Zhao Liewen’s Gardening Practices and Activities as Reflected in His Diary Nengjingju Riji – A Secondary Publication

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ABSTRACT

Zhao Liewen, a late-Qing-dynasty scholar, wrote more than a million characters in his diary titled Nengjingju Riji. Through analysis of Zhao’s text, the author of this paper reconstructs the daily life in the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) and brings light to the site selection, house construction, garden planning, as well as the ‘elegant gatherings’ of literati that took place in the garden. More specifically, in the 7th and 8th lunar months of 1865, the 4th reign year of Emperor Tongzhi, Zhao traveled to the south of the Yangtze River. After considering the prices of houses and fengshui of the sites in different cities, he finally chose a place in Jiuanwei, Changshu. As his family was growing, the house and garden became more clearly divided according to their functions. Especially, the library space of Tiangfanglou, and the garden area along the Tranquil Stream (Jing Xi) were rebuilt on several occasions. Zhao often invited relatives and friends to gather here. The creative work inspired by his life at the Tranquil Garden was modeled after the Wangchuan poetry collection of Tang poets and born from the gatherings held in the garden between 1876 and 1877, the 3rd and 4th reign years of Emperor Guangxu (r. 1875–1908).

Keywords: Jing Pu; siting and garden planning; Nengjingju Riji; elegant gatherings; Changshu Garden


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Zhao Liewen (1832‒1894), style name Huipu and pseudonym Nengjingushi, was from Yanghu, Jiangsu Province, China. The Chronicle of Mr. Zhao Huipu (Liewen) of Yanghu compiled by Mr. Chen Naiqian offers a glimpse into his life. His first dairy, titled The Diary of Falling Flowers and Spring Rain Nest (Luohua Chunyu Chao Riji), now stored in the Nanjing Library, documents his life between the 2nd year (1852) and the 6th year (1856) of the Xianfeng period. There were many wonders and anecdotes in his life, but they were easy to come and easy to go. Two years after he wrote his first diary, Zhao Liewen picked up his pen again and wrote his second diary, titled The Diary of Tranquil Living (Nengjingju Riji), spanning 32 years, demonstrating very real emotions and events, especially the spa information of his life. His first dairy, The Diary of Tranquil Living and his second diary, written by Zhao Liewen, now known as the West Village (Jing Pu) planned by Zhao Liewen, and the West Garden of Fuzzy Boundary (Xukuo yuan 虚廓园) are collectively referred to as “Zheng-Zhao Garden.” The diary written by Zhao Liewen might truthfully reconstruct the process of site selection, house purchase, and garden construction, thus offering a detailed understanding of the elegant gatherings of literati that took place in the garden in the late Qing dynasty (1644‒1911).

1. SITE SELECTION
1.1 Choosing a site in the west of Changshu city
The process of site selection requires consideration of many factors. It is both complicated and coincident. Zhao Liewen had been working for Zeng Guofan and his salary was paid by Zeng Guofan. In the summer of the 4th reign year (1865) of Emperor Tongzhi, Zhao Liewen set out from Changzhou and went alone to various places in Jiangnan to select a site for building his house and garden. The Fuyuan Garden Palace Treasure Book (Fuyuampu Gongbaoshu) documents that he travelled east for site selection: “Since July, I have traveled east and reached my hometown first, but the town environment was damaged and not good enough for accommodation. So, I decided to head for the foot of the Yu Mountain for site selection and chose a remote area. At the end of August, I found one.”

Zhao Liewen went south by boat along the water trail to places such as Yangzhou, Wuxi, Mudu, Changshu, and so on. Together with his friends from various places, they examined over a dozen of sites inside and outside Xianju of Yangzhou, Suzhou, and Changshu. Most of the sites were given up due to dissatisfaction, unwillingness to rent, or the high price. After comprehensive considerations of price, location, fengshui, vista, and other factors, Zhao Liewen pondered between the empty lot of the West Village outside Changshu city, and the former site of Wu Garden in Jiuanwei south of the city. The West Village was recommended by his friends Feng Shizhi and Xue Anlin, which was located outside Changshu, with “a view of the mountain from near and afar.” And the Wu Garden’s former site was in Jiuanwei west of Changshu city. “It is near water and the West Mountain looks like a bird stretching its wings. There was no such beautiful scenery in the whole city. A vast parcel of wilderness has been found, with a big pond located in the south. An old man worked there. I tentatively asked him what the family name of the owner was. He said it was the former Wu Family’s Plant/Herb (or Medicinal) Garden.” Wu Baoshu, the owner of the private garden, wanted to put it on sale because his family was on the decline. What made Zhao Liewen to finally decide to select the former site of
Wu Garden was just that the Wu Garden owner gave a reply first. In November of the same year, in a Letter to Premier Zeng (Shang Zengxiang Shu). Zhao Liewen described his recent situation to Zeng Guofan and thanked him for the care and support that Zeng offered for his livelihood: “In hot July, I travelled east and soon negotiated a small house at the foot of the Yu Mountain. In September, I came back and fed the horse. Not until recently could I pack my luggage to travel. My livelihood was given consideration by Young Marshal Li, who promised to offer me a secure with twenty taels per month. I think that according to ancient philosophy, if it is a charity, it can be received and I would not be ashamed, so I didn’t refuse” [3].

### Table 1. The process of site selection by Zhao Liewen in the 4th reign year of Emperor Tongzhi (1865)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Documentation</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 27</td>
<td>Changshu inner city</td>
<td>There is a building with five bays. The owner said it was the former site of Jiangyun Building (Crimson Cloud Building). Actually, it is not.</td>
<td>Feng Shizhi, Yao Xiao’ou</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 28</td>
<td>Changshu inner city</td>
<td>Houses examined all the way could not be obtained due to the owners’ unwillingness to rent, to sell, or if you want to buy, the price is a thousand taels.</td>
<td>Feng Shizhi</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 29</td>
<td>West Village, Changshu</td>
<td>Feng Shizhi sent a message, saying that there is an empty lot with a view of the mountain in the West Village outside the city, which is suitable to build a house. There is a small rock cave at the tail of the Yu Mountain, a resort for the residence of monks.</td>
<td>Feng Shizhi, Zhang Yuesheng</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1</td>
<td>Old residence, Mudu town</td>
<td>The two owners of the house, Zhou Lan’an and Qian Jucun, both died. The paths and gate surrounding the house have all changed completely, and the building with rooms have been damaged and converted into three bungalows.</td>
<td>Xue Anlin</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 4</td>
<td>Suzhou</td>
<td>Not satisfied. The house is nice but too expensive. It is not suitable for a poor scholar, either.</td>
<td>Zi Qing, Ji Ruzhi</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 5</td>
<td>Suzhou</td>
<td>Need repairing. I think there are too fewer rooms. I don’t think it is suitable.</td>
<td>Ji Ruzhi</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 6</td>
<td>Yu Mountain, Changshu</td>
<td>I visited Xue Anlin and have returned from the Yu Mountain. I examined two sites, one for sale and another for rent. The one for sale has fewer rooms, but after repair and refurbishment, which although will be a lot of work, it will be livable for generations. The one for rent has more rooms and it is easily accessible and trouble-free, but it is not good in a long run. They are both priced at over one thousand strings of cash coins, not easy for me.</td>
<td>Xue Anlin</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 18</td>
<td>West Village, Changshu</td>
<td>With a beautiful view of the mountain that offers inspirational and exciting feelings.</td>
<td>Xue Anlin</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 20</td>
<td>Juwanwei, Changshu</td>
<td>It is near water and the West Mountain looks like a bird stretching its wings. There was no such beautiful scenery in the whole city.</td>
<td>Feng Shizhi</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 20</td>
<td>Dongting Mountain, East of Lake Tai</td>
<td>Xi Songquan sent a message, saying that in the Dongting Mountain, east of Lake Tai, where his home is located, one can buy a big house with one thousand strings of cash coins. I am also pleased with the mountain and water there. The location is out of the way, with counterproductive roads, so I give it up and want to choose the Yu Mountain. I have no choice but to do so.</td>
<td>Xi Songquan</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 21</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>Shaoxuan came too, saying that he inspected two sites yesterday and today, neither is suitable and both are too expensive. So, I called for a carpenter and discussed with him about the cost of building a house. Together, we looked at a Lu family residence with a big gate. It is beyond my ability to purchase it.</td>
<td>Shaoxuan, Feng Shizhi, Xue Anlin</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 23</td>
<td>Juwanwei, Changshu</td>
<td>Negotiated the price together. The lot and the pond occupy around 4 to 5 mu. He asked for 100 and dozens of strings of cash coins. I agreed on 100. Wu wanted to consult his nephew and then left. The owner Wu Baoshu sent a message, saying that his nephew agreed to sell it with 100.</td>
<td>Feng Shizhi, Wu Baoshu</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 24</td>
<td>Juwanwei, Changshu</td>
<td>I plan to ask Wu Baoshu to go to his site for measurement.</td>
<td>Feng Shizhi, Zhou Zirong, Feng Shixi</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.2 Purchase and Planning of the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu)
Zhao Liewen controlled his family’s finances and was directly responsible and involved in negotiation on the land purchase and land title deed transfer and other processes. Meanwhile, he directed the planning and design of the house and garden. “At noon, I arrived at Sanwan Changming Restaurant to meet Feng Shizhi, and the Wu Garden owner, Wu Baoshu, also arrived. We talked about the price. The site and the pond occupy around 4 to 5 mu. He asked for 100 and dozens of strings of cash coins. I agreed on 100. Wu wanted to consult his nephew and then left…” The owner Wu Baoshu sent a message, saying that after consultation, his nephew agreed to sell it at 100 strings[3]. After settling the price with the former owner, Zhao Liewen started to buy the property, negotiated with other sellers, and redeemed various pawn deeds. After signings, he set up drawings and attached deeds with the former owner and the agent, and then held a banquet to celebrate it. The owner of the Joyous Garden (Yi Yuan) in Suzhou, Gu Wenbin, documented the general conditions of the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu): “Moving to the west gate of Changshu, the site is an abandoned garden of some family. Huipu bought it at a low price, repaired the house and lived there”[3].

After the house transaction concluded, Zhao Liewen negotiated with craftsmen, made construction drawings and intended to establish a layout of five bays for the main building, with the upper floor for storing books and the lower floor for residence. There is also a bungalow of four bays for ancestor worship and guest reception. After planning his own house, Zhao Liewen wanted to build another four bungalows to form primary and secondary spaces for his four sisters. After drafting the initial scheme, the first thing to do was to acquire timber. Zhao Liewen also bought a Yan family house and used its wood for the construction of the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) to save money and effort, while keeping part of it for lease, because “it is located in the downtown, incomparable to empty and spacious lots, with easy access for coming late at night. This rare commodity is worth for living”[5]. After all assignments were well conducted, Zhao Liewen tasked his friend Xue Anlin with supervision of the construction, advising him to supervise the craftsmen to construct according to the drawings, and then gathered with his family. After arriving at his former residence, Zhao Liewen checked the furniture and had them sent to Changshu first, and then moved with his family and luggage to his new residence in Changshu by boat. The process lasted more than 5 months.

1.3 Consideration of fengshui
Zhao Liewen not only acted as a supervisor in the construction of his house and garden, but also directly involved in the construction of the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) through using the judgment of fengshui. He believed in and mastered the traditional fengshui theory had the capacity of identifying good fengshui books, and could conduct fengshui practices such as divination, prediction of luck, and site inspection. When the house and garden was renovated, Zhao Liewen invited the fengshui master Qin Yuanzhai to orient the former building complex and define the specific orientation for the new main gate, inner gates, screen wall, ancestral hall, study room, and the proposed north building. “Before dawn, the fengshui master Qin Yuanzhai arrived at the site to look for the correct orientation, and started to work at noon, first on the ancestral hall, then the inner halls, then the study room, and then the screen wall, all underwent groundbreaking and ramming”[3]. Then the columns were erected and the beams raised, and the craftsmen proceeded the work. Such things are usually found in Zhao Liewen’s diary. He not only invited the fengshui master to help survey the garden site, but also could strictly follow the fengshui instructions of good and bad omens when directing the construction of each part of the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) himself. His life trigram “Dui (Swamp) Hall Destiny” and the Tranquil Garden’s site trigram “Gen (Mountain) Residence” are the bases for judging the good and bad fortunes in various parts of the
Tranquil Garden, and for determining the orientation, size, and specific time of dismantling and construction of various building components and structures in the garden. It has reflected that the literati class of the late Qing dynasty attached much importance to fengshui.

2. CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOUSE AND GARDEN

2.1 “Liufeng Bridge,” the gateway to the water trail of Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu)

Zhao Liewen used the word “Jing” (meaning “Tranquil”) in his pseudonym “Nengjing” (meaning “Inner Tranquility”) to name his house and garden, which was very common for residential gardens in the south of the Yangtze River. On October 29 in the 3rd reign year (1877) of Emperor Guangshu, the two characters “Tranquil Garden” (静圃 Jing Pu) first appeared in his diary: “[We] returned to the Tranquil Garden [Jing Pu] together” [3], and it had been 12 years since Zhao Liewen moved to this place. On December 16 of the same year, as Wu Qunong finished his work, the Painting of the Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry Contest (xi beidou shi tu) Zhao Liewen documented it in literature, and for the first time he talked about the reason for naming the “Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu)”: “I previously used the pseudonym Inner Tranquility (Nengjing), so I name the stream Tranquil Stream and the residence I live the Tranquil Garden”[3].

There was a gateway to the water trail in the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu), which was located under the Liufeng Bridge. As the Tranquil Garden was near Jiuwanwei, with water flowing on its two sides, the gateway was the main entrance and exit for the Zhao family. On February 6 in the 6th reign year (1867) of Emperor Tongzhi, Zhao Liewen changed the water outlet of the Tranquil (Jing) Stream, he “moved the water outlet for irrigation to be near his residence”[3] and built a bridge on top of it. “I chose to build a house in this place in the year of Yichou (1865) and wanted to build the Liufeng Bridge on top of the water outlet at the time. Things took a turn for the better with time and my wish finally came true. Building this bridge was a tough task” [3]. It took three months for the bridge to be completed, and named “Liufeng Bridge.” It was a pond-mouth ring bridge located west of the residence. Zhao Liewen often entered the garden by boat through this gate: “Entering the Tranquil (Jing) Stream by boat saves money” [3] or reached the city gate by a small boat with his friends and relatives and then changed to a bigger boat to head to other cities. The bridge was a small north-south single-hole arch bridge with an arrow height of 3.5 m, a central width of 2.35 m, and 12 steps on both side ramps with a full length of 10.3 m. It was a segmental, longitudinally embedded-type bridge, with carved granite slates as the top face of the bridge, and the three characters“柳风桥” (Liufeng Bridge) inscribed in seal script on the stone tie of both sides. The bridge has stayed the same as when Zhao Liewen built it, which is very important for determining the property area of the site and relative spatial position of the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) [Figure 1].

![Figure 1. Liufeng Bridge. (a) Detail of Figure 9. (b, c) Pictures photographed by the author.](image-url)
2.2 Reconstruction and repair of the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu)

(1) Increase in the number of family members

In November of the 4th reign year (1865) of Emperor Tongzhi, Zhao Liewen moved to Changshu by boat with his whole family. At that time, there were totally 10 upper and lower rooms and 12 bungalows in the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu). Thereafter, Zhao Liewen went to Zeng Guofan and worked for him as an assistant till the 13th reign year (1874) of Emperor Tongzhi. The Tranquil Garden layout had not dramatically changed ever since and had maintained the main functions of living, storing books, receiving guests, worshipping ancestors, and so on. With an increase in the number of his concubines and children, the number of dwellings were added accordingly. In addition to his wife Nanyang Jun, Zhao Liewen [Figure 2] married four concubines in succession (one of them was sent back) and had six children [Figure 3]. After two of his sons having completed the coming-of-age ceremony, each of them had a spouse and produced offspring, “Nan Yangjun has been my wedded wife for 30 to 40 years now, and we have 12 children, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. Except our eldest son Zhao Shi who is travelling outside, the rest are all around us.” Servants for the kitchen and warehouse needed living rooms; siblings also needed support if they had no offspring to take care of them; rooms were also needed to accommodate others during gatherings and banquets.

![Figure 2. Zhao Liewen](image1.jpg)

Figure 2. Zhao Liewen [1]

(2) Changes in the pattern of the house and garden

Zhao Liewen’s garden construction objectives and realistic factors, as well as his subjective emotional expressions in his garden planning, reflect Ji Cheng’s (计成, 1582 – c. 1642) consideration that “Sites have different suitability” and “People have different suitability.” Due to topographical limitations, the whole Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) was divided into two parts of the house and the garden, with the house situated in northeast, and the garden in southwest.

In the early stage of completion, the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) was limited to meeting the basic requirements for living, which meant that it had met the daily necessities of housing, food, clothing, and transportation, which were concentrated in the north of the Tranquil Stream (Jing Xi), while the other three sides nearly had no construction but the land property gradually increased and it was enclosed with walls: “Several gong (one gong is equal to five chi or 160 cm) of east high land, which is the property of the Zhu and Ge families, along the Tranquil Stream [Jing Xi], has been expanded, and a wall is built along the Huangxi Xiang (lane) to the South River, and the construction starts today” [3]. Zhao Liewen had the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) rebuilt and renovated three times, in the 1st reign year (1875), the 4th reign year (1878), and the 6th reign year (1880) of Emperor Guangxu, respectively. Changes in the pattern of the Garden are shown in Figure 4. It can be
roughly seen that Zhao Liewen’s orderly increase in pavilions, corridors, and towers in the northeast residential area, as well as the rich landscape of “one islet, one embankment, and two islands” in the Garden area, with the Tranquil Stream (Jing Xi) as the center. September 28 in the 12th reign year (1886) of Emperor Guangxu was the date of completion of the entire Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu). Zhao Liewen sighed deeply in his diary: “I have acquired this land for 22 years. Due to my financial difficulty and lack of strength, I often say I would never realize my wish. Today I have succeeded. My wife congratulates me by raising her hands and makes rice balls for the entire family to eat to celebrate this success. There are 120 rooms in residence, including halls, towers, and pavilions, and more than 80 of them are connected internally and externally through corridors, the rockeries were hard to pile, and there are six big and small bridges, fruit trees and flowers are in the thousands. It can be said grand” [3]. The final layout of the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) has thus established. The door plate with two characters “静圃” (pronounced “Jing Pu,” literally “Tranquil Garden”) was written in official script, “Today, I changed the door plate to ‘静圃’in official script” [3]. In his Diary of Passing the Cloud Tower (Guoyunlou Riji), Gu Wenbin (1811–1889) documented the situation when he visited the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) in April of the 9th reign year (1883) of Emperor Guangxu: “There is a big pond in the middle of it, the halls, the study room, and the main rooms are located south of the pond. The Yu Mountain is behind the house, and the pond connects to the river outside. There is a stone bride in the east of the pond, with fences as the border. There are buildings, pavilions, and a timber bridge for transportation in the north of the pond. There is no wall, but with hibiscus flowers on the fence” [5]. This description is good, but it is exactly the opposite of the real situation, except the scenery matches (Liufeng Bridge in the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) still survives today, and surely it is located in the west of the Garden). In reply, Zhao Liewen presented a poem to Gu Wenbin: “…There are views of the mountains in my garden, green and steep, with winding paths spiraling up and down. There is water in my garden, calm even in the wind, where algae and lotuses rest beside. There are bright and beautiful stones in my garden, jumping like rising phoenixes and soaring dragons. There are trees in my garden, green and standing in line, with my hand-planted pine firs growing intertwined branches. There are 500 rare books in the garden, with precious seals on calligraphy and paintings in random compilation and edition…”[3]

Opening a private garden to the public to make profit was becoming a common practice in the late Qing dynasty (1644–1911). After renovating the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu), Zhao Liewen opened it partly to the public and collected fees to supplement to the household expenses. “After seeing the gardens in Suzhou such as the Liu Garden, the Gu Garden, and so on, are all open to visitors to make money. I have always despised such behavior, and thought the two garden owners are superrich, why do they need to do that? But my family’s financial situation is declining, and I have spent twenty years building the house and garden to settle down, I am physically tired and mentally exhausted. If I am seeing it collapses while alive, I don’t think I can be indifferent. I’d better use all I have to complete this garden and follow Suzhou people’s behavior, when I have repaid the funds in a few years, I will immediately stop it. It does not seem to be a shameful conduct. So, I discussed it with my family members, and they all agreed” [3].

2.3 Construction of the library
(1) Zhao Liewen’s hobby of collecting books
One of the trends in the construction of residential gardens during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties was building a library in the garden. Conversely, this minor trend in the social environment had also influenced the decisions of residential garden owners. From the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties to the early
Ming dynasty, there were more than 40 influential book collectors in Changshu. Starting from the late Ming dynasty, many book collectors and libraries appeared, and Changshu became the center of private book collections in the country. Yu Zixian’s “Elegant Interest in the South of the City” (“Chengnan Jiaqu”) of the Yuan dynasty, Yang Mengyu’s “Seven Paintings of Three-Mountain Houses” (“Qihui Sanshan Fang”) of the Ming dynasty, Sun Ziyu’s “Reflecting Snow Mountain Residence” (“Yingxue Shan Ju”) of the Ming dynasty, and Zhao Yongxian father and son’s “Moth Pavilion” (“Maiwang Guan”) of the Ming dynasty, were all very famous. Qian Muzhai’s “Crimson Cloud Tower” (“Jiangyun Lou”) and Mao Zijin’s “Drawing Ancient Pavilion” (“Jigu Ge”) were even more widely known in the south of the Yangtze River for their very extensive collections of books. Following these two people, various book collectors appeared one after another. When Zhao Liewen moved to Changshu from Changzhou, checking books

Figure 4. Schematic diagram of change in the pattern of the house and Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu). (a) From the 4th reign year (1865) of Emperor Tongzhi to the 13th reign year (1874) of Emperor Tongzhi. (b) From the 1st reign year (1875) of Emperor Guangxu to the 4th reign year (1878) of Emperor Guangxu. (c) From the 4th reign year (1878) of Emperor Guangxu to the 6th reign year (1880) of Emperor Guangxu. (d) From the 6th reign year (1880) of Emperor Guangxu to the 12th reign year (1886) of Emperor Guangxu. Source: Prepared by the author according to Nengjingju Riji
became important for him. Thereafter, he spent several decades building his private Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) and constructing two libraries: the old and the new “Heavenly Release Buildings” (“Tianfang Lou”) in the Tranquil Garden. The existing Tianfang Lou Book Catalog is an important historic material for studying Changshu book collection culture and literati groups.

Since childhood, Zhao Liewen had liked reading, especially collecting books. Every time he went out, he very much liked strolling around book shops, and bought rare and good books and stored them in the old and new Heavenly Release Buildings (Tianfang Lou). Zhang Yu marveled at Zhao Liewen’s vast collection of books: “The rich collection of bronze and stone inscriptions, paintings, and books in Tianfang Lou has made it standout in the south” [10]. Zhao Liewen had a passion for inscriptions in his later life and whenever he heard others had inscriptions on ancient bronze and stone tablets, he asked for rubbings and modifying and correcting the errors of predecessors, and he compiled years of research into such works as “The Compilation of Stone Drum Texts” (Shiguwen zuanshi), “Bronze and Stone Inscriptions near the Capital City” (Jifu jinshi liüe), and “Bronze and Stone Signatures at the End of the Texts in the Heavenly Release Buildings” (Tianfang Lou jinshi bawei). Gu Wenbin praised him an expert in poems, ancient-style proses, and lyrics, especially in inscriptions, “He produced more than 10 rubbings of inscriptions, mostly with textual research, which offer a glimpse” [5]38-339. His collected books bore the names of “Kind Father’s Home Catalog” (“惠父寓目” Huifuyumu), “Tranquility Books” (“能静图书” Nengjingtushu), “Liewen’s Private Seal” (“烈文私印” Liewensiyin), “Heavenly Release Buildings” (“天放楼” Tianfang Lou), and so on (Figures 5 and 6).

Zhao Liewen’s second son Zhao Kuan also liked collecting ancient books. As his eldest son Zhao Shi was married into the bride’s family, Zhao Kuan inherited Tianfang Lou’s collected books. In addition, he built another library, called “Small Moth Pavilion” (Xiaomaiwangguan), and after the death of his father, he copied and corrected his diaries [2]. Xiaomaiwangguan Booklist is still extant, and there are 22,958 books in total. The books were later achieved in the Nanjing Library [11].

**Figure 5.** Compilation and explanation of Stone Drum Inscriptions (Shiguwenzuanshi) printed by Zhao Liewen (left). Source: Guo Liang, Zhao Liewen and book collection in Tiangfanlou

**Figure 6.** Zhao Liewen’s couplet in regular script (right). Source: Guo Liang, Zhao Liewen and book collection in Tiangfanlou
(2) Book collection space with Tianfang Lou as its core

The studies and study courtyards of the Ming and Qing dynasties accommodated most of literati’s activities when they were alone, they were the results of an artistic system development of a culture of seclusion and scholar-official personalitys [12]. Book collection was flourishing in Changshu, and Zhao Liewen very much liked collecting books. The space for book collection in the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) was large, with two sites of Heavenly Release Buildings (Tianfang Lou), two sites of “Micro Book Rooms” (Jianweishuwu), there were also a number of book houses and book sheds.

In the early stage of construction of the house and garden, although there was only one building Tianfang Lou as the library, a whole floor was dedicated to storing books. Zhao Liewen sighed in the “Eighteen Poems on Choosing Where to Live” (buju shiba shou): “In my whole life, I have used bags and cases to store paintings and books, which are now displayed along the four walls” [3]. Besides the Nengjingju in the downstairs of Tianfanlou, there was another Nengjingju in the downstairs of “Women’s Eyebrows Language Building” (Daiyu Lou), with copies and stationaries set in the main hall and the east hall: “I chose the best ones from Confucian classics and famous paintings, inscriptions, and books to store them here, which are enough for my retirement in the twinkling of an eye” [3]. Zhao Liewen often invited friends to appraise calligraphies: “I invited Xiao Gong to come to Tianfang Lou where I store books to examine my calligraphies and so on” [3]. In February of the 12th reign year (1886) of Emperor Guangxu, the South Building (Nanlou) was completed on the south islet, Zhao Liewen moved the name board Tianfang Lou to name it here. The hall in the downstairs of the new Tianfang Lou was named “Moth Time Study Pavilion” (eshishuzhai), which was used to commemorate his late father and encourage learning: “When I was eight, my late father named his study ‘eshishuzhai’ to encourage learning. It has been nearly 50 years since then, and I haven’t gained achievements in academy, nor have I established my reputation. I have been taught many lessons. Since the South Building is completed, I use the plaque to name the hall downstairs to show that I dare not to forget” [3]. There is a square pavilion in the west of the building that connects to the long corridor on the west bank, with a plaque that reads: “Learning Time Leading to All Directions” (Xuebutongjin), which was the only path to the new Tianfang Lou in the south islet, and a way for the persuasion of learning.

The original Seeing Micro Book Room (Jianweishuwu) was situated in the north bank of the Tranquil Stream (Jing Xi), connected with the Distant Heart Hall (Yuanxintang). The new Seeing Micro Book Room (Jianweishuwu) was built near water and located in front of the Green Forest Hall (Qinglintang). Qinglintang was a study hall, an important place for viewing the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu), which could also be used to accommodate others, on top of which there is a couplet that reads: “Clear spring, green mountains, and lush woods, are enjoyed by those who are secluded and happy to keep their faiths; chant, discourse, and education, are where elegance and generosity are gathered” [3]. The diary often has words such as “study room,” “study pavilion,” “private school,” “study shed,” “study hall,” “study building,” “study tower,” and so on. Although the specific spatial positions of most of them cannot be determined, the spaces for book collection and reading implied by these words all demonstrate that Zhao Liewen had used book collection spaces very frequently, and with the gradual change in pattern of the house and garden, the name of Heavenly Release Building (Tianfang Lou) also changed with the pattern, and the book collection spaces had always occupied the best places in the building complex and landscape environments, maintaining its core position.
3. ELEGANT GATHERINGS IN THE HOUSE AND GARDEN

3.1 Modeling after a Trip to Wangchuan

Imitation of landscape architecture results from appreciation of or reverence for earlier works, or is about extracting conception of garden planning, or emulation of gardening activities, but all have their own unique styles. In the Wanli period (1573–1620) of the Ming dynasty, the Investigating Censor (Jiancha Yushi) Qian Dai, at age 44, lodged a request for resigning from his office to care for his parents at home, and came back to his hometown of Changshu. He built a mansion in the southwest of the city. Qian Dai admired Wang Wei for his personality, so he named all terraces, towers, and pavilions after the attractions in Wangchuan [Shaanxi Province] and gave the name of “Minor Wangchuan” to his garden. Chen Ke commented it as a place for solitude: “Qian Dai had read ability, but could not apply, so he wore himself down and wasted time in dance and music in his garden and mansion” [13]. Tu Long (1543–1605) documented the Minor Wangchuan, claiming it was “very similar to Wang Wei’s Wangchuan in Lantian” [14]. There is a sentence in the poem Jiawanwei by Wu Weiguan (1743–1803) of the Jiaqing period of the Qing dynasty that, “there are countless thatched cottages and splendid mansions, which are all part of the Minor Wangchuan of the Qian Family”, showing the Minor Wangchuan occupied a vast property of land. At that time, many people thought the Minor Wangchuan was exactly like Wang Wei’s “Wangchuan Villa.” Tu Long defended Qian Dai at the end of the article, and argued that, first, imitation due to admiration was not wrong and has been passed down since ancient times, there was just one “Wangchuan;” second, Wang Wei liked practicing Chan Buddhism and had lived alone for 30 years, but Qian Dai’s garden featured dancers and singers, dominated by amusement. They were totally different in the state of mind.

Years later, on the same land, Wang Wei received another round of adoration. But this time, the imitation was more on the act of his “documentation.” Zhao Liewen was astonished at the Painting of the Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry Contest presented by Wu Guxiang (1848–1903), and lamented that Wang Wei’s Wangchuan Painting still remained in the world, he also wanted to preserve the attractions in the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) in the form of an atlas: “Previously, Wang Wei lived in Wangchuan, and painted the attractions in two volumes, which survived till the Yuan and Ming dynasties… I ran away from the world and hid in a shabby house all year round, to demonstrate their beauty and richness, but overlook their ugliness, I want the descendants to view us, just as the way we look upon our predecessors” [3].

3.2 The Painting of the Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry Contest

(1) The trend of elegant gathering

Residential gardens were not only elegant places for composing poetry and enjoying scenery, but also places for officials and scholars to talk about government affairs and negotiate businesses. During the time when he was an assistant, Zhao Liewen often discussed government affairs with Zeng Guofan and other officials in his private garden: “In the afternoon, Di Shi (Zeng Guofan) came to have an in-depth talk with me. In the evening, we went to enjoy the cool at the rear of the garden, and continued the in-depth talk until 9 pm” [3], “After returning to the government office, I heard that Di Shi arrived at the garden in the wrong time, I therefore went to the inner garden, where the new terrace was completed. I went to the terrace with Di Shi as well as Cai Zhenzhai and Tan Yueqing, to enjoy the cool” [3].

In the Ming and Qing dynasties, there were many paintings with the theme of landscape architecture, and the painters were often invited to gardens for doing paintings,
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which were accompanied by compositions of literati and scholars. Yue Jun’s Scroll Painting, Elegant Gathering in Yixing Mountain House (Yixingshanfangyajitujuan) [Figure 7] depicts the faraway Yu Mountain, Xinfeng Pavilion, and the Yixing Pavilion (Yixingxuan) with its center hidden in green pines and verdant cypresses, to record the elegant things about him and his friends gathering at Wugu, outside the west gate of Changshu to appreciate maples, drink wine, have dinner, and compose poems. Although Zhao Liewen did not paint himself, he set a big mirror in the south pavilion to reflect the Yu Mountain, to “picturize” the real scenery in the garden, “placing a big mirror in the south pavilion to portray the Xi Mountain” [3].

He also invited his friends to the garden to appraise paintings and calligraphies. On November 25 in the 13th reign year (1887) of Emperor Guangxu, “Zhao Zuoren came and revealed the silk version of Wang Shigu’s Twelve Attractions of Yu Mountain” (Yushan shi’er jing) painted in the year of (1695 Yihai) in the Kangxi period, it was undoubtedly a real work. There were also calligraphies produced in the Ming dynasty [1368‒1644]. The first was the Hongwu Command Paper (Hongwuchishu), then there were works by dozens of people, some were true and some false, it had two volumes, with an asking price of 100 yuan, I paid 60 yuan, which was a good deal” [3].

(2) Prelude to the Painting of the Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry Contest
From the end of the 3rd reign year (1877) of Emperor Guangxu to February of the 4th reign year (1878) of Emperor Guangxu, Zhao Liewen invited famous scholars from Haiyu to his garden to compose poems and make couplets, imitating Wang Wei’s Wangchuan atlas, and documenting the first reconstruction of the house and garden.

Wu Guxiang (1848‒1903) painted the Painting of the Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry Contest (Xi Beidou Shi Tu), and presented it to Zhao Liewen to congratulate his new home. This painting was completed in the 3rd reign year (1877) of Emperor Guangxu [Figure 8]. Zhao Liewen, Yang Yisun, Zeng Zhizhuan, Zeng Baozhang, Yang Enhai, and so on, wrote postscripts and sang in the garden for many times. Zhao Liewen wrote the Prelude to the Painting of the Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry Contest to summarize the conditions of his house and garden. As the pavilion was completed in midwinter and snow came, Zhao Liewen invited his friends to feast. His friends composed poems to express congratulations. Zeng Junjing, one of his friends, thought that “there should be paintings for the party.” He invited Wu Qiunong to do a painting. Zhao

Figure 7. Scroll Painting Elegant Gathering in Yixing Mountain House by Yu Jun of the Qing dynasty (28.6 cm×62 cm). Source: Achieved in Changshu Museum
Liewen lamented that “This painting, compete through poetry contest, poems do not have forms, but pavilions do. Then where the pavilion is located, who live there, from which year it was built, these must be clear. As for the meaning of the name “Spring and Autumn Annals” came from the owner. It is better to line up the pavilion with dawn and name it “The Painting of the Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry contest””.[3]. Following the first prelude to the painting, Zhao Liewen wrote the “second prelude to the Painting of the Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry contest,” “third prelude to the Painting of the Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry contest” and “fourth prelude to the Painting of the Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry contest” in an attempt to document the spectacular events of that time. Most of the atlases mentioned above remain unknown and only two paintings survive till today.

Figure 8. Wu Guxiang’s Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry and Painting Contest (Frontispiece: 32.5 cm × 79.5cm, painting: 40cm × 149 cm, postscript: 40cm ×1200cm). Source: Shanghai Arts and Crafts Exchange 2002 Autumn Aution, China Calligraphy and Painting

In February of the 4th reign year (1878) of Emperor Guangxu, Wu Dacheng travelled to the Yu Mountain and visited his friends Yang Yisun and Zeng Bowei. At that time, the first reconstruction of the “Tranquil Garden (JingPu)” was just completed, Zhao Liewen invited Wu Dacheng to tour around the garden. Wu Dacheng painted the Tranquil Stream Painting [Figure 9] to express thanks, with the three characters “静溪图” (Jing Xi Tu, or Tranquil Stream Painting) as the caption. The aforementioned two paintings have many similarities to the remaining old photos, which demonstrates sufficiently that the two Wus’ depictions to a large extent are true to the real scenery, and have more truly documented the real situation of the Tranquil Garden (Jing Yuan) at this stage. On February 2 in the 6th reign year (1880) of Emperor Guangxu, Zhao Liewen documented in his lyrics “Eight Melodies of Ganzhou” (Basheng Ganzhou) that he invited his friends to appreciate lotus and emulate famous garden feast, “Imitate famous garden feast and appreciate songs, suddenly the rain hits the new lotus. The tired guests who are pleased to abandon officiaaldom, and the old friends who have expressed their minds, have a happy time together in the hideaway”.[3].
3.3 Elegant living in the garden house
Zhao Liewen often invited famous scholars to visit his garden, in the pavilion, high platform, and tower to appreciate the moon, feed the fish, watch flowers, enjoy the snow, and taste the teas, or participate in raising animals, taking photos, and other novel activities. It is better to listen to music across the water: “Ask the singer to go to the South Pavilion to sing, while we sit in the North Pavilion and listen to the songs across the water, syllables are loud and clear, we can smell the scent of lotus and see the color of willows, which add fragrance and beauty” [3]. It was better to drink wine somewhere else: “Xu Yuezhuan, a native of Wuxi, is good at playing Pipa [Chinese lute], and being considered as the best in the Wu region (today’s Jiangsu, Anhui, and Zhejiang provinces). Zhao Chihou invited her to perform in my garden. There were 10 participants gathered in the party: Ji Junmei, Li Shenglan, Zhao Zuoren, Chihou, Yang Binshi, Shucheng, Sizan, Zeng Junjing, the host, and Xu Yuezhuan. In the afternoon, we all gathered in my East Hall. Xu Yuezhuan pulled and plucked the string, starting to play the “Overlord Disarming” (Bawang Xiejia), seemingly with the sound of metal. After the performance was over, we drank in the “Auspicious Lotus Pavilion” (Ruiqu Xuan) behind the Distant Heart Hall (Yuanxintang). At nightfall, we finished drinking and gathered in the North Pavilion again, listening to her playing the “Dragon Boat Racing” (Longzhou Jingdu), with vivid voice and feelings” [3]. These prestigious scholars generally praised highly of the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu), considering Zhao Liewen as romantic and unruly, indifferent to fame and fortune. Yang Yisun’s comment that Zhao Liewen was “not a celestial being, nor a hermit, nor a Confucian scholar; he could be an official, a Buddhist, or a Daoist,” which indicates Zhao Liewen’s life condition and pursuit after resigning from his office.

Relying on the well-developed waterway transportation, Zhao Liewen could go out very conveniently. He often travelled by boat to the theater in downtown, to watch plays and drink tea in the Teahouse. He would also go to other private gardens with his family to attend elegant gatherings held by his friends. While traveling, he went to the flower shops in Tiger Hill (Huqiu) and Shantang Street to buy plants [17], or to bookshops to buy classics and books. He had plentiful activities. According to preliminary statistics, Zhao Liewen with his relatives and friends toured 17 gardens, such as the Lion Grove Garden (Shizilin), Lingering Garden (Liu Yuan), Qian Family Garden, Upper Garden (Shang Yuan), Upright Garden (Duan Yuan), and so on. Zhao Liewen appraised the Master-of-Nets Garden (Wangshi Yuan) as “gorgeous...
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but not vulgar,” the Humble Administrator’s Garden (Zhuozheng Yuan) as “the most secluded place,” and although the Garden for Smooth Repose (Jichang Yuan) [in Wuxi] had been abandoned for a long time, the quiet and beautiful atmosphere created by the winding pools and old trees was “absolutely incomparable to its layout by prominent garden design masters of the time” [3]. Zhao Liewen considered the Joyous Garden (Yi Yuan) and the Surging Waves Pavilion (Canglang Ting) were just ordinary because they had too much craftsmanship, among which the Joyous Garden had too many pretty stones but too few trees. Comparing the Joyous Garden with the Humble Administrator’s Garden (Zhuozheng Yuan), the difference between them was like “crane and duck”: “Looking at its layout closely, the site is large but with narrow views, no spot is worthy seeing” [3]. Due to the poor management by the later generations, the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) gradually dilapidated and was finally transferred to others.

4. CONCLUSION

Although Zhao Liewen selected the old garden in the west of Changshu city because of the price, location, fengshui, and other factors, he designed his house and garden based on creation and expression of “self.” The name of Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) was also from his pseudonym of “Tranquil Householder” (“Nengjingjushi”). As the owner of the garden, Zhao Liewen participated in the whole process of purchasing, design, and construction of the Tranquil Garden, and his attention to fengshui was often reflected in the layout of the Tranquil Garden. The increase in the number of family members directly resulted in reconstruction and improvement of the house and garden, and the difficulty in maintaining the private garden made it inevitable to open to the public for a fee. But at the heart of constructing the entire house and garden, it was always Zhao Liewen’s personal preference. His passion for book collection led to many such sites in the garden, and his adoration and admiration for Wang Wei’s Wangchuan prompted him to hold grand events of the Stream of the Big Dipper Poetry Contest that lasted more than several months. The house and garden were an important place for living, where painting, poetry composition, listening to music, scenery appreciation, and discussing current affairs, all happened.

For an individual case study of house and garden in the south of the Yangtze River, the Tranquil Garden (Jing Pu) site still remains, and it has a detailed record of words and deeds from the first perspective of the owner. The authenticity of information about the house and garden documented in the text is especially precious. The whole process of creating the house and garden from scratch in the Jiangnan region, mapped by Zhao Liewen’s life story and presented in his “Diary of the Tranquil Garden” (Nengjingju Riji), vividly reflect the real-life pictures of scholars and literati in the late Qing dynasty.  

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

REFERENCES


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