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Architectural Heritage Analysis of the Yuanying Guan Pavilion: Construction and Signification

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyse the structural function and symbolic function of the historic building Yuan Guan during the inculturation process in the early Qing dynasty in China. This process was the dominant Western practice during the early Qing dynasty, when technology, design, aesthetics, and linear perspective were considered indispensable tools to express the nature of an architectural encounter between China and Europe. Given the artistic–cultural richness of this context, the masterwork Yuanying Guan complex can be examined from a spatial semiotic study in an original and unique way. Thus, semiotic tools were used to interpret the expression of the architectural space and to formulate a subsequent understanding of the architectural forms of this destroyed heritage, turning each element into a tool of communication.

Keywords: architectural heritage; semiotics; geometry; construction; historic building

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1. Introduction

An artistic and cultural manifestation such as architecture is a consequence of a great diversity of factors: contextual, religious, artistic, cultural, social, or political, and other elements in the form of signs, which allow a polysemic interpretation of the architectural object. The architectural trends of the Renaissance strongly influenced the architecture developed by Jesuit missionaries at the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). As part of their missionary work a process of inculturation was developed, which, in the field of architecture, attempted a balance between Western trends and Chinese aesthetics, creating an Asian–European architectural interaction. Many of the authors who have dealt with the concept of inculturation have developed their own vision without ever reaching a consensus, which implies that identical terms often convey different meanings. According to [1] (p. 44), "the related terms acculturation and inculturation both describe the experience of confrontation between any external influence and a resilient structure of traditions, with the external force striving for predominance over native tradition."

From a more concrete point of view, inculturation is a term used in theology, which means that a religion is adapted to a new culture [2] (p. 5). Possibly, this strategy was used in the Jesuits missionary work ensuring that the design and construction of the European Palaces located in the northeast of Yuanming Yuan transmitted the language of their structural function and their symbolic function. The structural function allowed the design and construction of the palaces in an architectural space. The symbolic function allowed the design to be unique and to be a generator of messages and emotions.

This paper aims to investigate whether the construction of the European Palaces has an intended message that can be interpreted by analysing its visual discourse. To achieve this objective, a literature review on semiotics is conducted, consisting of the presentation of models of semiotics and the discussion of their properties to analyse architectural language [3] (pp. 89–107). Previous studies in the same area are reviewed, and finally, the framework that shall be used in the case study is presented. The final phase is application of the semiotic analytical framework on the case study.

2. Theories of Semiotics

In semiotics, there are two branches: one is the European branch, whose founder is the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), the other is the American branch, whose founder was the philosopher Charles Pierce Sanders (1839–1914). In his theory, Saussure adopted a dyadic model with two components for the sign: signifier and signified, [4] (pp. 14–28). As for Peirce, he adopted the triadic model [4] (pp. 29–32). This model comprises the signifier element, the signified, and a third component called the object.

In our case, it is simply a matter of replacing the Saussurean binomial, signifier/signified, by the term's space/function, (the function could be structural and/or symbolic).

Semiotic "tools" help to articulate the form of the expression of the architectural work with the form of the content to make a corresponding reading of the signifying object possible.

The fundamental reason for the existence of architectural works is their utility. However, this is not their only function, but there is a parallel function of architecture as a mass communication [5]. In this process there is a sender and a receiver. The sender writes a language or text using a code. Consequently, the receiver, or reader in semiotic sense, utilises his socio-cultural code to decipher this text.

From this perspective, this research shall adopt the theory of semiotics of Greimas, by using a derivative framework that was applied earlier in semiotics and church architecture [6].

Following this approach, the work aims to analyse the visual discourse created by the socio-cultural dimension of the spatial architecture, particularly considering space as a visual message throughout the process of inculturation set out by the missionaries.

However, the space is a three-dimensional extension that can be contextualised both physically and metaphorically. Nikolaus Pevsner (1974) in his book, *An Outline of European Architecture* [7], writes:

> *"What distinguishes architecture from painting and sculpture is its spatial quality. The analysis of this space, from semiotics, suggests that its meaning as a sign is generally understood in relation to different aspects and considerations."*

According to A.J. Greimas, "space starts from the extensiveness, which refers to space as a continuous and undifferentiated dimension of reality" [8] (p. 114).

When the space is divided into subspaces with different utilities, "into places, such as road, land, city, buildings, etc., a certain impoverishment of extensiveness is gained, but a purposive signification is achieved. Construction of extensiveness as a series of places requires the construction of semiotic object when space is its signifier. Now signifier is for to embody something more than space, it is more about human being, a signified of all the languages" [9] (p. 129). The point of view of the Greimassian theory helps us to understand the visual and spatial language of the Yuanying Guan complex. On the other hand, the Chinese concept of space must be understood in the context of Chinese culture, since, compared to the notion of space in Western culture, space in China is more momentous and subjective. Obviously, the sign is the key element in any semiotic analysis of spatial architecture. In this article, the sign is used to analyse the architectural language of the Yuanying Guan complex (Beijing, 18th century) as a specific object of spatial architecture. Historic buildings can have semantic values, as each subject having influence on the building wants to fulfil its goals. Naturally, alongside the social, economic, and political factors come into play functional and aesthetic considerations. Architectural objects belong to a specific class of spatial semiotics. This circumstance assumes that the architectural objects and their parts change meanings over time. For example, the amphitheatre of Italic (Seville, Spain), which was originally a place for public events, is now a symbol of Roman culture in southern Spain.

Therefore, an updated interpretation of the architecture in the context of the built space produces a meaning derived from that space. This result expresses the correlation between the structural function (form of expression) and the symbolic function (form of

content) of the buildings that can be explained by the harmonisation of their physical and sensory aspects.

The form of expression is related to the real architectural structures or the materiality of the signifier. The form of the content refers to the signified communicated by the sign, that is to say, the semantic and syntactic structures of the architectural object. In this work, the space of the Yuanying Guan complex is considered as a semantic micro-universe, as well as a system of meanings generated by the uses of its elements.

3. Analysis of the Yuanying Guan Pavilion

3.1. Introduction

A brief introduction to the case study will be presented in this section. In 1709, the Qing emperor Kangxi (r.1662–1722) began the construction of a garden known as Yuanming Yuan in Beijing. In 1747, Emperor Qianlong (r.1736–1795) began to add a section of European style pavilions and gardens, (European Palaces), which came to an end in 1782. The last pavilion built was the Yuanying Guan. The person who was responsible for the designs of the pavilions and gardens were the Jesuit missionary Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), whose Chinese name was Lang Shining, who was a painter and architect of the imperial court, [10] (pp. 115–143), [11] (pp. 45–49). These palaces were savagely sacked and burned in 1860 by Anglo-French troops.

Likewise, in 1783, Emperor Qianlong commissioned a set of twenty copperplate engravings of the European Palaces by Chinese Imperial Academy painter Yi Lantai (1749–1789), who probably studied with Castiglione. Yi Lantai used Western and Chinese techniques of depiction in these engravings, [12] (pp. 81–84). Of these, only three engravings refer to the Yuanying Guan complex, (View of the Distant Sea), and can be used to read the messages from the spaces incorporated into the complex: the View of the Distant Sea pavilion itself (Yuanying Guan, engraving nº 14, Figure 1), Great Fountain (Great Fountain, engraving nº 15, Figure 2), and Throne, (engraving nº 16, Figure 3).

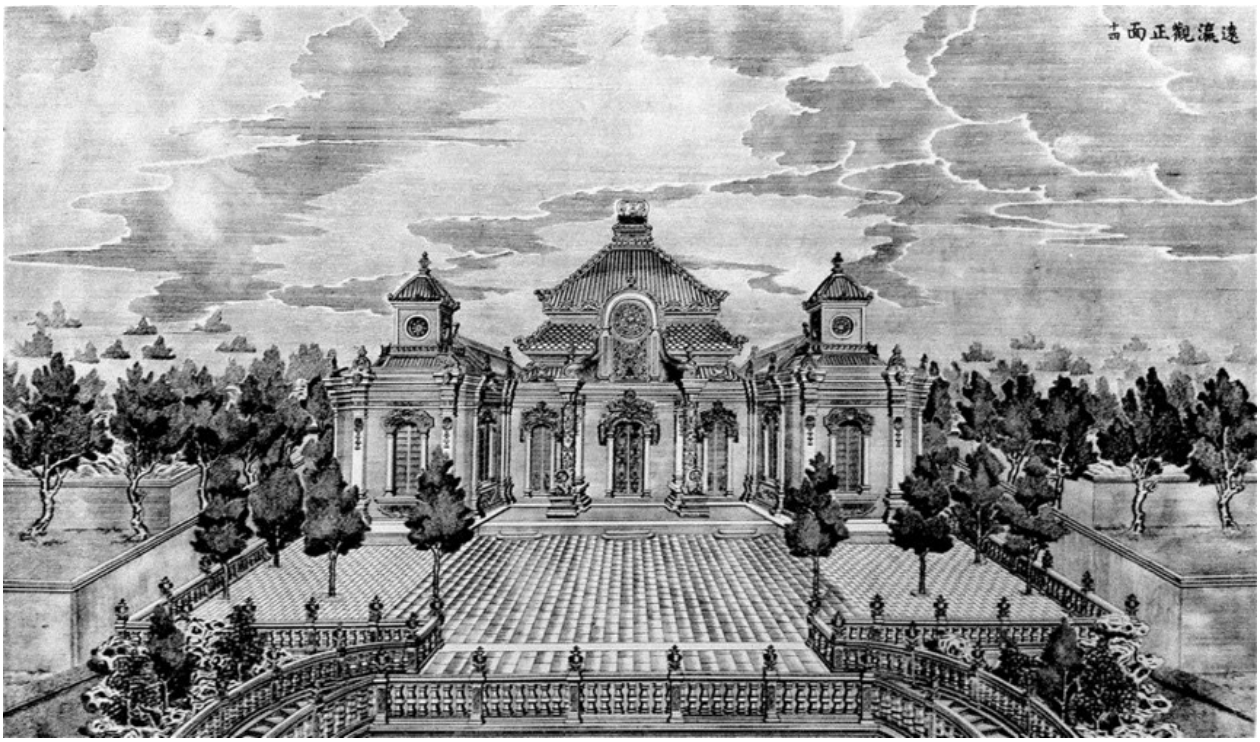

Figure 1. View of the Distant Sea (Yuanying Guan). Yi Lantai (1749–1789). Copperplate nº 14. Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

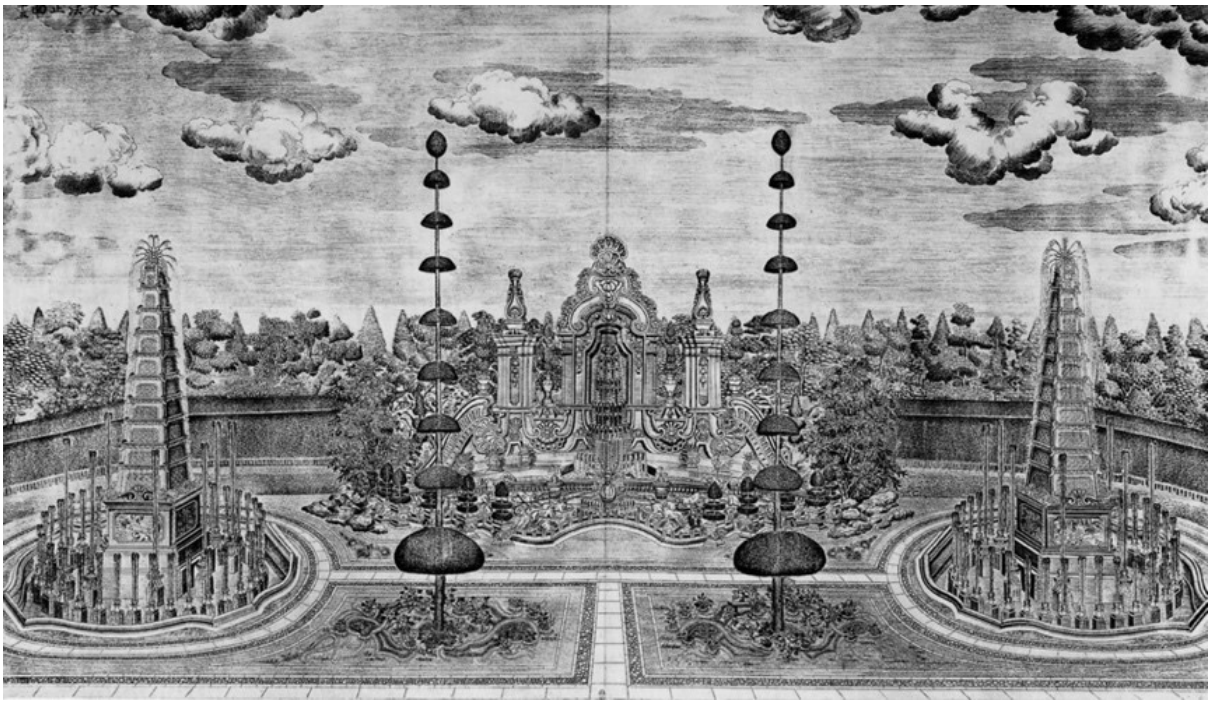

Figure 2. Great Fountain. Yi Lantai, (1749–1789). Copperplate nº 15. Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

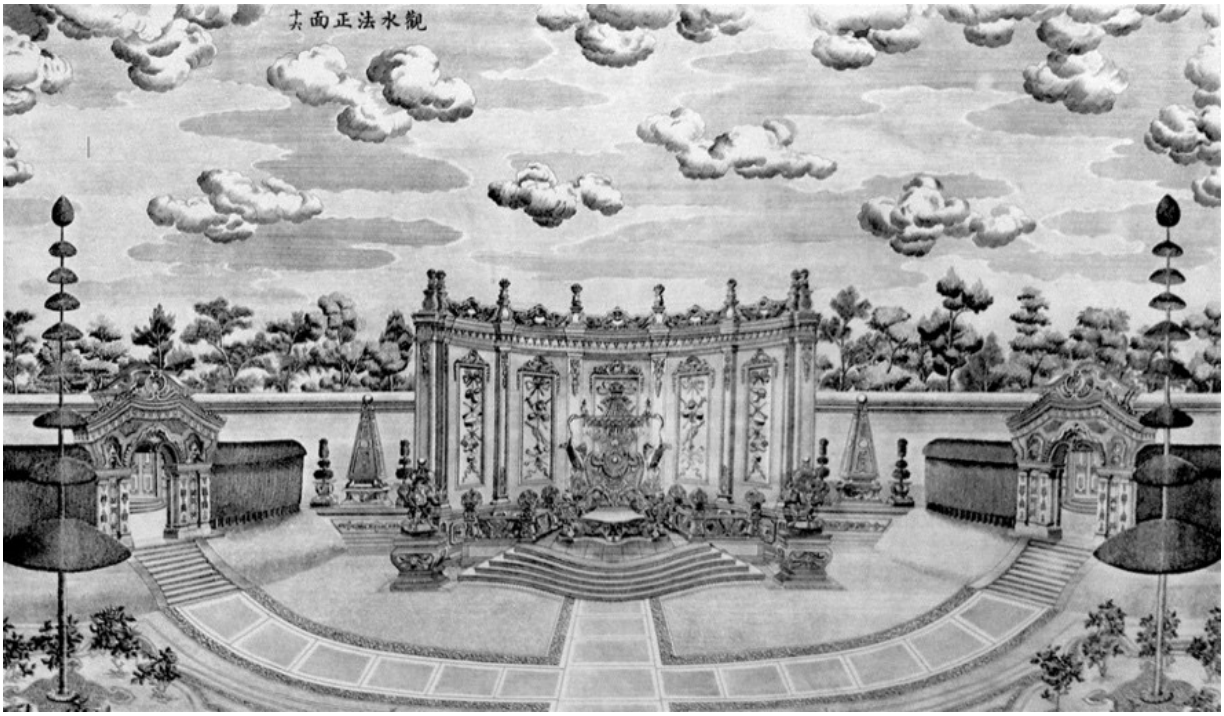

Figure 3. Throne. Front view. Yi Lantai, (1749–1789), Copperplate nº 16. Source: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

The pavilion was built on a high terrace and structured with a grid of columns with traditional Chinese techniques. The pavilion was divided into three zones in a similar way to the division in a building of traditional Chinese architecture, where the central area was larger than the side galleries (Figure 4).

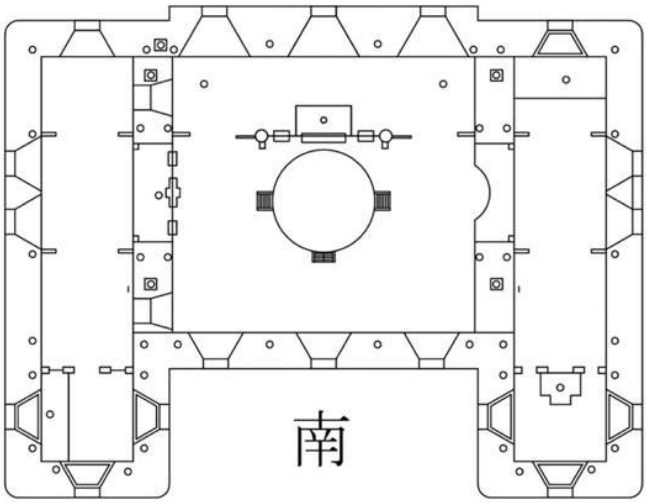

Figure 4. Plan of the Yuanying Guan, (Model Lei, Qing Dynasty) (南, means South). Source: Reconstruction by the author.

To worsen the disappearance of this patrimony, there is little information in the imperial archives, in the bibliography, and in the remains found in the area. Consequently, a semiotic analysis can only be conducted using external structures and conceptual tools. Therefore, the reading focuses on the originality of the visual and aesthetic message of the architectural space and the meaning in its own context. The hierarchical relationships of the exterior signs transmitted by these engravings will be discussed. There are only a few references to the inside of the pavilion. Among those that exist, the French missionary Delatour (1803), who visited the Gardens, and, referring to the interior of the Yuanying Guan Pavilion [13], said:

> *"Dans la sale quil a fait nouvell mentbâtir pour placer les Tapisseries de la manufacture des Gobelins, que la cour de France lui envoyées en 1767, il y a partout des trumeaux magnifiques."*

3.2. Semiotic Analysis: Structural Function

The structural function in architecture is constructed and identified as a material architectural object. It is related to the form of expression and the pragmatic function. At the same time, it contains the *plastic* and *topological* dimensions of the construction process, both constituting the signifier (Figure 5).

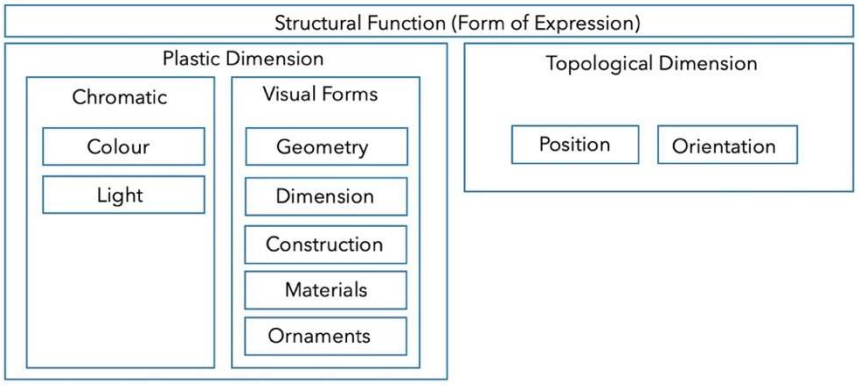

Figure 5. Analytical framework of the semiotic analysis of the structural function.

The plastic dimension is related to the use of shapes and materials to generate the signifier. It is made up of the *chromatic* category (colour and light) and the category related to *visual forms* (eidetic).

Plastic and visual semiotics, developed mainly by F. Thürlemann and J.M. Floch, and embodied in the Greimassian model, consider colour as a distinctive element, and consequently, as a form. However, these visual forms (colours) are not isolated and are related to other forms, such as density, intensity, and texture. Colours, in semiotic terms, are chromatic forms. The plastic dimension of the Yuanying Guan combines the chromatic categories of light and colour in the pavilion windows that provide direct natural light to the galleries.

The numerous windows not only have a plastic meaning, due to the luminosity they provide, but also a symbolic meaning, due to the spirituality that the southern light implies in Chinese thought. It is possible that the chromatic shapes of the pavilion are be related to the Western paintings developed by the Jesuit artists on the ceiling of the central nave [14] (p. 191), although there are no remains as a result of its destruction.

With regard to the *visual forms*, the plan of the ground floor of the pavilion (Figure 4) suggests the existence of wooden columns attached to the structure of the stone walls [15] (p. 137).

In order to be able to conduct a general *geometrical analysis* of the front elevation of this pavilion, it was necessary to have a precise plan of its façade. Through a process of trial and error, the façade drawing of the pavilion was analysed, and fortunately, some geometrical and numerical patterns were discovered within it. Since there were no accurate and reliable drawings of this building, the author had to measure the building and draw its architectural plans from the drawing of A. Durand, and its most fundamental geometrical order is illustrated in (Figure 5). The whole façade is circumscribed by a rectangle ABCD. The pavilion was designed to be located on the original lower ground level of the DC line. The lines GH and EF halve the sides of the rectangle. The boundaries of the main and side galleries are defined by the rectangle GHCD, while the central part of the façade is circumscribed by a square IJLM. The limits of the roof are roughly defined within the isosceles triangle ENO (Figure 6).

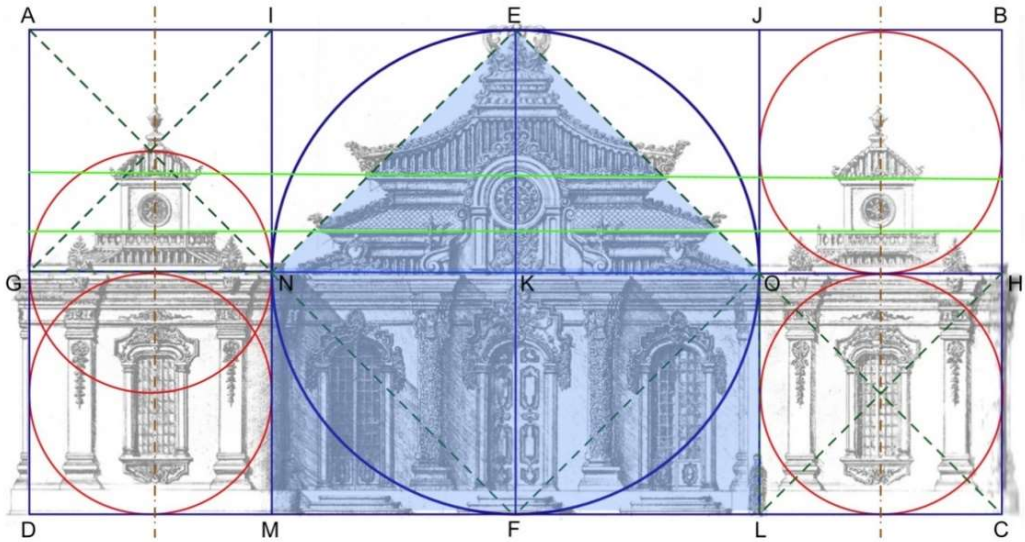

Figure 6. The Fundamental Geometric Order of Yuanying Guan on their Restitution on Paper by Antoine Durand 1987: 1988 Mission Palais d'étè, París.

From the perspective of *ornamentation*, the central exterior area is the one that has the most decorative richness. The main facade was designed with a post-Renaissance style, especially Baroque, and decorated with extremely rich elements [16] (pp. 279–300). In the remains of its two lateral columns, we find the bases of the Western column design, carved with plant motifs, mainly leaves (Figure 7).

Figure 7. (**Left**) A column of the facade of the Yuanying Guan Pavilion. (**Right**) Southern facade of the Yuanying Guan Pavilion. Photograph by Ernst Ohlmer (1873) exhibited at the Beijing China Millennium Monument in 2010.

The Asian symbolism of the leaf as a sign of prosperity reinforces the dual language of the Jesuit artists because, from a Christian point of view, leaves are widely mentioned in different biblical texts (Appendix A A1). In front of these columns there were two figures representing lions, "protectors of sacred buildings and defenders of the law" [17] (p. 16). A stone clock completed the facade as a symbol of the technological contribution of the West (Figure 7, right). On the other hand, as we only know the plan and the facade of the pavilion, we cannot describe the total composition of the plastic categories of the building. However, we know that Castiglione presented designs to Qianlong of an original Baroque style, reminiscent of the art of Guarini and Borromini, [18]. Likewise, the European Garden Palaces contain Renaissance concepts, Baroque ornaments, and Chinese materials, such as coloured Liuli tiles and Taihu rocks (A2).

The facade of this pavilion, as a signifier, has a signified that is identified by the repetition of elements (windows, doors, columns, etc.) that are regularly spaced, which generate the effects of proportionality, lighting, and ornamentation. The facade transmits a double message, rhythm, and proportion, which denotes the classic Italian villas of the Renaissance. Both are based on the original Greek conception of rhythm [19] (A3).

The *topological* dimension is related to the study of *position* and *orientation.* Regarding the position or location of the Yuanying Guan Pavilion in the axial centre of the east–west axis of the European Garden (Figure 8), a message is conveyed of centrality, order, geometry, hierarchy, and dominance. Its construction on an elevated platform was designed so that the north–south axis of the pavilion coincided with the same axis of the Garden of Eternal Spring (Figure 8). Consequently, there was a rigid geometric control in the construction of the pavilion within the European Garden. The objective was to have a good view of the lakes of the Garden of Eternal Spring, and probably, of others located in the Garden of Perfect Brilliance. This constructional centrality connotes the concept of directionality.

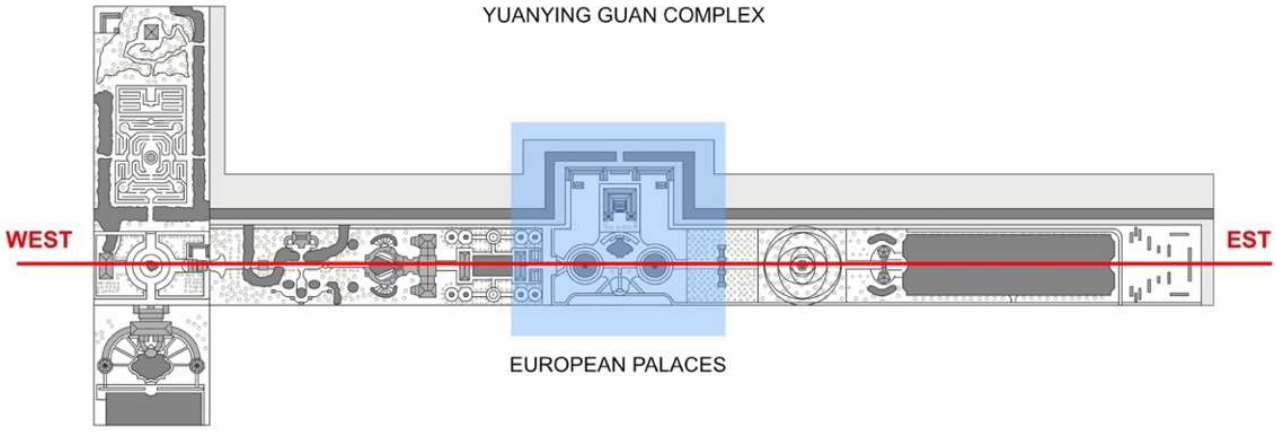

Figure 8. Plan of the European Palaces. This reconstruction has been made from the general plan (restitution plan 1985 of Antoine Durand). Source: author's reconstruction.

Metaphorically, its very name, Yuanying Guan (or View of the Distant Sea), is a beautiful metaphor. The word "sea" invokes all the lakes visible from the throne of the pavilion. In this sense, the sign is metonymic. The lakes were called seas in the Northern and Southern dynasties (420–581). Previously, in the Western Han dynasty (206–224), the great Kunming Lake was symbolically called the sea, creating a direct relationship between the standing water of a garden and the sea.

The northeast orientation of the European Garden was not accidental. Ancient cosmological diagrams reveal that the sign "gen" means the northeast (NE) direction. An explanation of this sign that was found in the Qing dynasty says, "The gen is the cosmological mark of the northeast direction where all things end and begin [. . .] Beijing is located on the gen point of China and can perceive the return of all things. It is close to the North and faces the brilliance from the South" [20] (p. 83).

Therefore, the *position* and *orientation* of the pavilion in the northeast, facing south, has a symbolic dimension. This explains a certain predisposition of the enjoyment of the emperor. These spaces formed part of the architectural scenography of the art of governing.

As mentioned earlier, the pavilion comprised three spaces: the central area, which contained a possible throne located at its centre, facing the south gate, and two lateral spaces for different activities. Regarding this plan, ref. [21] (p. 185) writes:

> *As the plan drawing of the View of the Distant Sea pavilion in the Model Lei collection illustrated there was a throne facing to the south in the central hall of this building. In the northern part of the hall there was a screen behind the throne to protect the emperor's back. In the drawing, a Chinese character for "south" was specifically marked to accentuate the importance of the orientation to the south.*

The plane, as a signifier, has a signified corresponding to tradition, stability, and perfection. Its mode of sign is indexical because of its connection with the constructive meaning of the zones. It denotes the planimetric division of the ground and connotes Chinese traditions, regarding the horizontal division of the pavilion, geometry, and southern directionality. It is significant that on the front of the plan there is a Chinese character, nan, 南, which means south, emphasising the importance of that orientation. Consequently, from the plan we can only analyse one element from the interior: the throne. Therefore, a first factor related to the form of expression is the position, belonging to the topological dimension. The Chinese character on the plan defines the throne's orientation. This made possible the views of the Great Fountain, the outer Throne, the Great Lakes (seas), the Garden of Eternal Spring, and the Garden of the Gallant Spring (Figure 9).

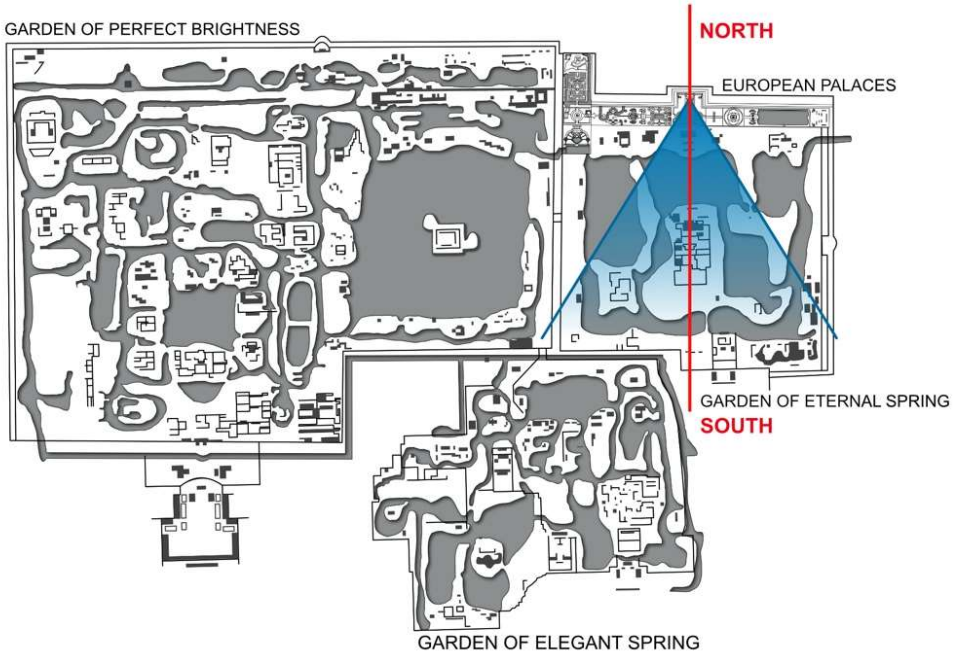

Figure 9. Area visible from the inside of Yuanying Guan. Source: reconstruction and interpretation by the author.

3.3. Semiotic Analysis: Symbolic Function

The symbolic function is identified with the form of the content. This form refers to the meaning communicated by the sign, i.e., the semantic and syntactic dimensions of architecture. When analysing the form of the content, three levels must be taken into account: the syntactic–semantic level, the superficial level, and the deep level. See Figure 10 for a brief description of the analytical framework of the semiotic analysis of the symbolic function.

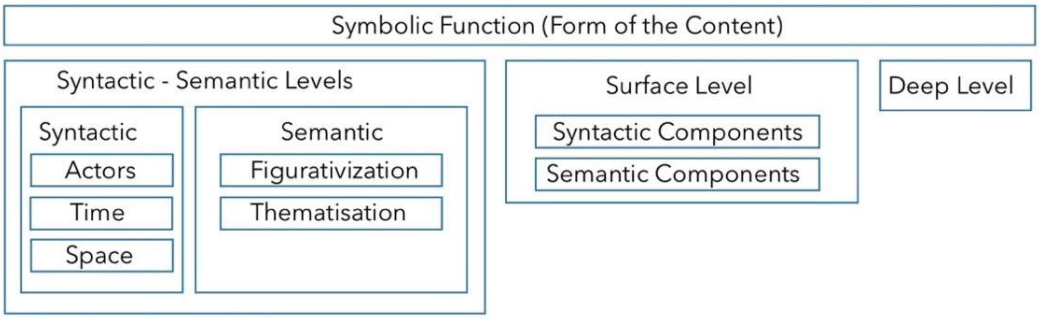

Figure 10. Analytical framework of the semiotic analysis of the symbolic function.

The analysis of the first level must be made from a syntactic and semantic point of view. The syntax is related to the organisation of the space based on the three elements that synthesise its activity: actors, time, and places.

3.3.1. Actors

In general, different actors participate in the architectural discourse: the architect, the builder, and the client. It is not usual for buildings to bear the signature of the architect or the builder, although their names can be used to refer to them. On the other hand, the emperor was the main recipient (client), who defined the complex as a scenic garden. The plans of the View of the Distant Sea pavilion were drawn up by the Lei family, builders of the Qing court for six generations, yet there are no signatures on the pavilions of the European Garden. In this sense, ref. [21] (p. 185) writes:

> *For an important building in a Chinese garden, such as a hall, two name boards were usually hung. One board was hung on the outer eave over the door so that people would see it when entering the building; the other board was hung on the inner eave over the central chair so that a visitor could view the board that hung over the host's head. The meaning of a name board was closely related with its location: inside or outside. [. . .] as well as "View of the Distant Sea", which were all hung on the inner eaves of their respective buildings and became the official names of those buildings. In all these cases, the name board was hung over an imperial throne.*

3.3.2. Time

In syntax, timing has an important role and is related to the time of the construction of the pavilion. In our case it is important to know some signs of its temporisation. It is known that Yuanying Guan (View of the Distant Sea) was the last pavilion built in the European Garden and that it was completed on the ninth day of the fourth moon of the year 47 of the Qianlong reign (1782). In this year, Jesuit artists, including the painter Joseph Panzi (1733–1812), were asked to paint Western figures on the roof of the central nave of the Yuanying Guan. Some other details are also known related to buildings that are part of the scenic garden of the Yuanying Guan. According to letters sent by the missionaries to Europe, in 1747, Emperor Qianlong saw a painting of European fountains and decided to build similar ones in his European Garden. The fountains were designed by the mathematician Michel Benoist (1715–1774), [22] (p. 195) and executed by Chinese craftsmen (A4). It is through this meeting of art and engineering that the European fountains were integrated into Chinese culture. It is possible that the Great Fountain was constructed before the completion of the Yuanying Guan Pavilion.

3.3.3. Space

It is another of the elements that enter into the construction or organisation of the discursive syntax. Greimassian theory and the Paris School presuppose three ways of describing space: *spatial localisation*, *spatial programming*, and *spatial aspectualization* [6] (pp. 32–33). The analysis of spatial location is based on the examination of the context in which the pavilions and gardens were located and depended on the selection of a limited thematic space (topos) [23] (pp. 87–109) and [24] (p. 116), (A5). The gardens are always activated in relation to their surrounding areas and these surrounding areas are called heterotopic spaces. The Yuanying Guan Pavilion, as a restricted space (topical space or topos) of the European Garden, was mixed with the surrounding spaces (heterotopics), such as gardens, fountains, lakes, etc., (Figures 11 and 12). From a metaphorical point of view, its name (View of the Distant Sea) is related to its heterotopic spaces.

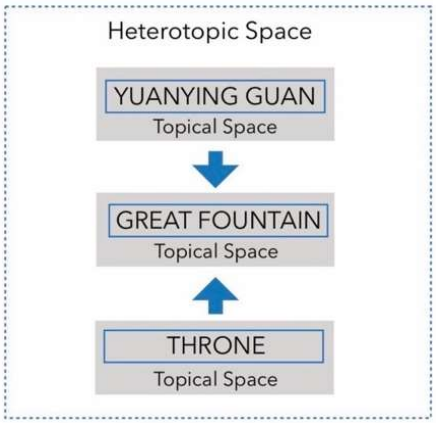

Figure 11. Topical spaces and heterotopic spaces and modal competencies scheme in the Yuanying Guan complex. Source: author's interpretation.

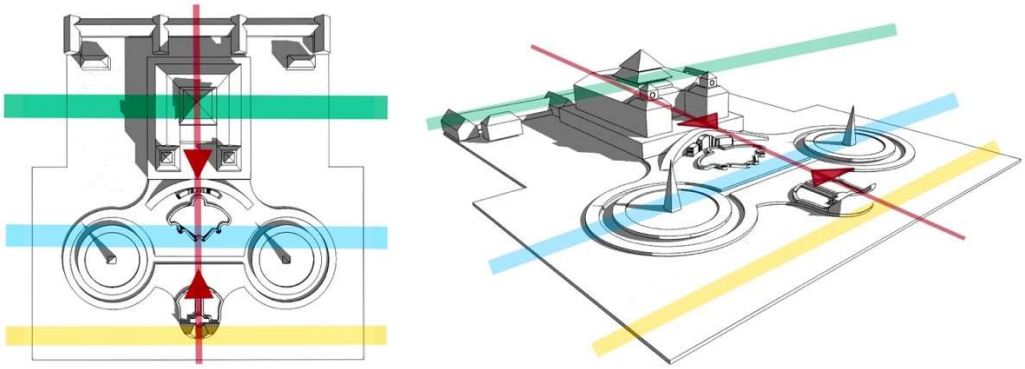

Figure 12. Topical spaces and heterotopic spaces and modal competencies in the Yuanying Guan complex. Source: author's interpretation.

Contrasting with the Western conception of a physical and objective space, in Chinese culture, space has a clearly emotional effect. Thus, ref. [25] (p. 8) reminds us:

> *In modern–day China, when people hear the term yuanming (literally, round brightness), they probably think of two wonders: one is the bright full moon appearing at the middle of each month; another is the Yuanming Yuan, literally, Garden of Round Brightness, which exists only in their minds (A6).*

Regarding its spatial programming, there are no transition spaces between the interior and exterior of the pavilion. The two staircases that lead to the high terrace constitute the only transition space towards the interior of the pavilion. The signifier, the elevation of the plant, had a signified directly linked to its utility. The sign is indexical because it is connected to the sign by a certain cause and effect and denotes the literal sense of elevation. In turn, it connotes different interpretations of the functionality of the elevated platform, such as better visibility and control of the gardens and lakes (seas).

Finally, in the spatial aspectualization, the presence of an observer can determine the association of space with the functions of the actor. The actor can operate without restrictions or can share the space with other actors. In our case study, the emperor freely used the pavilion as a lookout point and as a place for receiving visitors. Taking into account the emperor's preferences, Castiglione designed spectacular scenes using the Renaissance codes of linear perspective, achieving optimal focal points for any observer [26] (pp. 159–193). A set of signs coded by the orthogonality of the axes allowed the bilateral symmetry to emerge from these scenes, in a strategy that was widely used by the Jesuits [27] (pp. 1773–1785). Overall, this scenic integration played an important role.

At the *semantic level*, the figurative and thematic aspects, both closely related, play a significant role. First, the figurative aspect is connected to the symbolic function of the architectural object. "This aspect is related to the form of the content of the architecture insofar as this content is related to the world" [28] (p. 1275). Yuanying Guan was not a commercial, residential, or religious building. It was a pavilion characterised by its ability to convey impressions and feelings to visitors, but it also represented an artistic conception and poetic feeling. In his "Chanting at the View of the Distant Sea", Emperor Jiaqing wrote:

> *"The rooms imitate the Western style.*
>
> *My little heart includes the distant seas.*
>
> *The imperial mind embraces the great world."* [21] (p.186).

In these verses, Emperor Jiaqing clearly refers to the influence of the West, and although he considers himself "small" and "humble", his visionary power grows to "embrace the Greatness of the World" represented in the microcosm of the spaces of the Yuanying Guan. A perfect Chinese garden includes everything, even the microcosm, and in this place, people can communicate with nature and the cosmos through the spirit, [29]

(pp. 17–50). Therefore, an effective way to idealise the world is to build a model that interprets it. Secondly, the *thematic aspect* is connected to the intentionality with which the building holds a dialogue with the world. In our case, the Yuanying Guan thematises their accessibility, visibility, and spatial arrangement for the embassy's reception. However, some of its elements, such as both thrones, could not have the same semantic value. They express the same modal competence, but their semantic discourse differs according to their situation in the complex. This is the case of modal values associated with a given place. Thus, the inner throne of the pavilion integrated in the visual values of the landscape and the outer throne were used to contemplate the magnificent spectacle of the play of the water of the Great Fountain (Figure 9).

During the Western Han dynasty, the Guan sign was related to the idea of a temple or building built specifically to view distant landscapes. Its sign mode as viewpoint, views, and visualisation is indexical because it has a cause–effect relationship with the signified. Its literal signified is denoted. In turn, it is connoted because it induces us to a subjective interpretation of the meaning. It connotes distant lakes (seas), with foreign embassies arriving across those seas, with scenic landscapes, theatricality, etc. Metonymically, it evokes a viewpoint. A symbolic reading of the formal expression of the pavilion is associated with a viewpoint to infinity. In Chinese philosophy, the point of infinity is clearly identified with the origin of the world [22] (p. 163). Yuanying Guan, (View of the Distant Sea), connotes the distant seas (or lakes) of the Garden of Eternal Spring.

The next step in the analysis of the symbolic function refers to the *surface level* and its syntactic and semantic components. At this level, the syntactic component can be explained by the conjunction (the subject and the object are in the same space at the same time) and disjunction (the subject and the object are in different spaces at the same time) [28] (p. 1275). In the Yuanying Guan complex, the organisation of different topoi with different roles allows a certain narrative program. For this reason, the spatial organisation of the Yuanying Guan Pavilion (View of the Distant Sea) as a means of communication is of particular significance. Its modal competencies (Figures 9 and 10) from the emperor's point of view were associated with the modal competencies of the visitors.

According to the characteristics and roles of its buildings, the complex consisted of the pavilion, the Great Fountain, and the Throne, each one with its corresponding syntactic roles. Therefore, we can contemplate three thematic spaces in the complex with different sets of roles within a mutual narrative program (Figures 9 and 10). The architectural and non-architectural forms of these spaces, with their symbolic meanings, had modal competencies of a scenic type, especially for those visitors who came from foreign countries.

Regarding the *deep level* [30] (p. 6), the relationship between form and meaning shows that the function of a building is not only that which concerns the architect, but also the appropriation of an idea expressed by a set of actors Consequently, the exterior of the building can transmit different signs that can be interpreted by an observer in different ways. Yuanying Guan was a pavilion built as a viewing place from its inner throne, but it could be interpreted as a Taoist temple or as an administrative building of the imperial court. The quality of the architectural elements, the shape, the height of the pavilion, its windows, the light, and the way in which the throne is placed, generated landscaped scenes that affect the sensory experiences of the emperor. The Baroque decoration of its main door, its elements associated with Western culture, and its heterotopic spaces suggest the option of a European-style palace.

4. Conclusions

A.J. Greimas's semiotic model is based on the importance given to the concept of architectural space. According to Greimas, we can mention some essential parameters of its visual coding and decoding, the topological organisation of composition, the organisation of forms, chromatic and light organisation, and the figurative and even symbolic analysis. Based on our analysis, it can be concluded that the constructed space of the Yuanying Guan complex has a meaning directly related to the spirit of architectural inculturation. Thus, the

complex contained traditional Chinese architectural elements that indicated the dynamism of the encounter between the cultures of Asia and Europe. The aim of this study is to show this historical encounter of Western culture and Chinese aesthetics and sensibility to understand the spatial architecture of the garden. This work seeks to demonstrate how, with the help of semiotic concepts and tools, the structural function of an architectural object can be related to the symbolic function to make possible the spatial reading of the Yuanying Guan complex. This reading of this visual discourse shows that both functions generate a system of signs through a complex network of conceptual hierarchical connections.

Many of the signs analysed are connotative and from a denotative point of view; the functions of some of their elements only communicate and do not have a specific function. As a whole, the pavilion creates for us a place for the scenic domain of the European Garden. The results of this research demonstrate that the phenomenon of Chinese European architecture was based on a convergence of Western technology and Asian aesthetics fundamentally related to spatial and formal design, materials, structural aspects, and ornamentation.

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Appendix A

A1. Different biblical texts like proverbs, parables, psalms, etc., use the leaf as an element that allows a wide and varied symbolic repertoire.

A2. From an architectural point of view, the term "Liuli" always refers to the roof tiles of Chinese palaces. It is the main artificial material for the roof of these palaces. The main component of Liuli is clay. After heating the tile to high temperatures, it is covered with enamel to obtain different coloured forms. Likewise, "Taihu rock" is a type of natural rock from Lake Taihu. Its main characteristics are roughness and transparency.

A3. Conceptually, the origin of the word rhythm could be traced back to the Greek concept of rhythmós. In Pollitt, 1974 [17], it is defined as a "repetition of elements at regular intervals". There is no doubt that the existing palaces and gardens in the European Garden of Yuanming Yuan are distinguished by their rhythmic emphasis. An example of this is the View of a Distant Sea Pavilion (Yuanying Guan), in which Castiglione designed the facade as a symphony of columns and pilasters, with harmonious proportions and bilateral symmetry, as well as important decorative details in the Baroque style.

A4. See L. Aimé–Martin ed. Lettres édifiantes et curieuses. Volume 4. Chine, Indo–Chine, Océanie. (Paris: Société du Panthéon Littéraire, 1843), 226.

A5. "Topos" is derived from the Greek word, τόπος, "place". Its plural is topoi. From a mathematical point of view, for Alexander Grothendieck, "topos" derives from modern mathematical category theory and constitutes the most perfect idea of the generalization of space. Category theory constitutes a generalization of set theory [22] (pp. 87–109). From the spatial point of view, a topos is a portion of space that can play a syntactic role. A rigorous definition of topos from the semiotic point of view can be seen in [23] (p. 116).

A6. Due to its short life, its greatness and its small European Garden, the space occupied by the Yuanming Yuan is remembered as something unique in the history of Chinese gardens. For a large majority of Chinese people, the memory of this garden, savagely burned and looted by Anglo-French troops in 1860, is based on two strong

emotions: fire and its ruins. This is the meaning that we suppose Zou wanted to give to his words.

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