

Article

Research on Changsha Gardens in Ming Dynasty, China

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Abstract: Despite the growing interest in Chinese gardens, there is a lack of research on Changsha Gardens. Through document retrieval, review, and map analysis, we reconstructed the Changsha Gardens during the Ming Dynasty. Our findings reveal that gardening flourished in Changsha during this period. The royal gardens, dominated by literati aesthetics, set the trend for development, while the landscaping techniques were influenced by Jiangnan Gardens. Private gardens placed more emphasis on artistic mood and cultural implications. Landscape architects incorporated towers, terraces, and suburban mountain gardening to borrow scenery. The use of spring water to create landscapes and the rectangular shapes of the water bodies reflected Neo-Confucianism and practical functions. Planting design focused on meaning over form, with landscapes used to commemorate sages and promote the farming and reading culture and other Confucian values. However, it relied too much on borrowing natural scenery and the pragmatism of the Hunan culture, which might have affected the progress of landscaping techniques and the development of Changsha Gardens. Changsha Gardens were not as skilled as Jiangnan Gardens, and the style was not as prominent as other regional schools of gardens. This might be the reason why Changsha Gardens have not become one of the regional schools of gardens in China.

Keywords: landscape architecture; Changsha Garden; Chinese garden in the Ming Dynasty; Hunan Garden; landscaping technique; landscaping ideas



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1. Introduction

China is widely recognized as the “Mother of Gardens” [1], and since the 20th century, Chinese gardens, with their ideas and their principles, have gained increasing attention, recognition, and practice worldwide [2]. After the establishment of the Suzhou Garden “Astor Court (明轩)” in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1980, China began building numerous Chinese gardens overseas, and UNESCO has listed Chengde Mountain Resort and its surrounding temples, Suzhou classical gardens, and the Summer Palace as World Heritage Sites [3,4]. The academic field of landscape architecture traditionally divides Chinese gardens into three major regional schools: Northern Gardens (北方园林), Jiangnan Gardens (江南园林), and Lingnan Gardens (岭南园林) [5]. In the 21st century, Ba-Shu Gardens (巴蜀园林) have been recognized as the fourth regional school of gardens [6], while some scholars have proposed concepts for gardens in smaller regions, such as Central Plains Gardens (中原园林) (a subtype of Northern Gardens), Fujian and Taiwan Gardens (闽台园林) (a subtype of Lingnan Gardens), Huizhou Gardens (徽州园林) (a subtype of Jiangnan Gardens), and Xu Style Gardens (徐派园林) [7]. However, due to the lack of documentation, drawings, pictures, and other materials, most of the gardens in Changsha were destroyed and are little known, making them absent from the history of gardens. Nonetheless, local chronicles and literati works of Changsha reveal that, during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), which was the mature stage of Chinese gardens [5], various types of gardens existed in Changsha that deserve attention and research.

Internationally, research on regional Chinese schools of gardens mainly focuses on Jiangnan Gardens and Lingnan Gardens, while the Northern Garden, Ba-Shu Gardens, and

Xu Style Gardens have received little attention. Regarding Jiangnan Gardens, researchers have taken Suzhou Gardens as an example to compare Chinese garden ideas with Western ideas [8], to explore the spatial distribution of Suzhou Gardens during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty [9], and to analyze Tang Dynasty gardens. They have also examined the distribution and scale evolution of Suzhou Gardens under the urbanization process of the Qing Dynasty [10]. For Lingnan Gardens, researchers have attempted to reconstruct the gardens of the merchant Howqua [11] and explored the characteristics and styles of Lingnan Gardens [12]. As for Northern Gardens, researchers have analyzed the imperial gardens during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty [13]. Regarding Changsha Gardens, researchers have taken Yuelu Academy (a famous Changsha Garden) as an example of Chinese Academic Garden and analyzed the space and design of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Academy Gardens [14]. However, there is no literature dedicated to the research on Changsha Gardens.

Chinese scholars have conducted limited research on Changsha Gardens. Some have classified Changsha Gardens into historical stages [15–18] and analyzed their characteristics, ideas, and some existing garden layouts [16,18]. Others have classified religious gardens in Changsha and researched the history of existing ones [19]. Most of these studies focus on the analysis of the history, classification, and characteristics of Changsha Gardens, especially existing gardens. Existing research seldom discusses the social and cultural background of the prosperity of Changsha Gardens in the Ming Dynasty, landscaping techniques, and landscaping ideas. The literature interpretation tends to be a simple overview, and there is no conjecture about the restoration of destroyed gardens. At the same time, the researchers have not explored the influence of other regional schools of gardens on Changsha Gardens and have not considered why Changsha Gardens have not become one of the regional schools of gardens in China.

2. Materials and Methods

The authors take the modern Changsha urban area as the research scope and take Changsha Gardens in the Ming Dynasty as an example to research Changsha Gardens in the Ming Dynasty by consulting relative articles, literati works, and local chronicles (Table 1), drawing garden restoration maps, hoping to fill the research gaps in Changsha Gardens, Hunan gardens, and Ming Dynasty gardens of China. We collected literati works and local chronicles from the Chinese Classics and Ancient Books Library (中華經典古籍庫), a large database of ancient books launched by Zhonghua Book Company in 2014, as well as some books from the Hunan University Library. This paper mainly uses document retrieval, document review, and map analysis as research methods.

Table 1. Literati works and local chronicles.

Literati Works	Local Chronicles
Poetry of Southern Chu, 南楚诗纪, 1827	Chronicles and Atlas of Rebuilding Yuelu Academy, 重修岳麓书院图志, 1594
Analects of Tianyue Mountain Mansion, 天岳山馆文钞, 1880	
Records of Exploring Ancient Relics in Changsha, 湘城访古录, 1893	Chronicles of Changsha Prefecture, 长沙府志, 1639
Celebrities and Changsha Landscape, 名人与长沙风景, 2012	Chronicles of Newly Revised Yuelu Academy, 新修岳麓书院志, 1687
Memories of a City—Changsha in Old Maps, 一个城市的记忆—老地图中的长沙, 2018	Brief Chronicles of Yuelu, 岳麓小志, 1932

3. Results

3.1. Overview of Changsha Gardens in the Ming Dynasty

3.1.1. The Social Background of the Rise of Changsha Gardens in the Ming Dynasty

Changsha, the capital of China's Hunan Province, is located in the valley basin where the Xiang and Liuyang rivers meet and is surrounded by mountains (refer to Figures 1 and 2). In the Ming Dynasty, Chinese emperors distributed princes in various places to protect their power, and only prosperous places could guarantee their stable rule. In 1372, Qiu Guang, the Garrison Commander, undertook large-scale repairs of war-torn Changsha City at the end of the Yuan Dynasty. Changsha officials improved water transportation by dredging river channels and renovating wharves, making Changsha the largest cargo distribution center and commercial center in Hunan. The huge expenditure of the princes also supported social stability [20], which brought economic development and cultural prosperity—the political, economic, and cultural conditions necessary for Changsha to build gardens.

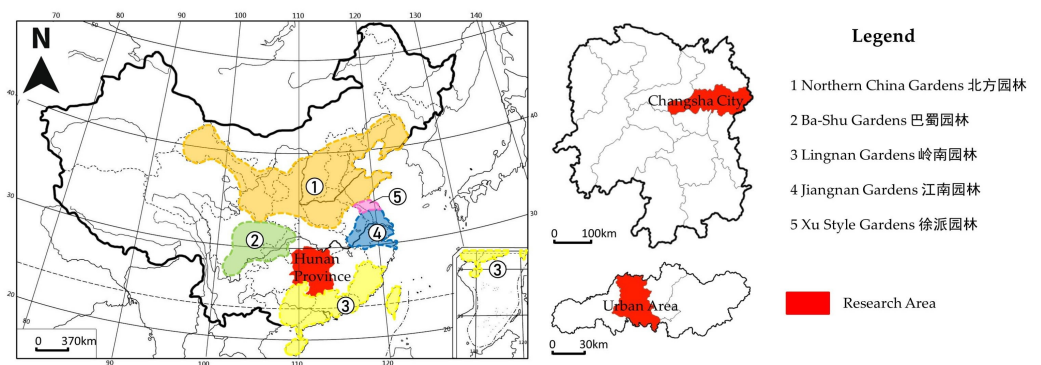


Figure 1. Research Area.



Figure 2. Map of Changsha in the Ming Dynasty (source: Chronicles of Changsha Prefecture, 1639).

3.1.2. The Overall Distribution and Number of Types of Gardens in Changsha in the Ming Dynasty

According to related articles [15–19,21–23], there were 20 gardens in Changsha during the Ming Dynasty, including four royal gardens, four private gardens, three academic gardens, seven religious gardens, one garden of ancestral hall, and one garden of government office.

The gardens belonging to the palace were all within the city for Prince Ji (吉王) to enjoy. The large Palace Gardens (大内园林), such as Zijin Garden and East Garden, were all close to the palace. Phoenix Terrace and Pine and Osmanthus Garden were the Detached Palace Gardens (离宫园林) located near the suburbs. Private gardens, academic gardens, and religious gardens were widely distributed, making it convenient for Changsha citizens to stay at home, read, worship, and engage in recreational activities. Religious gardens were mostly located in suburban mountains, which were conducive to practice in peace. Based on local chronicles, literati works (refer to Table 1), and related articles [15–19], we have drawn a distribution map of garden sites and garden types (refer to Figures 3 and 4).

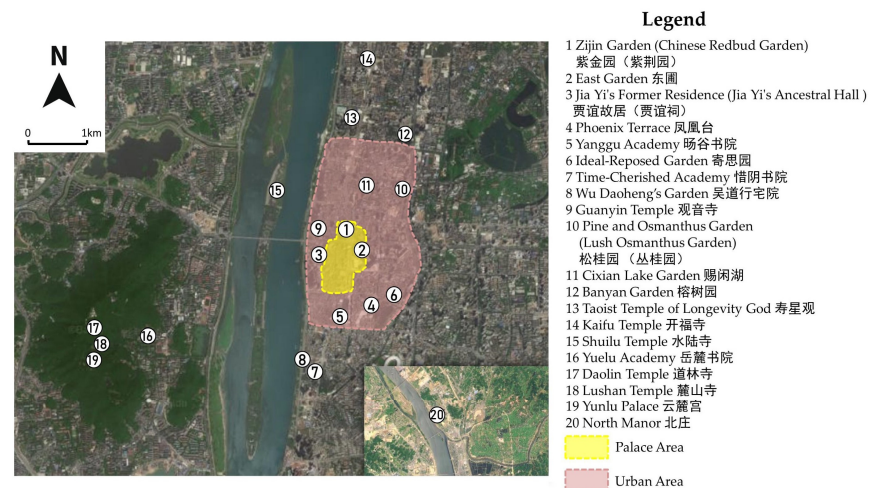


Figure 3. Names and distribution of Changsha Gardens in the Ming Dynasty (source: the author repainted from Google Maps).

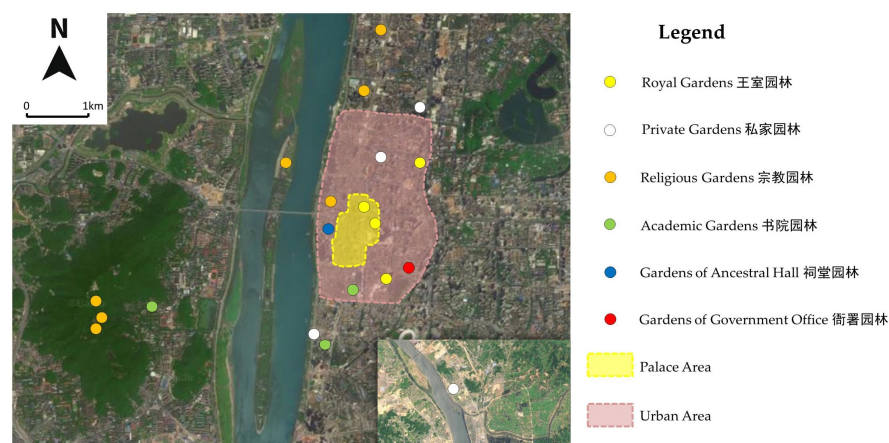


Figure 4. Distribution of Changsha Garden types in the Ming Dynasty (source: the author repainted this from Google Maps).

3.2. Description

3.2.1. Royal Gardens

There were three royal gardens: Royal Gardens (Zijin Garden and East Garden), Phoenix Terrace, and Pine and Osmanthus Garden. The architectural layout of the palace is the same as the Forbidden City in Beijing, the capital of the Ming Dynasty.

(1) Prince's Palace Garden

It was built by Zhu Jianjun (朱见浚), Prince Ji. To the northwest of the palace was the back garden of the palace, named Zijin Garden, also known as the Chinese Redbud Garden because of the many Chinese Redbuds. It was the only large-scale palace garden in Changsha. Zijin Garden had two major landscapes, Zijin Mountain in the east, also known as Chinese Redbud Mountain, and Wanchun Pool in the west. Zijin Mountain was made of Taihu stone, and it is the first large rockery group in the history of Changsha Gardens. There were many slender and winding stone paths on the mountain, as well as many caves for people to rest and view were formed inside [18,21]. It is speculated that the landscape architects used the crevices and caves in the rockery to fill in the soil to plant Chinese Redbud.

Zijin Mountain is one of the commanding heights of the whole city landscape. Wanchun Pond, which had a wide water surface, was a place for gathering and boating. There was a dressing-changing pavilion on the south side and a dressing building on the north side [18]. It could be seen that the garden landscape architecture had various functions, which were set up for the entertainment services of dignitaries (Figures 5 and 6).

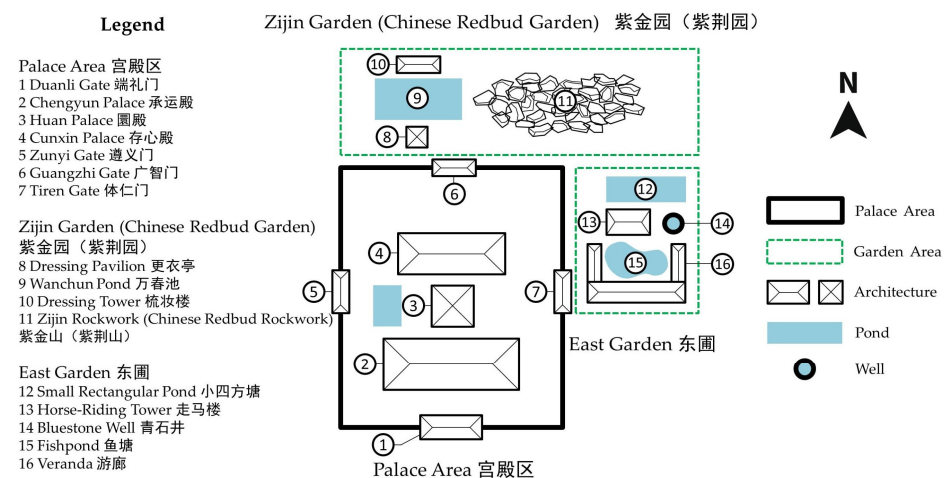


Figure 5. Plan of Prince's palace and gardens.

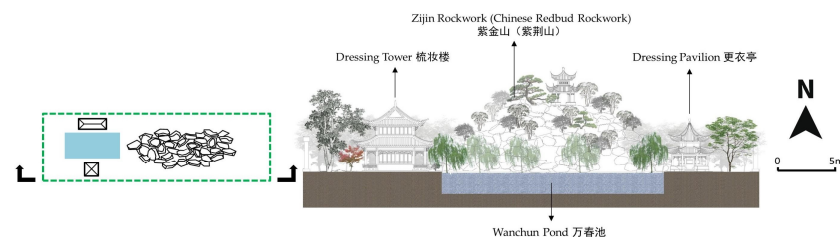


Figure 6. Section of Zijin Garden (Chinese Redbud Garden).

The northeast of the palace is the harem, called the “East Garden”. The Horse-Riding Tower is one of the veranda-shaped buildings, which was the place where Prince Ji rode horses and read books. There is a rectangular pool in the north of the building, which is surrounded by palms, later known as the “Small Rectangular Pond”. There is a bluestone well on the east side of the building for drawing water. The south of the building and the

well is a fishpond, which is enclosed by verandas and terraces [15,17,21]. The fishpond landscape has both production and ornamental value (Figure 7).

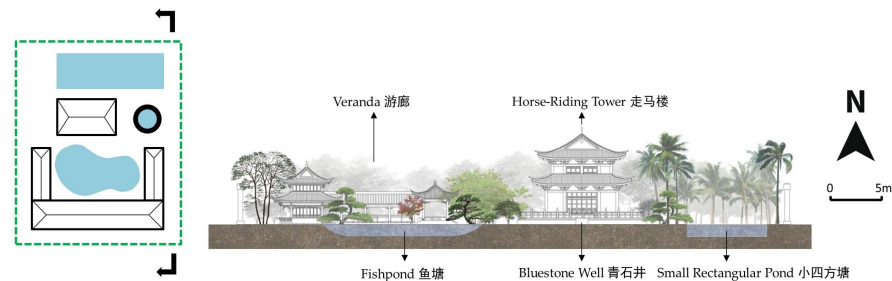


Figure 7. Section of East Garden.

(2) Phoenix Terrace

Adjacent to Tianxin Pavilion, there was a raised terrace in the southeast of the city. It is a dressing tower with a garden built by Prince Ji for his daughter, Princess Phoenix. On the stage, people could overlook the whole city of Changsha, Orange Isle, and opposite Yuelu Mountain and Tianma Mountain, becoming another commanding height in the city [17,21].

(3) Pine and Osmanthus Garden

Also known as Lush Osmanthus Garden, according to the name, it could be speculated that the garden was dominated by pine and osmanthus trees. It was a detached palace garden named after the plant. Prince Ji often entertained celebrities here [15,17,21].

3.2.2. Private Gardens

(1) Banyan Tree Garden

The owner of the garden was Zhuang Tianhe, the Minister of Rites. The garden was named after a plant, and it was dominated by banyan trees, as well as climbing figs, Japanese kerria, willows, bamboos, and other plants. There were many old trees and paths in the bamboo forest for walking. Inside the garden, there was a rectangular pond with pavilions and a reading tower beside it. Lotus flowers were planted in the pond, and ornamental fish were cultivated. A small bridge was set up on the water, and whale stone carvings were placed by the water [15,21,22,24].

(2) North Manor

North Manor was a retreat garden built by Wang Wei, the Vice Minister of the Ministry of War, in the area of Eyang Mountain in the northern suburb of Changsha City. It was the only private garden that belongs to the natural landscape garden of Changsha in the Ming Dynasty. There was a book house in the garden and a fishing terrace by the stream. The landscape architecture made fewer changes to the original natural environment. There was a large Chinese parasol tree planted on the mountain, and there was spring water in the garden. In the park, people could borrow the scenery outside the park [15,18]. The near view next to the mountain is the Lake of the Chu Family, and the distant view was the waterlogged pond surrounded by trees, as well as Yuelu Mountain, Xiang River, and Orange Isle. Wang Wei named North Manor and its surrounding scenery “Eight Views of North Manor” [17,18,22].

(3) Cixian Lake

It was originally a detached palace garden and was later given to Yan Jing, the Huguang inspector who was idle at home, by Prince Ji. There were pavilions, terraces, bridges, waterside pavilions, and other types of buildings in the garden. The pond is rectangular in shape, and there were natural springs in the park, so a pavilion was built for protection [15,21,25].

(4) Wu Daoheng's Garden

The owner of the garden was Wu Daoheng, a famous scholar who has not been an official. There were two ponds in the garden, one for fish and one for lotus. There were various garden buildings, such as hall, veranda, pavilion, tower, and windowed veranda beside the pool. There were many old trees and green trees in the garden, and the plant space is tightly enclosed, making the whole garden seem to be surrounded by valleys. The landscape architecture took the Xiang River as a close-up view and Yuelu Mountain as a distant view by borrowing scenery [15,17].

3.2.3. Academy Gardens

(1) Time-Cherished Academy

Created by Lv Tingjue, the magistrate of Changsha, in 1525, the Time-Cherished Academy features Mingdao Hall at the front and Tao Gong Shrine at the back, which honors Confucian sage Tao Kan (陶侃). The Heart-Washing Pavilion was in the middle, with Frog-Prohibited Ponds on both sides. The central point of the garden was the Talent-Gathering Tower, and Broadcast Benevolence Hall was situated behind it. The surrounding area of hall was a concentrated area of academy gardens, featuring verandas, pools, and pavilions. The Mountain-Overlooking Tower was at the back of the hall, and in front of it was the Mountain-Overlooking Pavilion with school fields, ponds, and large open spaces on the left and right.

The academy's overall layout was symmetrical on the left and right, with the main buildings strictly arranged on the axis from Mingdao Hall to Mountain-Overlooking Tower. The central hill's Talent-Gathering Tower was the commanding height of the whole garden, acting as the climax of the architectural sequence. Broadcast Benevolence Hall was located behind the Talent-Gathering Tower, and its surrounding area was a concentrated area of gardens. The Mountain-Overlooking Tower, located at the end of the axis, was also the commanding height, echoing with the Talent-Gathering Tower and serving as the end of the academy building sequence (Figures 8 and 9) [15–19,26,27].

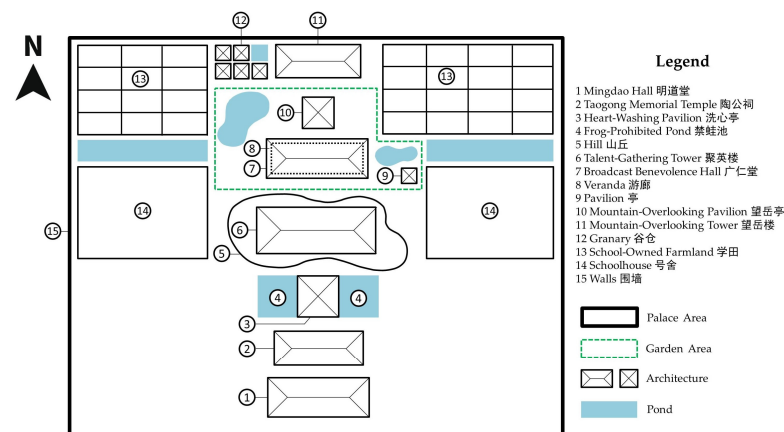


Figure 8. Plan of Time-Cherished Academy.

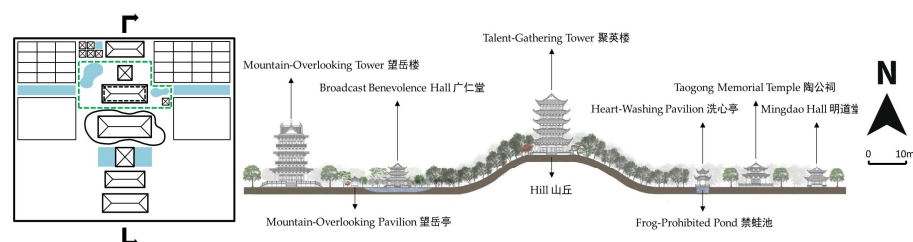


Figure 9. Section of Time-Cherished Academy.

(2) Yanggu Academy

It was a palace school for the children of the prince. The garden was named and designed with the theme of the four seasons, such as the Eight Hexagrams Building (for viewing the spring scenery), Summer Clouds Pavilion, Autumn Osmanthus Windowed Veranda, Severe Winter Pavilion, and other buildings [15,18,21]. It was established earlier than the Ge Garden (个园) in Yangzhou (a Jiangnan Garden in the Qing Dynasty), which is famous for its landscape with the theme of the four seasons.

In addition, in 1509, Wu Shizhong, the garrison commander of Changsha, demolished the Daolin Temple and rebuilt the Yuelu Academy, which was originally built in the Northern Song Dynasty (976).

3.2.4. Religious Gardens

Yunlu Palace was built by Zhu Jianjun, Prince Ji, and consists of three halls: front, middle, and back. The courtyard was filled with pines, cypresses, tung trees, catalpas, bamboos, and other flowers and trees [15–19,27]. The surrounding area was enveloped by natural forests, and the atmosphere of the Taoist temple was solemn and peaceful. Kaifu Temple is a religious garden constructed using borrowed scenery, with the Xiang River and Yuelu Mountain serving as its borrowed scenery and landscape background [15,17,21].

Some gardens were established before the Ming Dynasty. Shuilu Temple was situated north of Orange Isle, and the Circumpolar Tower (拱极楼) was the tallest building among them, serving as a summer resort [15,26–28]. Lushan Temple was constructed in the Western Jin Dynasty (268). Some religious gardens were poorly documented in the literature and difficult to predict, such as the Guanyin Temple, the Taoist Temple of Longevity God, and the Daolin Temple used by Prince Ji [15–18].

3.2.5. Gardens of Ancestral Hall

Currently, Jia Yi's Former Residence is the only garden of ancestral hall that could be examined. It was established during the Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.—8 A.D.) and has been rebuilt in all the subsequent dynasties. In 1465, Qian Shu, the prefectural magistrate of Changsha, discovered the ancient well of Jia Yi and raised funds to rebuild Jia Yi's former residence. This pattern continued into the Qing Dynasty.

Jia Yi's former residence is divided into the Grand Preceptor Temple of Jia, the house, and Qingxiang Villa (清湘别墅). The garden land is regular, surrounded by verandas and buildings, with a regular pond in the middle and a triangular pond in the northwest, which are separated by a veranda (Figure 10) [15–18,21,29].

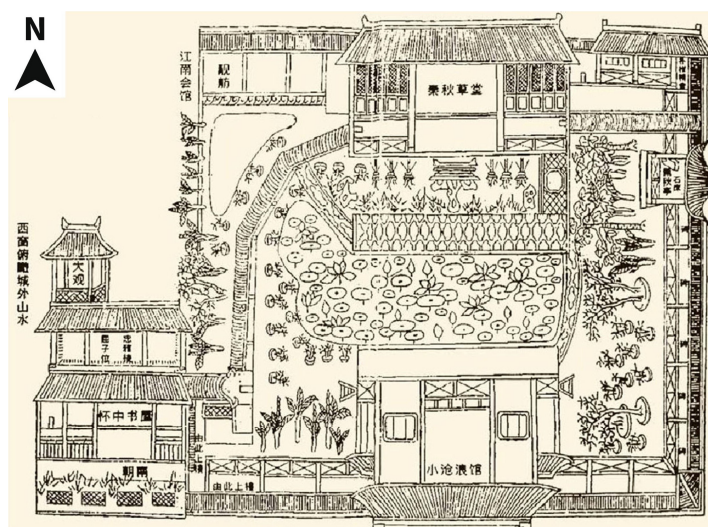


Figure 10. Plan of Jia Yi's former residence in the Qing Dynasty (source: The contemporary significance of Jia Yi's former residence cultural heritage by Wu Song-geng).

3.2.6. Gardens of Government Office

The only known garden of government office is Ideal-Reposed Garden, where the owner expressed his ideas through landscape design. The garden features a rectangular pond excavated by the owner, with a terrace built from the excavated soil and raised to a height of approximately 1.6 m. A bamboo pavilion was set up on the terrace, surrounded by various plants, such as flowers, bamboos, lotus, peach and plum trees, and plum blossoms, with cranes and other animals also present in the park. Each plant and animal in the garden had its meaning and symbolism [15–18,21,22].

3.3. Analysis of Landscaping Techniques

3.3.1. The Method of Borrowing Scenery—Borrowing the Scenery of “Mountain, Water, Isle and City” and the Hills Surrounding the City

The urban pattern of Changsha is characterized by “mountain, water, isle, and city” (山水洲城), which is unique to the regional environment. The isle refers to the Orange Isle, located in the center of the Xiang River. The mountain refers to Yuelu Mountain, a famous historical and cultural mountain in China, while water refers to the Xiang River, the mother river of Changsha [30]. Changsha is surrounded by hills, the landscape architect made use of the landscape of Mountain, Water, Isle, and City (the urban pattern of Changsha) and the hills surrounding the city and used the borrowed scenery to borrow the scenery into the garden by borrowing the scenery to become a part and background of the garden. For gardens located in urban areas, the landscape background could be divided into four parts: Xiang River and Orange Isle, Yuelu Mountain and other mountains, Miaofeng Mountain and other mountains, and Eyang Mountain and other mountains. Changsha City is a concentrated distribution area of gardens, and the surrounding mountains, Xiang River, and Orange Isle served as the landscape backgrounds of the gardens in the city. Many religious gardens, as well as a few private and academic gardens, were built in this area, and the buildings faintly exposed from the woods complemented each other. For viewers located within the landscape background, other landscape backgrounds and Changsha City also became part of the garden’s landscape background. Eyang Mountain and the mountains were far away from Changsha City and became secondary backgrounds. North Manor, a private garden located in it, only offered views of the Xiang River and the remnants of Yuelu Mountain (Figure 11).

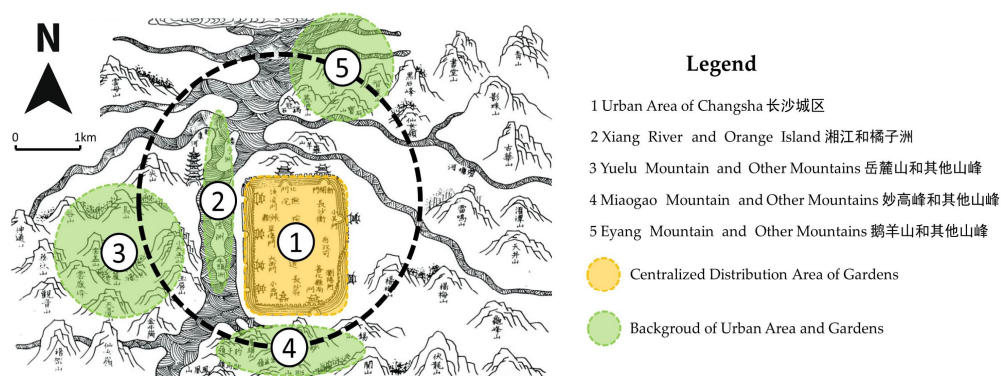


Figure 11. Analysis of borrowed scenery (source: the authors repainted from the Mountains and Rivers Map of Changsha in the Ming Dynasty, from *Memories of a City—Changsha in Old Maps* by Shen Xiaoding).

To obtain a distant view, it is necessary to climb to a high place. The gardener borrows the distant view in two ways:

(1) Building Terraces

Most of the gardens in Changsha city were built with terraces for viewing. People looking from a high-rise building could not only overlook the entire garden, but also the

terraces of other gardens in the distance. The terraces offer close-up views of palaces and Changsha City, medium views of Xiang River, Orange Isle, and Circumpolar Tower, and distant views of Wenchang Tower and Towers on Yuelu Mountain.

(2) Mountaineering

Gardens in the mountains have the best conditions for scenery borrowing. Viewers located in Yuelu Mountain and the temple complex could see Yuelu Academy and farmland from a close view, Orange Isle and Circumpolar Tower from a middle view, and Changsha City and the Palace of Prince Ji from a distant view.

The field of vision was wide, and the landscape was rich in layers. The mountains, waters, isles, and cities were all visible. At North Manor, which was located on Eyang Mountain, viewers could see the general outline of Changsha City, Yuelu Mountain, Xiang River, Orange Isle, Circumpolar Tower, and five of the eight scenic spots were borrowed. Visitors felt as though the garden was indistinguishable from the inside and outside.

3.3.2. Landscaping Techniques

(1) Springs and Wells

Changsha is a city with many springs, and the spring water enjoys the reputation of “not overflowing and inexhaustible” [29]. The landscape architect of Banyan Tree Garden used natural spring water to create waterfalls on rockeries, which became important landscapes. The landscape architect of North Manor and Cixian Lake built wells to tap into spring water, serving both production and landscape functions. The wells of Cixian Lake were protected by pavilions and became a landscape combined with garden architecture. The garden of Jia Yi’s former residence was even built around a well, which has become a symbol of Jia Yi’s spirit.

(2) Rectangular Ponds

Most of the water bodies in the Ming Dynasty Changsha Gardens were rectangular, such as the Wanchun Pond, commonly known as the Big Rectangular Pond, the Cixian Lake, known as the Small Rectangular Pond, and the rectangular pond in the Ideal-Reposed Garden.

(3) Rockeries

Taihu stone is produced in the Taihu Basin of Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, which are part of Jiangnan in China [31]. Hunan is not the origin of the Taihu stone. Based on the characteristics of the rockery described in the literature, it is likely that the Taihu stone used in the rockery was shipped from Jiangsu and Zhejiang. During the Ming Dynasty, a large number of people, including those from Jiangnan, came to settle in Hunan [32], and commodity activities such as food trafficking increased population movement between Jiangnan and Hunan [33]. Therefore, the landscape architect and craftsmen of Zijin Garden were likely from Jiangnan and used the techniques of Jiangnan gardens to create large rockeries. The landscape architect of Banyan Tree Garden replaced the common islands in the water body of Chinese gardens with stones shaped as whales, which innovatively broke the traditional Chinese gardening method of “Three Mountains in a Pool” that symbolized the ocean and islands [5].

4. Discussion

4.1. Eight Views Culture

Chinese scenic spots often summarize the scenic characteristics by numbers, such as “eight views”, “ten views” and so on. This expression forms the “Eight Views Culture” (八景文化) [34]. The Eight Views Culture originated in Hunan and covered the essence of traditional landscaping from all over China [35]. It depicts and showcases people’s perception of nature, as well as patterns and customs of leisure [36]. The owner of the North Manor divided the visible scenery from the garden into eight scenes. The landscape architect borrowed the scenery to incorporate the landscape of Orange Isle and Xiang River into

the garden so that the garden owner could enjoy the “Evening Snow Blending River and Sky” (江天暮雪), which is one of the “Eight Views of Xiaoxiang (潇湘八景)” in winter.

4.2. Literati Tastes

Private garden landscapes were entrusted with spiritual sustenance. From the literati’s inscriptions on Yanggu Academy, it is evident that the Eight Diagrams Building was a reading building that one could climb to enjoy a distant view. The Summer Clouds Pavilion had pillow seats and curtains for drinking and resting, and rockeries and goldfish ponds adorned its surroundings. The Autumn Osmanthus Pavilion had osmanthus trees planted around it, making it a perfect place to enjoy the autumn scenery. The Severe Winter Pavilion was a place for scholars to drink and write poems after school. It had rockeries and noble and clean plants, such as plums and chrysanthemums in its vicinity. The owner of Banyan Tree Garden regarded the garden as a place of seclusion, where he could enjoy the moon, drink, play Guqin (古琴), sing and read with friends, and write inscriptions on the garden’s scenery.

Landscape architects mostly use plants with noble meanings in Chinese cultures, such as pine, bamboo, peach, plum, banyan, sunflower, kerria japonica, and sycamore. However, none of the literature describes the plant’s shape, leading us to speculate that it was not taken seriously. Some gardens were named after plants, such as Banyan Garden. The owner of the Garden of Contemplation entrusted bamboo and lotus to his parents, sunflowers to symbolize respect for light, and peaches and plums to cultivate talent. He also realized the beauty of the artistic mood (意境) created by the changing seasons of the landscape. The owner of the North Manor resigned and went into seclusion, building a garden on Eyang Mountain, which was far away from Changsha City. There were many Chinese parasol trees on the mountain, symbolizing modesty and loneliness.

4.3. Confucianism

(1) Carry forward the Farming and Reading Culture

Confucian literati advocated the lifestyle and value orientation of “farming on one side and studying on the other side, the heirloom of cultivating and studying”, forming a farming and reading culture [37]. Among the academy gardens in Hunan, Time-Cherished Academy still had farmland inside, even though there was a school field outside. We speculate that the landscape architect deliberately used the farmland as part of the landscape, not only to meet needs, but also to make the academy a place to promote the farming and reading culture.

(2) Commemorating Famous Sages and Educated People

The government regards ancestral gardens and academic gardens as centers for the dissemination of Confucian culture. The ancestral hall commemorating Tao Kan, the Duke of Changsha County in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, was expanded into Time-Cherished Academy in the Ming Dynasty, and Tao Kan Temple became the center of the academy. Jia Yi’s former residence was officially regarded as a place to promote the Confucian culture of “loyalty and filial piety” [38], and the restoration of Jia Yi’s former residence as a cultural holy place had become a way to educate the people.

(3) Allegory of Confucianism

The Hunan school of thought was an important school of Neo-Confucianism during the Song and Ming Dynasties, and it has a profound impact on Hunan culture [39]. The rectangular pond has been a symbol of Neo-Confucianism since the Song Dynasty. Influenced by traditional ideas, such as Feng Shui and the Five Elements, the construction of rectangular ponds was very popular from the Song Dynasty to the early and mid-Ming Dynasty [40]. Therefore, most of the water bodies in Changsha Gardens were rectangular ponds, which may have been both the trend at that time and the influence of Neo-Confucianism.

Legend has it that when Zhang Shi (张栻), a famous Confucianist in the Southern Song Dynasty, was giving lectures at Chengnan Academy (城南书院), he stayed overnight in the academy. Due to the noise of frogs in the pond, Zhang Shi picked up his writing desk and threw an inkstone at it, and the sound of frogs died down. Therefore, the Forbidden-Frog Pond in Time-Cherished Academy is likely named not only to commemorate the ancient sages, but also to express the hope that the academy's environment will be peaceful by naming the landscape.

4.4. *The Needs and Political Purposes of the Royal and the Literati*

Prince Ji built several royal gardens for leisure and enjoyment. In addition to their basic viewing and recreational functions, these gardens had other purposes, such as housing books, hosting horse racing events, and serving as fish farms. The garden area of the prince's palace was vast, including Zijin Mountain, which was made entirely of Taihu Lake and Wanchun Pond, which were large enough for boating. These gardens showcased the royal family's style and taste. Prince Ji won over the gentry group by rewarding private gardens and inviting celebrities to feasts and events in the royal gardens. In the Ming Dynasty, Taoism allowed the prince to enjoy a degree of freedom and autonomy beyond his social role restricted by the vassal prohibition system. Local Taoist temples took advantage of their close relationship with the prince to expand their scale and influence [41]. Through the construction and reconstruction of temples, Prince Ji established himself as a local ruler who cared for the people while satisfying his religious beliefs, and he promoted the revival of religious gardens. Prince Ji was an avid book collector and built a library in the Royal Academy. He also placed great importance on education and supported the construction of the academy, which promoted the development of the academic garden.

The academy served as the material carrier of Confucian education, which was the official ideology [42]. After the mid-Ming Dynasty, academic education began to revive [43], a phenomenon known as "the turning of culture and education" [42]. According to available information, the Ideal-Reposed Garden was the only garden of government office in Changsha, while there were three gardens in the academy, reflecting Changsha's "the turning of culture and education". Besides Yanggu Academy, dedicated to the royal family, Yuelu Academy and Time-Cherished Academy were built during this period. It is evident that the academic gardens in Changsha have developed under the revival of the academy and the attention of the royal family and literati.

5. Conclusions

Changsha's landscape architects in the Ming Dynasty were adept at utilizing the landscape and the landscape of hills surrounding the city as the background of the garden. The gardens above it borrowed scenery from each other. Hunan, the birthplace of the Eight Views Culture, was deeply influenced by it. Landscape architects built structures, such as pavilions and terraces, to enjoy the "Evening Snow Blending River and Sky", one of the eight views of Xiaoxiang, by borrowing the scenery of Orange Isle and Xiang River into the garden. Some garden owners even divided the visible scenery in the garden into eight views.

The abundant spring water resources of Changsha were utilized to create waterfalls on rockeries, wells as productive landscapes, or gardens with wells at the center. The design of ponds took into account the practicality influenced by Neo-Confucianism, Feng Shui, Five Elements, and other traditions. The ponds were mostly rectangular in shape, and the landscaping predominantly used native plants. The design emphasized meaning over the shape. Landscape architects utilized the scenery to promote Confucianism, demonstrate the farming and reading culture, commemorating the sages, and educating the people.

In the Ming Dynasty, Changsha had a prosperous gardening atmosphere, and the development trend of Changsha Gardens was led by the royal gardens. The prince who ruled Changsha introduced the gardening techniques of Jiangnan Gardens, which influ-

enced Changsha Gardens. Gardening was a manifestation of identity, and the landscape architects of royal gardens showed the style of the royal family through large-scale landscapes with diverse functions. The owners of private gardens were mostly civil servants and literati, and they paid more attention to creating artistic mood and cultural implications in the landscape. This may be because they lacked the power and financial resources to obtain a large area of the site and create a large-scale landscape or because they were more concerned with spiritual connotations. We have not found any private gardens whose owners were businessmen, which is very different from Yangzhou gardens, a subtype of Jiangnan Gardens that had many businessmen. We speculate that this is because Changsha's economy was not yet developed, and the status of the merchant class was not strong.

The development of Changsha Gardens in the Ming Dynasty was greatly influenced by politics. The prince created a good image of local rulers by inviting literati officials to garden gatherings, rewarding gardens, and building new religious gardens. The academic gardens and the gardens of ancestral hall were mainly promoted by civil servants and literati, but they were also inseparable from the support of the royal family. The academic gardens flourished under the social background of "the turning of culture and education" and were driven by the royal family, civil servants, and literati.

As with Jiangnan Gardens, Changsha Gardens were also dominated by literati aesthetics, but they were simpler and heavier, emphasizing practicality and meaning over modeling. During the Ming Dynasty, Changsha was blessed with abundant natural scenery resources, and all the gardens relied on borrowing natural scenery for their aesthetic appeal, which might have hindered the development of landscaping techniques in the gardens. Hunan culture, which was deeply influenced by Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties, emphasized "pragmatism (经世致用)" [39]. Landscape architects might have focused too much on practical functions and artistic mood, neglecting the innovation of landscaping techniques. These factors might have contributed to the underdevelopment of gardening in Changsha during the Ming Dynasty. As a result, Changsha Gardens were not as sophisticated as the Jiangnan Gardens of the time, and their style was not as distinctive as other regional schools of gardens. This might explain why Changsha gardens, and even Hunan gardens in general, have not been considered as one of the regional schools of gardens in China.

"Landscape" and "history" are determined by specific social, cultural, and economic backgrounds [44]. The cultural expression of landscape, especially the expression of the visual type, is an excellent tool to understand the historical evolution of the region [45]. Unfortunately, all of Changsha Gardens were destroyed during the war in the late Ming Dynasty, and only a few were rebuilt and have survived to this day [46]. The dense high-rise buildings in Changsha now obstruct the view of the city. "Evening Snow Blending River and Sky" could only be seen on the banks of the Xiang River and Orange Isle. The hills surrounding the city have been flattened due to urban expansion, destroying the landscape background, and the newly constructed garden landscapes do not pay attention to the use of borrowed scenery. Most of the springs and ancient wells have been buried, and landscape architects have not considered the use of spring water or the digging of wells. The plant configurations seldom consider cultural significance, and the shrubs are mostly trimmed neatly, resulting in a monotonous form and high maintenance costs. Changsha's gardens lack local characteristics. People have an affective tie with the physical environment, and the ties will be more complex in their hometown [47]. In order to strengthen the tie between people and the environment, increase people's sense of pride and belonging to their hometown, and inherit regional culture, such as the local garden culture, we suggest that landscape architects use Changsha's abundant groundwater to create landscapes and use water wells as a unique feature of Changsha's landscape. Some classical gardens could be reconstructed, new parks could be built in the mountains around Changsha, and buildings, such as terraces, could be constructed to provide views and borrow scenery. The mountain parks could also become a part of the urban landscape background. Plant design

should pursue a more simple and natural style, focusing on cultural meaning rather than regular appearance. For other places with few existing gardens such as Changsha, we suggest that landscape architects excavate the characteristics of local classical gardens through relevant literature, historical maps, and other sources, restore classical gardens, and construct new landscapes as public leisure spaces and displays of garden culture, while also protecting urban modernization and historic sites.

The research has certain limitations. Firstly, there are no extant remains of Changsha gardens in the Ming Dynasty. Only five existing gardens are known, which comprise only a quarter of the total number. These gardens are Jia Yi's former residence (the garden of ancestral hall), Kaifu Temple, Yuelu Academy, Lushan Temple, and Yunlu Palace (religious gardens), which belong to two types. The five existing gardens have all been rebuilt and repaired on a large scale during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and modern times. As with the literature, paintings and maps are visual representations of landscape in cultural form, and maps are a complex and culturally constructed means of representing knowledge [48,49]. However, due to the lack of visual data, such as historical maps, garden plans, and garden paintings of the Ming Dynasty, it is difficult to verify the style and appearance of the Ming Dynasty gardens. The other four types of gardens, namely, royal gardens, private gardens, academic gardens, and gardens of government office, could not be researched through relics. Secondly, the historical documents of Changsha gardens in the Ming Dynasty might be incomplete. The introduction of gardens in the documents is often brief, and some documents tend to be lyrical, which might limit the understanding of the history of Changsha gardens in the Ming Dynasty.

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