

## Article

# Chan, Garden, and Poetry: The Tidal Sounds in the Changshou Monastery Garden of Canton in the Qing Dynasty

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**Abstract:** The Caodong School (曹洞宗) advocates the integration of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism (三教會通) and interprets Chan through the *I Ching* (以易釋禪). During the transition from the Ming to the Qing Dynasty, there was extensive interaction and mobility between the Ming loyalists (遺民) and Chan monks. This accelerated the secularization of monks and promoted the construction of temple gardens, which were expressed and preserved through literary Chan poetry. This study explores the relationship between Buddhist concepts and garden construction through a specific case, the Changshou Monastery Garden (長壽寺花園) in Canton (now Guangzhou) during the Qing Dynasty. This study examines how the Chan master Shilian Dashan 石濂大汕 (1633–1705), who journeyed to Dang Trong (Cochinchina 廣南) to spread Buddhist teachings, shaped the design and layout of the temple garden, reflecting Buddhist ideals and Caodong principles. This study analyzes the changes in landscape at the Changshou Monastery Garden, according to “the sound of tides” (潮音) from a Buddhist perspective. It also reveals how Dashan, as both a monk and a literati, blended Chan and Chinese philosophy in making the garden. The cultural resonance of tides within religious and literati traditions furnishes novel insights and prospects for the development of garden spaces.

**Keywords:** Changshou Monastery Garden; tides; Brahma’s sound; Caodong; poetry; Chan enlightenment; garden making



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## 1. Introduction

During the Qing Dynasty, garden construction in Canton witnessed a remarkable flourishing, fueled by social and economic progress. Due to the convenience of water transportation and access to water sources, many gardens were strategically built along the Pearl River and its tributaries, which experienced regular ebb and flow. Consequently, the design, construction, and landscapes of these gardens were profoundly influenced by the tides (Feng and Li 2023).

In the early Qing Dynasty, Canton had the “Five Major Monasteries<sup>1</sup>,” among which Changshou Monastery (長壽寺, known as the “Temple of Longevity” in Western accounts), stood out for its exquisite tidal garden. Caodong master Shilian Dashan 石濂大汕 (1633–1705), abbot of Changshou Monastery, not only developed methods for garden making and appreciating gardens adapted to the tides but also creatively expressed Chan’s principles through both garden design and his poetry. This profoundly influenced subsequent literati gatherings and garden design activities. Unfortunately, due to a combination of Sino-Western conflicts, political struggles, and disputes between temple monks and the local gentry, the Changshou Monastery was confiscated and demolished in 1905 (S. Huang 2018). Despite vanishing over a

century ago, the ingenious design of Changshou Monastery Garden remains a subject worthy of exploration.

In Buddhist scriptures, there are detailed depictions of gardens in the portrayal of the cosmic world and ideal spaces. The teachings of the Buddha are expressed through the description of garden scenery, inspiring the hearts and minds of practitioners. In East Asia, Chan Buddhism is the most thoroughly Sinicized and widely influential Buddhist sect. Current studies on temple gardens generally assert that, from the Song Dynasty onwards, the integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism led to the secularization of Chan temple gardens, aligning them with literati gardens (Ren 1994; Zhou 2008; Zhao 2016).

During the transition from the Ming to the Qing Dynasty, along with social upheavals, the mobility between the literati (the educated elites, also known as the scholar-officials) and monks from different social strata was significant. To evade the political and psychological challenges posed by the Qing Dynasty, many literati sought refuge in temples, giving rise to the trend known as “escaping into Chan Buddhism” (*taochan* 逃禪). In Lingnan (the South of the Five Ridges 嶺南), there was an intimate interaction between Chan monks and the literati. The influx of scholars into temples and the ensuing interactions between local elites and the literati who migrated southward facilitated an exchange between religious and secular cultures within Lingnan Chan monasteries. This exchange manifested as a secularization of Southern Chan Buddhism, blurring the lines between spiritual and worldly aspects (Jiang 1999, p. 583).

Unlike other temples that are famous for their long history or grand scale, Changshou Monastery is renowned both domestically and internationally due to the spread of Chan Buddhism to Dang Trong (Cochinchina 廣南) by Dashan and the creatively designed garden of the monastery in response to the tides labeled as “ingenious thoughts” (*qiaosi* 巧思, S. Wang 1968, p. 6). Dashan embodied the thought of Caodong School through garden making. Influenced by renowned loyalist poets, he developed his own unique blend of poetic and Chan concepts. His overseas experiences not only provided funding for the renovation of Changshou Monastery and its garden but also influenced his garden-making methods. Primary sources suggest that Dashan prioritized the garden’s construction, building it before the main monastery buildings, and devoted significant attention to its management. The tidal nature of the location became a prominent feature when he returned from Dang Trong to Canton to renovate the garden. Compared to other temples in the same period, which focused on constructing main halls, Dashan’s approach was clearly unconventional. Therefore, the complex life experiences of Dashan and the secularization of the temple garden drew criticism from his contemporary society.

Previous studies have investigated various aspects of Dashan’s life and work, including his early life experiences (Jiang 1999; J. Li 2023), Chan concepts, artistic accomplishments in poetry, “zither” (*qin* 琴) playing, and painting (Jiang 1999, 2007; Dang 2019). They have also examined his role in organizing the poetry society and literati gatherings at Changshou Monastery Garden (Jiang 1999, 2007; R. Li 2011), his Dharma propagation experiences in Dang Trong and related writings (Sun 2017; Wheeler 2007), the reasons behind the monastery’s demolition (S. Huang 2018), and the inscriptions and transmission of Changshou Monastery’s drawings (R. Li 2011). However, a crucial link remains unexplored: the connection between Dashan’s life experiences, the process of constructing Changshou Monastery and its garden, and the literati gathering held in its garden. Consequently, further investigation is warranted to illuminate the potential influence of Caodong School concepts and literati aesthetics on the design and character of Changshou Monastery Garden.

Building upon previous research, this study explores the following questions: Why did Dashan attach such importance to the creation of the garden? What did the garden signify for Dashan and the Chan tradition? and Why was establishing “a connection to tidal water” (*tongchao* 通潮) crucial?

Since the physical space of Changshou Monastery Garden has vanished, it is necessary to rely on textual and visual materials to understand the garden’s spatial layout and

its connotations. This study introduces the concept of “traces” (遺痕) as a method that involves focusing on the relationships and differences between various materials within the historical context (Feng and Li 2023). By adopting this approach, this study aims to uncover the garden’s evolving character rather than treating it as a static entity, delve into the metaphorical and symbolic layers embedded within poetry, move beyond mere historical documentation of the garden space, and shed light on the activities and spatial relationships that unfolded during literati gatherings at the garden.

This study draws upon a wide array of primary sources, including poetry, prose, diaries, and local gazetteers, to establish a comprehensive understanding of the Changshou Monastery Garden. Dashan’s poetry collections, such as *Liliu Tang Ji* (離六堂集) and *Liliu Tang Jingao* (離六堂近稿), and his prose works *Haiwai Jishi* (海外紀事), as well as writings by eyewitnesses of the Changshou Monastery Garden, such as *Guangzhou Youlan Xiaozhi* (廣州遊覽小志), *Dulu Tang Shiwen Ji* (獨漉堂詩文集), and *Gengshen Xiuxi Ji* (庚申修禊集) offer invaluable insights into the garden’s spatial layout, the Chan philosophy, Dashan’s personal experiences, the literati gatherings, and the broader geographical context of Canton.

To fully grasp the complexities of Dashan’s perspective and the Chan Buddhist concepts alluded to in these primary sources, it is essential to consult secondary literature focused on Dashan and the Caodong School. These secondary works provide a deeper understanding of the intellectual and spiritual environment that influenced Dashan’s interaction with the garden.

Visual sources include woodblock prints, late Qing dynasty maps, literati paintings, and historical photographs. Woodblock prints depict the ideal Buddhist world of Chinese monks and literati perceptions of immortal mountains. Late Qing dynasty maps illustrate the positions and directions of Changshou Monastery and the surrounding waterways, revealing the garden’s integration into the hydrological network. Literati paintings, inspired by gatherings in the garden, provide a window into the spatial relationships between activities and key scenery. However, to accurately determine the spatial dimensions of these scenes, an architectural approach is required for analyzing late Qing Dynasty historical photographs.

This study comprises three main sections. Section 2 examines Dashan’s life and experiences propagating Chan Buddhism overseas, the construction process of Changshou Monastery Garden, and the influence of Caodong School concepts on the garden’s spatial design. Section 3 focuses on the symbolic significance of tides in Chan Buddhism and how Dashan incorporated tide-related elements into the garden’s landscaping, fostering a connection between Chan philosophy and the garden experience. Section 4 explains how monks and literati engaged in a dialogue on the theme of “tides” through poetry and literati gatherings.

Based on this analysis, the study argues that Chan Buddhism secularized in its relationship with the literati, and both together influenced the garden. Caodong monk Dashan, drawing upon his understanding of Chan Buddhism, the behaviors of literati, and his experiences from travels at home and abroad, utilized the characteristics of tides to shape the unique spatial layout of Changshou Monastery Garden. Tides, serving as a medium, interconnected the realms of Chan, garden, and poetry. Throughout this process, tides, with their cultural significance in religion and literati traditions, offered new opportunities and insights for the creation of garden spaces.

## 2. Chan Encounters: Dashan and the Construction of Garden

### 2.1. The Life Experiences of Dashan and His Chan Buddhist Concepts

Dashan, also known as Shilian (石濂) and Shitoutuo (石頭陀), was originally from Jiaxing but was raised in Zhejiang Province and was renowned for his proficiency in poetry and painting (Jiang 1999, p. 44). Born into modest circumstances, Dashan demonstrated remarkable intelligence from an early age. At the age of sixteen (in 1649), he had already taken refuge in the Caodong School under the esteemed monk Juelang Daosheng

覺浪道盛 (1592–1659)<sup>2</sup> from Tianjie Temple (天界寺) in Jinling (now Nanjing). Before the age of twenty, he had begun spreading Caodong teachings in Jiangnan.

After the fall of the Ming Dynasty in 1644, Dashan adopted the identity of an itinerant monk and traveled to the Five Sacred Mountains. During this period, he established extensive connections with the remnants of the Ming loyalists. In 1662, the Southern Ming Dynasty came to an end, and Dashan relocated to Canton the following year. Subsequently, he gained the patronage of the Ming loyalists Qu Dajun 屈大均 (1630–1696)<sup>3</sup> and Liang Peilan 梁佩蘭 (1630–1705)<sup>4</sup>. Through the former, he established a relationship with Jin Guang 金光 (1609–1676), an aide of the King of Pingnan (平南王) Shang Kexi 尚可喜 (1604–1676). After being recommended by Jinguang and serving as the abbot of the Great Buddha Temple (*Dafo Si* 大佛寺) for 9 years, Dashan left and traveled north to Zhongzhou (now Henan), the capital (now Beijing), and Wumen (now Suzhou). In 1678, Dashan returned to Canton and was invited to be the abbot of Changshou Monastery (Jiang 1999, p. 69).

After Kangxi's abolition of feudal domains and the execution of Shang Zhixin 尚之信, the son of the King of Pinnan, Dashan, through interactions with loyalists and aides, found new patrons: the Governors-General of Guangdong and Guangxi (兩廣總督), Wu Xingzuo 吳興祚 (1632–1697), and Shi Lin 石琳 (1638–1702). After the calming of maritime tensions and the opening of foreign trade, Dashan was invited by Lord Nguyeu Phuc Chu 阮福週 (1692–1725) to spread Buddhism in Dang Trong in 1695, and he returned to Canton the following year (Dashan 2007, p. 433).

Through the overseas spread of Buddhism and trade with Southeast Asia and Japan, Dashan obtained funds and resources for the continued construction of Changshou Monastery, the renovation of its gardens, and its daily operation (Wheeler 2007). Compared to the ways in which other temples survived at that time, Dashan made a distinctive choice.

Dashan was regarded as a “diplomatic” monk and was considered to be someone who was unconventional in their adherence to Buddhist precepts by being actively involved in political discussions and contemporary affairs, socially versatile, and proficient in poetry, art, and various crafts.

In general, although Dashan held the identity of a monk, his actions resembled literati. He actively supported and assisted the Ming loyalists, showed concern for political matters, and maintained close ties with the authorities in Canton. He led a refined life, excelling in poetry and painting, and demonstrated skills in furniture design and garden making. His overseas experiences also indicate that he possessed a keen business sense. Furthermore, Dashan inherited the concept of the integration of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism (*sanjiao huitong* 三教會通) and innovated a new approach to poetry and Chan (*jishi yanchan* 即詩言禪). Drawing inspiration from the Caodong School's “interpretation of Chan through the *I Ching*” (*yiyi shichan* 以易釋禪), Dashan incorporated concepts like the “Two-Fold Li Hexagram” (*chongli liuyao* 重離六爻) and the “interplay between appearance and essence” (*pianzheng huihu* 偏正回互) to design the Changshou Monastery Garden.

## 2.2. The Construction of the Changshou Monastery and Its Garden

Changshou Monastery was initially established in the Wanli era of the Ming Dynasty (F. Huang 1994, p. 561). It was situated outside the west wall of the Canton city, at the end of the Shang Xiguan Creek (上西關涌). The prominent Southern Buddhist monk Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623) complemented its site selection, describing it as “backed by mountains and facing the sea, an excellent area for a Buddhist temple”. Originally, the land belonged to the local Pan family before the completion of Changshou, and its layout was as follows:

*The upper and lower halls, along with the flanking abbot's quarters, the vegetarian kitchen, and the meditation room, are meticulously arranged, adorned with cinnabar, and maintained through regular renovations ... Therefore, though this hermitage may be small, it can encompass the Dharma realm, embrace sunyata (emptiness or nothingness). Morning bells and evening chants, the illusion of the moon on water, the gentle breeze in the pines, all manifest the eternal sounds of Dharma.*

上下殿堂，兩翼方丈，齋廚禪室，輪廂連捲，丹飭煥然。……是則此庵雖小，可以含法界，包虛空，晨鐘夕梵，水月松風，皆演無盡法音。

(Hanshan 2005, pp. 423–24)

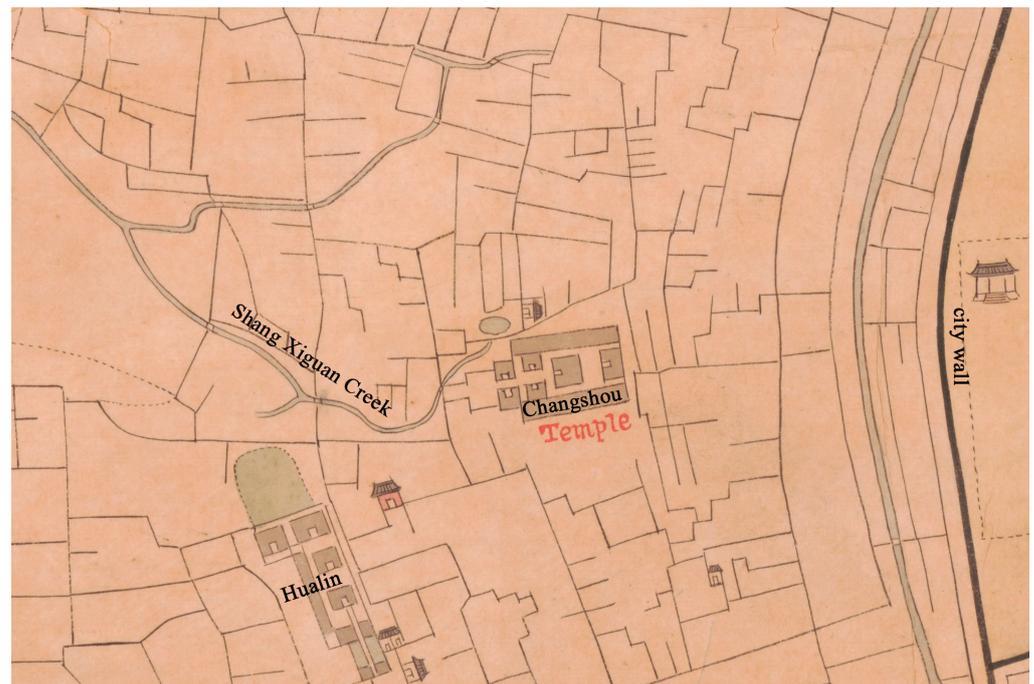
Since it was considered a “Pure Land”, with peoples’ belief in “Eternal Life”, it was named “Longevity” (*Changshou* 長壽). Twenty-six years later (1606), the imperial envoy Shen Zhenglong 沈正隆 expanded the old site and constructed the Cidu Pavilion (慈渡閣) to enshrine the Guanyin, and the Miaozheng Hall (妙證堂) and Linyi Pavilion (臨漪亭) were built on the remaining site, with fully equipped meditation rooms on both sides, covering an area of eight acres (Qiu 1993, p. 260).

When Dashan returned to Canton and took up residence in Changshou Monastery in the winter of 1678, the temple was half-ruined. Initially, near the abbot’s quarters, there should have been the Bamboo Waves Study (*Zhulang Zhai* 竹浪齋) and a bamboo garden (*Xiuzhu Yuan* 修竹園). Later, Dashan constructed Twelve Scenic Spots (十二觀), including Liliu Hall (離六堂), Half-Sail Pavilion (半帆亭), Drawing Sunyata Pavilion (繪空軒), Cloud-Half Pavilion (雲半閣), Recruiting Hermits Hall (招隱堂), Tower of Nostalgia (懷古樓), Settling Heart Pavilion (澗心亭), Mu Mo (木末), Terrace for Strolling under the Moon (月步臺), Gallery of Echoing Spring (響泉廊), Old Banyan Tree (老榕團), and Chi Mu Bridge (尺木橋). In 1685, Wang Shizhen 王士禎 (1634–1711), the Sacrificial Official of the Imperial College, visited Changshou Monastery after performing rituals in Nanhai Temple. He recorded the experience in the *Brief Records of Touring Guangzhou* (*Guangzhou Youlan Xiaozhi* 廣州遊覽小志):

*... Dashan exhibits prowess in both poetry and painting, showcasing creativity in construction. On the secluded west side of the temple, a pond connects to the Pearl River, its water level fluctuating with the tides. North of the pond lies the Half-Sail Pavilion. Continuing along the winding gallery eastward brings one to the Drawing Sunyata Pavilion. Before the pavilion, a precious Buddha statue is nestled amidst diverse blossoms, crafting a picturesque tableau. South of the pond, and parallel to it, is a path bordered by lychee and longan trees. To the south of the pond, the Tower of Nostalgia offers a commanding and unobstructed vista. Nestled beneath it, the Liliu Hall is cradled by clear waters and verdant foliage, evoking the ambiance of temples in the Wu and Yue regions. Within, a sculpture of Shakyamuni holding a flower, adorned with gold, pearls, chalcedony, agate, and other exquisite materials, exudes a majestic and resplendent presence. Furthermore, there are bronze statues, believed to date back to the Tang Dynasty.*

汕能詩畫，營造有巧思。寺西偏有池，通珠江水，增減應潮汐。池北為半帆，循廊曲折而東，為繪空軒。軒前佛桑寶相，諸花叢萃可愛。由半帆竝而南，緣岸皆荔支龍目。池之南為懷古樓，高明洞豁，其下為離六堂，水木清華，房廊幽窈，如吳越間寺。有拈花釋迦像，飾以黃金、珠玉、碑磬、瑪瑙、琴瑟之屬，莊嚴妙好，又有銅像雲是唐鑄也。(S. Wang 1968, p. 6)

After obtaining alms from Dang Trong and returning to Canton, Dashan proceeded to construct Mahavira Hall (大雄寶殿) and the Scripture Repository (經閣 or 藏龍閣). The records indicate that Dashan constructed the temple garden before concentrating financial resources on the main temple structures (Dashan 2007, p. 441; Jiang 1999, p. 21). According to the map from the late Qing Dynasty (Figure 1), Changshou Monastery was oriented westward while being situated to the east. The garden was located on the northwest side, with the pond’s water source originating from Shang Xiguan Creek.



**Figure 1.** Vrooman, D., Cartographer. *Map of the city and entire suburbs of Canton*. [Canton: Rev. D. Vrooman, Canton City: For sale by Lee Mun Une, Painter, 1855] Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2019588123/> (accessed on 30 November 2022). (The black text in the figure was added by the author).

Huang Deng 黃登, in *Poetry Selection of the Five Dynasties in Lingnan (Lingnan Wuchao Shixuan 嶺南五朝詩選)*, expressed that the Changshou Temple garden provided a suitable place for discussing Buddhist scriptures and engaging in meditation.

*Ponds and flower gardens envelop, while tidal waters flow around.*

*In the leisure of meditation, poetic inspiration is found.*

*Monks convene on platforms, engrossed in discourse,*

*Not a seat vacant throughout the course.*

*Occasionally, lofty themes are raised,*

*Enlightening minds, words flowing like cascading streams,*

*Each word laden with intent and significance.*

*Listeners silently resonate, no need for forceful shouts to seize opportunities.*

池塘花圃，潮水周通，禪余放參，興到吟和。諸上台公暇，每聆講論，日無虛座。間或舉揚宗旨，啟迪諸方，下筆如流，千言立就。凡有聞見，莫不默然融洽，不區區棒喝機緣。(Jiang 1999, p. 20)

If Wang Shizhen's description leans more towards a straightforward presentation depicting the basic layout of the Changshou Monastery Garden, then Huang Deng's approach implies a greater emphasis on the timing in the context of the garden scenery and the Caodong School. The phrase "forceful shouts to seize opportunities" (*banghe jiyuan 棒喝機緣*) echoes the relatively more aggressive enlightenment methods associated with the Linji School (臨濟宗), revealing the gentle and articulated practices of the Caodong School. Insights were triggered by the garden scenery, and poetry played a crucial role in this school.

### 2.3. Interprets Chan through the I Ching: The Caodong Concept in Garden Making

The Caodong School stands out within Buddhist theoretical frameworks for its distinctive approach: it prioritizes interpreting Chan teachings independent of extensive reliance on written scriptures. Instead, it derives inspiration from the *I Ching* 易經, a classic in

both Taoist and Confucian traditions, to elaborate on Chan's philosophy. It is considered the most philosophically inclined among the various Chan traditions. "Non-established written teachings" (*buli wenzi* 不立文字) refers to the avoidance or minimize the use of concepts derived from Buddhist scriptures translated from Indian languages when discussing Chan principles and experiences. In this context, how did Dashan, adhering to the principle of *buli wenzi*, evoke people's attention to the teachings of Chan Buddhism through spatial design?

Throughout its history, successive generations of Chan masters in the Caodong School have followed the practice of *yiyi shichan*, establishing a unique and unified approach to Chan teachings based on the *I Ching* (J. Chen 2015). Dashan inherited this abovementioned tradition and method. In the preface of *Liliu Tang Ji* 離六堂集, he elucidated *chongli liuyao*, *pianzheng huihu*, and "venerating fire as the essence" (*yihuo weizong* 以火為宗).

*Six represents water, from water to attain fire, from the moon to attain the sun, from the mind to attain nature. Therefore, the Dao esteems li. Our former master consistently elucidated the principle of venerating fire, as in the sky it is represented by the sun, in individuals it manifests as nature, and in hexagrams it symbolizes li.*

蓋六為水，離水所以得火，離月所以得日，離心所以得性，故道貴乎離。先師浪杖人常著論尊火為宗，火在天為日，在人為性，在掛為離。(Dashan 2007, p. 19)

Dashan built "Liliu Hall" to the south of the Half-Sail Pond, absorbing the concept of *liliu* (離六) from the *I Ching*, where one and six represent water. In the teachings of the Caodong School, *liliu* symbolizes fire, and *li* implies "intense brightness". Additionally, the hexagram *li* (離卦) in *I Ching* is associated with the south. The *pianzheng* emphasizes the positional relationship between "appearance" and "essence", embodying the realm of "harmonious integration of principle and matter" (理事圓通的境界). At the same time, *huihu* focuses on the mutual dependence and interaction between appearance and essence, grasping the essence without overlooking the differences between phenomena (Wu 1999; J. Chen 2015). The Half-Sail Pond (related to water) is located to the north (*pian* 偏), and the Liliu Hall (related to fire) is situated to the south (*zheng* 正), thus spatially realizing the intention of *pianzheng*.

From Chen Gongyin's 陳恭尹 (1631–1700) poem, one may envision the imagery of Liliu Hall: "Twelve railings, fashioned in jade hue, encircle as water winds its course. Mimicking an ascent to a pavilion amidst sea mirages of clouds and delving into pearls beneath the dragon's jaw" (十二欄杆砌碧瑜，四周流水入縈紆。似登海蜃煙中閣，同探驪龍頷下珠) (G. Chen 2015, p. 492). The first line suggests that Liliu Hall was likely surrounded by the waters of the Half-Sail Pond, indicating a *huihu* concept. The second line leads to the upper level of the Hall, referred to as the Tower of Nostalgia, a place for contemplating ancient times. The hall and the pond occupied the most important positions in the garden, serving as spatial manifestations of Dashan's comprehension of the Caodong School.

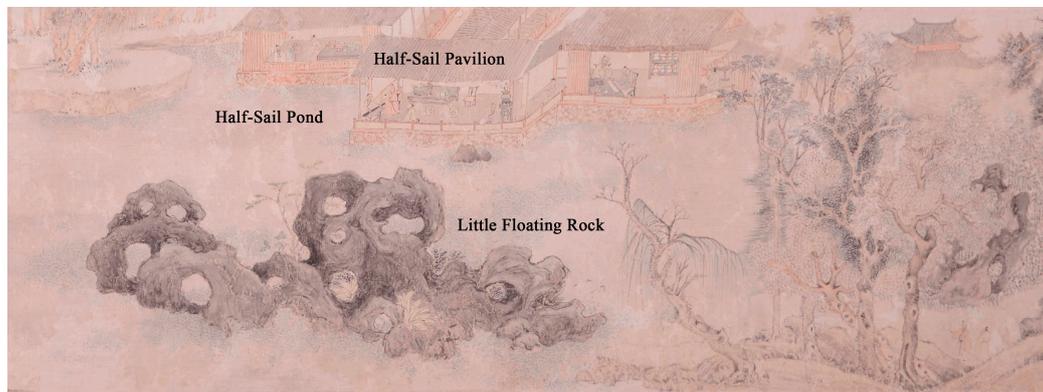
### 3. The Sensory Garden: Manifestation and Significance of Tides

#### 3.1. Metaphorically Represents the Sea: Half-Sail and Echoing Spring

According to Wang Shizhen's records, situated to the west of the temple lay a sizable pond. Its waters streamed through a stone water outlet, intricately linked to Shang Xiguan Creek, ultimately converging with a tidal river—the Pearl River (F. Huang 1994, p. 562). The water level in the pond experienced daily fluctuations due to the ebb and flow of the tides. In the northern part of the pond, there was a structure known as the "Half-Sail Pavilion". Despite being referred to as a pavilion, it comprised a hall-type structure intended for receptions, residence, and leisure, serving as the focal point within the temple garden. The adjacent pond was dubbed "Half-Sail Pond" in reference to this significant edifice.

In 1815, many years after Dashan's passing, during the Double Third Festival (上巳節), the Office of the Governor-General of Guangzhou Zeng Yu 曾燠 (1759–1831) and eleven others gathered at the Half-Sail Pavilion in Changshou Monastery for a purification ceremony (Figure 2). The main structures in the painting are arranged in the shape of the

Chinese character “品”. At the focal point stands the main building, where one person is playing the Guqin while two others listen attentively nearby. Another person leans against the railing, gazing at the artificial rocks in the pond. According to the inscription, this building is none other than the Half-Sail Pavilion:



**Figure 2.** The Half-Sail Pavilion and the Little Floating Rock, the Ritual Cleansing at the Rear Pond of Changshou Temple 曾賓谷先生長壽寺後池修禊圖 (Jiang 2007). (The black text in the figure was added by the author).

*Half-Sail Pavilion rises high, eager to take flight with the wind (to the north of the pond there is house called Half-Sail). Stacked peaks standing aloof, the tide recedes and settles again (there is a Little Floating Rock in the pond) ... Guests assemble, tapping the gate of Chan, wild delicacies and fragrant wines arranged, seated beneath the sail, as if navigating a lofty boat, soaring over vast seas to face the Three Sacred Mountains. Flowers and trees intermingle, their reflections shimmer in the mirror; suddenly, wind and rain arrive, the body floats in the sky ... Amidst the boundless bitter sea, what awaits beyond? With the merciful ferry sailing steadfastly, the Half-Sail beckons.*

半帆高展，風動欲飛（池北有屋曰半帆）。疊嶂孤浮，潮迴仍定（池中有小浮山）。……乃會賓履，敏禪關，芳尊野蕪，列座於帆下，宛然駕樓船，凌渤澥而對三神山焉。花樹相錯，影搖鏡中；風雨忽來，身浮天上。……苦海蒼茫，何為彼岸？慈航安穩，乃有半帆。（Jiang 2007）

Using the Half-Sail as a symbol of a merciful ferry, with the tides representing the sea and the Little Floating Rock symbolizing the sacred mountains, these served as the transitional points from the garden scenery to the traditional Three Sacred Mountains [Penglai 蓬萊, Fangzhang 方丈, Yingzhou 瀛洲]. Finally, this was sublimated into the Buddhist ideology of a merciful ferry breaking free from the sea of suffering.

*Wonderful sound, Perceiver of the World's Sounds,*

*Brahma sound, the sea tide sound—*

*they surpass those sounds of the world;*

*therefore you should constantly think on them*

*from thought to thought never entertaining doubt!*

妙音觀世音，梵音海潮音，勝彼世間音，是故須常念，念念勿生疑。

This passage from the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* (妙法蓮華經) (Watson 2002, p. 347) describes the blessings of Bodhisattva Guanyin, Perceiver of the World's Sounds. As the sea tide arrives punctually, and its sound is grand, its sound metaphorizes the timely and opportune preaching of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. The sea and mountains are essential components of the cosmic world centered around Mount Sumeru (須彌山), forming the overall pattern of “nine mountains, eight seas, and four major continents (九山八海四大洲)”. In the Longer Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra (無量壽經), the Pure Land world (淨土世界) was described

as having seven jewel ponds (七寶池) and eight meritorious waters (八功德水). Water symbolizes the sea, and the water in the ponds constantly changes according to the mental state of those who enter (Bodhisattvas and monastic disciples who comprehend the teachings by hearing them 聲聞眾). There is a legend that under the protection of Guanyin (觀音, in Chinese, the name “Guanyin” means “Observing the Sounds” or “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds”), the incoming tidewater can be transformed into the Brahma’s voice and vanishes.

The sound of sea tides in Buddhism symbolizes the timely propagation of the Dharma. Above the water outlet of the pond in Changshou Monastery was a gallery called “Echoing Spring” (*xiangquan* 響泉). From Chen Gongyin’s poem, it is evident that the changes in tidal water levels in the pond of Changshou Monastery were metaphorically extended to sea tides, and the sounds that they evoked were appreciated by the literati and harmonized with the Guqin melodies of the literati gatherings:

*The sea tides contend in their comings and goings, singing ceaselessly even when not stirred.*

*Perched upon a modest couch through the night, the sound of the waterfall reverberates in the secluded mountains.*

*Attuned to the distant whispers of nature, weaving them into a pristine melody upon the jade Guqin.*

*It’s not about attaining perfection akin to Master Chenglian; who could discern the stirring of my soul?*

海潮爭出入，不激亦長鳴。小榻坐終夜，空山聞瀑聲。聽從天籟遠，譜作玉琴音。不是成連子，安知移我情？(G. Chen 2015, p. 539)

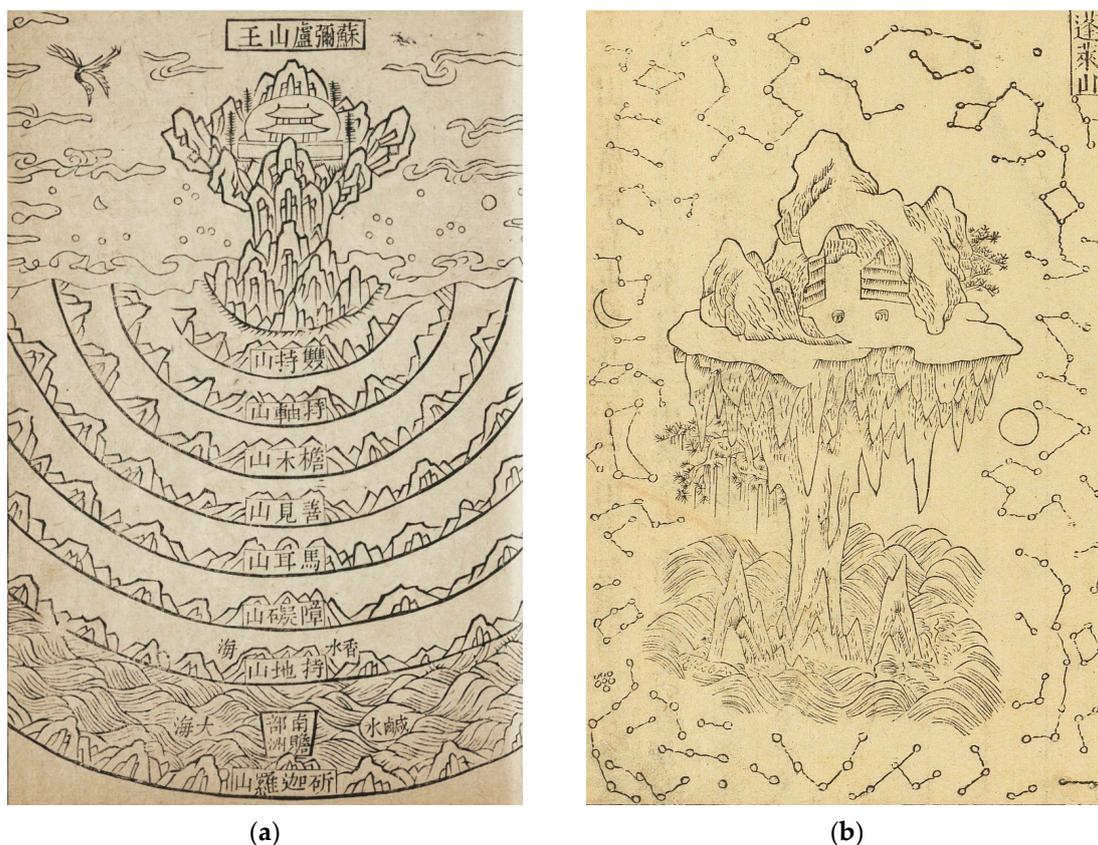
The character “Chenglian zi” (成連子) in the poem is inspired by the well-known literary allusion “Chenglian into the Sea” (成連入海). Master Chenglian 成連 is the teacher of Boya 伯牙, a famous qin player and musician from the Spring and Autumn period. Master Chenglian once led Boya to the mythical Penglai in the Eastern Sea and left him alone on the island. Boya, stretching his neck to gaze into the distance, found that there was no one on the island, only hearing the sound of the surging sea tide and feeling the mysterious silence of the mountains and forests. In the end, he attained enlightenment through the sounds of the tide.

Chen Gongyin, using the sea tide sounds from Changshou Monastery and drawing inspiration from the literary classic, implied that he had already attained the “enlightenment” of literati—a sense of empathy and sunyata, akin to Boya.

Moreover, in the Ming Dynasty, Penglai emerged as a transcendent realm, breaking free from the Three Sacred Mountains, symbolizing a mystical paradise accessible only by crossing the boundless sea by boat. In many instances, Penglai often appeared in the writings of literati as a mountain in the sea, visible but unreachable.

### 3.2. Ideal World: Little Floating Rock in the Tidal Water

During the Ming Wanli era, the Chan master Renchao 仁潮 visualized the Buddhist cosmology in *An Illustrated [Guide to] the Established Order of the Dharma-realm (Fa Jie An Li Tu 法界安立圖)*. The book depicts “Four Great Continents” (四大部洲) and “Nine Mountains and Eight Seas” (九山八海), the structure of the Dharma Realm, a concept in Mahayana Buddhism that classifies the entire cosmos. The diagrams illustrate the arrangement of realms, mountains, and seas within this Buddhist cosmology. Mount Sumeru (須彌山 or 蘇彌盧山) is situated in the center, surrounded by the Fragrance Ocean (香水海), with the outermost being the Great Iron Enclosing Mountain (鐵圍山 or 斫迦羅山) (as shown in Figure 3a). The 16th-century Chinese encyclopedia (*Sancai Tuhui* 三才圖會) shows how literati in the late Ming era perceived Penglai (Figure 3b). In this image, Mount Penglai is depicted as a mountain rising from the sea, with a larger top and a smaller bottom. Mount Sumeru and Mount Penglai share the image of the sacred mountain from ancient Chinese legends. The *Fa Jie An Li Tu* reflects the Sinicization of Buddhist cosmology in the late Ming era, integrating it with traditional Chinese geography and mythology (see Fang 1997).



**Figure 3.** (a) Illustration of Nine Mountains and Eight Seas 九山八海圖 in *Fa Jie An Li Tu* 法界安立圖 (Renchao 1607, xia.10a). (b) Illustration of Mount Penglai 蓬萊山圖 in *Sancai Tuhui* 三才圖會 (Wang and Wang 1609, dili8.17a).

In the Half-Sail Pond of Changshou Monastery, one can observe Dashan’s idealization through the arrangement of the temple garden. By combining local characteristics and traditional Chinese mythology with the *sanjiao huitong* philosophy of the Caodong School, a unique Buddhist world is presented. This intention was gradually realized through the transformation of the garden scenery.

During the early days of Dashan living in Changshou Monastery, although the west pond was influenced by the tides, there was no mention of the “Little Floating Rock”. In the poem *Xi Shuichi Xiaoque Luo Cheng* (西水池小却落成), the reference to “the sound of tides” (*chaoyin* 潮音) is present, but the poem still focuses on planting and pastoral imagery, reflecting a strong yearning for a secluded life, characteristic of the literati who sought refuge (Dashan 2007, p. 127). At this point, despite the pond being affected by the tides and featuring the resonant sounds of the tide in the context of the temple, it had not yet formed a direct connection with the ideal cosmological diagram in Buddhism. The sea symbolism was more commonly associated with the act of climbing the Tower of Nostalgia for a panoramic view of Pearl River. Only a single strange rock was placed near the side pond of the Liliu Hall, and observers still interpreted this “strange rock” (*qishi* 奇石) based on traditional criteria, such as its color, texture, and patterns<sup>5</sup> (for aesthetic discussions on strange rocks, see Yang 2003, pp. 91–137). The full integration of tidal elements and the significance of the Little Floating Rock into the religious and cosmological context seemed to be a later development in the evolution of the temple garden’s scenery.

After receiving offerings from Lord Nguyeu and returning to Canton, Dashan reorganized the temple garden, dredged the west pond (Half-Sail Pond), and gained new insight into the garden landscape and Buddhist teachings. Apart from financial considerations, this approach was likely influenced by his maritime experiences, the Dang Trong geo-

graphical environment he encountered, and the tidal temple gardens he visited. In his *Overseas Records (Haiwai Jishi 海外紀事)*, he wrote: “The land of Dang Trong is one continuous mountain range rising and falling amidst the vast ocean ... The temple is located on flat land, surrounded by water on three sides, with mudflats just a hundred steps outside the gate ... There is a square pond surrounding the temple, which rise and fall with the tides” (蓋大越國土，總是一山曲折起伏於巨洋中。……寺處平壤，三面臨水，門外百步即淤塗。……有方池環繞殿外，與潮汐消長) (Dashan 2007, pp. 408–9). Moreover, he took great pride in his Dharma propagation experiences and his status as the “National Teacher” appointed by Lord Nguye.

He took advantage of tides (*chenchao 趁潮*) to transport Ying rocks (*yingshi 英石*). These stones originated in Yingde 英德 and had a rough texture. They were often used in Lingnan gardens for rockery making, and they were stacked to make the Little Floating Rock in the middle of the pond, facing the Half-Sail Pavilion.

*Cracked and porous Ying rocks, carried by the shifting tide. Peaks and ridges acquired effortlessly, flowers and trees planted in their rightful seasons. Climbing the winding path to the summit, lotus blossoms unfold before me. The aged monk, unable to articulate, simply nods in silent acknowledgment.*

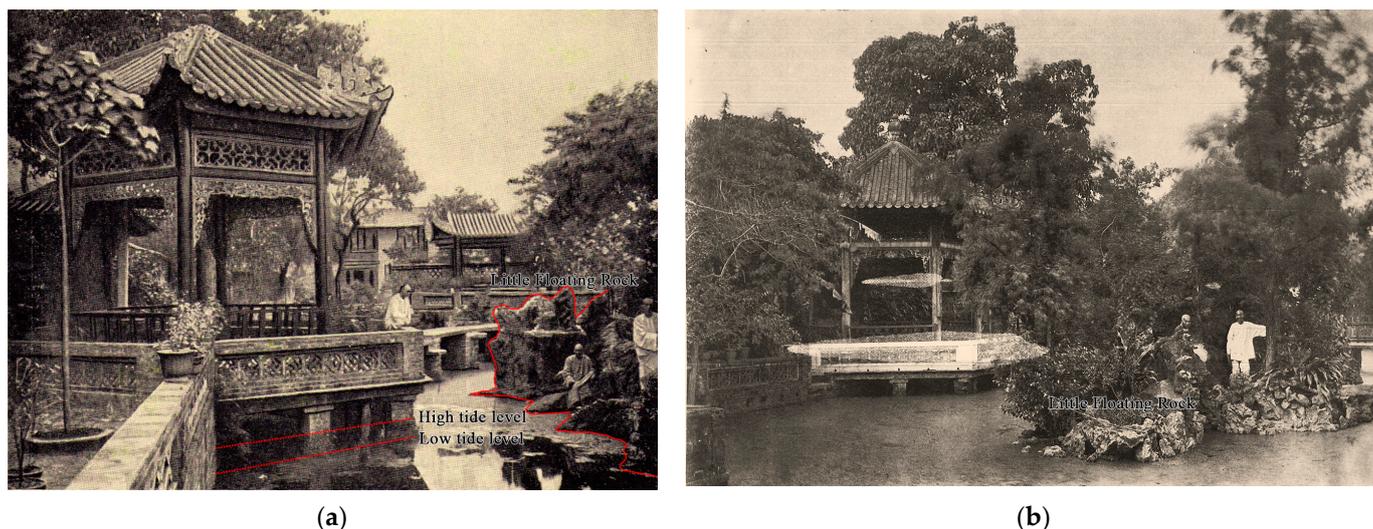
漏透英州石，乘潮運載回。峰巒隨意得，花木逐時栽。蹬道盤空上，蓮花靚面開。老僧無法說，孤負點頭來。 (Dashan 2007, p. 316)

Dashan skillfully used the tidal changes in the pond to metaphorically represent the ideal Buddhist cosmology of the sea and the mountain. Elements such as the Great Wilderness 大荒 and Floating Mountain from the piece of classical Chinese literature the *Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shanhai Jing 山海經)* were transformed into Dashan’s solemn Buddhist realm through the imagery of the Half-Sail Pond and the Little Floating Rock. Furthermore, to the northeast of Canton lies Luofu Mountain (羅浮山), famous as a Taoist mountain, which Dashan once visited. Legend has it that Fu Mountain (浮山) was originally a part of Penglai, later drifting across the sea to merge with Luoshan (羅山). In the *Little Floating Rock Ode (Xiao Fushan Fu 小浮山賦)* from the *Recent Notes of the Liliu Hall (Liliu Tang Jingao 離六堂近稿)*, Dashan described his contemplation of constructing the Little Floating Rock in the Half-Sail Pond, which was inspired by the traces of the great Floating Mountain (大浮山), during his leisure due to illness. He expressed the idea that beyond the Great Wilderness (*dahuang 大荒*), there existed the Floating Mountain, albeit as a remote and unreachable destination. He emphasized the significance of tides in shaping the ideal space of the sea and the Floating Mountain.

In the Little Floating Rock Ode, Dashan described the key elements for realizing his intent: “mountain standing on water” (山立水上), “water connecting with the Pearl River” (水通珠江), and “tides surrounding” (潮汐環繞). First, the idea of a “mountain standing on water” laid the foundation for inspiring the imagination of a sea mountain. Second, “water connecting with the Pearl River” and “tides surrounding” were crucial means of the illusion of a sea in the pond. In the ode, Dashan described the Half-Sail Pond as “spacious and clear, with shimmering waves and a vast expanse;” yet, the historical map indicates that the pond was not very large. The rise and fall of the tides provided conditions for imagining a sea, ultimately creating an image of “stacked mountains and layered rocks, akin to floating islands adrift in a boundless ocean” (爰壘山與疊石，像浮島乎巨洋) (Dashan 2007, pp. 301–3).

Photographs of the Changshou Monastery Garden taken in the 1870s show this scene. On the left side of Figure 4a, a hexagonal pavilion with an upturned eave (which may be the Pavilion for Moon-Waiting and Tide-Listening 待月聽潮亭) is shown, half-elevated above the water and half-connected to the pond shore. A zigzag stone bridge extends from the pavilion’s side to the artificial rock. On the right side of the photograph is the “Little Floating Rock” made of Ying rocks. The tide is receding, revealing the muddy bottom of the pond. The brick and stone foundations of the Little Floating Rock are fully visible. The depth of the pond is about three feet. From the watermarks, it can be inferred that the tide

risers and falls by less than two feet. At this moment, the Little Floating Rock appears to be on land. In the photograph, one person is standing outside the pavilion, while two others are seated on the stones around the artificial rock and by the edge of the pond. Figure 4b illustrates the landscape during high tide from another perspective, showing that the Little Floating Rock has transformed into a small island. The fluctuation of the water levels in the pond due to tidal effects metaphorically represents the sea in the Buddhist cosmological world. When the tide recedes, it symbolizes a mountain, while it becomes a shoal or island as the tide rises, and the stacked rocks become a Floating Mountain.



**Figure 4.** (a) The Half-Sail Pond at low tide; provided by Zhou Junrong 周俊榮. (b) The Half-Sail Pond at high tide (Worswick 1982). (The black text and red lines in the figure were added by the author).

#### 4. The Concept of Chan Poetry of the Caodong School and the Literati Gathering in the Garden

##### 4.1. The Concept of “Understanding Chan through Improvised Poems” in Chan Poetry and Its Integration with the Garden Scene

The Chan tradition emphasizes the concept of *buli wenzi*. Chan masters often find themselves in a dilemma: they cannot speak directly, yet they cannot remain silent. Therefore, they resort to expedient means of using certain things or objects as inducements for “skillful guidance” (*fangbian kaishi* 方便開示).

On the other hand, the secularization of the monastic system in Ming and Qing Chan Buddhism, with abbots engaging in diverse studies outside of Buddhism, led to a gradual transformation. There emerged a phenomenon in which “through the melodies of the Guqin and verses, the resonance of Buddhist activities is evoked. Brushwork and painting become the subjects of Chan discourse, where worldly learning transcends worldly phenomena” (以琴韻詩詞為聲音佛事，以臨書描畫為禪關話頭，雖世間學，即超世間法也) (R. Wang 2019, pp. 79–80). Chan Buddhism, through direct intuitive contemplation of natural scenery itself, attains the realization of the true nature of the universe (D. Wang 2014, pp. 231–32).

Building upon Caodong tradition’s emphasis on *chongli liuyao* and *pianzheng huihu*, Dashan further developed the concept of *jishi yanchan* (Dang 2019). He advocated poetry as the primary medium and asserted, “Through poetry, one may delve into the depths of Chan, departing from poetry to expound on Chan, one loses the essence of poetry, and even more so, the essence of Chan becomes elusive!” (在詩言詩，便可即詩言禪；離詩言禪，不可以言詩，愈不可以言禪而言詩耶！) (Dashan 2007, p. 381).

In the Changshou Monastery Garden, Chan’s enlightenment was realized through the garden scene, a theme prominently featured in the poems of Dashan and the literati gatherings. An example is Dashan’s *Planting Trees Ode* (*Zhongshu Xing* 種樹行):

*Changshou, graced by water nourishing the western pond,  
A terrace beside it, known as Strolling under the Moon.  
Encircled by walls, devoid of stairs,  
A narrow path meanders through the woods.  
Halting around half a mu,<sup>6</sup>  
Elevated yet unpretentious, humble yet unsullied.*

...

*Who truly understands this Samadhi?*

*I do not rush into worldly matters, nor do I heed the urgency of others.*

長壽有水注西池，池邊築台名月步。四圍壁立無階梯，林下微通一線路。約略方停半畝間，高不至亢下不污。……此中三昧誰得知？我不從人急世務。

(Dashan 2007, p. 310)

Evidently, Dashan interpreted Buddhist teachings through the concept of “entering the world” (*rushi* 入世), gaining insights into the Dharma through the process of garden making, daily life in the garden, and interactions with the literati during gatherings. In the Changshou Monastery Garden, the scenery was commonly associated with Buddhism, such as the bamboo grove, Bamboo Waves Study, and Bodhi trees. The bamboo symbolized the site where Gautama Buddha preached and propagated Buddhism, and the Bodhi trees signified enlightenment. The garden also featured a Shakyamuni statue, a Buddhist allusion to picking up a flower and smiling (*nianhua yixiao*, 拈花一笑). According to the *Compendium of the Five Lamps* (*Wudeng Huiyuan* 五燈會元), Shakyamuni Buddha held up a flower that only Mahākāśyapa understood and responded with a subtle smile. In response, the Buddha passed on the Dharma to him. Here, the Buddha skillfully used the flower and the action of holding it to achieve *fangbian kaishi*.

What made the Changshou Monastery Garden unique was its utilization of the tidal scenery, connecting it to the Buddhist concept of the sound of the tide. As mentioned above, the Gallery of the Echoing Spring was associated with the sounds of the tide, and poet Xu Qiu 徐鉉 (1636–1709) expressed this connection with his poem, “Fragrant streams enter gently, departing clouds leave no trace behind. In leisure, leaning on the rail, I drift and grasp the essence of Chan’s sound” (香浦細泉入，雲歸無處尋。閒來時倚仗，流之悟禪音) (Jiang 1999, p. 215). This poem links the insights gained from the flowing water scenery with the sound of Chan Buddhism.

#### 4.2. From the Literati Gatherings amongst the Tide Sounds to the Construction of the Pavilion for Moon-Waiting and Tide-Listening 待月聽潮亭

For the literati who lived in Canton for a long time, the sounds of tides and oars signified the beginning of literati gatherings in the garden. Xie Lansheng’s diary of literati gatherings recorded the scenes of the incoming and outgoing water in the wide creek (Xie 2014). Through numerous gatherings spanning over a hundred years, the connection between “tides” and “Chan” in the Changshou Monastery Garden was continuously reinforced. The “tides” served as a common theme in these gatherings, facilitating connections between contemporary individuals and their predecessors, bridging the worlds of literati and monks.

The continuity of the local literati regarding this theme lies in establishing a connection between them and their predecessors, prominent figures of the past. While the temple monks utilized the theme to maintain their relational network, they consistently associated the regular changes of tides with the causal conditions in Buddhist teachings. The monk Zaoan 早安 reflected this connection: “Being and extinction, they are mirrored in the pond’s ebb and flow. Morning tides naturally come, and evening tides naturally go” (因生因滅，可以池喻。朝潮自來，夕汐自去) (Jiang 2007).

In the Changshou Monastery Garden, there were three significant literati gatherings.

In the spring of 1685, Dashan gathered with Wang Shizhen and others in the Tower of Nostalgia for a literary gathering. Wang Shizhen left the following couplet: “The red mansion mirrors the midnight sea under the moonlight, while the stone water outlet links with the river, encountering dual tidal currents” (F. Huang 1994, p. 562).

In the Double Third Festival of 1815, Zeng Yu organized a purification ceremony with 11 people at Half-Sail Pond, and this scene was depicted in a painting of a purification ceremony (Figure 3). In this gathering, tides and the Half-Sail Pavilion were mentioned by most participants.

In the Double Third Festival of 1860, Luo Tianchi 羅天池 (1805–1866) gathered six people, and in August, Li Changrong 李長榮 gathered several scholars for a purification ceremony at the Half-Sail Pavilion (Figure 5). Based on the records from the *Gengshen Xiuxi Ji* (庚申修禊集), these two gatherings at the Changshou Monastery Garden were part of several literati gatherings held in various gardens (C. Li 2015, pp. 427–72). At this time, the Pavilion for Moon-Waiting and Tide-Listening (待月听潮亭) was built in the Changshou Monastery Garden.

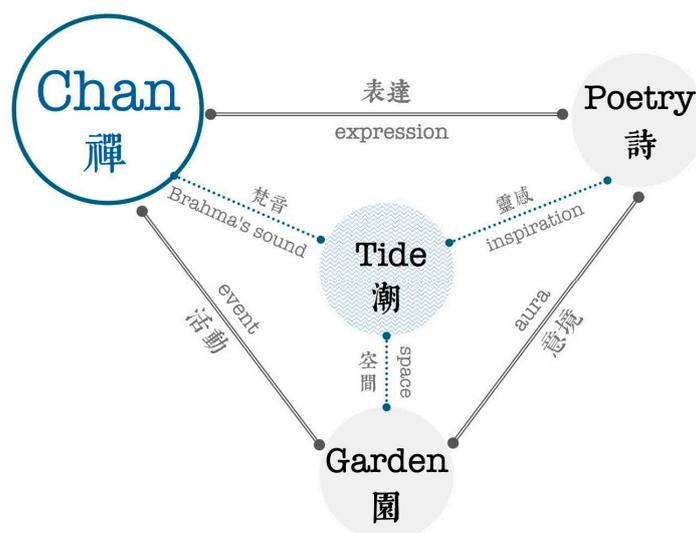
Tides, initially just a natural phenomenon, took on new significance when they were introduced into the garden by Master Dashan to shape the garden scenery. As monks and literati continued their gatherings, the religious and historical meanings of the tides were consistently being discovered and reinforced. In response, a new structure was built, and new garden scenery emerged.

## 5. Conclusions

During the transition from the Ming to the Qing Dynasty, there was widespread interaction between Chan monks and the literati. Meanwhile, the secularization of Chan Buddhism facilitated the construction of Chan temple gardens. The historical records of Master Dashan’s management of the Changshou Monastery Garden illustrate that Chan Buddhist concepts and life experiences influenced the cultivation of essential garden scenery.

Chan Buddhism not only influenced the artistic conception of garden-making but also shaped the spatial layout of temple gardens through its specific religious beliefs. Dashan chose spaces and perceptual mediums that could resonate with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, such as the Floating Mountain and tides, connecting the ideal Buddhist world, traditional Chinese sacred mountains, and the general understanding of the contemporary literati. Dashan organized the garden space based on the aforementioned connections, expressing the ideals of the Caodong School through the depiction of garden aesthetics in poetry. Successors inherited the tradition established by Dashan. Through poems composed at literati gatherings, they continuously reinforced the imagery linking the garden and Buddhist themes. This practice solidified their connection with their predecessors through the shared experience of the garden and its ever-changing tidal scenery.

In summary, it can be observed that tides served as a medium connecting Chan, garden, and poetry (Figure 5). Tides were able to alter the garden scenery and trigger garden imagination, while the garden itself provided a space to accommodate the tides. Tides inspired poetic composition, simultaneously pointing to the transcendent sounds within Chan Buddhism. Through the medium of tides, poetry expressed the ideals of Chan, with Chan forming the core of garden poetry. The garden offered a place for the enlightenment of Chan Buddhism, facilitated by gatherings of literati within the garden, leading to the promotion and dissemination of Chan principles. The garden provided an aura for poetry creation, and poetry injected Chan into the garden scenery.



**Figure 5.** The connections between the tide, garden, Chan, and poetry. Drawn by the author.

These findings cast new light on the “secularization” within Chinese Chan Buddhist temple gardens. Furthermore, they encourage further exploration of the relationship between the creation of garden spaces in East Asian temples and Buddhism in the context of missionary activities and networks.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Hualin Monastery (華林寺, “Temple of the Five Hundred Gods” in Western accounts), Changshou Monastery, and Haichuang Monastery (海幢寺, “Honam Temple” in Western accounts) were located outside the Canton city and were well-known to Westerners during the late Qing period. In contrast, Guangxiao Monastery (光孝寺, literal meaning Bright Filial Piety Temple) and Dafo Monastery were both located within the Canton city, which was surrounded by walls.
- <sup>2</sup> Juelang Daosheng, a native of Pucheng in Fujian, is commonly known as Zhang Lian 張璉, with the courtesy name Juelang 覺浪 and the alias Zhangren 杖人. Daosheng was highly accomplished in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, and his expertise extended into these three major teachings. In his Chan practice, he emphasized a straightforward approach to the Dharma and sought to reconcile the teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. He demonstrated a strong concern for the interplay between politics and religion.
- <sup>3</sup> Qu Dajun was a Ming loyalist from the Lingnan region and a renowned poet. He briefly became a monk, claiming to be a disciple of Juelang Daosheng, but later returned to secular life. Throughout his life, he devoted himself to the cause of opposing the Qing Dynasty and restoring the Ming Dynasty.
- <sup>4</sup> Qu Dajun, Liang Peilan, and Chen Gongyin 陳恭尹 are collectively known as the Three Masters of Lingnan (嶺南三大家).

- <sup>5</sup> In *Fen Gan Yu Hua* (分甘餘話), Wang Shizhen said: “Its color is yellow like steamed chestnuts, lustrous like honeyed amber, with slight wrinkles, and its height is about three or four feet. Truly a strange object (真奇物也)”.
- <sup>6</sup> Mu, a traditional Chinese unit of land area, is roughly equivalent to 667 square meters. In poetry and literature, half a mu (banmu) often serves as a metaphor for a small piece of land.

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