

CHAPTER SEVEN: FRUITFUL SITES – THE CHINESE GARDEN IN AUSTRALIA

Jung-Jung rises as the sun falls on her bed and goes through to the pool in the back of her new Brisbane home. Surrounded by tropical palms, she practices Ti-Chi for half an hour each morning before starting her busy day working with her husband, Chi-Fong, in their jewellery shop in the local shopping mall. It is peaceful and private in her garden, but she misses the sense of belonging when she did her morning Ti-Chi with the other women in the park in Hong Kong. After Jung-Jung and Chi-Fong have driven away to work, closing the large cast-iron gates set in an imposing brick front wall, how would a passer-by know that this was a Chinese-Australian house and garden? There are no Chinese elements like the Greek columns or Italian statues that are displayed so proudly in the gardens of Greek and Italian migrants. What is it about Jung-Jung and Chi-Fong's garden that reflects the rich garden heritage from China?

Su-Ling stands in her large living room gazing over the valley before her. Su-Ling and Xin-Yi's imposing Brisbane house sits on top of a hill. The room where Su-Ling is standing has a white marble floor and the furniture is modern and elegant. There are two large Chinese urns containing tall stems of bamboo which have come from Hong Kong. The cool tranquillity of the room contrasts with her garden outside where the sun beats down onto a straggling lawn of kikuyu and weeds. She has rejected the numerous landscape designs drawn for her garden. The only aspects of her garden which gives her pleasure are the long views to the hills which remind her of the views from her balcony in Hong Kong. She wonders why she cannot make the garden she has always dreamed about in Australia.

On a late February afternoon, Tee and Wing-See come into their large comfortable house each laden with mangoes, bananas, and guavas that they have picked from their garden. Jean washes the bok choy and the long white eggplant, also from the garden, ready to make the family stir-fry and she thinks back to her school days when she would get up at dawn to harvest the same vegetables for the market in Penang. After spending the afternoon tending the vegetable gardens, Tee's last job is to mow the front lawn of his new house. He pauses with satisfaction. His house and garden are exactly the same as all his neighbours; large new two-storey houses with neat lawns forming an uninterrupted green sward around the curve of the new street. Many of his neighbours are also Chinese professional people, but how would a visitor know? The new estate with its curving streets and large houses looks the same as a typical real estate brochure for any large city in Australia.

What is it about Jung-Jung and Chi-Fong and Tee and Wing-See's gardens that draws from the rich garden heritage in China, so beautifully evoked by Tao Ch'ien during the 11th Moon of the year of 405 AD?

*I lean on the south window and let my pride expand,
I consider how easy it is to be content with a little space.
Every day I stroll in the garden for pleasure.
There is a gate there, but it is always shut.
Cane in hand I walk and rest,
Occasionally raising my head to gaze into the distance.
The clouds aimlessly rise from the peaks.
The birds weary of flying know it is time to come home;
As the sun's rays grow dim and disappear from view,
I walk around my lonely pine tree, stroking it.¹*

From the poetry of Tao Ch'ien dated the 11th moon of the year 405.

The age of this poem reminds us that China is the oldest continuous civilization on earth. Such a long and continuous history would suggest a long tradition of monuments from the past. For the Chinese, however, there seems to be a paradox associated with their history. The Chinese show great respect for the moral and spiritual values of their ancestors, while at the same time appearing to be indifferent to their tangible heritage.

Pierre Ryckmans, a renowned scholar of China, evokes this paradox in his description of everyday life of China.

The presence of the past is constantly felt in China. Sometimes it is found in the most unexpected places, where it hits the visitor with added intensity: movie-theatre posters,

*advertisements for washing machines, television or toothpaste displayed along the streets are expressed in a written language that has remained practically unchanged for the last two thousand years. In kindergartens, toddlers chant Tang poems that were written some twelve hundred years ago. In railway stations, the mere consultation of a train timetable can be an intoxicating experience for any cultural historian*²

As Su-Ling gazes from her window, she probably does not know why she is so unsettled. In China, the past seems to pervade everything, but not as recognisable ancient monuments. The apparent lack of physical evidence of the past is disconcerting to Westerners, where despite the destruction caused by countless wars, every age has left tangible milestones to mark former times. The heritage which animates Chinese life in so many unexpected ways seems to exist in the people rather than their cities and towns. As Pierre Ryckmans says *the Chinese past is both spiritually active and physically invisible*.³ In the West, the desire to build in a way that will avoid the ravages of time has resulted in monuments of stone. The Chinese, in contrast, have not tried to resist the effects of time. Their architecture is made of perishable and fragile materials and requires frequent rebuilding. Ryckmans states that for the Chinese *eternity should not inhabit the building it should inhabit the builder*.⁴ Could it be that a form of Chinese eternity inhabits the spirit of the Chinese-Australian gardeners rather than inhabiting their new gardens?

In this chapter the long heritage of Chinese gardening will be explored in detail, because while it appears that little of this heritage is in Australian Chinese gardens in a tangible form, perhaps it is there in spirit. Clues to Chinese culture in Australia may lie in the fact that rather than historic buildings and gardens, Chinese heritage exists in poetry and the art of calligraphy. Interestingly, despite the great value accorded to ancient calligraphy, it does not have to be authentic. This may give us further clues to the apparently cavalier attitude the Chinese have towards their physical heritage. Authenticity seems to be an obsession of the Western world rather than the East. There was a particularly influential calligraphic work, the 'Preface of the Orchid Pavilion', which was thought to be created in the 4th century by the great calligrapher Wang Xizhi. Over subsequent centuries the calligraphy was lost, when it was found numerous copies were made, after which it was buried. It was after it disappeared, however, that the scroll began to have its greatest influence. Recently, a Chinese scholar claimed that the original work, which inspired so many revered copies, might never have existed. Like the gardens, whether it existed or not, scarcely matters. Pierre Ryckmans suggest that the vitality, creativity, and seemingly unlimited capacity for change and adaptation, which the Chinese tradition has displayed for so many millennia may well be derived from the fact that this tradition never let itself be trapped into set forms, static objects and things.⁵ Traditional Chinese gardens, particularly many of the great scholars' gardens, often survive only as literary descriptions. The fact that these gardens may or may not have existed does not diminish their importance in any way.

Today Western people study Chinese garden design for similar reasons to their interest in Chinese medicine, each embodies spiritual significance at a time when the power of orthodox Western faiths is declining. Chinese gardens draw from the philosophy of *Tian-Ren-Ha-Yi* (human/nature harmony) and *Tian-Ren-Gan-Yin* (human/nature tension)⁶. This philosophy is based on the unity between humans and nature. It suggests that significant changes in the natural environment affect the human body and in turn humans can influence the balance in nature. Traditionally Chinese gardens were expressions of nature and humans in equal partnership. The Chinese house mirrors the Confucian desire for order while the garden follows the Taoist principles of harmony with nature which also allows for a certain creative playfulness. In order to maintain the balance between humans and nature, the location of gardens and their orientation are most important. Traditionally a geomancer is asked to select the site and determine the orientation, based on the principles of *Feng Shui*. According to the principles of *Feng Shui*, when humans occupy a landscape, it is not simply an empty space, instead the landscape has certain powers which can influence the fortunes of those who occupy it. The book of *Gu-Jin-Tu-Shu-Ji-Chen*, states

[when creating] *a human settlement, attention should be paid mainly to the [surrounding] mountains, rivers, and earth; because their veins and momentums are the largest among all and thus will become the most important elements affecting the occupants' fortune and luck. So that, when judging a house, one should put its outside form [its setting] as the first consideration.*⁷

Selecting a suitable environment is even more important than the arrangement of trees, water and rocks in the garden. Once the site is selected and the most suitable orientation determined, the arrangement of buildings, trees, water and rocks must conform to the Tao principles of *Yin-Yang*. *Yin-Yang* is the harmony between contrasting forces and forms, such as rivers and mountains or man and woman. Harmony results from a continuous series of balanced contrasts in the environment. Traditionally when planning a Chinese garden one consulted the old book of rules, the *Yuan Yeh*. The rules urged garden builders to avoid the obvious by integrating the arts of architecture, landscape design, painting, poems and calligraphy in order to create a garden composition which was lyrical and picturesque. Such garden compositions included miniature mountains built up from grotesque rocks to create a sense of awe, contrasted against pools of water to provide stillness and reflection. Pavilions, projecting over pools, intensified the experience of reflective water. Covered walkways, twisting this way and that, provided windows for the contemplation of arrangements of delicate plants including plum blossom, bamboo, the unusual leaves of Ginkgos, the weeping branches of willows, or the finely dissected leaves of maples. Curves and mounds meeting the smooth plane of water created the *Yin-Yang* harmony and balance.

Chinese houses traditionally present grey walls to the streets, which are laid out in strict grid-like orientation. The garden is small and is contained in an inward looking courtyard. Wealthy people have larger houses often near a lake or natural feature where the borrowed landscape beyond the garden can be explored. Borrowed landscapes include views of the mountains, lakes and rivers, seen either over a wall or through carefully placed 'windows'. Views can also be borrowed from one part of the garden to another through cleverly placed 'windows' along twisting and turning paths. All of this creates the illusion of space.

This simplified description of the Chinese garden does not do the fine art justice, nor does it explain why none of their great traditions is evident in the gardens that Chinese migrants have made in Australia. Perhaps some clues lie in understanding the Chinese landscape and how it has influenced the practice of agriculture and horticulture. Descriptions of the Chinese landscape might also help us see why the Chinese migrants would not find the same inspiration in the Australian landscape.

A Simple History of the Chinese Garden

Chinese gardens differ depending on whether they reflect Confucianism or Taoism. Confucian teachings stated that the way to peace and harmony was through ethics and morality. This could be achieved by a strongly defined hierarchical society, characterised by respect for elders. In contrast, Taoism emphasised individual freedom and the natural order of the universe. Instead of the discipline associated with ethics and morality, Taoism was imbued with mysticism expressed as rituals which explored the dichotomies between light and dark, male and female and yin and yang.

In these early gardens, a person's reputation was judged by the quality of his or her response to nature. There were three responses; rulers who used nature in an attempt to overcome mortality, scholars who used the garden to create a homage to nature, and the rich who used the garden for ostentatious displays of wealth.

Three hundred years later, the early garden tradition had become refined into two highly developed art forms. Gardens were either great country estates or humble cottage retreats. The humble cottages were scholars' gardens. In such humble places the scholars sought to achieve harmony with nature through a profound desire to understand everyday existence. The scholar's garden was usually a flat terrace, which floated over a square pool. The terrace and pool were surrounded by mountain bamboo and wild grasses. This restrained simplicity was in marked contrast to the great country estates which belonged to either nobility or the wealthy. Wealthy merchants vied with each other for the numbers of different pavilions the garden contained and how richly they were decorated. The gardens continued to reflect these traditions for many hundreds of years. We are led to believe this through poetry and painted scrolls because few of the gardens survive today.

Similarly, Chinese horticultural life continued in this way until the end of the 15th century. Fine gardens occurred within towns, while outside the town were intensively cultivated market gardens. Produce, however, was grown in both gardens. In accord with Confucianism it was customary for members of the elite to participate in a little genteel horticulture such as growing edible crops. In Suzhou, a town famous for its traditional gardens, the gardens had miniature ricefields, vegetable plots and compact

orchards of sweet orange, apple and flowering plum. The word for garden, 'yuan' also meant 'orchard' as the garden at this time was a productive landscape.¹¹

The practice of gardening in the 15th century had an overwhelming moral authority because of this agricultural and horticultural production. It was part of the Confucian order. Fruit and vegetables were not only an essential part of the Chinese diet, they also symbolised purity and sobriety. They were the food of the common people who were unable to obtain meat. Fruit was also good for the pious – Buddhists, hermits with magical powers and scholars living in rustic seclusion.¹³

By the 16th century, the gardens started to undergo an aesthetic shift. One of the most well known gardens at this time, 'The Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician', is an example of the new form of Chinese garden. The garden still exists today in the town of Suzhou although it has not been preserved in the same way as the great gardens of Europe. None of the plants have grown continuously in the same place and few of the architectural elements remain. Yet the original garden is strongly present as another form of reality, a fragment of literature. There is something called a Chinese garden that has not changed significantly in its pattern of meaning or its underlying aesthetic principles from the 16th century up to the present. The explanation for this relates to people rather than aesthetics. If the person who created the garden is remembered, then the garden is remembered, even if it withers. If the person is not remembered then, even though the garden may flourish, it is not remembered. The unsuccessful politician, Wan Xianchen, was a great man who is remembered for his humility. 'Unsuccessful' meant 'guileless' or 'artless' at a time when politicians and the court were highly corrupt.¹⁴

In the West, the Chinese garden as an idea has been the focus of much discussion and study as most of the clues about the meanings of the gardens are only available in maps, paintings, scrolls or as illustrations in books. The romanticising of the East, a form of Orientalism,¹⁶ has become increasingly evident in the 20th century, when architects, artists and landscape designers visit the East as a kind of spiritual homage. The Chinese garden is symbolic of an intimate connection with nature and a place where 'thoughtful Chinese sought release from the irritations, frustrations, discord and cares of life'.¹⁸ Jung-Jung and Chi-Fung's garden provides such a release from their busy life, however, it is unlikely that they are aware that they are continuing their long heritage of tranquillity in the garden.

Plants and their Meaning in the Garden

The love of flowers is an ancient passion among the Chinese, but the use of flowers in the garden has always been restrained. Plants have spiritual meaning and these meanings have been passed down through the practice of ancestor worship. The Chinese loved only the flowers that their ancestors had loved before them

The plum, promising spring and the renewal of vitality and hope, or the peach, embodying fecundity and immortality in lore and legend, exemplifying a host of old familiars, rich in human associations. Not so the lychee, for instance; though known to the north since Han times even in T'ang poetry, it is still treated as an exotic, colourful and romantically charming but only feebly expressive of ordinary dreams and passions.¹⁹

Plants, such as the chrysanthemum, peony, peach and plum, bamboo and pine and the lotus, all had meanings associated with the values held by the ancestors. This is a very different way of seeing flowering plants to the Western gardener who delights in unusual and new horticultural specimens.

For the Chinese gardener in China, it is not the spectacular horticultural specimen that is rewarding. Instead it is the delight of the freshness that rises from a stream in the summer heat, or the distant sounds of fish leaping in the evening mist or the scent of the lotus or the Michela or the transforming power of the snow. The Chinese are also fascinated with paradox such as when the buzz of the cicada heightens the silence or the rustling breeze makes the stillness more intense.

By immersing himself in these transient but oft repeated effects, the garden maker grew in awareness of the Tao's eternal transformations and in acute perception of the passing moment, himself transcending time.²⁰

How much of this fine tradition of the Chinese garden has been brought to Australia by Chinese migrants? If the recent or new has no ancestors and therefore lacks spiritual meaning what can a garden

in Australia mean to a Chinese migrant? The gardens described in this chapter seem to release the gardener from the constraints of tradition but in the process of adopting Western attitudes to gardens something seems to have been lost. Chinese migrants have brought two forms of gardening to Australia; the market garden and the house garden. Chinese market gardens have been a fundamental part of Australia's cultural heritage since the 1850s. It was the Chinese market gardens which provided most of the vegetables for people in Australia in the second half of the 19th century. Some of these early Chinese market gardens continue to provide vegetables for Australian communities. The Chinese house garden has been less easy to translate to the Australian house on its quarter acre block. Instead of a walled complex surrounding a courtyard garden, the Australian house has a distinctive front and back garden. Nevertheless by understanding the meanings and intentions of the traditional Chinese garden one can see possible metaphors for ancient traditions in some of the contemporary Chinese-Australian gardens.

Chinese Migration to Australia

The migration experience in Australia has a mixed history for the Chinese. Between the 1840s and 1890s, more than 100,000 Chinese came to Australia as indentured or contract labour. There were only a few free settlers. Most of the migrants were men and they gravitated to the goldfields in the 1850s and 1860s. There were other Chinese who became merchants, boarding house keepers and market gardeners in the cities. As the gold was depleted in NSW and Victoria, the Chinese started to work as fishermen, station hands and market gardeners in rural areas. Those who moved to the cities opened small businesses or worked as cabinet-makers but they were particularly successful as market gardeners.

In Queensland, when the Southern goldfields were depleted, many of the Chinese moved north to work in the mines and on later gold findings. By the 1880s, these gold seams had also been depleted and the Chinese then moved into agriculture, growing sugar and bananas. They were particularly successful at banana growing. Cairns became a centre for the Chinese community in North Queensland. The story of the Chinese migrants in Western Australia in the last century is similar, first they worked on the goldfields and then moved into service industries such as market gardening, laundries and cabinet making.

During this long Chinese presence in Australia little was known about their house gardens. It is only since the 1970s that a distinctive Australian-Chinese house garden has become evident. The market gardens, however, have a long and interesting history.

The Chinese Market Garden.

Although market gardening is associated with a range of migrant groups from Europe, the Chinese market gardens have the longest continuous heritage in Australia. The early Chinese settlers established gardens on the goldfields for their own use but soon found a ready market for any surplus produce. When they left the goldfields, in the 1870s and settled in other parts of Australia, they again established market gardens, either on the fringe of small rural towns or on swampy land in the cities that was considered unsuitable for housing. A number of these early Chinese market gardens still exist, such as the market garden at La Perouse, at Kogarah and at Rockdale. Why have the Chinese market gardens continued to be productive when the European market gardens were willingly sold, only to disappear under vast tracts of speculative housing? It would seem that the tradition of market gardening has been a different enterprise in the Chinese community.

Two important Chinese market gardens in Australia today are on sandy alluvial land associated with Botany Bay in Sydney. Both these gardens were established in the 1870s and continue to operate more or less in the same families. Originally Chinese market gardens were cultivated by men from the southern part of mainland China. They lived in basic accommodation beside the garden. They were often very lonely and did not mix with the surrounding community. Some of the men sold the garden produce at the markets or hawked from door to door carrying the vegetables in two baskets hanging from a pole which rested on their back and shoulders. The gardeners slept in the primitive huts next to the gardens. When they took produce to the markets, they stayed in the lodging houses which had grown up around the produce markets in Haymarket. After a day of selling they came in to the boarding houses and eateries in the early evening to gamble. The tradition of opium smoking and gambling was an accepted part of the Chinese working class culture. By 1885, fifty-four Chinese

market gardens were listed in Sydney. Half of these were located on the flat sandy-clay soils at Alexandria. Others were located in nearby Botany and the rest were scattered throughout the suburbs along sandy creek beds. This pattern of Chinese market gardens was typical of other major Australian cities. Chinese managers rented cheap land and employed hard working Chinese labourers. Most gardens had up to ten men working in them but some had as many as fifty. In Alexandria, where most of the market gardens were clustered in the 1880s, the houses were described as a

*... nest of huts [which bore] more resemblance to an Arab town on the outskirts of an Egyptian city than anything they expected to find in Sydney...*²¹

Although this comment was prompted by a Royal Commission into 'Alleged Chinese Gambling and Immorality' in 1891²² and therefore has to be seen as the values of the mainstream Australian culture of the time, the living conditions associated with the gardens were primitive. The Mayor of Botany indicated in 1891, that he knew that many of the huts had no floor and no drainage but he felt that the gardens were good for the area and was prepared to overlook the health needs of the gardeners.²³

The market gardens are working gardens where the same centuries old traditions from Canton are practiced. The gardens are laid out in neat rectilinear beds separated by a grid of irrigation canals. The soil is heaped up in the beds creating distinct edges between each crop. Because the crops consist of relatively low plants and the gardens are situated in creek lines flowing to the bay, the gardens create a patchwork landscape of neat squares following the curve of the creek. The crops consist of red in-choy, green on-choy, bok choy, leeks, spring onions, Italian parsley, English spinach, and broccoli which the Chinese only use for the young leaves, young stalks and small flowers. They have started to grow horseradish for the recent Japanese market and white radish for the Korean and Cambodian migrants. Watercress is grown in the irrigation canals. Until recently all the seeds for the vegetables came from Chinese suppliers in Hong Kong. Now it is cheaper to buy the seed in Australia.

Today the garden is managed by the young sons who live in well-to-do suburbs in Sydney and are university educated. Despite this they still work long hours in the garden, from 6.00am to 5.00pm every day, assisted by elderly relatives who live in basic accommodation on the site. The La Perouse market garden occupies a dramatic setting. Immediately to the north is Bunnerong Cemetery, similarly patterned into rectilinear lots of graves and headstones, but instead of a creek, an avenue of pink and cream mausolea belonging to Italian-Australian families winds through the graves. Beyond the cemetery is the dramatic borrowed landscape of Port Botany and Sydney Airport. To the south of the garden is the Aboriginal settlement associated with Yarra Bay House. The Aboriginal flag of red, black and yellow flutters on the skyline, while Chinese victims of the 'White Australia Policy' toil in a crouched position producing the basics for the new multicultural Australian cuisine. These gardens have a long and mixed history in Australia. In 1928 Sydney City Council resumed some of the land belonging to the Chinese market gardens in order to build the Bunnerong Power Station. The Power Station, a once dramatic landmark on the Botany Bay skyline, has served its useful life and has now been demolished, but the Chinese gardens continue to produce.

New Forms of Chinese Gardens: the Australian-Chinese Garden

There are few examples of traditional Chinese gardens in Australia. The most accurate representation of the traditional garden, a gift to Australia for the Bicentenary, is located close to Chinatown in Sydney at Darling Harbour. There are a number of possible reasons why Chinese migrants did not recreate classical Chinese garden traditions in their gardens in Australia. First, the Chinese were in Australia to work and earn money, either professionally or through business. They did not have time to create the labour intensive traditional gardens, nor did they have the servants with the knowledge required to create such gardens. Second, life in Australia has few of the rituals associated with the gardens of their ancestors. Instead the rituals are associated with food and festivals usually carried out in restaurants and as street activities. This is in contrast to many of the European market gardeners whose work and recreation occurred in the extended garden so the tension between work and recreation did not exist. Third, domestic gardens in Australia did not have the same dramatic landscape features to borrow, nor could they create miniature versions of the mountains because limestone was not available in most settled areas of Australia. The limestone used in the public classical gardens was imported from China. Finally, the concept of scholarship for the Chinese in Australia shifted into professional realms, particularly medicine and engineering. So the scholar has become scientific rather than poetic and the garden a site for the application of this scientific rigour in order to produce the most bountiful crops of fruit with the sweetest flavours.

Despite this, there are a few physical aspects of the traditional garden. Flowers have maintained their importance, particularly the chrysanthemum and the peony. Flowering trees which are heavily scented are particularly valued such as the Wong Lan, *Michaëla doltsopa*, and Champak, *Michaëla champaca*. Trees such as magnolia, which is seen as beauty and strength – steel magnolia- are valued, as is peach blossom, which represents prosperity, and pine which represents masculinity and balances the femininity of blossom trees – the ying and the yang. Such trees, when they occur in a Chinese migrant's garden, are likely to have been planted for their traditional meanings. It must be remembered, however, that the Chinese in Australia have come from a number of countries. One can expect the gardens to be a complex mix of the migration experience, the way of life in the original country, ancient cultural traditions and responses to living in a new country.

Hong Kong Australian Gardens

In Australian cities, the Chinese community has always valued their Chinatowns as places where they were able to shop and eat. Unlike other immigrant groups, distinct Chinese residential areas have not developed. Instead the Chinese live among other Australians, dispersed throughout the suburbs. Recently this has changed. Since the mid 1980s, new residential areas have developed on the margins of Australian cities, often on the site of former European market gardens. These residential areas are predominantly peopled by recent migrants from Hong Kong. The areas are characterised by large new two-storey brick houses, surrounded by gardens which are separated from the street by two metre high brick walls often with decorative cast-iron insets.

You have met Jung-Jung and Chi-Fong and Su-Ling and Xin-Yi. They are typical of the new Chinese migrants from Hong Kong. Most people from Hong Kong have lived in high-rise apartments where their gardens have consisted of a few pots on a small balcony, long views to the sea and the occasional indoor plant. Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated areas of the world. The same steep mountains that characterise China, form a backdrop to the tall apartment blocks crowded together in a replicated version of the tall mountain backdrop. Su-Ling and Xin-Yi lived in an apartment in Hong Kong until they came to Brisbane in 1991. They chose Brisbane because the climate was similar to that of Hong Kong.

Su-Ling was born in Mainland China. Her father had been a businessman in Southern China and had made his money through a grocery business and a lychee orchard. In 1954, the government confiscated the orchard and the family fled to Hong Kong. Su-Ling was only four years old but she can remember the garden in China and the sorrow her parents felt at leaving, because they believed they would never be allowed to go back. The family moved into a public housing apartment block where they had to use a common kitchen and a common bathroom. They continued to live this way until Su-Ling left to study overseas at eighteen. In these crowded conditions any sense of a garden was achieved by a pot of jasmine on the balcony and indoor ferns in pots. When Su-Ling married Xin-Yi they moved to a larger apartment on the top of a hill in one of the New Territory towns. They had a large balcony and long views to the sea.

Xin-Yi had studied to be an engineer at the University of Queensland and after working in a number of different countries they moved to Brisbane. The first house they bought was a small timber 'Queenslander'.²⁶ It was surrounded by a green lawn and nestled under a large spreading jacaranda. Both Su-Ling and Xin-Yi had always been apartment dwellers so they did not change the garden. They kept the little house with its Queensland garden while they continued to move to different countries for Xin-Yi's work. In 1991 they returned to Brisbane and built themselves a new house on top of a hill in a new suburb. The house is an imposing two-storey brick structure with an opulent interior but there is no garden. Su-Ling is a busy professional woman and she loves the house with its long views over the landscape but she does not know how to garden. She continues to engage landscape designers who suggest different forms of garden but she cannot decide. The only elements of her garden which give her pleasure are the views and the large indoor pots of bamboo.

This is in strong contrast to Jung-Jung and Chi-Fong who also lived in an apartment in the in Hong Kong but have made a beautiful garden around their new house in Sunnybank, a suburb of Brisbane which has become home to many Chinese families from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Jung-Jung and Chi-Fong lived near a public park in Hong Kong Central and every morning Jung-Jung would go to the park for an early morning walk before going to work. Sometimes she joined other women as they practiced Ti-Chi. Their apartment had views over the park. Jung-Jung's garden consisted of numerous pots of flowers on their small balcony. In 1980, they came to Australia for a short holiday which

included a stay at the Gold Coast. They both loved the Gold Coast so they decided to migrate to Australia in 1988, settling in Sunnybank.

Sunnybank had been a Soldier Settlers' development. The area was high, providing long views over a picturesque landscape. Because the area consisted of deep red soils as well as a number of natural springs, most of the soldier settlers used their large lots for market gardens. At this time the area was renowned for its fruit, particularly figs, papaya and succulent strawberries. It was called 'The Salad Bowl of Brisbane' and Brisbane people often bought fresh strawberries and other fruit from roadside stalls in the area. In the early 1980s the market gardeners subdivided their land and the area became the destination for many of the new Chinese economic migrants. They were mostly affluent business people and within a decade the suburb was a Chinese enclave of large two-storey brick houses surrounded by generous gardens most of which were enclosed by brick walls interrupted by ornate cast-iron double gates. The shopping centre changed to cater for the new residents. Fish markets opened, numerous Chinese restaurants offered Yum Cha for lunch and small jewellery shops opened to buy and sell gold, the travelling currency for many Chinese.

Jung-Jung and Chi-Fong opened one of these small jewellery stores in a shopping mall and built a large two storey house with a swimming pool. Before building the house they found land which had good Feng Shui in that it was a long block and was oriented east-west. They also built the house according to the principles of Feng Shui. The house is situated so that the front garden is half the size of the back. The front garden is surrounded by a high brick wall with ornamental insets of cast-iron and large ornate cast-iron double gates leading onto a wide concrete driveway. The house is placed in the centre. It is built of light ochre coloured bricks which Chi-Fong considers to be orange coloured. He says that the brick colour was selected because it was a happy colour and it reminded him orange tiles on the roofs in China. The rooms in the house were arranged for good Feng Shui. The morning sun streams into the bedrooms to wake them up for each new day and the living room has long views to see the setting sun over parkland.

The garden has also been arranged according to good Feng Shui by avoiding any sharp angles in laying out the garden beds. The only plants that Chi-Fong and Jung-Jung have grown which reflect their Chinese traditions are some conifers, a few fruit trees and some traditional jade bushes which sit in ornate pots near the front entry and on the back terrace. All the other plants have been planted because of their colourful flowers. Chi-Fong cannot resist buying plants with yellow flowers. When they are buying food in the supermarket they are often drawn to the plant section where they select plants either in flower or plants with attractive pictures of the flowers they will produce attached.

The back garden, which falls steeply from the house, is bordered by a tropical grove of palms mixed with one or two conifers. Most of the back garden is occupied by a swimming pool and planted retaining walls. From the terrace at the back of the house there are pleasant views of the borrowed landscape of trees in the neighbours' gardens and a distant park.

Jung-Jung continues her tradition of waking early as the sun comes into the bedroom. She then goes to the poolside where she practices Ti-Chi for half an hour before starting her working day. In the evening Jung-Jung and Chi-Fong look at their garden before Jung-Jung prepares the evening meal. They are busy people, working six days a week in their jewellery shop and attending church and Chinese community activities on a Sunday. Because of this they employ a gardener to look after the plants and mow the grass. There is little physical evidence to compare this garden with traditional Chinese gardens. If one were unaware of the Feng Shui or the significance of some of the plants, the only thing that would indicate a Chinese presence is a small collection of highly polished pebbles, each carved with Chinese characters, which are carefully placed at the base of a pot containing a jade bush on the back terrace. Jung-Jung uses her garden in Australia in a similar way to the gardeners in 16th century Suzhou. Perhaps the garden is less opulent and the spiritual role of the garden is more significant than the intellectual pursuits of the Suzhou gardeners, but like the wealthy merchants, she and Chi-Fong are keen to display their affluence, which in Australia takes the form of ornate walls and colourful flowering plants.

The Hong Kong gardeners show how one expression of the Chinese garden has been translated to Australia. There is, however, another form of the Chinese garden in Australia which could be considered as a development of the 15th century practice of cultivating fruitful sites within the garden. Tee and Wing-See, who are both Chinese Malaysian migrants, have created such a garden in Brisbane.

Australian Chinese Scholar's Garden: Chinese Malay Australian Gardens

In Malaysia there tend to be three types of garden; courtyard garden, utilitarian gardens and market gardens. It is the utilitarian aspects of the Malaysian garden that have been translated to Australia. These are gardens created to produce fruit and culinary herbs.

Tee and Wing-See live in a large modern house in a new suburb, Chapel Hill, north west of Brisbane. The house sits on half an acre of ground most of which forms the back garden. The front garden is small and simple, consisting of a neat lawn and a few flowering shrubs. The back garden is both a tropical orchard and herb and vegetable garden, bringing together the fruits and vegetables of Malaysia and Queensland. Unlike Sunnybank, where the new Chinese gardens have been inserted into the existing grid of streets and 1960s housing, the new suburb of Chapel Hill, which has a similar number of Chinese families, is a recent subdivision. It has a curvilinear street layout which is characteristic of new Brisbane developments. The streets are dominated by large houses with open front gardens which flow together as continuous lawn because there are no fences.

Both Tee and Wing-See grew up in the town of Bukit Mertajan just outside Penang. Tee was born in China but came to Malaysia when he was four. He finished high school in Bukit Mertajan and then came to Brisbane in 1971 to attend university. Before he could enter university he had to undertake a year of study in order to matriculate. During this time he lived in a 'Queenslander' house in Kelvin Grove as a paying guest. Although he could not speak English well and Brisbane seemed like a country town, he felt at home in the Queenslander which was similar to the houses in Penang.

After three years, Tee went back to visit his family and friends where he met his future wife, Wing-See. It took four years before they were married during which time Tee travelled back and forth between Penang and Brisbane. The Chinese in Australia often are divided between two countries. Unlike European migrants who usually only make one or two trips back to their old country, the Chinese have commonly gone back to their places of origin numerous times. They effectively live in two countries, living dual lives. Shirley Fitzgerald, an eminent historian, stated when researching her book on the Chinese in Sydney,

I was quite amazed at the degree to which a number of Chinese who could hold dual loyalty to both cultures.²⁷

After Tee and Wing-See married in 1978, they came to live in Australia renting a small house in Brisbane until Wing-See gave birth to twin boys. Tee responded to this surprise by providing his new family with their own house in Jamboree Heights, Brisbane. It was also a small house, but they were able to start their first garden in Australia.

Both Tee and Wing-See are avid gardeners. Wing-See grew up on a farm in Malaysia. When she turned 15, she realised she needed pocket money, so she started to work in her family's market garden in the evenings after school which included harvesting the plants for the traditional 'wet' market at 4.00am. It was dark in the early mornings and Wing-See was scared to walk to the farm alone, so she convinced her brothers to come with her in return for a share of the profits. Her brothers helped her harvest the vegetables, mostly spinach and to carry it to market. They would tie bundles of vegetables onto a long pole and then two of them would carry the pole on their shoulders to the markets as dawn was breaking. After they would all go to school. Tee had also grown up on a farm, a chicken farm. His family kept pigs, poultry and ducks. Tee would have to feed and wash the pigs and clean up the pigsty and feed the chickens before school in the morning. His parent's farm was next to a market garden where the vegetable beds were protected from birds by fluttering kites. These romantic images convey a sense of Tee and Wing-See's childhood, surrounded by a strong market gardening tradition.

In Australia, Tee is a modern Chinese scholar. He teaches and undertakes research at Queensland University of Technology's Electrical Engineering School. He is a dedicated teacher but he is also a committed gardener. Each of the two gardens Tee and Wing-See have created in Australia reflect qualities of the Ming Dynasty productive gardens. Their first house set the pattern for their Australian gardens. In this garden they planted a small orchard of guava trees, pawpaw, and sugar cane and they terraced the garden into different areas. The top terrace had the ubiquitous Australian Hills Hoist clothes line as well as pots of herbs and a row of fruit trees that they would have grown in Malaysia. The lower terrace had five beds of Chinese vegetables such as spinach and *choy sun*. It also had a shed

for garden tools and racks for drying seeds. Their back garden at Chapel Hill is similar. It is separated into three areas, the top two areas are generous grassy terraces, while the third area is a large orchard. The orchard, which grows many of the fruit from Malaysia, slopes into an attractive valley, providing an interesting 'borrowed landscape'. It is an Antipodean 'borrowed landscape'. Instead of looking up at wild plants growing on steep mountains, Tee and Wing-See look down over a cultivated landscape with a few giant eucalypts as reminders of the former wild forest. There are many traditions associated with growing fruit trees in Penang such as placing sugar in a circle around the trunks of fruit trees in the belief that the sugar will ultimately sweeten the fruit. Because Tee is a scientist, he does not believe in this tradition, but there are other horticultural practices that he maintains.

At the bottom of the valley, they have planted a row of banana trees because bananas like wet rich soils. In Queensland, domestic gardeners are allowed to grow only 5 banana stools. These five stools, however, can produce 10-15 bunches of bananas, each with 8-10 combs, all year round. The banana trees were originally given to Tee and Jean by friends as suckers from large mature trees. When Tee and Wing-See planted their banana grove, they were unaware of the Chinese connections with banana growing in Queensland in the last century. Other Malaysian elements are the clumps of sugar cane which form the remainder of the boundary planting. Sugar cane is an important part of the Malaysian diet. There are even special sugar cane crushers that households use to crush the juice out of the cane. Tee and Jean simply cut the middle part of the sugar cane stems into segments, crush and boil them in a little water and drink the juice.

Tee has planted more than thirty fruit trees in their orchard, including five bananas, five mangoes, four jackfruit, four guavas, four lychees, five longans, three custard apples and one persimmon. Many of the trees have been grafted by Tee, others have grown from the seeds of particularly delicious fruit that Tee and Wing-See have eaten. The mangoes that Tee is growing in the garden are a far cry from the small and sour mangoes which grow in Penang. Of the five mango trees, two are Australian, one is Thai and two have come from seeds of tasty mangoes the family has eaten. It has taken three to four years for the trees to bear fruit but now they produce prolifically. The Jackfruit was always Tee's favourite fruit in Penang. He has planted four trees, two are local Queensland varieties and two are Penang varieties, however, because of the Brisbane winter, the trees hibernate. As a result the fruit do not ripen as well as in Penang. Another favourite fruit from Penang is the guava. Tee has planted four trees, two are Thai varieties with large fruit and two are local.

According to Tee, most Chinese gardens in Brisbane have lychee or longan trees. Tee has planted two different types of lychee and five longan trees. The other trees in the orchard are not commonly found in Penang. These include three local custard apples which are growing very well on the sloping ground. Finally, Tee has planted one persimmon tree which is a cold climate fruit. Despite this, Tee manages to get over one hundred fruit a year from this tree. The family like to eat the persimmon before they are fully ripe because they are sweet and crunchy.

Apart from the orchard on the lower slope, pawpaws, lemon and loquat grow on the middle terrace, while peach and mulberry grow on the top terrace. Tee takes good care of his trees, sometimes playing music to them to ensure that they produce. As a result the family have fruit from the orchard all year round. The almanac of annual fruit production from Tee's orchard would even impress the Ming Dynasty gardeners in Suzhou.

Tee's Orchard Almanac

longans from January to March
guavas from February to April
custard apples from March to May
persimmons from April to May
pawpaws from March through the winter
loquats from September to October
mangoes, from early November to February
peaches and mulberries from November to February
lychees from December to January

Each of the three terraces are separated by magnificent stone retaining walls, at least two to three metres high, built from large round boulders of sandstone. The middle terrace is the main vegetable

garden. Just as in Tee and Wing-See's first garden there are five vegetable beds on one side of a large grassy area. The vegetable beds follow a particular sequence; one bed is always lying fallow. The fallow bed has a moving hole into which the kitchen compost is dug. As this hole fills and is covered with soil another hole is dug until eventually the whole bed has been composted. When the next crop of vegetables is ready to be planted, one of the other beds is selected to be the compost bed. The vegetable beds have winter and summer crops. In the winter, there are healthy crops of snow peas, sugar snap, choy sum, pak choy, kailan, kaichoy, cauliflower, cabbage and broccoli. In the summer, the beds mostly consist of Chinese spinach, choy sum, kailian, kankong, snake beans, okra, sweet potato and long narrow, white eggplant. All the vegetables are used for stir fry but Wing-See is happy to supply a recipe for the most delicious, the white eggplant.

Stir Fry White Eggplant

Boil the eggplant, then peel off the skin.
Fry chopped garlic in oil,
Add soybean paste,
Pour mixture over eggplant, mix well,
Add some chilli
Serve with hot steaming plain rice.

Another vegetable, which is grown in summer is the sweet potato. The family stir fries the leaves with shrimp paste (blacan) and chilli and eat the potato in many ways. A particular delicacy that the family enjoys, uses the sweet potato, yam and Chinese New Year cake. Chinese New Year cake is made with glutinous rice and sugar and is considered to be food for the 'Kitchen God'. Wing-See points out that it was traditionally believed that if the Kitchen God has sticky rice in his mouth then he is unable to report bad things during his annual pilgrimage to Heaven.

Kitchen God's Sweet Potato Delicacy.

Slice a sweet potato and a yam,
Slice the Chinese New year cake.
Put the three slices together, with the sticky rice in the centre,
Coat in a batter of flour and pinch of salt,
Drop into medium hot oil until it is brown,
Test with chop stick to see if cooked,
Serve with Chinese green tea.

Along the base of the retaining wall in the middle terrace, is a herb bed in which grow numerous essential herbs for Chinese cooking. The Pandang or Screwpine is the plant which gives the bright green colour to Chinese cakes. Wing-See picks two of the long leaves, ties them together in a knot and throws them into different dishes she prepares. It is particularly delicious in coconut custard (kaya). Lemon grass is another herb that is always found in Chinese gardens. It is used for curries, sweet and sour dishes and for TomYum soup. There are a number of different gingers in the garden; the green ginger roots are used for cooking seafood and chicken, yellow ginger is the tumeric used in curries, and the 'blue ginger', langkuas, is used for satay and beef rendang. A small frame, about one and a half metres high and two metres long, holds up a bitter gourd vine. Wing-See explains that tradition has it that *if you acquire the taste of the bitter gourd, you are a wise person.*

The top terrace adjoins the house as a wide paved patio area bordered by a garden bed of mixed flowers, herbs and vegetables, growing along the top of the stone retaining wall. In this bed are a few rose bushes mixed with day lilies whose flowerbuds are used in stir fry, as well as okra bushes which provide green okra for summer curries, a curry leaf plant, and chilli bushes. The boundary between the neighbours is marked by a row of heavily fruiting pawpaw trees, and near the house is a collection of pots containing lime trees, more curry leaf plants and chillies. Behind the pots, a robust clump of 'blue ginger'.

Just as the Ming Dynasty gardeners used the plums and peaches for relish, Wing-See picks the pawpaws when they are green to make green papaya pickle. All the ingredients for the pickle are near the kitchen.

Wing-See's Malay Pickle Salad - Acar

For this pickle, Wing-See uses green papaya, carrot, cucumber, snake beans, cauliflower, cabbage, whole green chillies, onions and garlic.

Slice the chilli along one side and clean out the seeds; stuff the chilli with grated green papaya.

Blanch the cabbage, cauliflower and beans and then rinse in cold water and dry so that they remain crunchy.

Chop the cucumber and squeeze out all the moisture so that it remains crunchy.

Grate and fry tumeric in oil. Add in vinegar, sugar and salt.

Spread chopped vegetables out in a bamboo rice sieve to air dry for two hours.

Pack the vegetables in a glass jar and pour in vinegar.

Let the vinegar cool. Seal and keep refrigerated.

Serve as an entre or as a side dish

Tee and Wing-See's garden has many traditional Chinese elements from the peach blossom tree near the house, to the range of fruit and vegetables and the orchard trees. However, it is also an Australian garden because of its size, the undulating landscape and more particularly the giant eucalypt trees which grow magnificently in the valley. The presence of tropical fruit trees and their diversity is characteristic of many Chinese house gardens in Australia. Tee is a scholar, but like many contemporary Chinese scholars, he is a scientist rather than a poet. His scholarship is evident in the garden as horticultural precision and rigour. He and Wing-See also come from a fine tradition of market gardening. Perhaps their garden can be seen as a version of the traditional Chinese garden – a fruitful site akin to those of the Ming Dynasty.

Summary

The market gardens and house gardens described in this chapter reflect many of the Chinese gardening traditions in understated ways. The respect for particular flowers and the use of fruit trees can be traced back to the Ming Dynasty, even if it is drawing a long bow. Perhaps it is the enigmatic quality of the Chinese and their gardens in Australia, with apologies for the orientalism, which raises interesting speculations about what is a tradition and what is heritage. Other migrant groups have continued many of their gardening traditions but they have also incorporated tangible cultural heritage elements whether they are Italian fountains, Greek colonnades, Latvian myrtles or manicured Vietnamese temple plants. Such tangible elements of Chinese culture are not evident in the Chinese Australian garden. Nor does the layout draw from their highly developed art form. Despite this there is a respect for Feng Shui and its power to bring fortune and good luck.

Living in a new country can be a releasing experience, particularly where rules and traditions have dominated the home country or where there are two ancestral countries. The new country offers the opportunity for invented traditions. Unlike some of the European migrant groups whose invented traditions are often extreme versions of their original culture, the Chinese in Australia have not created hyper-real versions of the traditional Chinese garden. Interestingly, unlike other migrant groups their market gardens have not been ephemeral. The market gardens are rich in tradition. Pierre Ryckmans reminds us, for the Chinese, the presence of tradition is constantly felt as a spiritual state even if it is not physically evident. The Chinese have continued their tradition of vitality, creativity and seemingly unlimited capacity to change and adjust. In this light it is interesting to compare the spiritual expressions in the Australian Chinese garden with the Australian Vietnamese gardens described in the next chapter.

Endnotes

1. Tao Ch'ien, preface (dated the 11th moon of the year 405) trans. J.R. Hightower. 1970. *The Poetry of Tao Ch'ien*. Oxford p. 269 as cited in Keswick, M. 1978. *The Chinese Garden*. London: Academy Editions. P. 81.

2. Ryckmans, P. 1986. *The Chinese Attitude Towards the Past*. The 47th George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology 1986. Canberra: Australian National University.p2.
- 3.Ibid.2.
4. Ibid.4
5. Ibid.11.
6. My thanks to BiHua Zheng for her unpublished case study of Suzhou gardens. 1997.
7. Cheng, M. & Jian, T. 1935. *Gu-Jin-Tu-Shu-Ji-Chen*. Shanghai: Xhong-Hua-Shu-Ju. P.245.
8. The descriptions of the Chinese landscape have been compiled from *Encyclopaedia of World Geography*. China, Taiwan. Hong Kong. Vol 20. 1994. NY: Marshall Cavendish.
9. Chuang Tzu. 1891. (Translated by Legge). *The Texts of Taoism*. Vol 2. Oxford.p.59 as cited in Keswick, M. 1978. *The Chinese Garden*. London Academy Editions. p 74
10. Keswick. Op cit. P 119.
11. Wang Ao (ed). 1506. *Gusu zhi*. Zhongguo shiue congshu fascimile edn 1965. *Juan 32*. P.25a as cited in Clunas C. 1996. *Fruitful Sites Garden Culture in the Ming Dynasty China* .London: Reaktion Books. p22
- 12.Xu Guangqi (ed). 1983. *Nong Zheng Quan Shu Jiao Zhu*. Commentary by Shi Shenghan, edited by Xibei nongxueyuan gu nongxue yanjiushi. 3 vols. P.778 as cited in Clunas. 1996. P.41.
13. Bray, F. 1984. *Science and Civilisation in China*: Volume 6, Biology and Biological Technology. Part II: Agriculture. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. P550 as cited in Clunas.1996. p.56. and Brook, T. 1993. *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China*. Cambridge and London as cited in Clunas. Op cit. P.56.
14. Clunas. Ibid. 53.
15. Taken from ‘A particular account of the Emperor of China’s gardens near Peking in a letter from Pere Attiret to his friend in Paris, translated from the French by Sir Harry Beaumont in 1749 as cited in Keswick. Op.cit. 8.
16. Said, E. 1978. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books: NY.
17. Steele, F. 1964. *Gardens and People*. Boston. P. 92.as cited in Clunas, C. 1996. Op Cit.10.
18. Wing-Tsit Chan, ‘Man and Nature in the Chinese Garden’, in Inn, H. 1950. *Chinese Houses and Gardens*. New York. And Osvald, Siren, 1949 *Gardens of china*. New York as cited in Clunas, op. Cit.12.
19. Schafer. E. 1967. *The Golden Peaches of Samakand*. Berkeley.119 as cited in Keswick. Op cit. 177.
20. Keswick. Ibid. 188.
21. NSW Royal Commission on Chinese Gambling 1891 as cited in Fitzgerald, S. 1997. *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*. Sydney: State Library of NSW Press.95.
22. Ibid. 95.
23. Ibid. 96.
24. 26. Rolls, E. 1992.*The Sojourners*. Queensland University Press. p.426.
25. My thanks to Richard Clough for his descriptions of his uncle’s property at Banksmeadow where a Chinese market garden occupied the alluvial flats. Richard described how he visited the garden as a young boy in order to collect the rent from the Chinese gardeners.
26. ‘Queenslanders’ are attractive weatherboard houses which are elevated on stumps to allow cooling breezes underneath. They are decorated with intricate timber fretwork screens which encloses deep verandahs
27. ‘Unravelling the lengthy Australian-Chinese puzzle’ in *SMH*. March 8,1997. 18