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**To cite this article:** Guangsi Lin (2023) A milestone in the history of Chinese modern landscape design: the Fangta Park in Shanghai, *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 43:4, 319-333, DOI: [10.1080/14601176.2023.2275977](https://doi.org/10.1080/14601176.2023.2275977)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/14601176.2023.2275977>

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 Published online: 20 Dec 2023.

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# *A milestone in the history of Chinese modern landscape design: the Fangta Park in Shanghai*

GUANGSI LIN

**Abstract:** Fangta Park in Shanghai is a widely admired Chinese modern park and a representative work by Professor Feng Jizhong. A literature review is first used to explain the construction process of Fangta Park, its design philosophy, master plan, and detailed design, followed by an analysis of the park's design. Previous studies have shown how Feng Jizhong 'deconstructed' Western architectural forms using traditional Chinese space concepts, thus generating novel Chinese architectural forms underpinned by Western construction concepts. He adapted rhetorical devices of Chinese traditional poetry and used them in the spatial arrangement and landscape design of Fangta Park, a modern landscape and architectural masterpiece with distinctive Chinese characteristics. Feng Jizhong promoted blending Chinese culture with modern landscape design and illustrated the process of 'space-time transformation' with 'conative space'. Through the design of Fangta Park, he exhibited his individuality and profound scholarship, charting a unique course for modern landscape architecture in China.

**Keywords:** conative space; Fangta Park; Feng Jizhong; modern architecture; modern landscape architecture; space-time transformation

The *Fangtayuan* (方塔园, Fangta Park or Square Pagoda Garden) in Shanghai, which includes *Helouxuan* (何陋轩, *Helou* Pavilion), is one of the most important works by Prof. Feng Jizhong (冯纪忠, 1915–2009), Honorary Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, an esteemed Chinese architect and landscape architect who taught at the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, Shanghai (figure 1). Fangta Park represents Feng Jizhong's design philosophies and is broadly recognized in China as a significant work of Chinese modern landscape architecture design, although it was not built in strict accordance with Feng Jizhong's specific concepts and underwent additional adaptations and changes.<sup>1 2</sup>

Feng Jizhong described two essential concepts, 'space-time transformation' and 'conative space', in Fangta Park's design.<sup>4</sup> The 'space-time transformation' refers to the way light and shadow in spaces strengthen the movement of physical time. In other words, time is transformed into a visible, three-dimensional entity.

Together with the roofs, floor, and walls, light and shadow form a space that constantly changes with and marks time. This space becomes palpable after being observed and experienced. An example of this concept can be seen in the *Helou* Pavilion, analyzed later, where the curved roof and surrounding cambered low wall amplify light and shadow changes.

There are two levels of meaning of 'conative space'. First, 'the trigger of conation is not just the thinking process and quest for a better configuration, but also the reflection of the designer's time, experience, and constant exploration'.<sup>5</sup> During the design process, the designer works out the park layout and arrangements through personal explorations. S/he also translates their evolving conception process into the design form on the site. For instance, the rotation and overlapping of the *Helou* Pavilion's three equal-sized terraces record the thinking process about the architectural orientation and layout — a palimpsest of design explorations. Second, the designer



FIGURE 1. Feng Jizhong in the early 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

expects users to form their unique experience of space and time by perceiving the movement of physical and palpable space, such as the cambered wall and changing light and shadow.

‘Conative space’ and ‘space-time transformation’ are related to a certain extent. For example, the process of Helou Pavilion’s terraces seeking orientation through rotation resembles an intermittent video that records the operation process. It’s a dynamic process from uncertain to certain<sup>6</sup>; that is, it solidifies the conation. It is also a process where time and space coexist and change,<sup>7</sup> therefore a form of ‘space-time transformation’.<sup>8</sup>

‘Conative space’ and ‘space-time transformation’ reflect Feng Jizhong’s adept inheritance of Chinese literary and artistic creation traditions. He incorporated these ideas and techniques into a contemporary public park and architectural space and, at the same time, generalized the unique terms in theory.

### The construction process

Fangta Park is located in Songjiang (松江), a suburban district of Shanghai (figure S1, see all supplemental figures in Appendix A). The land area was 11.47 hm<sup>2</sup> in 1995. The area around the Square Pagoda (figure 2) was originally the *Xingguo Changshou* Temple (兴国长寿寺), which was rebuilt from a housing property in the second year of Qianyou (乾祐二年, 949), Later Han Dynasty, and renamed *Xingshengjiao* temple (兴圣教寺) during the years of *Dazhong xiangfu* (大中祥符, 1008–1016) in the Song Dynasty. The



FIGURE 2. The site before Fangta Park was built.<sup>11</sup>

temple pagoda (i.e., the Square Pagoda) was built during the years of *Xi'ning* (熙宁, 1068–1077), *Yuanfeng* (元丰, 1078–1085) and *yuanyou* (元祐, 1086–1094) in the Song Dynasty. In the Yuan Dynasty, the temple was ruined, but the tower survived. In the early Ming Dynasty, *Xingshengta* Yard (兴圣塔院) and Town God's Temple (城隍庙) were established here. However, with the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War from 1937–1945, both the temple and courtyard ceased to exist.

In May 1974, the Songjiang County government started reconstructing the Square Pagoda following the mandate of 'keeping its original appearance'. It was completed in early 1977 and declared a Municipal Protected Historic Site by the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee (上海市革命委员会) on December 7.<sup>9</sup> In 1978, the Shanghai Basic Construction Committee (上海市基本建设委员会) approved the construction of a historical relics park centered around the Square Pagoda accompanied by the Qing Dynasty *Tianhou* Temple (天后宫), which was relocated into the park from elsewhere and renamed as *Tianfei* Temple (天妃宫) (figure S2, Apx. A). A surviving Ming Dynasty brick carving *zhaobi* (照壁, screen wall) from the Town God's Temple is located north of the Square Pagoda. To the southeast is a Song Dynasty stone bridge with eight ancient trees and two bamboo forests nearby. To the south of the pagoda, a river flows east to west with a T-shaped river fork. Several earthen mounds are distributed in the west and southwest of the pagoda.<sup>10</sup>

In May 1978, Feng Jizhong was invited to develop the master plan of Fangta Park. Liu Lvhu (柳绿华) from the design office of the Shanghai Landscape Administration Bureau was responsible for the planting design. The team also included other designers: Zhao Hanguang (赵汉光), Wu Guangzu (吴光祖), Guo Zhiling (郭志令), and Zang Qingsheng (臧庆生). In December 1978, during a team meeting on Fangta Park's planning,<sup>12</sup> the designers submitted master plan drawings to the construction team.<sup>13</sup> In 1982, official approval for the design scheme was obtained.<sup>14</sup> Between May 1978 and the end of the year, Phase 1 was completed, including land requisition and demolition, fence installation, landform modification, road construction, and *Tianfei* Temple relocation. Phase 2 took place from 1981 to the end of 1987 and included the relocation of *Nanmu* Hall (楠木厅), the construction of two park entrances, a corridor, a road, pavilions, a service building, a retail shelter, and living facilities, and planting. On May 1, 1982, the park was opened to the public while still under construction.<sup>15</sup> In June 1984, Feng

Jizhong presented Fangta Park at 'The 2nd International Congress of Architecture and Town Planning' (IKAS/ICAT) in Copenhagen, Denmark.<sup>16</sup> From 1984 to 1986, Feng Jizhong led the design and construction of the bamboo Helou Pavilion with assistance from Zhang Linwei (张遴伟) and Yu Lin (俞霖).<sup>17</sup> Between 2009 and 2010, partial corrective maintenance work was carried out in Fangta Park.<sup>18 19</sup> From 2021 to 2023, the Helou Pavilion underwent a reconstruction due to the aging of the bamboo structure, which had stood for over 30 years and was no longer stable. The chief architect of the reconstruction project was Huang Yiru (黄一如), who had been a student of Feng Jizhong since 1986 during the pavilion's original construction. Several enhancements were implemented according to Feng Jizhong's ideas, including thickening the thatch roof and adding two walls on the opposite side of the river from the Helou Pavilion.

### The overall design

After Feng Jizhong had learned the history of Songjiang and the Square Pagoda — as well as the surrounding natural environment — he identified several principles based on conceptual analysis: (1) The park must seamlessly blend the Chinese style with the new meaning of the contemporary era, preserving the essence of historical forms, while catering to the modern functionality of a park. (2) The three ancient structures from distinct historical periods, i.e., the Song Dynasty Square Pagoda, Ming Dynasty screen wall, and Qing Dynasty *Tianfei* Temple, should harmoniously coexist and integrate with the central square. (3) The Square Pagoda should be highlighted as the park's main attraction, while other supporting elements strategically contrast and complement its presence.<sup>20</sup>

As a result, the spirit of Fangta Park's design is: 'endowing the old with the new' (与古为新, *yugu weixin*).<sup>21 22 23</sup> The most valuable element within the park is the Square Pagoda; therefore, it rightfully assumes the central role in the park's overall design, radiating its enduring charm across the entire park (figure 3; also see figure S3, Apx. A). The addition of other buildings was avoided within the sightlines around the pagoda to 'eliminate unnecessary elements and redundancies and uncover the essence or most dynamic aspects' (冗繁削尽留清瘦).<sup>24 25</sup> By studying the evolution of Chinese traditional gardens, Feng Jizhong believed that gardens in the Song Dynasty were

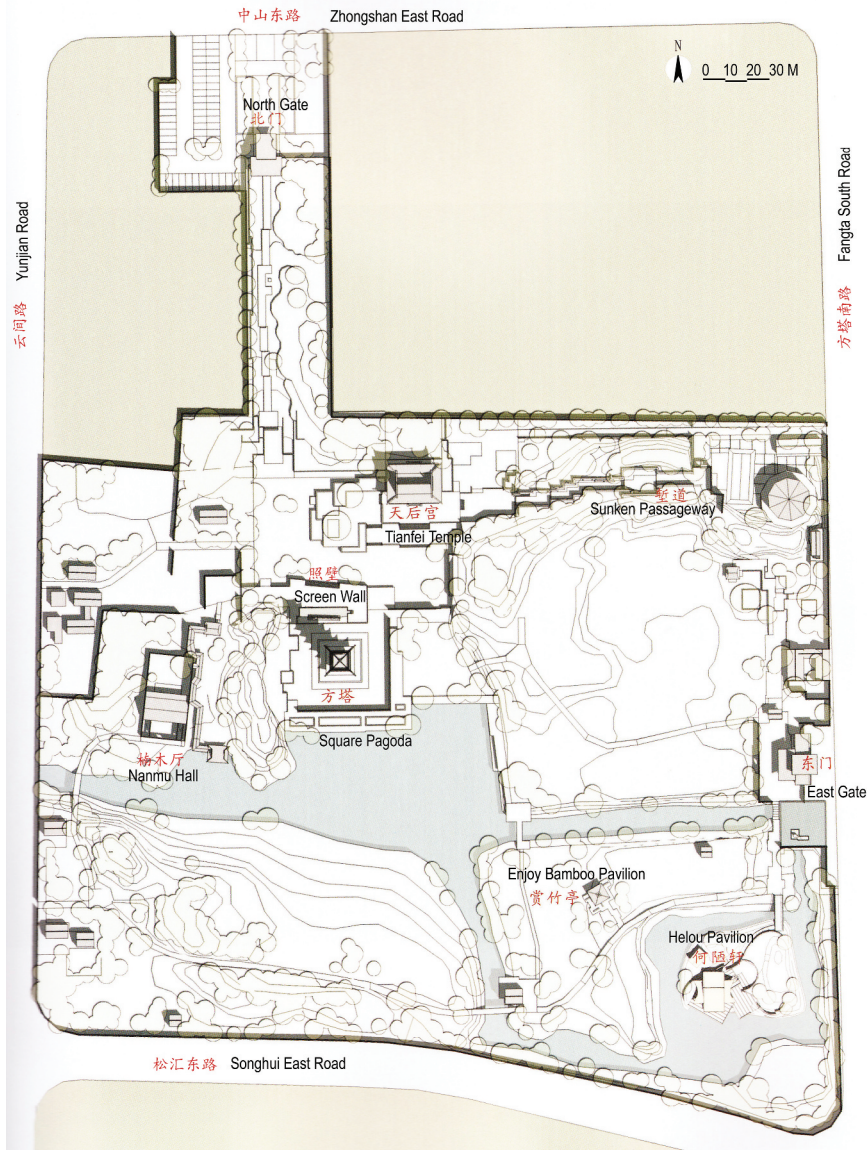


FIGURE 3. The final site plan approved for construction.<sup>27</sup>

designed to focus on real nature and reflected the spirit of the landscape, while in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, garden design began to focus on artistic conception. Consequently, the design of Fangta Park, from its relationship with the surroundings to every detail, emanates the spirit of the Song Dynasty, using the Square Pagoda, also from the Song Dynasty, as its focal point. Through the use of widespread water, expansive lawns, and plants, the design conveys the spirit of nature. The Helou Pavilion, however, shifts from depicting the natural spirit to conveying its own artistic conception, the theme of which is actually ‘in real nature’ instead of accentuating it.<sup>26</sup>

In terms of the layout, Feng Jizhong borrowed arrangement characteristics from large-scale traditional Chinese gardens and divided the park into several scenic zones by organizing mountain and water systems. Buildings of various uses were placed in each zone to create unique inward spaces and landscapes. For the central area around the Square Pagoda, a dining hall (unbuilt) was originally designated in the northeast corner. To the south, a waterside pavilion offers visitors a serene setting to appreciate the tower’s shadow and glistening light of waves. In the southwest, a deer park (unbuilt) and a large deer-grazing grassland were initially planned. To the west, a traditional Chinese garden was designed, with the relocated Ming Dynasty Nanmu Hall as the main building, repurposed as an exhibition hall.<sup>28</sup> Finally, in the southeast corner, the bamboo Helou Pavilion with thatch roof serves as a teahouse for the poetry society and chess club. The park is unified by planting *Sapium sebiferum*, or Chinese tallow, to express the theme of ‘autumn scenery’. To enrich seasonal scenery, traditional garden flowers and trees are interspersed close to the buildings of each scenic spot. As a result, Fangta Park has been designed as an open and tranquil public park, with an emphasis on its rich heritage as an open-air museum (figure S4, Apx. A).

For the detailed design, Feng Jizhong determined the size of the treeless courtyard between the Square Pagoda and the Tianfei Temple based on the pagoda’s height and enclosed it with simple walls (figure 4; also see figures S5 and S6 in, Apx. A). He broadened the river into a pool that could fully reflect the Square Pagoda (figure 5). In contrast, the footpath leading from the park entrance to the Square Pagoda was designed to change dramatically in levels — with subtle changes in directions — in order to eliminate the negative feeling that the Square Pagoda’s ground level is lower than its



FIGURE 4. *The plaza between the Square Pagoda and the Tianfei Temple. (Photo by Feng Jizhong and provided by Ye Feng).*

surroundings (figures 6 and 7).<sup>29</sup> For the scenery design, Feng Jizhong used ‘contrast’ (对偶, *dui’ou*), such as openness and closeness<sup>30</sup> throughout the park’s spatial sequence, and the curved and straight, hard, and soft shapes for the flower beds from the East Gate to the Square Pagoda’s courtyard and on both sides of the paved path from the North Gate into the park (figure S7, Apx. A). Other contrasting designs include the complicated and simple, high and low shapes of the cultural relics’ bases, white walls, stones, and mounds of the Square Pagoda’s courtyard, and the natural and artificial forms of the lawn and revetment (figure S8, Apx. A).<sup>31</sup>

When he studied at the Technische Hochschule (now Technische Universität Wien) from 1936 to 1941, Feng Jizhong visited Schloss Nymphenburg in Munich and concluded that ‘everything can be seen from one viewpoint’ there, whereas ‘in a Chinese garden, you could not conclude an appraisal after a walk through the entire garden’.<sup>32</sup> It is said that, when studying in Shanghai, Feng Jizhong frequented his grandparent’s home in Suzhou during summer to learn ancient Chinese prose. There, he gained a deep understanding of Suzhou



FIGURE 5. *The Square Pagoda reflected in the expanded river. (Photo by author, 2012).*

gardens,<sup>33</sup> especially the *Wang Shi Yuan* (网师园, Master-of-Nets Garden), which may have inspired certain details of Fangta Park.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the 1950s, Feng Jizhong actively participated in the planning and review of various park designs by the Shanghai Bureau of Gardens and Parks.<sup>35</sup> In September 1978, he began to supervise master students<sup>36</sup> and launched research on the protection and reconstruction of historic cities, as well as the history, theory, and critique of gardens.<sup>37</sup> In November 1985, Feng Jizhong investigated Japanese gardens in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Nara for a week.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, in 1986, he proofread the essay, ‘*Meanings of the Chinese Garden*’, written by Charles Jencks and translated by Zhao Bing (赵冰).<sup>39 40 41</sup>

In August 1979, Feng Jizhong published the article ‘*Zujing chuyi*’ (组景刍议, Over ‘Landscaping’).<sup>42</sup> Through analyzing four elements of the landscape — the extent of perception, length of the route, diversity of experience, and time/speed — he stated that the goal of organizing landscapes was to establish a holistic sense of the landscape by manipulating space perception. Then, based on the ‘openness and closeness’ (旷, 奥; *kuang, ao*) theory by Liu



FIGURE 6. View of the passageway from the Square Pagoda looking northwest. (Photo by Feng Jizhong and provided by Feng Ye).

Zongyuan (柳宗元, 773–819), a philosopher, poet, and politician in the Tang Dynasty, Feng Jizhong proposed that the fundamental scope of scenery design was to construct a carefully selected, edited, processed, and painted section of nature full of rising and falling tones and rhythms. Its rhythm is the sequence of opening and closing spaces. Furthermore, he used plaques, couplets, poems, historical narratives, and legends to evoke resonance and encourage what he termed ‘re-invention’ among those experiencing the gardens. Lastly, he



FIGURE 7. The sunken passageway from the east Gate to the Square Pagoda. (Photo by author, 2004).

believed that the essence of the landscape lies in its artistic conception, which can range from high to low and elegant to vulgar. It is also important to control the scale when carving out pathways and constructing bridges and buildings in the scenery.

Feng Jizhong applied the concepts of openness and closeness when designing an earlier teahouse — the Huagang Teahouse in Hangzhou (花港茶室) in 1962–1963. However, in the design of Fangta Park, he had begun to use ‘antithesis or comparison’ (对仗) from ancient Chinese poetry as a design technique, although the concepts of openness and closeness can also be considered a form of antithesis. On November 25, 1980, Feng Jizhong delivered

a speech on ‘*Chinese landscapes and gardens in Hangzhou*’, proposing the ideological system of Chinese modern landscape architecture and the framework of Chinese garden history.<sup>43</sup> The topic was discussed in his article, ‘*Mutual Nutrition of Man and Nature: An Outline of the Comparative History of Landscape Architecture*,’<sup>44 45</sup> officially published in 1990. Therefore, he conducted parallel research in two distinct fields: Chinese ancient poetry and garden history and criticism, integrating both into his landscape and architectural design practice.

The entrance buildings of Fangta Park (figure 8) exemplify Feng Jizhong’s efforts to blend new structures with traditional forms to infuse the interior space with dynamic changes and express the atmosphere of landscape



FIGURE 8. *The East Gate and its courtyard. (Photo by author, 2004).*

architecture.<sup>46</sup> Here, Feng Jizhong continued his exploration of a prominent roof as he did with the Huagang Teahouse. He used a maroon steel structure and two shed roofs covered with ‘small black tiles’ (小青瓦) of varying lengths, staggered and overlapping each other in mid-air, which was borrowed from traditional local greenhouses. These two roofs resemble traditional Chinese gable and hip roofs (歇山顶), with one oriented crosswise and the other lengthwise.<sup>47</sup> Notably, the historical buildings in Fangta Park are also roofed with small black tiles.<sup>48</sup> The roof truss comprises a lightweight steel framework with crosswise connecting rods, reminiscent of *dougong* (斗拱), a system of interlocking wooden brackets between the top of a column and a crossbeam essential to traditional Chinese architecture. The dominant color scheme of the North Gate is simple yet elegant, adorned with a *bian’e* (匾额, horizontal inscribed board) with golden classical characters ‘方塔园’ against a blue background (figure S9, Apx. A). The vibrant and elegant colors blend beautifully and enhance each other.<sup>49</sup> This serves as a compelling example of the successful amalgamation of modern materials and traditional charm.<sup>50</sup>

### The Helou Pavilion

In the master plan of Fangta Park, the southeast district formed a relatively independent area, where a simple bamboo-structured amenity facility — the Helou Pavilion — was proposed (figure 9). The pavilion is located on an island, one meter generally above the water, leaning slightly from north to south. Its base area resembles the Tianfei Temple, comprising three equal-sized layers measuring 17.64 m long and 11.64 m wide (figure 10). These layers overlap and shift at 30- and 60-degree angles, as if looking for the correct orientation. However, the pavilion itself maintains the north–south direction, unaffected by its base layers’ orientation. The three stacked base layers create a triangle gap in the middle, where a wooden board bearing the pavilion’s name is prominently displayed (figure S10, Apx. A).<sup>51</sup> The final form recorded the thought process like an intermittent video. Feng Jizhong called it ‘space–time transformation’,<sup>52</sup> while Zhao Bing named it the ‘conative design’ method, such as gradually drawing the ‘movement’ of ‘intention’.

The primary roof of Helou Pavilion is oriented north–south and measures 16.8 m long, with supporting columns at intervals of 3.36 m and overhanging



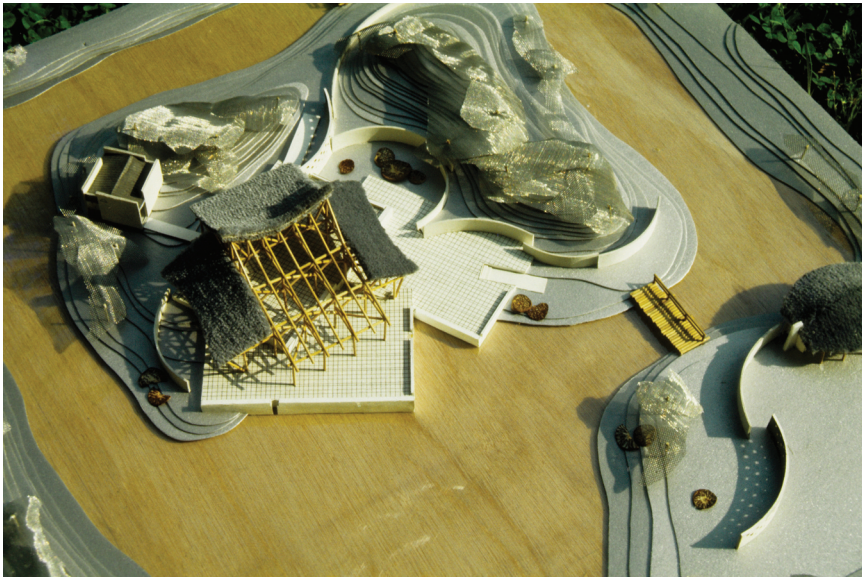


FIGURE 9. *The model of Helou Pavilion. (Photo by Feng Jizhong and provided by Feng Ye).*

eaves extending 0.8 m on both sides. Its east–west dimension is 8.73 m, with columns spaced at 2.91-meter intervals and eaves overhanging 0.4 m. The arc roofs on both the east and west sides appear to align with the center of the main roof, but they are, in fact, slightly offset to the north due to the latter’s asymmetric form. Slanted and irregularly shaped, the arc roofs span 10.08 m in the north–south direction, with overhanging eaves of 0.4 m. The arcs’ narrowest point measures 2.96 m, while the widest point measures 5.09 m.

Regarding height control, the three pedestals descend in altitude from north to south, measuring 4.9 m, 4.3 m, and 3.85 m high, respectively. The main roof’s ridge structure reaches its highest point at 13.24 m (with a relative height of 8.34 m), while its cornice structure in the north and south descends to 7.98 m (relative height 3.08 m) and 6.3 m (relative height 2 m), respectively, at their lowest points. For the slanted arc roofs on the side, the central cornices rise to 7.98 m high (with a relative height of 3.68 m in the west and 4.13 m in the east), while the north and south cornices descend to 6.9 m (relative height 2 m) and 6.3 m (relative height 2 m), respectively, at their lowest points.

While the Huangang Teahouse is simply a spatial combination influenced by the openness and closeness theory, the Helou Pavilion is wholly a creation and record of a conative space. The conation was inspired by the ‘*Inscriptions on Painting (Bamboo)*’ of Zheng Xie (郑燮, 号板桥, 1693–1765), a painter and calligrapher of the Qing Dynasty known for paintings of bamboo and orchids. The inscription translates, ‘In a late autumn morning, I rose from a riverside tavern to appreciate bamboo. The moving mist, shadows, and dew adorned slender branches and lush foliage. My chest swelled with excitement, and I felt the urge to paint. However, the bamboo in my mind differed from those before my eyes. As I readied my ink and laid out my paper, I lifted the brush to paint, and then the bamboo taking shape on the canvas changed yet again. They no longer resemble the bamboo in my mind. As a rule, the imaginative artistic conception surpasses the image being painted. The allure that transcends fixed painting methods is only understood from beyond the earthly world. Such expressions remain confined to the world of art!’<sup>53</sup> Feng Jizhong believed that ‘the bamboo in the eyes’ is the object, ‘the bamboo in the mind’ is the imagery shaped by the artist’s emotions, ‘the bamboo on the paper’ embodies the artist’s creative ideation, and ‘the painting’ is a visionary object (意境, *yi jing*) resulting from the artist’s emotions. The visionary object reveals the artist’s artistic level (境界, *jing jie*), reflecting their temperament. The formation of the idea (意, *yi*) differs from the visionary object. It is an obscured desire, an early stage of artistic conception that has not been elevated. Idea is intention, including rationality and sensibility, logic, and aesthetic appreciation. Imagination requires organization and combination, appropriate sound and color selection, and even penetration of unconsciousness to become a poem or painting.<sup>54</sup> The so-called antithesis is just a technique of creating an image.

Feng Jizhong first used the method of creating conative space in the design of *Datianchi* (big heavenly pool) scenic area in Mt. Lushan (庐山大天池风景点), Jiangxi Province.<sup>55</sup> From May 27 to June 9, 1981, Feng Jizhong and Professor Beecher from Germany led the landscape planning and design for Mt. Lushan, including the design of three scenic spots of the Datianchi, Manjusri Platform (文殊台), and screen wall (照壁).<sup>56 57</sup> Since the primary focus of the scenic area was the natural landscape, Feng Jizhong kept the main principles of highlighting and arranging landscape nodes. Special attention was given to the dimensions and proportions of the corridors around the Datianchi, the round Manjusri Platform, and the arc screen wall (figure 11).

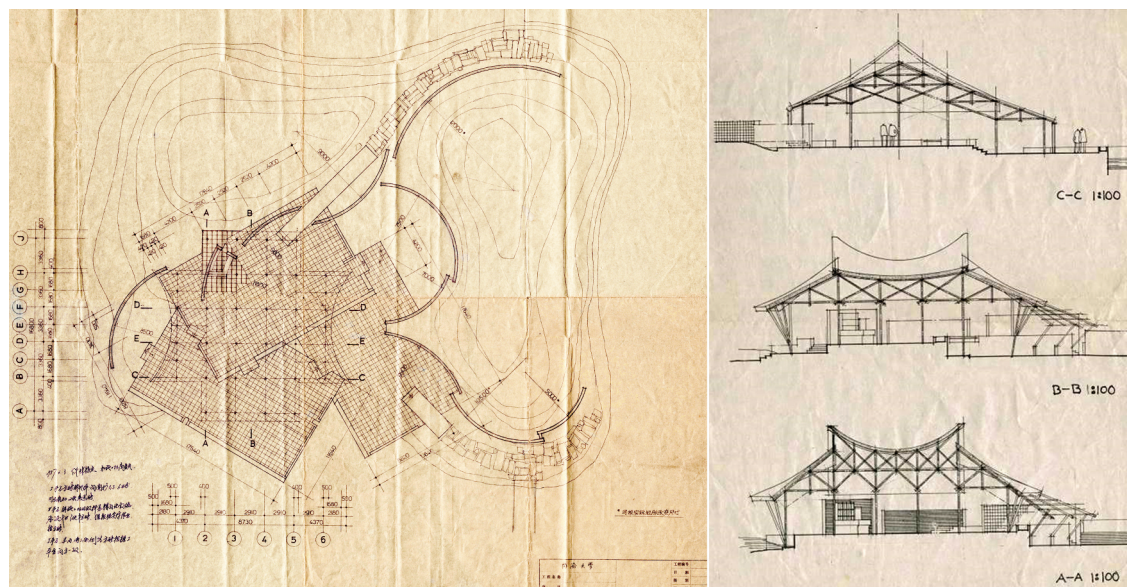


FIGURE 10. The plan and sections of Helou Pavilion. (Drawn by Feng Jizhong and provided by Feng Ye).

However, the connection among these three elements was not dependent on the flow, opening, and closing of space; instead, it was achieved through the flow of ideas, both deliberate and unintentional. For example, by incorporating the symbolism of *tianyuan difang* (天圆地方, the dome-like heaven embraces the vast earth), an ancient Chinese theory of ‘hemispherical dome cosmology’, the broken and incomplete screen wall complemented the rounded and complete walls of the Manjusri Platform, thereby establishing a connection between the two. Visitors can explore the corridors to overlook the scenery, ascend the platform to look upward, and recline against the wall to enjoy a horizontal view. The slowly flowing behavior resulting from transitions between different perspectives — looking up, down, and horizontally — makes up the connections between building and building and buildings and the environment.<sup>58</sup> Feng Jizhong specifically noted, ‘About the screen wall’s shape and detailed treatment at both ends, I intentionally replicated the size and shape of a gap in the circular courtyard walls of the Manjusri Platform to create the impression of a fragmented wall that appears

to have originated from the Manjusri Platform’.<sup>59</sup> Subsequently, the three consecutively stacked stylobates of the Helou Pavilion directly evolved from this concept. Feng Jizhong emphasized that the spirits of ‘reflecting nature and pursuing truth and enjoyment’<sup>60</sup> from the Song Dynasty and ‘pursuing individual expression’ should penetrate and flow throughout Fangta park.<sup>61</sup> This also embodies the essence of conative space.

Feng Jizhong had a unique design philosophy for each of his projects. He considered it as ‘thinking something novel or enlightening’,<sup>63</sup> or in other words, ‘every design must incorporate well-founded ideas’. He was wholly dedicated to the design process, meticulously refining every detail.<sup>64</sup> Feng Jizhong recognized that as individuals move through a sequence of spaces, the scenery changes with each step, reflecting the dynamics of human movement. The desire for improvement and innovation guided the design of Helou Pavilion.

In the *Over ‘Landscaping’* paper, Feng Jizhong analyzed that spatial feeling is mainly produced at a visual space interface formed by each

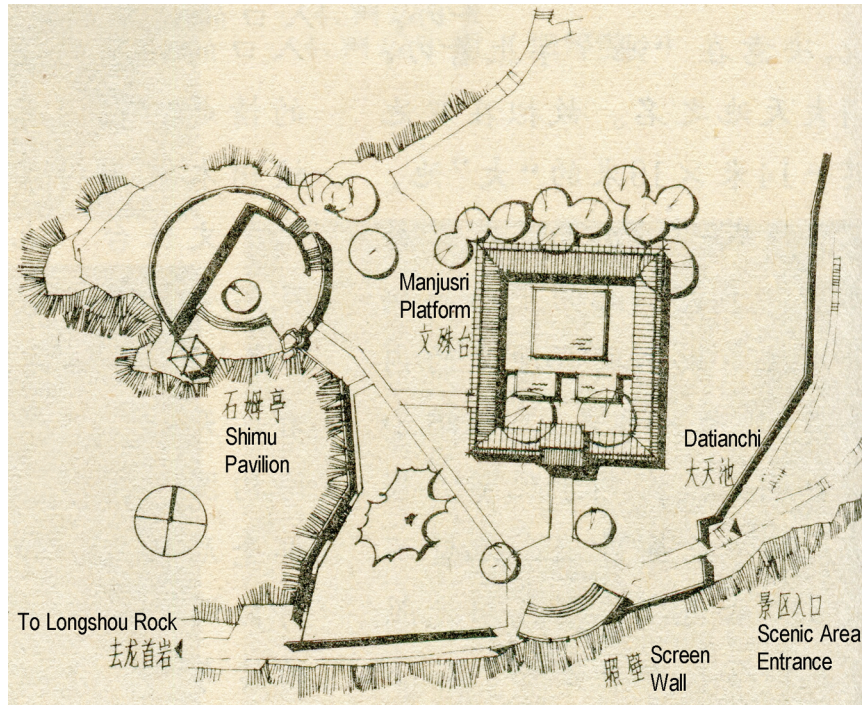


FIGURE 11. Site plan of scenic spots at Datianchi in Mt. Lushan.<sup>62</sup>

image. For in-position viewing with little changes in spatial perception, it has to take longer to obtain a substantial feeling. Conversely, if the viewing time is short, there must be a dramatic spatial change to evoke an emotional response. This perspective was shaped by his solid modernist architectural study. Feng Jizhong elicited the time-space relationship within landscaping by analyzing it from space, different from many other scholars who primarily examine landscape from the perspective of a 'picture' or 'picture composition'. He then sought support from Chinese traditional poetry, with which he was deeply familiar. For example, he drew upon verses from Wang Wei's (王维, 701–761, a renowned poet, literateur, and painter in Tang Dynasty) poem 'zhongnan bieye' (终南别业, On His South Mountain Villa), 'shuiqiong xingdao chu, zuokan yunqishi' (水穷行到处, 坐看云起时).<sup>65</sup> It means one can witness changes in

a mountain's appearance and character as light and shadow play across it without physically moving; you never moved, but the view constantly changed.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, around the Helou Pavilion, Feng Jizhong incorporated curved walls of varying radius and height to retain soil and delineate space (figure 12;



FIGURE 12. Sunlight and shadow through the holes of the curved wall of Helou Pavilion. The side of the wall near the road to the gate was intended to be black in the design proposal but was mistakenly painted white. (Picture by Feng Jizhong and provided by Ye Feng).

also see figures S11–S13, Apx. A). The curved wall could appear bright when facing the light or dark when the light is behind it. When its side faces the light, the shadow changes from bright to dark or dark to bright from one side to the other, like a color change lapse. By placing two concave walls facing each other in an east–west direction, the sense of space between these two interfaces undergoes constant change throughout the day. Moreover, the outline of the shadow on the ground cast by one side of the curved wall moves in a curvilinear path, in contrast to the static skyline of the opposing arc wall. Altogether, they result in an ever-changing three-dimensional spatial experience.

The Helou Pavilion itself, with two curved cornices and flanking curved walls, promotes a similar, dynamic, three-dimensional spatial experience. These spatial changes are created by the shifting sunlight, representing the first level of ‘space–time transformation’. While the change of time is everlasting, the shift in space is ephemeral. Conversely, the three stacked bases of the pavilion represent a transformation of space built through the ideation process, belonging to the second level of ‘space–time transformation’. The change of time is ephemeral, but the shift in space endures over time. This mirrors the verse ‘*jingtao lie’an*’ (惊涛裂岸, the huge waves struck the rocks of the riverbank) from the poem ‘*nian’nujiao*’ (念奴娇) of Su Shi (苏轼, 1037–1101), a famous poet, literateur, and calligrapher in the Song Dynasty. The transient nature of ‘*jingtao*’ (惊涛, the huge waves) contrasts with the eternality of ‘*lie’an*’ (裂岸, the crack on the riverbank) carved by natural forces over centuries,<sup>67</sup> illustrating a form of antithesis. It can be concluded that ‘space–time transformation’ reflects Feng Jizhong’s extended exploration on landscaping.

Feng Jizhong chose a simple bamboo structure for the Helou Pavilion due to its intended use as a ‘shelter’ and budget constraints (figure 13; also see figure S14, Apx. A).<sup>68 69</sup> He had prior experience using bamboo structures for student apartments at Tongji University in 1952.<sup>70</sup> The roof design of the pavilion drew inspiration from the hip roofs (庑殿顶) of village houses (figure S15, Apx. A) featuring a dramatic ridge curve in the Songjiang (松江) and Jiaxing (嘉兴) regions. Feng Jizhong selected this form for various reasons. First, he had a long-standing interest since the 1950s in using a farmhouse to represent the national style. Second, the Helou Pavilion’s proximity to the south wall of Fangta Park meant it



FIGURE 13. View of the Helou Pavilion from the southwest. (Picture by Feng Jizhong and provided by Feng Ye).

should respect the park’s surroundings, echoing the broader context. The decline of traditional village houses made their form a valuable feature for preservation. Therefore, this design aligned with Feng Jizhong’s research on historic city protection and reconstruction and Fangta Park’s cultural relic park status. Moreover, it surpassed Fangta Park’s boundary to continue the cultural spirit at the district level. Third, the curving lines of the ridge, cornices, walls, and retaining slopes were integrated into a balanced composition, combining solid and empty spaces, upward and downward elements, concave and convex surfaces, elements facing outward or inward, and unified themes and varying rhythms. To maintain design consistency, Feng Jizhong eventually chose a gable and hip roof (歇山顶) for the Helou Pavilion while retaining the roof and cornice curves from the village houses.<sup>71</sup> The upswept eaves’ height was slightly reduced due to the pavilion’s proximity to the road outside the park’s



FIGURE 14. *The usable space of Helou Pavilion (the painting does not completely match the original design proposal). (Photo by author, 2004).*

south wall.<sup>72</sup> The use of these curves, to some extent, bores a resemblance to Baroque art.<sup>73</sup>

The joints of the bamboo support structure are tied together without the use of mortise and tenon joints (figure 14). This structural system was consistent with the steel structure of Fangta Park's entrance gate, but bamboo was selected to match the intended thatch roofing (though straw was used at last).<sup>74</sup> Zhao Bing thought that, compared to the two-dimensional sheet units utilized in Huagang Teahouse for organizing individual elements and the overall space, the Helou Pavilion began to

use more abstract one-dimensional linear units, including more expressive curves, for spatial organization.<sup>75</sup> Feng Jizhong described this approach as evoking 'a feeling of returning to nature'.<sup>76</sup>

In Feng Jizhong's original proposal, the bamboo joints were painted black, while the transverse bamboo under the ceiling and connecting the pillars was painted white. The pillars and stringers between the joints and the ground were intended to retain their natural color,<sup>77</sup> although the final painting deviated from the original proposal (figure 14; also see figure S16, Apx. A). Under the dark roof, the dark areas become blurred, while the white areas stand out and appear to be separated from the overall structure, creating a 'floating' effect.<sup>78</sup> This design technique, which contrasts nodes to stabilize the overall structure, was influenced by poet Su Shi's saying that "unconventional contrasts are interesting" (反常合道为趣).<sup>79</sup> In addition, the upper bamboo bars were coated with oil paint, giving them a touch of magnificence amidst the overall simplicity while enhancing durability.<sup>80</sup>

The components of the Helou Pavilion, including the bases, walls, water drainage ramp, and kitchen (figure S17, Apx. A), are independent, complete, and characteristic. They may appear unrelated but are indeed intricately connected and complementary. These distinctive designs make the island of the Helou Pavilion an independent area, but also an integral part of the park, strongly connected to the park as a whole.<sup>81</sup> The design essence reflects Feng Jizhong's introspection on the relationship between an individual and their community after overcoming personal hardship. It is also an affirmation and tribute to individuality and independence.<sup>82 83 84</sup>

## Conclusions

In summary, this essay results from field surveys and document analysis of materials related to Fangta Park written by Feng Jizhong and other project team members, as well as unpublished materials containing Feng Jizhong's recollections and later comments on the design. It comprehensively explores Fangta Park's construction process and design philosophy, drawing comparisons with Feng Jizhong's other works that share similar characteristics. This thorough examination of Fangta Park helps reveal how Feng Jizhong blended modernist architectural ideas with the spirit of Chinese traditional culture.

Through Fangta Park, Feng Jizhong demonstrated a unique approach to developing modern landscapes and architectural masterpieces with distinct Chinese characteristics.

### Supplemental data

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/14601176.2023.2275977>

### Acknowledgment

I would like to express my gratitude to John Tudor, Wu Ange (吴安格), Deng Wei (邓位), Zhao Jijun (赵纪军), Liu Xiaohu (刘小虎), Kuang Zhifeng (邝志峰), and Feng Ye (冯叶, daughter of Feng Jizhong) for their help preparing this manuscript. I also wish to thank Wu Hong (吴竑) and Ron Henderson for their invaluable assistance with language editing.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Funding

This research was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China [Grant No. 51108241] and the China Scholarship Council [CSC No. 201308440046].

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23. 'Rujiangbujin, yugu weixin' (如将不尽, 与古为新) comes from *Ershisi Shipin (Twenty-four Poems)* by Tu Sikong (837–908). It explores the relationship between 'jing'(境) and 'yi'(意). This verse translates: by introducing connotative and endless conceptions into the description of state, one's writing will become novel and unique, setting it apart from the works of the ancients. See Yu Yuan 郁沅, *Ershisi Sshipin Ddaodu 二十四诗品 导读* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2012), p. 15.
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