

The New Pictorial Canon of Imperial Gardens: The Production and Meaning of Kangxi *Yuzhi Bishu shanzhuang shi* (*Imperial Poems on Mountain Estate for Escaping the Summer Heat*)

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Abstract

The reconstruction of Chinese imperial palaces and gardens usually relies on historical texts and archaeological findings as most of the architecture does not survive. Qing (1644-1911) palaces and gardens, however, are less problematic due to well-preserved sites and contemporaneous images made by the court. Although most Chinese images of contemporary imperial gardens do not describe them in detail, Qing representations of imperial gardens often contain dozens of comprehensive views printed both as independent volumes and as part of gazetteers. Such a deviation from the tradition of Chinese court art should be understood as a deliberate invention. Why do Qing images of imperial gardens have no parallel in Chinese art? As the first production of the Qing series, Kangxi *Yuzhi Bishu shanzhuang shi* (*Imperial Poems on Mountain Estate for Escaping the Summer Heat*) must be the starting point of any investigation. This paper examines the creation of Kangxi *Yuzhi Bishu shanzhuang shi*: after an overview of the cultural meanings of garden imagery in late imperial China, this paper will discuss how the Kangxi scenes appropriated and transformed the pictorial tradition of gardens to construct the ideal imperial garden and to reflect the emperor's sage rule.

Keywords: imperial garden, Rehe, *Bishu shanzhuang* (Mountain Estate for Escaping the Summer Heat), *Yuzhi Bishu shanzhuang shi* (Imperial Poems on Mountain Estate for Escaping the Summer Heat), Thirty-Six Views of Bishu shanzhuang (Thirty-Six Views of Mountain Estate for Escaping the Summer Heat), images of garden