Systematic Survey and Documenting of Qiao yuan, Taizhou
Funded by Dumbarton Oaks 2008-09

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A. A brief history of Qiaoyun 喬園

Qiaoyun, or the Qiao Garden, located on the south side of South Hailing Road in the city of Taizhou, Jiangsu province, boasts a history of over four hundred years. The oldest existing private garden in the North Jiangsu region, it has been known as the “First Garden in the East Huai Region.” The garden has changed hands several times, experienced its splendour and decline, and assumed different names in different periods of its history. It is now on the list of cultural heritage of Jiangsu Province.

During the period of the Wanli reign (1573-1620), Chen Yingfang 陈應芳 (jin shi degree, 1574) built the house of his grandfather, Chen Yuan 陈廞, a garden and named it Ri she yuan 日涉园 (Garden for Daily Stroll), referring to a famous line—“The garden, strolled in daily, gains interest/A gate is set there, but it is always shut”—in Tao Qian’s 陶潜 (ca. 372-427) rhymed prose “Returning Home,” or “Gui qu lai xi ci 歸去來兮辭.”

The first change of ownership of the garden, to the Tian family, happened in the early Kangxi reign (1662-1722); over sixty years that is after Chen Yingfang’s death. And yet it was not until a local scholar named Gao Fengzhu 高凤翥 came into possession of the garden, in the period of the Yongzhen 雍正 reign (1723-1735), that the garden started to enjoy its longest period of careful maintenance continuously under one single family of considerable wealth and cultural attainment. By the period of the Jiaqing 嘉庆 reign (1796-1820), the garden reached the zenith of its fortune, and after having acquired three slender rocks of over three metres long and added them to the garden, the Gao family changed the name of the garden to San feng yuan 三峰園 or the Garden of Three Peaks.

In the ninth year (1859) of the Xianfeng 咸丰 reign (1851-1861), Wu Wenxi 吳文錫 purchased San feng yuan with three thousand two hundred strings of cash, and immediately spend over three months to have it repaired at the cost of one thousand five hundred strings of cash. This happened at the time of Taiping rebellion, and claiming the site as

1 Tao Qian, Tao Yuanming ji, collated and annotated by Lu Qinli (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 5.159-162.
2 Wu Wenxi, “Record of Zhe Yuan,” in Chen Congzhou, Yuan lin tan cong (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1980), 106.
“a hiding place,” Wu Wenxi, upon the completion of the construction work, named the garden Zhe yuan or Garden of Seclusion.3

During the Tongzhi reign period (1862-1874) it was owned by Qiao Songnian (1815-1875); changed the name of the garden to Qiao yuan.

Only the central part of Qiao yuan, measuring around 1,300m², remains largely intact now. An extension project was carried in 2006-08 at Qiao yuan, which, endeavouring to conserve the “style” of the past, significantly enlarged the garden to encompass an area of 12,000m² and to create several new “scenic spots.”

The importance of Qiao yuan is China’s garden history lies not only in its rich historical, cultural, and literary layers, but also in the pivotal role it plays in the geographical distribution of extant gardens in the Jiangnan Province—existing private gardens in the north of the Yangzi river are very limited in number, whereas Qiao yuan, as identified by the late garden historian Chen Congzhou, is the oldest existing garden in that region. On the other hand, if the threat to the survival of this garden previously came from dereliction, it is now in even greater danger of effacement because of possible inadequate interventions to it in the name of heritage conservation. As the “restoration” and “extension” work on Qiao yuan has just completed by the local government in 2008, the work of investigating and setting the boundaries of the site, of systematically surveying, measuring, photographing, and documenting its existing garden components in detail, and of mapping out its historical layers has become particularly urgent.

B. Fieldwork and documentary work

1. Travels and surveys

After extensive studies of the history of Qiao yuan, on 26-27 June 2008 we paid the first visit to the site nestled in the old quarter of the city of Taizhou. (Because of the significant discrepancy in the academic calendars between the Northern and Southern hemispheres, this first take of the survey had to happen a few days earlier than the starting point stipulated by the Dumbarton Oaks funding scheme.) Guided by the garden maintenance manager, we inspected in detail both the old part and the newly extended areas of the garden, drafted a site plan, and identified and documented all of the notable plants in the garden. Considering that the Ban fang ting 半方亭 or the “Half Domain Pavilion” was one of the individual structures in the garden that had not physically been reconstructed in the 2006-08 “restoration” work, we proceeded with its detailed survey as an initial take of the comprehensive fieldwork.

More detailed survey of the garden as a whole was carried out on 6-10 September 2008, leading to the production of the site plan, on which the buildings, ponds and streams, vegetation, rockery and prominent individual rocks are carefully documented. Work at this time also involved examinations of the newly constructed areas of the garden in relation to its old quarter.

The remaining individual structures in the old quarter of the garden were systematically surveyed on 14-15 March 2009; these

3 Ibid., 107.
2. Documentation work

Historical studies and documentary work were carried out throughout the whole period covered by the Dumbarton Oaks fund. Yinong Xu travelled to Nanjing three times—June-July 2008, January 2009 (with self-funded airfare), and June 2009—to work with Professor Chen Wei of the Southeast University and to oversee the local staff’s work.

The textual report went through three drafts (mainly in Chinese), and the graphics and tables, once produced, had constantly been amended, expanded, and revised. All these are once again being revised through the translation of them into English.

C. Analysis of historically significant individual buildings

1. Shan xiang cao tang 山響草堂 (Thatched Hall of Echoes in the Mountain)

Shan xiang cao tang is the main structure of the whole garden. Supported by twelve inner pillars defining the hall space and sixteen outer pillars forming the surrounding gallery, the rectangular, spacious building has the column-beam-and-strut structural system, and has a hip-and-gable roof covered by small grey tiles. The four eave corners are upturning, and the ceiling above the south gallery is made concave in the north-south direction—a traditional mode of construction known as xuan 轩. The floor is paved with square bricks; roof structure is exposed rather than hidden with ceilings; railing-seat is fixed between every two outer pillars except south, east and west central bays; stone steps are set in front of the south central bay.
Situated at the centre of the old quarter of Qiao yuan, Shan xiang cao tang is a pivotal place conventionally suitable for repose, receiving guests, and viewing the garden. To the east of the hall is a bamboo grove, and on its west an opening is an opening leading to the newly extended part of the garden. The hall can open widely to the south and north, accentuating its axial position in the garden.

In front of this south-facing hall is a small paved open ground, and beyond lies a narrow, winding pond nestled at the foot of an artificial hill. The hill is constituted largely by Lake Tai rocks and yellow rocks, and forms the principal garden view for the hall. A tortuous tunnel runs through part of the hill, with stone grates on top to allow lights in. On the hill there is an old cypress tree (Sabina Chinensis), its age being identified by Wu Wenxi as commensurate with the age of the garden from the Ming period. Also on the hill are the three long, slender rocks, from which the name of the garden, San feng yuan or the Garden of Three Peaks, was derived around the turn of the nineteenth century. Two small bridges across the narrow pond link the paved open ground to the hill; regular steps on east side lead to A Few Fish Pavilion, and those on the west side to Half of a Domain Pavilion.

Both the interior and exterior of the hall were renovated in the early 1990s. The main building materials of the Shan xiang cao tang include bricks, timber, and tiles. It does not carry much decoration and ornament, and thus appears plain, elegant, and unaffected. This atmospheric quality of the hall is further enhanced by the colours applied to the structure: apart from the white-washed interior surfaces of the east and west walls, the dominating colours here come from the dark bluish-grey of bricks, dark grey of tiles, and dark red paint on the timber members. With this dominating shade of colour, not only does the hall look "ancient," but also fit in harmoniously with its setting of the whole garden.

Shan xiang cao tang is an open structure, its interior space being surrounded by continuous door or window leaves with consistent lattice works, and thus is typically flooded with natural light. Its location seems adequate, its configuration elegant, its scale appropriate, and its structure simple, logical and effective. All these render it a fine piece of architecture.

2. Gengji tang (Hall of the Means of Drawing upon the Ancient)

Gengji tang stands at the north end of the axis of Qiao yuan, and is the main structure in the north, elevated part of the old garden. This one-bay building, also of a column-beam-and-strut structure, is surrounded on four sides by a row of columned gallery and has a hip-and-gable roof. The floor is paved with square bricks. Timber remains its principal structural and decorative material, only employing grey bricks in the gables and side walls. Only the four pillars for the hall space have a base each. And the colour scheme is similar to that of Shan xiang cao tang, with the exception of the eave purlins, eave corner purlins, and overhanging roof boarding planks painted bronze colour, which makes this building distinctive. The outer edge of the galleries on all four sides of the hall is marked by a line of brick parapets of 0.46m in height and 0.28m in width, also to be used as seats.

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4 Ibid.
A brick wall, covered by plants and pierced by a “moon gate” at the centre and by lattice-work “leaky windows” on both sides, separates the area of this building from that of Shan xiang cao tang. This separation by wall reduces the tension caused by the two-metre difference in height between the north and south areas. Since the distance between the two halls is very short, and since Geng ji tang stands on a ground much higher than the ground of Shan xiang cao tang, not only could the space formed by the two halls easily become cramped, but Shan xiang cao tang could also look dwarfed. This potentially malign problem is resolved by a carefully constructed artificial hillock of yellow rocks inside the moon gate, which creates one more layer of screen between the two halls; in other words, by making the space even more cramped and at the same time by changing the building relationship into a relationship of alternating garden elements.

The crowdedness of space inside the moon gate is further manipulated by planting a small grove of bamboos on the east side of the yellow rocks, directing the visitor’s sense of space to the east side. Here both the slenderness and loftiness of Song chui ge, and the porous parapet of its second-floor terrace, renders this small space less uncomfortably constricted; at the same time, through the space between Geng ji tang and Song chui ge, a visual corridor to the north is established, suggesting a space of a different character beyond.
The space on the east, west and north of Geng ji tang is surrounded by a “cloud wall” of 1.5 metres high. A line of cornice is made at the height of 0.46m on the north part of the wall, while flower beds constructed on the east and west. They are built in such a way as if the footing of the wall has been elevated to that particular height, so that it resonates with the parapets at the outer edge of the gallery of Geng ji tang and defines the space between them. Furthermore, the wall is pierced by a series of brick lattice-work leaky windows, echoing the timber lattice-work windows of the hall, which thus at a different height provides a second definition of the space, thereby strengthening the horizontal stretch of the small space.

3. Song chui ge 松吹閣 (Belvedere of Breezes Through the Pine Trees) and Yin chao ting 因巢亭 (Pavilion by the Nest)

Song chui ge and Yin chao ting stand respectively on the east and west sides of Geng ji tang, but slightly to the south. Their approximately symmetrical disposition sets Geng ji tang out as an axial structure. Moreover, since the two buildings are both situated by the wall of the Geng ji tang court, they also function as visual links between the inside and outside of the court.

Song chui ge, a three-storey building of brick-and-concrete composite construction, was likely to be built in the early twentieth century. It has a hip-and-gable roof and exterior staircases.

Located between the Geng ji tang court and Wen cui tang court to the east, entrances to different floors of Song chui ge are set separately at the two courts—one enters the first level of the building...
from the court on the east, but enters the second and third levels from the court on the west. In other words, Song chui ge, in name and form, is a singular entity of its own; but in use, it provides separate spaces for different domains—for the routine daily life on the ground level and leisurely viewing on the upper levels separately. From the spacious terraces on the two upper levels one overlook the whole garden. The terraces are supported by concrete beams rest on timber columns and brick bearing walls; the outer part of the beams are painted the same red colour as the timber columns, which helps this modern structure avoid overt disagreement with the traditional garden setting.

Much care to details of the building is evident in a number of aspects. Octagonal windows are fine in proportion and compensate for the monotonous three-level high walls; brick carvings and reticulated works further enrich the walls; and on a section of the parapet of the stair case an image of the thematic “Three Friends of Wintry Season” is carved, referring to the allusion made by the name of the building.

Yin cao ting is a one-story building, square in plan and with gabled, roll-top roof. The most distinguishing feature of this building is the making use of a section of the south wall of Geng ji tang court as its elevated base, thus creating sharply contrasting sense of the inside and outside spaces: viewed upward from outside the court, Yin cao ting seems to ride on top of the wall, lofty and upright; but if coming through the moon gate into the court and following the stone steps to ascend to the front gallery of Geng ji tang, one has to turn back and enter Yin cao ting from the north, and here one finds the space low and small, which lends an air of quietude and intimacy to the space.

A row of timber railing-chair (known as mei ren kao or “that against which the beauty leans”) is set along the columns of the southeast part of the gallery of Yin chao ting, its carvings and decorations being particularly delicate. Leaning on the rail there and looking outward, one can faintly see Shu yu ting through the dense bamboo stems and leaves.

4. Shu yu ting 散魚亭 (A Few Fish Pavilion)
Standing on the east side of the hill in front of Shan xiang cao tang, Shu yu ting in the early 19th century was a pavilion of pentagonal plan, with a pyramidal roof. Its reconstruction in 2006 changed it into one of hexagonal plan, albeit still with a pyramidal roof.

5 The three friends: the pine/cypress, the bamboo, and the plum.
The name of the structure certainly refers to the story of the dialogue between Zhuang zi and Hui Shi, for the obvious reason of its high location where, as stated by Zhou Xiang 周庠 in the colophon for his 1825 “Views on the Four Sides of the Garden of Three Peaks,” “one looks down on the bluish-green stream, in which the slender fish can be counted.”

The building materials used and the colours employed for this pavilion are the same as those of Shan xiang cao tang: bricks, timber, and tiles, and dark red and dark bluish-grey. Thus with fine and lively wooden carvings and brick engravings, an air of the ancient is presented in this newly reconstructed building.

The pavilion's lofty position affords it a vantage point to view the garden: from it one can look down at Shan xiang cao tang, and look more in distance at Song chui ge. But a more interesting aspect of this vantage point is the contrasting scenic characters from the right to the left when standing there facing Shan xiang cao tang. The luxurious bamboo grove on right, to the east of Shan xiang cao tang, presents to the viewer a spread of verdancy; on the left, however, the old cypress tree among various plants, the three slender rocks (known as the Three Peaks) among variously formed rocks, and the varying contours of the hill, offer the viewer a scene of great complexity.

5. Ban fang ting 半方亭 (Half of a Domain Pavilion)
Located on the west side of the hill but against the west wall of the old quarter of the garden, Ban fang ting resonates in position with Shu yu ting to its east. This is the highest place in the old quarter of Qiao yuan, an ideal spot for garden scenic views. The location is a suitable for the visitor to repose after climbing up to the hill, while at the same time functions as an easily recognized reference point in the garden. But there is still more to it: standing right on the dividing line between the older quarter on the east and the new extension on the west, the pavilion itself becomes a prominent view in both garden areas, and plays the role of linking the old and new, the past and present.

The design of Ban fang ting was obviously derived from its topographical setting, and its form and scale depend on the surrounding garden elements. Rectangle in plan, the pavilion has a pyramidal roof covered with small grey tiles and topped by an oblong finial. On the west side it is against the boundary wall of the old quarter, and open in the other three directions. No excessive decorations and ornament were applied to either its interior or exterior, which renders it plain and unaffected. It is elegantly proportioned both to the surroundings and among its own elements on the one hand, and, small, light and open, its shape has an air of simplicity and unsophisticatedness on the other. These qualities make Ban fang ting a rare fine work of architecture.
As in the case of Shan xiang cao tang and Shu yu ting, bricks, timber and tiles are the three material building materials, while dark red and, more dominantly, dark bluish grey determine the shade of Ban fang ting.

D. Survey and documentation of the overall plan of Qiao yuan

The survey and documentation of the overall plan of Qiao yuan was carried out in five steps. In the first, the positions and orientations of individual structures were determined, their overall dimensions were measured, and the spatial interrelationship between them was mapped out. The second stage was one of measuring those building details that had bearings on the overall plan of the garden, and these measurements were also used for cross-referencing the work produced in the first stage. In the third stage, the survey work was concentrated on the measurement of all of the pavements in the garden. This was followed by the work of categorizing, labelling, registering and photographing all of the plants on the site. And finally, the rocks were registered, classified, and photographed. The eventual production of the plan of Qiao yuan reflects the outcome of these works.

1. Relationship between the old quarter and the newly extended areas

The old quarter takes Shan xiang cao tang as its centre, which, together with Geng ji tang in the north, forms a north-south axis. This axial layout is reinforced by Song chui ge on the east side and Yin chao ting on the west side of the north court, by Shu yu ting on the east side and Ban fang ting on the west side of the central court, and by the artificial hill and the narrow pond that curve in on both east and west sides. Thus the old quarter of Qiao yuan shows some extent of regularity in its spatial disposition. By contrast, the layout of the new extension of the garden, with the evenly spreading out of its buildings, waters, and rocks, appears to be “free plan,” without any recognizable order in it.

There is, however, an aspect of correspondence of the new extension area to the old quarter, in which a certain extent of respect to the latter can be sensed. It is in the hidden relationship of physical alignment. A series of structures in the new extension area, from north to south, roughly form an arc, as if taking Shan xiang cao tang as its centre; in other words, the new extension appears to fan out from that centre. Thus the free arc of the new extension works with the regularity of the old quarter’s axis to constitute the principal spatial pattern of the whole garden. Moreover, three auxiliary east-west alignments can be identified: the new teahouse aligns with Geng ji tang, Jiao yu xuan and Lai qing tang in the new area align with Shan xiang cao tang, and the west entrance to the garden and Lai qing ge in the new area align with Ban fang ting and Shu yu ting.

This hidden correspondence of the new extension to the old quarter unfortunately remains hidden on the plan, and it is by no means a quality that can be experienced. Instead, what one experiences while strolling through both parts of the garden is a tinge of detachment. In terms both of the character of spatial layout, and of the scale of buildings, rockery, and root paths, the new extension area does not seem to be an “extension” of the old quarter, but merely something physically in juxtaposition to it, and thus, in effect, experientially detached from it. This sense of detachment is made all the more
intense by the only access to the old quarter from the new extension, through the court of a newly constructed building complex called Laiqing tang 来庆堂. Although the two moon gates at both ends of the court echo the one linking Shan xiang cao tang and Geng ji tang in the old quarter, the rigid regularity of Laiqing tang is entirely at odds with either the old or the new parts of the garden, as if it were there to accentuate the incompatibility of the two.

2. Analysis of the garden elements of Qiao yuan

(1) Pavements

Building interior pavements, all with 300x300 bluish-grey square bricks (except those in Shan xiang cao tang, which are 400x400), are characterized by their consistency, simplicity, plainness, and elegance.

Exterior pavements are diversified in pattern. Employing a very limited number of materials (bluish-grey square bricks and black and white cobbles), eleven basic patterns are created. Attention is evidently paid to any of the joints between two patterns of pavement. The patterns used in the new extension area generally follow those in the old quarter, and at the same time allow variations to emerge, thus
enriching the effects of pavement in the whole garden.

To cater for the expected large number of tourists, many a paved path is much wider, just as many an open space is much larger, than those in traditional gardens, thus generating an effect of the “public park” rather than a traditional private garden.

(2) Waters

As the Chinese saying goes, “a garden can never to alive without water.” In this line of thinking, one deficiency of the old quarter may be seen as the inadequate scale of its water feature—merely a small creek-like pond tucked at the foot of the artificial hill—as compared to the scale of the hill. Following the pattern of keeping waters close to the rockery in the old quarter, the new extension nevertheless contains two significant water bodies, an expansive one in the north and a small one in the south, linked together by a tortuous, narrow stream to form the water system of the garden.

These two new ponds are treated differently according to their different locations and thus atmospheres: the large one functions as the starting area for the garden, and the small one the ending point; the former acts as the centre of a relatively busy and noisy area, the latter as the centre of a quiet domain; the former is exposed in front of arranged rocks, the latter hidden behind a curved wall of “cloud” topping. The ponds thus help to complete the conventional composition in a traditional garden of rockery, waters, buildings, and vegetation.

Regrettably, however, is the lack of connection between the waters in the new extension area to those in the old quarter, resulting not only in the loss of integration of all waters in the whole garden, but also in reinforcing the sense of detachment of the new from the old.

(3) Rocks

The two types of rocks—Taihu rocks and yellow rocks—employed in Qiao yuan are treated differently. Yellow rocks are generally piled together to form artificial hills or rockeries, whereas Taihu rocks are mainly placed singularly for their individual viewing. Relatively large-scale rockeries are arranged in the south and southwest parts of the garden, while small-scale rocks make the edges of the ponds and streams, along which middle-range rockeries are sporadically distributed.
In the older quarter, vegetation dominates the scenes, while rocks are used to screen or embellish the bases of the plants (except the Three Peaks and a few extraordinarily formed Taihu rocks that are placed in such a way as to be viewed individually), thereby creating a sense of layers. In the new extension area, by contrast, the rockeries dominate, and yet their scale in many cases is commensurate with nearby plants, and in others is far too large be look “natural,” thus losing the sense of the relationship between the primary and the secondary, which are often crucial in a fine Chinese garden.

(4) Vegetation

As explained above, vegetation constitutes the primary scenes in the old quarter, and rocks function as supporting views; individual rocks, singular tall trees, and groves and shrubs are carefully arranged for their thematic composition, thus clearly revealing the designer’s intention.

In the new extension area, however, various types of vegetation seem to have been randomly planted, without any treat of the bases of tall trees and showing no conceptual thinking in designing the landscape. The approach looks resembles that to a mediocre modern road design, and falls far short of those ideas as evinced in classical gardens.

(5) Individual buildings

Buildings in the new extension area, prima facie, follow those in the old quarter in form and material. And yet some of them look overwhelming in scale, even though none of them individually is larger in plan than Shan xiang cao tang. For this reason, some seem to be out
of proportion to the garden, while some others engender in the visitor a sense of overcrowdedness. Such negative effects have more to do with the buildings’ voluminous relationship with other garden elements, such as rockery, vegetation, and waters, than with their size itself.

Another dubious phenomenon is that the new buildings seem to have borrowed more from the forms and techniques of Suzhou gardens, than from local tradition. This practice of application of stereotypical elements developed in a specific region to a different region is quite common in present-day China, which has the effect of universalizing what is considered to be local and distinctive.

(6) Topography

One important technique of producing layered views is not only to take advantage of, or even to create, topographical variations, but also to treat them in somewhat reverse ways as to generate a sense of complexity and subtlety. In the old quarter, the larger, relatively open space on level ground is devoted to the principal and largest structure, Shan xiang cao tang; whereas elevated but crowded spaces are occupied by secondary structures the secondary structures—Shu yu ting and Ban fang ting on the artificial hill in the same court, Geng ji tang, Song chui ge and Yin chao ting on terrace in the upper court to the north. This arrangement, seemingly full of contradictions and tensions, not only is in accord with traditional logic of building layout in China, but also generates a kind of subtlety in spatial experience. In the new extension area, by contrast, the approach is blatantly straightforward, in that the largest structure is elevated in the central part, announcing itself to be most important. The kind of subtlety that one usually experiences in classical gardens is lost here.

**E. List of plants**

(to be translated into English)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>位置编号</th>
<th>植物名称</th>
<th>科属</th>
<th>常绿/落叶</th>
<th>乔/灌木</th>
<th>使用次数</th>
<th>设计意图</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>睡莲</td>
<td>睡莲科</td>
<td>多年生草本</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>浮水植物</td>
</tr>
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<td>龟背竹</td>
<td>禾本科</td>
<td>常绿</td>
<td>多年生</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>盆栽观叶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>金钟</td>
<td>木犀科</td>
<td>落叶阔叶</td>
<td>灌木</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>群植，花黄色，早春开放</td>
</tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>小叶黄杨</td>
<td>黄杨科</td>
<td>常绿</td>
<td>灌木</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>树型，观叶</td>
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<td>桂花</td>
<td>木犀科</td>
<td>常绿</td>
<td>灌木</td>
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<td>具浓郁香气</td>
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<td>红花檵木</td>
<td>金缕梅科</td>
<td>常绿</td>
<td>灌木</td>
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<td>可做桩景，兼观叶观花</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>八角枫</td>
<td>八角枫科</td>
<td>落叶阔叶</td>
<td>乔木</td>
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<td>秋叶深红</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>南天竹</td>
<td>小檗科</td>
<td>常绿</td>
<td>灌木</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>观叶观果</td>
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<td>龙爪槐</td>
<td>豆科</td>
<td>落叶阔叶</td>
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