cultural and historical connections with the region. Business connections between Dunedin and Shanghai, moreover, are anticipated to flourish as a consequence.⁷⁷ Certainly, support for the gardens among the local community has proved to be very strong. Not even a headline by the *Otago Daily Times*, pointing out their possible maintenance costs, failed to dampen enthusiasm for the garden.⁷⁸

New Plymouth

On a hot Taranaki day at Chinese New Year (27 February 2005), the Kunming garden at Pukekura Park, New Plymouth, was officially opened. A crowd of some 300 people gathered to witness speeches and blessings from various community groups. At the gathering were members of the New Plymouth District Council (NPDC), as well as local community leaders and representatives from Kunming, including its eight-member team sent to

⁷³ James Ng quoted in ‘A Distant Echo’, 20.

⁷⁴ Chin, June 2005.

⁷⁵ Field.

⁷⁶ Wong.

⁷⁷ ‘The Authentic Dunedin Chinese Garden: A Report’, unpublished report, University of Otago, 2004; Wong; Chin. Quotation from Wong.

⁷⁸ ODT, 30 January 2006, 1; ODT, 30 January 2006, 16; ODT, 1 February 2006, 1. For responses, see: ODT, 1 February 2006, 1.

construct the garden.⁷⁹ The establishment of the Kunming garden in Pukekura Park cemented the sister-city relationship, signed in August 2003, at which the then Mayor of Kunming, Mr Zhang Zhenguo, announced the gifting of a garden to New Plymouth.⁸⁰ Kunming had already gifted gardens to cement its other sister-city relationships. (In 1988, for instance, Kunming signed a sister-city relationship with Wagga Wagga, Australia, involving the gifting of a Chinese Pavilion.⁸¹)

After the signing of the agreement, planning for the gardens in New Plymouth progressed remarkably quickly. With regular consultation between the Kunming Landscape Bureau and New Plymouth's own experts, a number of sites were considered before the present one, situated in New Plymouth's Pukekura Park, was decided upon. After that, preparation of the site and its structures began in earnest in both sister-cities. New Plymouth took charge of finding local contractors, preparing the foundations for the garden, readying planting beds and sourcing Chinese and other plants from nurseries in New Zealand. Kunming Landscape Bureau began to prepare the design and principal structures, including its centrepiece, a pavilion incorporating designs found among the region's Dali Community (one of the region's many ethnic minorities). Once built it was disassembled in preparation for its final journey to New Plymouth, where it was erected and painted by craftspeople from local Yunnan minorities. In all, some 34 tonnes of material, including this structure, made its way to New Plymouth.⁸²

New Plymouth's present Mayor, Peter Tennent, who also signed the 2003 sister-city agreement with Kunming, sees the garden as 'one of the cornerstones of the sister-city relationship' and it as entirely appropriate that a garden symbolises this relationship. As he points out, New Plymouth's sister-city relationship with Kunming, 'driven by the community in the first place', was based around educational and horticultural ties between the two areas.⁸³ According to him, the development of the gardens is most 'appropriate', since Kunming is well known as 'the Spring City of China', its 'Flower Capital', and is an area where 'gardening is an important part of the culture'.⁸⁴ The well-respected Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust (PRT), established in 1951, forged close ties with the Kunming Botanical Institute, with which it signed an agreement in the mid-1990s to enable the exchange of plant materials and to support reciprocal visits. Moreover, since the 1980s plant collecting and, latterly, garden tours by members of the PRT have taken

⁷⁹ 'Chinese Link to be Celebrated with Garden Opening', <http://www.npdc.govt.nz/articles/ChineseGarden.asp?print=yes>. Accessed 3 November 2005.

⁸⁰ Peter Tennent, 'Interview', Kunming, 21 May 2006.

⁸¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Wagga_Wagga_Botanical_Gardens.jpg, Accessed 4 August 2006.

⁸² Grant Porteous, Bryan Gould and Tim Lander, 'Interview', New Plymouth, 22 November 2005; Lynn Bublitz, 'Interview', New Plymouth, 23 November 2005.

⁸³ Tennent.

⁸⁴ Tennent.

place. Educationally, student exchanges have occurred since the 1990s, most notably between Inglewood High School and No. 15 School in Kunming.⁸⁵

How does the garden design represent the idea of the sister-city relationship? Immediately apparent from even a cursory glance at images of the two gardens, are the striking differences between New Plymouth's, also prefabricated in China, and the one planned in Dunedin. Where the latter strongly emphasises its 'Chineseness' and separateness, strong design and conceptual elements link Kunming Garden with its environment. Where Dunedin's design draws from the Jiangnan region and the 'private garden' tradition, New Plymouth's draws from designs from the Kunming region, whose ethnic elements are literally drawn into the pavilion's decoration. Where for Dunedin's garden almost all rock and other material is sourced in China, New Plymouth's utilises local rock, concrete (in the moon gate) and lawn.

As Lynn Bublitz, Deputy Mayor and a prominent member of the PRT who has led many garden tours of Yunnan, observes, New Plymouth's Kunming Garden 'is a Western-Chinese garden'.⁸⁶ This is seen in a number of areas. Most notably, the garden's path wanders between lawns, until recently not a feature common to Chinese gardens or associated with 'classical' Chinese gardens. Emphasising its hybrid nature, the garden's path incorporates stone-edging from stone milled in Kunming and pebbles chosen by stonemason Yang Jiagui from a local quarry and laid into the path.⁸⁷ Also, as Bublitz observes: 'Some of the plants which are included in the garden are European—and New Zealand—hybrids'. The fact that all of 'the plants are not strictly Chinese plants', he continues, 'is not an unusual feature of Chinese gardens'. As he explains:

Movement of plants from one country to the next has occurred over many, many centuries, so while the purists might think the New Plymouth garden has plants which are not representative of China, they actually represent the type of plantings you are likely to find [in China].⁸⁸

Many of these came overland, along trade routes connecting Central Asia, India, Burma with regions like Yunnan and Sichuan.⁸⁹ Kunming's gardeners, elaborates Bublitz, therefore grew 'plants which were available, and have

⁸⁵ See, for instance, Arthur Fryer, 'Davies, Victor Caddy 1887-1977', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 7 July 2005. See <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>, Accessed November 2005.

⁸⁶ Bublitz, 23 November.

⁸⁷ Gould.

⁸⁸ Bublitz, 23 November.

⁸⁹ Wheat and barely arrived in China around 1500 BCE, and Lucerne and grapes around 126 BCE. More recent arrivals include potatoes from South America brought by European missionaries. Valder, *Gardens in China*, 23-4.

always enjoyed those which produced a bright flowering period', including 'annual plants like pansies, petunias, marigolds'.⁹⁰

Considerations of how the garden was translated into the wider landscape and what this added to the whole, and the whole to the particular were, as Tim Lander, the NPDC architect charged with site preparation, particularly important when selecting an appropriate location.⁹¹ For this reason, the initial garden site was rejected on the grounds that the general landscape and the particular garden did not integrate well. The site eventually chosen at Pukekura Park had been a plant nursery and lies next to the historic homestead, The Gables, originally owned by the King family of Taranaki and formerly the Colonial Hospital. The relationship between this and Kunming Garden is one of 'integration but separation' where 'there is simultaneously a sharp line between the different gardens, at others a linking'.⁹² According to another council official, it appeared that designers of the Kunming Garden had 'picked up some of the formality of the existing Gables building' in selecting the position of the pavilion.⁹³ Separation will also be evident. As the garden matures, less of the Gables will be able to be seen from the garden and surrounding area. Such growth will present 'peeking views' of the pavilion from the roadside and entranceway, he notes, thereby enticing visitors onto the site.⁹⁴

The reciprocal relationship of the garden to its setting and vice versa did not stop there, with design elements sometimes having to be changed to accord with the wider environment, much in the manner that Yuan Mei had accommodated his garden to the landscape around (see above). Concerned that the garden would blend 'in a way that sits well with everything surrounding it', NPDC staff altered access to Kunming Garden so as to adapt it to the alignment of the Gables' entranceway. The path between the pavilion and moon gate was also re-drawn.⁹⁵ Moreover, the site makes use of the wider landscape in a variety of ways, most notably by incorporating Mt. Taranaki 'into views from Kunming Gardens'.⁹⁶ The garden also draws on the kauri (*Agathis australis*) plantation on one side of the site. This connection will be especially evident in autumn when its deciduous foliage will give 'autumn colour contrast against the green backdrop' of the kauri.⁹⁷

Like other members involved in its construction, the head of services of NPDC, Grant Porteous, is delighted with the overall result. He thinks that Pukekura Park 'has responded to change very well' and that Kunming Garden has significantly blended into the garden while at the same time

⁹⁰ Bublitz, 23 November.

⁹¹ Lander, 'Interview'.

⁹² Lander.

⁹³ Gould.

⁹⁴ Lander.

⁹⁵ Gould.

⁹⁶ Lander.

⁹⁷ Gould.

enhancing its character.⁹⁸ Tim Lander, the architect responsible for laying out the garden's groundwork, concurs, pointing to the: 'Idea of translation of meaning from China to New Zealand', that is, that the garden changes its meaning because of its setting in a new environment.⁹⁹ Thus, like Dunedin's planned garden, the meaning and symbolism of New Plymouth's has been translated into a different setting, the outcome of which is a Chinese garden with different associations than its southern counterpart.

As Mayor Tennent observes, Kunming garden is 'something very practical that folk can see and relate to', particularly for those 'who probably would never be able to visit this beautiful city of Kunming'.¹⁰⁰ Within the local community, the site has proved extremely popular, for weddings, social events and the like. For the Chinese community of New Plymouth, it has proved a focal point for cultural activities, most notably Chinese New Year and Lantern Festival. The Chinese community is 'extremely proud of the Kunming Garden'. According to Betty Leung, President of Taranaki Chinese Association, it 'gives the Chinese a sense of being accepted in this society'.¹⁰¹

While of great significance to the Chinese community of New Plymouth and Taranaki, Kunming Garden differs from Dunedin's in that the concept was initially not locally driven by the New Zealand Chinese community. Like Dunedin's garden, though, New Plymouth's has also become a focus of sister-city relationships. 'Every Chinese group to come to New Plymouth is taken to the garden' while school children are taken to visit this 'little bit of history of Kunming'. The relationships forged through the close connections during the construction of the garden have also acted as a catalyst for further educational relations.¹⁰² At the recent NPDC delegation to Kunming in May 2006, an educational agreement was signed. Business connections also have followed from the relationship.

A so far unique aspect of any sister-city relationship involving New Zealand centres is the plan to develop a 'New Zealand Garden'. This is taking shape in Kunming's historical Golden Temple Scenic Area, a 120 hectare cultural site located on the outskirts of the city. The garden will be located on a 200 square metre site in the rare plants section of the Garden (Fig. 2).¹⁰³ Designed by Tim Lander, the garden is structured around a koru pattern in gravel that radiates outwards from which 99 kauri trees will be planted in the manner of a grid. This region's climate—monsoonal continental with a dry winter and wet summer, and few frosts—will also support other northern New Zealand species, including pohutakawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*), coprosma, hebe and Flax (*Phormium tenax*) as well as species not necessarily associated with kauri in the wild. When fully grown,

⁹⁸ Porteous.

⁹⁹ Lander.

¹⁰⁰ Tennent.

¹⁰¹ Betty Leung, Pers. Comm., 12 July 2006.

¹⁰² Tennent.

¹⁰³ Gould.

the result will be the ‘storied effect’ experienced in ‘the New Zealand forest’ and that forests’ associated ‘tapestry of textures’.¹⁰⁴

There is significance both in the choice of kauri and their number. Kauri and pohutakawa imaginatively connect both the Kunming Garden and the New Zealand Garden, since these species back on to the site of the Kunming Garden in New Zealand and will be planted in the New Zealand Garden in Kunming. The longevity associated with the kauri emphasises the depth of friendship between the two sister-cities. As Mayor Tennent observes, Kunming councillors were particularly impressed that the ‘tidying up of the kauri grove [next to the Kunming Garden in New Plymouth] was done with clear instructions that the pruning of the kauri would be reviewed in another 200 years’.¹⁰⁵ Longevity of plants has been particularly valued in Chinese garden culture, and is demonstrated in countless garden sites throughout the land, so it is likely that the kauri are given added symbolic importance because their great age appeals to such a tradition. The number of kauri planted—99—is also doubly significant. The number nine is a rebus (the expression of an idea through a picture or object which suggests words or syllables) for forever, with ‘99’ referring to the nature of the sister-city relationship as ‘forever and ever’.¹⁰⁶ New Plymouth was also Kunming’s ninth sister-city, so the significance of the planting resonates strongly.

If the planting has particularly strong significance for the sister-city relationship, then so too has the site. The garden was originally planned to be included in the large Expo Gardens, constructed in the year 2000 to house a medley of garden designs from around China and the rest of the world. On the suggestion of Kunming’s then Mayor, New Plymouth’s garden was moved to the Golden Temple area. This site was suggested because the Mayor ‘felt that it would stand out’ and ‘show the importance of the Kunming-New Plymouth relationship’.¹⁰⁷ At the time of my visit to the Golden Temple site to witness the blessing of the garden’s plaque and rock in May 2006, plants shipped over from New Plymouth were already growing in a nursery nearby in the Scenic Park (Figs. 3 and 4). It is hoped this garden will be opened sometime in 2007 and gradually added to over the years to provide a symbol and tangible example of the growing friendships between the two cities nurtured through these gardens.

¹⁰⁴ First quote from Bublitz, Bublitz, ‘Interview’, Kunming, 22 May 2006; second quote from Lander.

¹⁰⁵ Tennent.

¹⁰⁶ As Lynn Bublitz notes, ‘it means “long life” and “forever”, so that is the association between Kunming and New Plymouth’. Bublitz, 22 May 2006.

¹⁰⁷ Tennent.

Conclusion

The development of Chinese gardens in New Zealand testifies to their importance in reinforcing various aspects of ‘Chineseness’ in New Zealand. To long-established members of the Chinese New Zealand community in Dunedin, its Chinese garden offers both a tangible connection to their forebears and to the culture that sustained such ‘classical’ garden culture, but also a basis for the development of future relationships with this region. An accent placed on the authenticity of Dunedin’s Chinese garden also denotes the importance of these historical connections, the strength of current sister-city relationships and the particular way in which this relationship has been conceptualised spatially. In Dunedin, design integrity and exclusion are emphasised in the choice of a ‘classical’ Chinese garden modelled on Suzhou’s Master of the Nets Garden. By contrast, New Plymouth’s Kunming Garden, which owes its existence to the generosity of the Kunming Municipal Authorities, emphasises its Chineseness in very different ways. The hybrid nature of its garden is reflected in the blending of aspects of non-Chinese garden elements like grass and local stone into its manufacture.

These gardens are more than mere symbols of friendship, but have themselves generated whole new sets of relationships connecting New Zealand and Chinese identities and landscapes. They have been important in reinforcing individual identities and those between and among different communities in New Zealand and China. In the case of the New Plymouth relationship, its gifted Kunming Garden has acted as a catalyst for explorations of New Zealand identity through the establishment of a New Zealand garden in Kunming. In all of these cases, gardens are being reinterpreted by another culture and, like those developed by Chinese gold miners and market gardeners in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, through their transplantation and the passage of time, they have created whole new landscapes of identity and meaning which demonstrate the heterogeneity of New Zealand’s culture and the important contributions that Chinese influences have made in forming New Zealand’s culture.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ I would particularly like to acknowledge the generous encouragement and help of Duncan Campbell and Brian Moloughney throughout this project. Associate Professor Cao Yongkang, Margaret and John Beattie, Ondine Godtschalk, Associate Professor Henry Johnson, Li Kangying, Stephen MacDowall, Professor Brian Moloughney, Dr. James Ng, Eva Ng and Malcolm Wong provided lively discussion and comment on this paper. I thank Brian for suggesting the project in the first place. I owe a great debt to the kindness of the many people and organisations that either spoke to me or hosted my visit. The Kunming Municipal Council generously hosted me during a visit to Kunming with the New Plymouth District Council (NPDC) in May 2006; individual members of the NPDC welcomed me into their delegation and spent time discussing the gardens; in Kunming I was also hosted by the Kunming Botanical Garden; members of the Dunedin City Council; the Shanghai Museum very kindly arranged and hosted my visit to Shanghai in June 2006; members of the Dunedin Chinese Gardens Trust and Wellington Chinese Garden Project Committee generously gave their time to me. My thanks also go to the



Figure 1. Entrance gate to Oamaru Chinese Garden.

generosity of the following individuals: New Plymouth Deputy Mayor Lynn Bublitz, Ken Chan, Cao Yongkang, Dunedin Mayor Peter Chin, Mick Field, Esther Fung, Bryan Gould, Tim Lander, Peter Ledingham, Betty Leung, Li Mei, Eva Ng, Dr. James Ng, Teresa Ng, Grant Porteous, Julie Straka, Professor Tan Yufeng, New Plymouth Mayor Peter Tenment, Malcolm Wong. I also thank John Sargeant, Property and Facilities Manager and Fiona Greenhill, Tourism and Events Manager, both of the South Taranaki District Council, for providing me with information about the Chinese garden in Hawera. Furthermore, I acknowledge the financial support provided to me by the 'Asia-New Zealand' Research Cluster, University of Otago, and the research facilities at the Stout Centre for New Zealand Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, for research conducted there in October 2006 and early 2007.



Figure 2. Detail of Pavilion, New Plymouth Chinese Garden.



Figure 3. NPDC Councillor, Howie Tamati, blessing the site for the New Zealand Garden in the rare plants section, Golden Temple Park, Kunming, May 2006.



Figure 4. Another view of the site of the New Zealand Garden, rare plants section, Golden Temple Park, Kunming, May 2006.