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Chinese Chan Buddhism and the Agrarian Aesthetic in the Garden

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Abstract: As the most important Buddhist school in the history of Chinese Buddhism, the philosophy of Chan Buddhism and its agricultural Chan practice have had a profound influence on the lives of the literati and scholars. Both historically and logically, the term “Chan Dharma 禪法” is extremely rich in connotations. The so-called “agricultural Chan 農禪” is a transformation of Chinese farming culture into the “Chan practice” by practising meditation through farming activities. The “garden farming 園耕” refers to the farming activities of the literati and scholars in the gardens, which were driven by the style of agricultural Chan. Under the influence of agricultural Chan, “garden farming” took on a new spiritual attitude towards crops and created a natural aesthetic realm of life in the act of farming. This article consists of three main sections. I start with an introduction to the religious thoughts and practices of Chan Buddhism, pointing out that the underlying colour of Chan Buddhism is the aesthetics of life, while gradually evoking its special practice of Chan. The second section discusses the concept of agricultural Chan and farming activities in gardens, to figure out the characteristics of agricultural Chan and how farming activities in gardens are carried out. In the third section, I argue for the beauty of farming in gardens, pointing out the essence of the beauty in garden farming and what aesthetic possibilities the act of farming in gardens may embody.

Keywords: agricultural Chan; farming practice; nature; aesthetics



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1. The Religious Thought and Practice of Chinese Chan Buddhism

The doctrinal and sectarian development of Chinese Chan Buddhism has a long history, and the practice of Chan is not only spread within Chan School, but is also widespread in the lives of Buddhist monastics, believers and lay people in general, resulting in deep and multifaceted connotations of the term ‘Chan Dharma 禪法’. It also involves a great deal of ‘farming’ vocabulary associated with the practice of Chan. In the following, I will first introduce the general idea in the religious thoughts of Chan Buddhism, then I will discuss the practice in Chan Buddhism to figure out the dynamic construction within Chan and dharma. Both the religious thought and practice in Chan Buddhism lead to the understanding of agricultural Chan as many farming vocabularies are associated with Chan practices.

1.1. Religious Thought in Chinese Chan Buddhism

Chinese Chan Buddhism is the most important Buddhist school in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Among the various schools of Chinese Buddhism, Chinese Chan Buddhism was not only an early and long-established school, with many branches and a high degree of domestication, but it also had a far-reaching influence on the thinking patterns and lifestyles of the literati class, as well as on the spiritual tastes, aesthetic trends and historical atmosphere of the time.

First of all, the harmony 圓融 is the cornerstone of Chan thoughts. A sense of harmony is prevalent in all Buddhist schools in the Sui and Tang dynasties, and this is also the case in Chan School. Chan Buddhism’s harmony is the process of integrating the doctrines and practices of Buddhism into its own growth by taking in the history of Buddhist

development with the Chan approach. Although Chan appears to be “a separate transmission outside the teachings 教外別傳” referred to as “different religion 別教”, it is in fact also called “yuanjiao 圓教”—a religion of integration and harmony. It is an indisputable fact that the first patriarch of Chan in China, Bodhidharma combined the Mahayana and the Hinayana view of Chan and laid the cultural tone of Chinese Buddhism from the small to the great with a rounded attitude.

Secondly, the integration of Buddhism into life through practice is the pillar of Chan thoughts. It is noteworthy that the Fourth Patriarch Daoxin 道信 “suspended” the Chan School’s wandering and secluded life with no fixed place and trace of action, and in 625AD, he began to “ensconce 安居” and opened an altar for Chan sermon at Zhengjue Temple in Huangmei Mountain. This “settlement” rapidly expanded the Chan monastic institutions and regulations, which was conducive to the convergence and growth of the monastic community. At the same time, Daoxin 道信 advocated a “monastic farming” approach that the monks cultivated the land, directly participating in farming practices to establish and maintain economic autonomy and independence from outsiders” (Ronald S. Green 2013). This self-sufficiency in farming not only exempted monks from laypersons’ donations to maintain livelihood which their Indian Buddhist counterparts mainly rely on, but also form an independent tradition detached from government administrative and legal interventions. That “when Chinese Buddhism was persecuted by the government during the Tang Dynasty in 842, Chan Buddhism was able to survive more easily than doctrinal Buddhist traditions because it was more economically autonomous from the government than those other traditions” (Ronald S. Green 2013). As a result, Chan Buddhism eventually became a long-lasting and self-sufficient Buddhist school and farming emerged as a prominent approach to everyday life practices.

Thirdly, the Chan Buddhism’s philosophy of life is based on the dimension of the ‘mind’. The mind is both the ontology of philosophy and the subject of life, and is equivalent to the Buddha in faith. This equivalence means that it does not establish words as a way to reveal the essence of the Tathāgata-garbha. As it is recorded in the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch that “Good friends, not being deluded about one’s own mind is called ‘self-realization’; self-realization is called ‘seeing one’s nature’; seeing one’s nature is called ‘becoming a Buddha’” (Yampolsky 1967, p. 150). The idea of “mind as Buddha 即心即佛” means that the infinite Buddha wisdom is inherent in every person’s mind and can be realized in life. This could be traced back to the Five Patriarchs 五祖, Hong Ren 弘忍, opened the “Eastern Mountain Dharma Gate 東山法門”, and many of his disciples were divided into two sects, the Northern and Southern, with Huineng’s 慧能 Southern Sect being particularly influential. After that, there are Huairang 懷讓 in Nanyue, Xingsi 行思 in Qingyuan, Shenhui 神會 in Heze, Huizhong 慧忠 in Nanyang and Xuanjue 玄覺 in Yongjia who transmitted the lamp 傳燈接法 (the transmission of the dharma from master to disciple). This genealogical continuity also reflected the relations between the mind and Buddha. Southern Buddhism has always advocated no mind, nonattachment, no dwelling, and “mind as Buddha 即心即佛”, but this “mind” is not an abstract theoretical presupposition, but a daily life of walking in the moment, stopping in the moment. With the maturation and crystalization of Chan movements over time, it emphasized “the the role of the Buddha-nature, or pure mind, within, as well as the behavior of the illusions—the false thoughts, or impure mind—that obscure the appreciation of our inner purity” (McRae 2004, p. 17). The so-called ‘mind’ is the ‘ordinary mind’ of ‘living in the moment’, where the mind is in things, not outside things, let alone outside the world.

Fourthly, the philosophy of life in Chan Buddhism is also called life aesthetics. That “Chan advocates an instantaneous, all-encompassing enlightenment that happens in the context of the everyday realm and retains a direct connection with life itself. It is in the ordinary perceptual existence of everyday life that one can find transcendence and enlightenment, and that one can attain the indestructible Buddha-nature” (Li 2017, pp. 161–62). This could be manifested in the history of Chinese Buddhism. It is known that three events in the history of Chinese Buddhism set the tone for the historical development of Chi-

nese Chan Buddhism: “dual cultivation of Chan and Pure Land 禪淨雙修”, “Zhuang-Chan merging 莊禪合流”, and “monastic farming approach 農禪並舉”. After the Northern Song Dynasty, most of the Buddhist schools died out and only schools of Chan and Pure Land remained, which gradually merged, and Chan was similar to Lao-Zhuang Daoism in that it advocated practising agriculture, all of which made Chinese Chan Buddhism a “secular” sense. “By the time of Mazu (709–788), the agricultural Chan had become a prominent meditation practices of Chan monasticism as a result of the reform on thoughts, doctrinal teachings, ritual observances and spiritual practices of Chan. Under these circumstances, the agricultural Chan was established by Mazu’s disciple, the Chan master Baizhang Huaihai (749–814), in the form of qinggui (monastic rules and procedures)” (Huan Qiu 2013, p. 33). It can be inferred from this institutional arena that Chan Buddhism’s focus on farming practices is in fact a philosophy in life with its roots in living in the present world. It neither encourages nor rejects secular desire, it defuses it; it does not exaggerate the distance and gulf between the ideal and reality, but instead merges the ideal and reality into one, realising the individual ideal in the vast and boundless life. Such a philosophy and aesthetic is fully embodied in the practices of Agricultural Chan.

1.2. Spiritual Practices of Chan Buddhism

“Xiuxing 修行” means to practice—to implement faith, to integrate faith into life and even to rewrite the process and results of life. Some terms in Buddhism, such as the Three Vehicles of Learning 三學, Four Noble Truth 四諦, Eightfold Path 八正道, Four Meditation Heavens (Caturdhyana bhumi) 四禪天, Four Foundations of Mindfulness 四念處, and even Eight Hundred Thousand Dharma Door 八萬法門, are all related to Buddhist practices. There are many ways to improve the efficiency and quality of practices, such as the popular “Sutra of Practice” written by the Indian monks Luocho 羅刹 and translated by Zhu Fahu 竺法護 in the Western Jin Dynasty. As early as the primitive Buddhist period, the “One Practice 一修法” was one of the “ten superior methods 十裏法” mentioned by Shakyamuni in Volume 9 of the Chang ahan jing (Dirghagama-sutra) 長阿含經.

In a narrower sense, “Chan Dharma” is the specific practice of Chan Buddhism. The Dharmadhara Sutra 達摩多羅禪經 (in two volumes), translated by Buddhahadra in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, is an early text on Chan practices, progressively opening the door to the “Chan Dharma”. The summaries are more comprehensive and precise in Chixiu Baizhang qinggui (Imperial Edition of the Baizhang Rules of Purity 敕修百丈清規, the Jingde chuandeng lu (Record of the transmission of the lamp 景德傳燈錄 and the Chan Lin Xiang Qi Jian 禪林象器箋. Sitting cross-legged, without mode of mind, and the whole being becomes one with the universe is called sitting meditation, which is an Indian Buddhist method of inner introspection, practiced by both Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism. Chan Buddhism went on to amplify this approach. After the eastern journey of Kumara-jiva, he equated Chan with samādhi 三昧 (sanmei; meditation), advocated the rituals, regulations, and practices of sitting meditation, and forged a colorful culture of Chan Buddhism. For example, according to Volume 5 of the Chixiu Baizhang qinggui (Imperial Edition of the Baizhang Rules of Purity 敕修百丈清規, sitting in meditation requires resting the mind and even abstaining from food, sitting cross-legged or half-legged, with the left palm on the right palm, the tongue against the palate, the eyes slightly open, leaving all conceptual thinking behind and continuous contemplation. There are also various Chan items like “zuotang 坐堂, zuocan 坐參”, “qingchan 請禪”, “peichan 陪禪”. In addition, there are even “sitting meditation boards” in front of the dormitories to announce the time of sitting meditation.

In a broader sense, it does not end there. The term “Chan Dharma” has broader intellectual lore, value connotations, and concomitant effects. This term can be perceived in two ways: one is “Chan 禪” and the other is “Dharma 法”. On the one hand, ‘Chan’ is a multifaceted concept. From the perspective of cultural transmission, “Chan” comes from Indian “Dhyāna” and is a method of practice, a way for individuals to practise the Dharma through meditation and contemplation—both the physical form of “meditation”

and the inner thought of “wisdom” which combined the theoretical and practical results of ‘meditation 定’ and ‘wisdom 慧’ in the ‘Three Vehicles of Learning 三學’. On this basis, after it was introduced to China, Chan became more than just a method of practice and gradually grew into a Buddhist school, and in later times it could even refer to Buddhism in general. However, from the perspective of the local Chinese culture, it had a very precise and specific meaning before the Indian ‘Dhyāna’ was introduced to China. The term “Chan” in domestic Chinese culture refers to the rituals of the emperor’s sacrifice to Heaven and Earth, and specifically refers to the “cession” of the emperor to another in order to achieve successive reigns and the continuity of the state. There is a term called “Chan rang 禪讓” referring to cession in a Taoist moral manner which advocates a modest and natural attitude towards power with wuwei erzhi (to govern without exertion). It can be inferred from a retroactive perspective, that the maturation of Chan is in fact a ‘product’ of multicultural interactions, especially the product of the dialogue between the Chinese and Indian cultures. It is a Buddhist way of practice as well as a Taoist open-mindedness and an implicit significance of reestablishment among kinship, clans and even power of imperial sovereignty.

On the other hand, the meaning of “dharma” is polysemous. “Dharma” is the catechism, doctrine and canon to which people adhere to the principles and methods of Buddhism (Cozort and Shields 2018). “Dharma” also represents the secular ideal of fairness, justice, rationality and moral self-discipline (Buswell and Lopez 2013). “Dharma” is a multifaceted concept. On the face of it, dharma from India is more akin to a Western ‘contract’—a ‘contract’ between the divine and the people that people believe in the divine and the divine act as the patron saint of people. The life of faith is in accordance with the law of cause and effect, which also supports the cycle of karma. The fact that the Dharma is the most important aspect of Triratna (Buddha-dharma-sangha) also embodies piety for the rationality of cause and effect. On a deeper level, however, from the perspective of the local Chinese culture, “dharma” already had a very precise and specific meaning before it was introduced to China from India. The so-called “Dharma 法” of ancient China before India can be explained from water 水 and the unicorn 麩 when being explained in semiotic Chinese characters and radicals. The word “unicorn 麩”, refers to a divine beast that is able to distinguish justice from evil, whose horns can punish people who disobey the righteousness of the law. Therefore, “Dharma” is to regulate people and has the meaning of law, decree, standard, etc. It is not only a causal and rational method of behaviour for people to follow, emulate and refer to, but also a principle for judging right and wrong in a concrete value theory.

Throughout history, the manifestation of Chan Dharma has been a major factor in the widespread dissemination and overall transmutation of Chinese Buddhist culture. If the Sinicization of Buddhism was a major historical progress in the history of Chinese Buddhism, then one of the key symbols of Buddhism’s domestication was that it brought ‘Chan Dharma’ to the centre stage of history. At the end of the third century (402), the Sutra of Sitting Meditation Samhita 坐禪三昧經 translated by Kumārajīva (344–413) included the Sutra of Bodhisattva Meditation 菩薩禪法經, the Sutra of Alanruo Practice Meditation 阿蘭若習禪法, and the Essentials of Meditation 禪法要, which mainly introduced various methods of sitting meditation and had an extremely widespread influence. However, when Buddhism was first introduced to China from the West in the early third century, before the establishment of Chan School there was already the role of *chanshi* (practitioner who practices meditation). During this period, *chanshi* were only limited as one of the types of Buddhist clergy who were on a par with the *fashi* (dharma teacher) 法師 who preached the Dharma and the *lvshi* (discipline teacher) 律師 who practised discipline. Obviously, Chan did not forge its orthodoxy as a predominant method to disseminate Buddhism at this time. Before the fifth century, although there were no Chan schools, practitioners of Chan meditation were extremely common. In fact, most schools of Chinese Buddhism were established by the Sui and Tang dynasties, and before the fifth century there may have been “liujia qizong 六家七宗”, but there were no established schools. In the Sui and

Tang dynasties and thereafter, schools sprang up, each fulfilling its own meditation practices, and the practitioners of Chan were not confined to internal disciples of Chan school. As for the sixth century, when Buddhism flourished in ancient China, not only did Chinese Buddhism establish the most representative and influential Chan School, but there was a prevailing phenomenon that basically most Buddhist schools practise “Chan” — “sitting in meditation 坐禪” was the consensus of all Buddhism schools at that time. There were also Chan teachings outside Chan school. For example, the “Zuochan fayao (Manual for sitting meditation) 坐禪法要” elaborated by Master Zhizhe of Tiantai for his lay brother is also a summary of the Mohe Zhiguan 摩訶止觀- Master Zhizhe (538–597) established ten special sections to expound the principles of sitting meditation, respectively are juyuan 具緣, heyu 呵欲, qigai 棄蓋, tiaohu 調和, fangbian 方便, zhengxiu 正修, shanfa 善發, juemo 覺魔, zhibing 治病, zhengguo 證果. When it comes to the Tang Dynasty, Zong Mi 宗密 (780–841) combined Chan with Huayan and created “Huayan Chan 華嚴禪”. Zong Mi divided Chan into five categories: waidao Chan (exoteric Chan), fanfu Chan (lay Chan), Hinayana Chan, Mahayana Chan, and the supreme Chan as taught by Bodhidharma. He proposed that the highest manifestation of Huayan Chan should be the combination of Huayan Buddhism 華嚴宗 and Heze Chan 荷澤禪, and even the integration of doctrines and Chan teachings as one. Then the Chan Buddhism transformed from a separate transmission of outside teachings to a form of unity with doctrines and Chan teachings. What is even more worth emphasising is that the ‘Chan Dharma’ quickly became popular outside the walls of monasteries with literati and scholars vying to emulate it. With or without Buddhist beliefs, the practice of Chan became a popular daily practice for literati and scholars to cultivate a lifestyle of leisure and elegance.

Logically, the promotion of the Chan Dharma is also an important theoretical support for the implementation of Buddhist doctrine in general. The inner thread of the sinicization of Buddhism is the shift from Prajna to Nirvana Buddhata, from Buddhist negation theory to affirmation theory, and the fleshing out of ontological thinking about the world into self-meditation. Chinese Chan Buddhism with its basic attitude of harmony and integration as a universal way of practice is the fundamental dharma door of the implementation of Buddhism’s teachings. For example, in the *Buddha’s Commentary on the Immeasurable Life Sutra* 佛說觀無量壽經疏妙宗鈔會本, it is stated that “Scholars should know that since daily contemplation, all sanguan 三觀 (Emptiness, Prajnapti, Madhyamika) are used for Chan practices which required thinking to make the manifestation of the image. If you complete meditation like this, the confusion of the three realms (realms of sensuous desire, form and formless) of thinking will be subdued” (Zhizhe 2002, p. 164). Here, “thinking becomes the emergence of the image” is very crucial. According to the teachings of the Tiantai School, in the practices of the Pure Land School, it is only through the wonderful observation of images that it is possible to attain the seventh faith position, and only when one reaches this position can one view the Buddha’s “true Dharma body”. In other words, the significance of Chan practices as a meditation approach is far more universal than Chan as a school.

The Chan Dharma spread broadly and is boundless and unlimited. As a method of practice, the main paradigm of thinking in Chan practices lies in the fact that it offers a non-objectification mode of thinking. In Huihai’s *Treatise on the Essentials of Enlightenment* 頓悟入道要門論, it is said that: “The question: What is seeing the true body of the Buddha? Answer: To see the Buddha’s true body without seeing what is there is to see the Buddha’s true body... It is like a bright mirror; if one looks at the image of an object, the image appears; if one does not look at the image, the image is not seen.” (Huihai 1968, p. 42). Objectification pursues a one-to-one, one-way relationship between subject and object, while non-objectification is a transcendence of objectification, constituting a field in which subject and object are juxtaposed into the present and eliminated the fixed identity of subject and object. It is similar to the phenomenological process of intentional generation which aims to forge a domain of presentness. In this domain, the so-called Being 有 is an object, and non-being 無 is also an object. They merge and integrate as a unitary whole without falling into dualistic extremes.

On this basis, the spiritual connotation of Chan Dharma more importantly lies in its role as a realm of life which gives the values of the other shore to the secular this shore. If the concentration of the Pure Land is about rendering the magnificence of the other shore and the firm belief in the salvation of all sentient beings, the focus of Chan Dharma is to discover the value of the secular this shore and the aesthetic sentiment of self-realisation. Chan Dharma does not seek to remove the theoretical presupposition of the other shore, but rather to erase the boundary between this shore and the other shore—compared to making the other shore an imitation of this shore’s magnificence and prosperity image, it prefers to create a transcendentalism ideal in secular this shore. To step further, the realization of transcendentalism ideal in this shore is achieved through the practices of the present. Those practices of enlightenment are all realized in the process of daily activities like eating when hungry, sleeping when tired, chopping wood, and carrying water. This emphasis on concrete activities of daily matters forms an effective prelude to the elaboration of the meaning of farming.

1.3. The “Farming” Vocabulary Associated with Chan Practices

Even without the specific terminology of “agricultural Chan”, in Chinese Buddhism, and particularly in Chan Buddhism, there is a ubiquitous use of terms that are close to the culture of ‘farming’.

Firstly, there are terms relating to the process of plant growth, for example, “zhongzi 種子 (seed), yishu 異熟 (ripening), yinghua 英華 (blossom), guoshi 果實 (fruit), etc. That a “zhongzi 種子 (seed)” is buried in the soil, takes root, sprouts, “blooming”, “ripening” and “bears fruit”, as originally developed by the ancients as they observed the growth of crops, eventually became a fundamental theoretical category in Buddhism. In Chan Buddhism, the cultivation of Buddha-nature in the human body is metaphorically described in terms of the growth of the “seed”—the plant tuber—which is Buddha-nature. The essence of a “zhongzi 種子 (seed)” is that it has the ability to grow, to take root and sprout, to break through the surface of the earth, to absorb the essence and nutrients of heaven and earth, to blossom, to ripen and to bear. It is worth noting that the ‘ripening’ here has a specific indication of plant growth. The so-called “Huayan 華嚴” is also known as “Huayan 花嚴”, in which “hua” means “flower” and “yan” means “solemnity”.

Secondly, there are Chan terms “infinitesimal particle” related to farming tools “a hoe 阿耨” which is mentioned in the *Essential Art of Qi Min*, “Ch.1, Ploughing Fields” 齊民要術·耕田第一, that: “The way to raise seedlings is better to hoe (耨 nou) than to shovel (鋤 ju), and to sweep (划 hua) than to hoe (耨 nou), with a handle three inches long and a blade two inches wide, to paddle the ground and weed” (Siwei Jia 2011, p. 21). “Hoe (耨 nou)” is a tool for weeding. The word “hoe (耨 nou)” is constituted of the Chinese radical “plough (耒 lei)”, which is an agricultural tool used to turn the soil, and “chen (辰)” refers to the shell which can also be used for ploughing. And the radical “cun (寸)” means manual operation. The use of “hoe” in the translation is clearly a “mirror image” of ancient Chinese farming culture.

Thirdly, there are terms related to farmland—for example, ‘tian 田 (farmland)’, ‘jin 井 (wells)’, ‘yi 邑 (city)’, ‘ye 野 (heath)’, etc. As the proverb goes, “All who admire Buddhism respect the field of blessings 欽崇釋教, 俱敬福田”, and it is in terms of the “field of blessings (福田)” that Buddhism creates and promotes the world on the other side. The term “field of blessings 福田” is similar to “blessed well 福井”, and there is also another saying “body field 身田”. The word “yi 邑” is similar to “capital 都”, but is older than “capital 都” and is often referred to in the scriptures as “jing-yi 京邑” or “luo-yi 洛邑”. Also, ‘ye 野 (wildness)’ is the opposite of ‘chao 朝 (court)’. All these terms relating to farmland are connected to the Chan vocabularies.

From a practical point of view, monks are also associated with gardens. A noteworthy detail is that those gardens which were left unattended were mostly taken over by monks. In Liang Zhangju 梁章鉅’s *Inscription of Canglang Pavilion* 滄浪亭圖題詠跋 in the Qing dynasty, it is recorded that: “The garden was guarded by monks, and monks have

a field, which can be used for decades, and it is hoped that those who board the pavilion afterwards will have it forever” (Liang 2008, p. 12). Monks have always had the status of ‘legal representatives’ who maintained the daily operation of the garden buildings. This is due to the fact that monks are *chujia ren* 出家人 who are detached from their secular life and family bonds, so objectively they are isolated from the interests of the family community entanglements which in turn effectively prevented disputes over property rights. The former owner of the garden is the “high standard” of the garden with delicate design and symbolization of virtue and tastes, while the monk is the “bottom line” of the garden with the monk’s role as a garden keeper, leading a simple monastic life. Monks not only operated within the monastery, but also in gardens that were abandoned by their original owners, transforming these into a kind of ‘public facility’ where monks practise and fulfil their promise to protect all living beings.

With a mythologizing sleight of hand, monks are often ‘woven’ into stories and myths of ‘origins’ of various skills including gardening. For example, there is a story in the *Record of Yangxian Pottery*, “Jiasu” 陽羨名陶錄·家溯 that “There is a monk in Jinsha Temple who has been famous for a long time. It is said that this monk has an introverted personality and is used to being accompanied by pots and jars. The steps for the monks to make a clap pot are to select fine grained soil, pinch it, make it a round shape, hollow the center, decorate it with a hand shank, and finally put it in a burning cave; a clay pot that can be used by people on a daily basis is made out of this” (Q. Wu 2011, pp. 259–60). This sounds more like a Buddhist story with Taoist ethos, and has been disseminated for a long time and cannot be disproved. Another example is that the fragrance of flowers has always been associated with monks. In Wen Zhenheng 文震亨’s *Records of Special Things*, “Ruixiang” 長物誌·瑞香, it is recorded that: “According to legend, there was a bhikkhu in Mount Lu who was sleeping in the daytime and smelled the fragrance of flowers in his dream, so he woke up and searched for them, hence the name of this kind of fragrance is called Sleeping Incense. It is said that this kind of flower symbolizes a propitious omen, so it is also called an auspicious fragrance, another name called Shenang 麝囊” (Wen 2011, p. 443). Here, it discusses daytime sleep, not nighttime sleep, and the bhikkhu who smells the flowers is clearly a daydreamer whose dreaming is consistent with the inner impulse and practical logic of artistic creation.

2. Agricultural Chan and Farming in the Garden

There is a large volume of published studies describing the relations between nature and Chinese Chan Buddhism. When it comes to the connection between Chan (Zen) Buddhism and agricultural practices, the focal attention of studies is more paid to Japanese Zen Buddhism. For example, Swanson discusses the relationship between religion and nature, specifically focusing on the roles of meditation and agricultural practices in Japanese Zen Buddhism, which shares historical and philosophical connections with Chinese Chan Buddhism (Swanson 2011, pp. 683–701). Ronald Green illustrated Chinese Chan Buddhism’s direct connections with farming self-sufficiency from a monastic institutional perspective, but this is only a small part to explore Fukuoka Masanobu’s identity as a naturalist farmer (Ronald S. Green 2013). There are also studies on the ecological dimensions of various Chinese religions, including Chan Buddhism, and their potential contributions to addressing contemporary environmental issues (Tucker and Berthrong 2014). Considering this, the proposition of “agricultural Chan” in this research is to root the specific aspects of Chinese Chan Buddhism into the process of farming in gardens as a result of the Sinicization of Chan Buddhism. This section is intended to show that “agricultural Chan” as farming activities in the garden is a social product of the combination of “Chan Dharma” and ancient Chinese farming civilisation. At the same time, gardens were not just a luxury for the nobility of the palace to enjoy material possessions, but had their own necessity for cultivation. In fact, the early monastic community was also potentially associated with garden farming.

2.1. What Is “Agricultural Chan”?

The gardens of Suzhou are known for their intricate designs, which often incorporate elements of Agricultural Chan, emphasizing the connection between humans and their natural environment (Liu 2005). The term ‘Agricultural Chan’ refers to the special meditation practice of the ancient Chinese literati through ‘farming’, and the dual world of ideological agendas and religious sentiments that emerged from it. The so-called “farming 農” can be divided into two levels, one being the abstract social division of labour in general, which relates to ‘agriculture’ and ‘farmer’ in a social sense, and the other being the specific empirical individual behaviour of “farming 農” which associates with personal behavior in response to personal satisfaction.

Ancient Chinese society was an agricultural society, and farming was the cornerstone of the state. The moral principles favor the standpoint of agricultural officials whose aim is to persuade people to participate in farming activities and make the importance of farming a common social consensus. If one were to follow industry and commerce, one would be relegated to the last class of society. As an old proverb is mentioned in the *Essential Art of Qi Min*, “Ch. 26, Goods and Produce” 齊民要術·貨殖第二十六: “Seeking wealth with a poor man’s mind, it is better to be a craftsman than a farmer, to be a businessman than a craftsman, to set up a stall in the market than to embroider. This is claimed that the business is the last resort which is easy to seek profit” (Jia 2011, p. 138). “Seeking wealth with a poor man’s mind” implies a rapid elevation, transfer and leap in social status—not seeking wealth with wealth, not being wealthy in the first place, but seeking to change from “poor” to “rich” with an original “poor” status. The consequence of this “change” was that the peasants were inevitably inferior to the workers and merchants. Therefore, this rapid leap in pursuing short-term competitive efficiency out of profit-making considerations belonging to the “last(marginal) industry 末業” and logic of the poor. That “agriculture encouragement 勸農” was the hallmark of ancient outstanding feudal officials. In *Essential Art of Qi Min*, “Epilogue” 齊民要術·後序, it is mentioned that *shouling* 守令 is the official who is close to people and shouling’s primary responsibility is to persuade and encourage people to farm. In the Han Dynasty, officials such as Zhaoxinchun and Gong Sui all persuaded people to go farming in the field (Jia 2011, p. 313). There is a long history of “agriculture encouragement” in ancient Chinese society.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to spiritualise an agricultural ‘farming’ that is institutionally and ideologically subservient to the societal division of labour. This can be manifested in the descriptions of Daoan’s 道安 *Two Contemplations* 二教論 that the increase in the amount of farmers due to the agricultural officials. The contents of agricultural life are a constitution of eight aspects, including sowing five kinds of grains, and plant mulberry to ensure sufficiency in clothes and foods. So, it is also called eight policies. Farming can provide food and goods which is what it is good at (Daoxuan 1990, p. 137). That is to say, the only responsibility for the ‘peasant family’ is farming to provide food, clothes and goods, all associated with living material subsistence, but not with the individual’s inner spiritual world or spiritual transcendence. In other words, ‘agriculture encouragement 勸農’ was mostly a function of showing the bureaucrat’s political performances during his reign, and had nothing to do with his personal cultivation of the mind.

As is the case that agricultural Chan exemplified as a paradigmatic approach for monastics’ Buddhist practice and enlightenment, it also exerts spiritual influences on the farming practices of the literati class. That agricultural Chan refracted in literati’s farming activities called “gonggeng 躬耕 (bending one’s back to plow a field)” which able to infuse poetry, personality charisma, life introspections and even rationality in farming activities. This literati style of “gonggeng 躬耕” emphasizes not “plowing” but “bowing”, focusing on personal practice that the literati, as individuals, directly face the soil. In the process of contact with natural objects, especially crops, the literati accumulated experience of harvesting, repeatedly “chewed” the inner enlightenment of their spiritual minds or resonated with religious sensibilities. Under most circumstances, such a limited personal behavior of “gonggeng 躬耕” is rare in vast wildness, but remains in gardens of Jiangnan—the literati,

as garden owners, “plowing under the sun and reading when it rains”. The experience of reading with “gonggeng 躬耕” accompanying rooted into the heart of the literati is just the same as sowing the seed in the soil.

Logically, the parallelism of agriculture and Chan Buddhism is reflected in the linkage of human beings’ dual existence that agriculture points to human physical corporeity while Chan Buddhism points to the human spirit. Without agriculture, where would food come from? Farming is the condition for food; just as without Chan Buddhism, how can the mind be at peace? “Chan” is the practice of the mind. Therefore, “agricultural Chan” is the theoretical assumption, the realistic process and the ultimate result of the unification of the dual human existence. Historically, the value of agricultural Chan manifested in its breakthrough of changing the prejudice that Chan Dharma can only be achieved through silent illumination and creating the meditation experience on a practical level through concrete manual activities. Before the advent of Agricultural Chan, Chan Dharma, as an ancient dharma door of practices, mainly focused on silent illumination and introspection of the mind. After the advent of Agricultural Chan, Chan Dharma, as a new approach to practices, focuses on the manual work of physical manipulation. “Agricultural Chan” can be described as a “revolution” of Chan practices with Chinese special farming tradition.

2.2. The Necessity of “Farming” in the Garden

In the exploration of gardens and farming in the context of Chinese literati culture, it is important to understand the significance of gardens as both a setting for intellectual and artistic activities and as a reflection of the literati’s values and ideals. Clunas (1996) emphasizes that gardens were not just the backdrop for literati pursuits, but their construction and maintenance were activities akin to the creation of calligraphy, painting, and poetry (p. 12). The literati gardens provided a space for escape, reflection, and creative expression, as highlighted by Murck (2000) in the context of Song China (p. 79). Rinaldi (2012) emphasizes the dual purpose of literati gardens, where the owner could retreat from the world, engage in scholarly pursuits, and cultivate plants for their aesthetic, medicinal, or culinary properties (p. 35). This idea of cultivating plants for various purposes links back to the concept of farming within the gardens, which played a significant role in the lives of literati.

Ironically, in the opinion of many literati, the land of Jiangnan was not suitable for farming. In Wu Weiye’s 吳偉業 “Returning to the Village and Farm” 歸村躬耕記 in the Qing dynasty, it is stated that: “My city is a remote and primitive seaside, with ruined unpaved ditches, shoes being immersed in shenchi 沈斥 and dirty juru 沮洳. The yearly harvest was frequently and repeatedly missed each year. The tax is calculated on a daily basis, so why should those who live here be pleased to farm?” (W. Wu 2008, p. 254). What is “shenchi 沈斥”? Salt and alkaline land. What is “juru 沮洳”? A marshy quagmire. In the area of Jiangsu and Zhejiang province, not only is there the lake of Taihu, but also the sea and the world beyond. In the remote and primitive seaside, how can farming be convenient? What is the pleasure of farming? The “sea” of the so-called “seashore” is often a place of uncontrollable barbarism in ancient context; anything associated with the “sea” has an inherent meaning of portentousness. What is the necessity of “farming” under such conditions? What Wu Weiye mentioned is the land of Jiangnan, but not the garden of Jiangnan, which shares different material foundation. Regarding this situation, there are two reasons for “farming” in gardens.

Firstly, they are coerced by the reality of their predicament. The owner of the garden needed “food”. Zhu Shou 朱綬 in the Qing dynasty recounted a period of his experience in his book “Notes on Moving House 移居圖記” that: “I live in a place where the door cannot pass a horse, where there is a hall without a high ceiling, and where my hands can touch the eave tiles. The garden is too small to grow flowers and fruits. I live with my wife downstairs and have no place to put my clothes. In front of the hall, there is a yi 窠 (side room), which is much shorter than the hall. Beyond the wall is the neighbor’s cookhouse, and the smoke blows over at every turn. The narrow space on the left side of the building

made two small houses for cooking and taking water, covered by a large mulberry tree on top. However, there was no such thing as a bathroom, a rice and flour jar or a wine jar..... I was over thirty years old, haggard face with melancholy. I had no choice but to settle down my home here, like a wren perched on a branch" (S. Zhu 2008, p. 106). The "arrogance" of the garden owner is to be detached from the secular life, and here, Zhu Shou obviously did not reach this status at all. As he described that the smoke from his neighbour's chimney at lunchtime moves to his house from time to time while he had nothing but a few old books that he had saved up, not even a rice bowl. Zhu Shou said that he was like a bird perched on a tree branch, and his words were filled with loneliness.

The food that came from farming was simply a way to make ends meet for those sorehead literati. The position of officials may rise and fall from generation to generation, and family fortune could be lost and devalued in an instant. That 'farming in garden' was always needed in real life, and the memories of the garden owner's unpleasant childhood would not be diluted or reduced, but is likely to be magnified and intensified. There is a quote from Li Dongyang's 李東陽 *Record of East Village* 東莊記 in the Ming dynasty that said, "The Wu family have lived in this village for several generations. From the Yuan dynasty to the early Ming dynasty, nine out of ten of the neighbours died and moved away, but only the Wu family survived. When his father died and the family moved west, he returned to his old job, not daring to abandon it, and was careful to clear the soil, hoe the ground, dredge the waterways, plant and weed, and work on time (Li 2008, p. 59). The "origin" of Baizhang's well-known dictum "those who do not work for one day, should not eat for one day (不作不食)" ought to be the idea that if you do not work, then there is no food available.

Secondly, they are tempted by seclusion and nature. The owner of the garden needs a leisurely vocation for refreshment. In the first line of Zhu Changwen's 朱長文 *Record of the Garden* 樂圃記 in the Song dynasty, it noted that: "If a man participate into the secular world and try to be successful, he will follow the ruler of Yao and the people of Yu, whose fortune and prosperity will flow to the world and to his descendants, and will have the same fame as Kui and Chi, and the same merit as Zhou and Shao. If they are detached from the idea of success in the secular world, they may fish, build, farm, or garden, adapt to the humid and marshy environment, shoulder with Huang and Qi, follow Yan and Zheng, and emulate Tao and Bai. The joy that one could attain from life is the same regardless of whether one's social situation is in a predicament or a prosperous rising stage." (C. Zhu 2008, p. 18). In the midst of advance and retreat, the distance between the official career and the secular ordinary life is the tension and flexibility that emerged in the two choices, two paths, and two moods of life for most ancient Chinese literati. Farming in the garden is not the means of production of livelihood for most peasants, but an expression of life attitude for a few literati who reject official careers and live in the remote mountains. This cloistered option connotes a mind that life is transient like boarding in this world. It also indicates the openness of an uninhibited man who sits and forgets, who does nothing and holds an attitude of frankness towards life.

Thirdly, gardens are treasured not only for their aesthetic appeal, but also for the plants cultivated within them. According to Hardie (2004), garden culture in China has a long history, and plants played an important role in both the literati and imperial gardens (p. 3). This is also mentioned by Hargett (1988), who describes the Genyue, a wonderland created by Emperor Huizong, where nature was imitated and controlled, and plants were grown for their beauty and utility (p. 150). This suggests that farming and gardening were not only practical pursuits but also had deeper philosophical and symbolic meanings for the literati. It is worth noting that the "crops" in the garden, compared with other plants, such as decorative flowers and trees, are isolated from each other. This is highlighted in Wen Zhenheng's 文震亨 *Record of Growing Things*, "Flowers and Trees" 長物誌·花木: "A bean shed vegetable garden, mountain flavor, but if you plow acres of land in the center of the garden, it is far from an artistic pursuit with good taste." (Wen 2011, p. 441). What can be planted in the garden to make it "charming"? Gnarled and ancient branches, exotic

flowers and grasses, isolated and sparse ones that are not so prosperous and redundant can be used as decoration. It is not only inappropriate to plant bean and vegetable beds in the center part of the garden, but also for peach and plum, while plum and apricot's florescence are short-lived and should not be planted in abundance. This means that the garden owner's affirmation of the spiritual value of the 'crops' in the garden is very limited and even contemptuous. The plants in the gardens are essentially more like auspiciousness, used to mark the 'high and pure' taste of the garden owner who, "despite being in the market place, has the aura of the mountains and forests" (Wei 2008, p. 21). The dominant logic of the garden is 'visual logic', 'archaic logic', the logic of time and vicissitudes—deliberate isolation of "blank space" is, in fact, another expression of pragmatism. The various hypothesis of "farming" in gardens cannot hide its inner hypocrisy. If "farming" in gardens has its spiritual value in the world, these values are merely limited to the transient moments of the act of "farming", in a narrow level of concrete activities, for the literati valued the process and deportments within farming rather than the crops.

2.3. Early Monastic Groups and "Farming" in the Garden

In India, gardens were one of the quintessential places where the Buddha left the palace and newly developed urban community for meditative practice. As Āśvaghoṣa described in *Life of the Buddha (Buddhakarita)*, it was in the forest and garden that Buddha reached his first jñāna, the stage of meditation. The Buddha usually had two criteria for choosing a place for his sermons, purity and vastness, and gardens fit the demands. For example, the garden of the prince of the gods, Gita, in the city of Shiva, was far enough away from trouble to accommodate a thousand people: "a garden of a yojana, wide and luxuriant" (Yuan and Ming 2002, p. 76). "Yojana" is a unit of length, either the distance a bull travels in a day with its yoke on, or the distance an emperor marches in a day, or about 11.2 km, or about 16 km, indefinitely. According to the "Pingjiang Map" of Suzhou in the Southern Song Dynasty, the ancient city of Suzhou is about 4.5 km from north to south and 3.5 km from east to west. Purity aside, such a vast garden is by no means of the same magnitude as a private garden in Jiangnan.

As for China, the early monks who separated from their original families and entered monastic life as a novice (chujia 出家) had no constant source of economic income, so farming was and will remain a prerequisite for their livelihood regardless of at a secular home or monastic community. In Dao Heng's 道衡 "Commentary on Refutation" 釋駁論, he mentioned the criticisms made against monks by the public opinion at that time: "As for the monks, they have no respite in their pursuit, or they cultivate fields and gardens in the same way as farmers, or they compete with others for profits in commerce and trade, or they rely on medical science to make light of the cold and the heat, or they are resourceful and heretical in order to help their livelihood, or they accumulate the fortunes and misfortunes of the world, or they boasting so as to profit from the ordinary people" (Sengyou 1990, p. 35). What is the meaning of "cultivating fields and gardens the same way as farmers" and "boasting so as to profit from the people"? The explanation of Dao Heng 道衡 is that "the body needs cloth to wear because it has no hair and feathers, and the belly is not a Lagenaria that does not need to be fed, and it does not mean producing and possessing more than one's need to an extreme, but indicates a situation that when the year is rich, they take enough from the people, and when the time is tough, they exert themselves to be economically autonomous (Sengyou 1990, p. 36). That monks also need supplies for livelihood and had to resort to farming self-sufficiency

It is noteworthy that in the Chan monastic regulations, monks are not directly responsible for planting flowers and trees or handling gardening. In the Baizhang qinggui (Baizhang Rules of Purity) 百丈清規, there is a clear occupation named "dianzuo 典座", whose main duty is to instruct the monks to follow the regulations and disciplines, for example, to ensure that the food for the meal is clean and free from overeating or wastefulness, as well as to obey some necessary dining etiquette. Among these duties of "dianzuo 典座", there is also one namely "urge gardeners to farm and plant in a timely manner"

(Dehui 1968, p. 681). It is clear from this illustration that there were specialized ‘gardeners’ in the Chan monasteries, and monks did not need to participate in the gardening work by themselves. The specific work of the gardener is also mentioned in the Baizhang qing-gui (Baizhang Rules of Purity) 百丈清規: “Gardener should be hardworking and diligent, take the lead in planting vegetables, irrigating them in time so as to supply the hall kitchen to ensure that there is no shortage” (Dehui 1968, p. 682). Here the “gardener” is responsible for planting vegetables and supplying the kitchen, which is closer to the essential meaning of the word ‘farming’ in Agricultural Chan.

3. The Agrarian Aesthetic in the Garden

The engagement of farming in the garden is a crucial component that constitutes the aesthetic life of the garden owner. Rather than being a spiritual product, the garden is a domain that links the material and the spiritual level together. It seems that farming in the garden is to provide food, but in fact, it is an aesthetic place that is shaped by the physical actions of people. On this basis, ‘farming’ in garden is a blend of strong ‘agricultural Chan’ beauty and an aesthetic realm with the significance of ‘Agricultural Chann’.

3.1. The Aesthetic Essence of Farming in the Garden

The aesthetic essence of farming in a garden essentially lies in the fact that the purpose of gardening is to build a sense of beauty. “Farming” is a physical action of personal behaviour, which is neither beautiful nor unattractive. The beauty of farming is mainly forged in its provision of possibility. This possibility indicates the anticipated process of crops’ natural growth in the garden as well as from a causality standpoint. Such Beauty is endowed with an inclination towards a ‘process philosophy’, focusing on the physical action and personal experience and is necessarily a socialised process of looking back and observing from the causality position.

On the one hand, “farming” in garden is a process. Farming in garden can provide food. The food comes in different shapes, smells, is edible and has a moral goodness for its use, a goodness that is physically meaningful; but the bringing of food itself is only a necessary but not a sufficient precondition for the aesthetic intervention of farming in garden. Then it comes to the essence of “gardening” which appears to be a process practised by the garden owner in which accomplished within a certain period of time and by the physical action of the individual. That the process is the meaning. On the other hand, “farming” in garden is “result-oriented”. This “result” fails to obey an objective “cause and effect” logic, but is a result of the inner mind. That is to say, the garden owner has foreseen the whole process of the crops taking roots and growing to maturity at the starting point of farming. What accompanies this process is the garden owner’s mentality of bridging this secular world with the transcendental other shores. Moreover, this “result” is also the fruit of reality. That the garden can certainly be spiritualised, but must perform its economical function of production. The food produced by garden farming might be used for sacrificial rituals, but it will first be eaten by the garden owner. Without food’s connection with reality and mentality, farming in the garden cannot be intervened at the aesthetic level.

More importantly, here ‘farming’ is done within the garden. “It does not take place in the wilderness, where the relationship between man and nature is in a tense, conflicting rush, but only in the garden, in a poetic, patterned, ontologised ‘farmland’ within the garden, where man and nature are gentle and soothing. It is soft and relaxed. This ‘farmland’ is a special kind of place, which gathers together all the elements belonging to the garden, it is an idealised spiritual and personal place. “Nature” is a product of abstraction, but it still appears in a figurative concrete form, and has a sense of aesthetic.

3.2. The Aesthetic of “Agricultural Chan” in Garden Farming

The art of Chinese gardens is deeply rooted in the philosophy of balance and harmony, with every element carefully chosen and placed to create a unified and immersive experience (Feng 1985). Farming in the garden is not the equivalent of agricultural Chan. just

as Chan Dharma is not the equivalent of farming practices. However, agricultural Chan is bound to have profound impacts on farming activities in the garden, making farming in the garden infused with the aesthetic connotations of agriculture Chan.

Firstly, the devout attitude towards plants in the process of farming encompassed the spiritual principles of agricultural Chan. It is the *rangdu* (modest and gentle) 讓度 mentality that fills the garden owner's heart with admiration and exhilaration towards the plants and crops as well as everything in the universe. Chinese gardens are not merely collections of plants and buildings; they are symbolic recreations of the natural world, evoking the harmony between humans and nature (M. Keswick 2003). Moreover, this *rangdu* (modest and gentle) 讓度 mentality can be seen as the "gene" of "chanrang 禪讓" in Chan Buddhism, which has been confirmed by the Taoist philosophy of nature. With the egalitarian perception that "everything as the same 萬物等齊如一", crops are no longer the object that was driven by objectification for the reason that the Chan practitioner would consciously decentralized the subjectivity of the self-ego, diluting the contradictions and oppositions between subject and object, and rounding out the inner nature of the crop. This penetrates deep into the heart of the garden owner, enabling him to understand life in the process of farming, to revere all things, and to reap the joy of the Dharma.

Do grass and trees have consciousness in ancient literati's minds? This question receives a positive answer in the book *Nongsang Yishi Summaries* 農桑衣食撮要. While in reference to tree removal, it states that, "As the ancients used to say, there is no specific time to remove a tree, just do not let the tree know, add more previous soil and remember to take the southern branch" (Mingshan Lu 2011, p. 534). What is meant by "do not let the tree know"? If the tree has no sense, no consciousness, how can we talk about not letting the tree know? So, it is a common consensus that trees have their self nature and awareness. It is not the trees that I planted have connection with me, but every plant and tree in the universe is related to me for the reason that the self-nature of plants and trees is magnified, enriched and clarified rather than the magnification of my self ego. This is exemplified in Gong Xu's 龔詡 *Zhujing yuan ji* 駐景園記 of the Ming Dynasty, which records that: "I feel obliged and responsible to every plant and tree in the universe. If they are prosperous, I am also vigorous. If they are withering, I am also emaciated. The prosperity and withering of every grass and tree signified that fact I am included in the circulation of nature and the universe." (Xu Gong 2008, p. 257). In general, it is all about the experience of Dao. Gong apparently transformed his sagacious observation of the yearly prosperity and withering of grass and trees into his own personal experience of Dao in nature. In his description of the garden, the garden itself becomes the semiotic signified and epitome of the universe, while his epiphany is the experience brought by agriculture Chan in a logical sense.

In fact, the inner logic of Chan Buddhism is *paccaya-pariggahanana* (enlightenment to conditions), which enters the path of enlightenment and achieves one's epiphany through the process of seeing the changes in all things, especially the extinction and decay of things. It is said that the king attains enlightenment by watching the falling flowers, the bhikkhu attains enlightenment by listening to the sound of the bracelets, and the "farming" practices and farmland in Jiangnan gardens are the world that the ancient literati and scholars observed, heeded and immersed themselves in, in order to understand the truth and attain illuminations. The world owned by the garden owner is a "solitary and pure place, a secluded dwelling where one can observe the changes of things and become enlightened, where one can see the falling scenery in autumn and enter the true path, where the four seasons are in order, and one can change worries into joy, rest in the idle forest and be at ease" (Chuandeng 1968, p. 588). The so called *paccaya-pariggahanana* is in fact a solitary enlightenment. Solitary enlightenment means that it particularly awaiting the awakening of the crowd, and only by the time the crowd awakens can the owner of the garden truly create an aesthetic world for inner wanderings on a spiritual level. There is a good saying from Yongjia 永嘉: "Standing out in the Dharma Ending Period could reignite the flame of Buddha's lamp 無佛之世出興, 作佛燈之後焰" (Chuandeng 1968, p. 588). The word "standing out 出興" is a critical word that punctuates the significance of the action. For the

literati class, in a world where there is no Buddha at the moment, “standing out” makes it possible to “dovetail” aesthetic creation with Buddhist enlightenment. The existence of farmland ensures the permanency of Buddhist transmission like a lamp never being extinguished. Then even if there is no tangible Buddha, there is an intangible Buddha.

Secondly, the physical practices of farming enrich the way in which the garden owner realises his aesthetic ideal of nature. That agricultural Chan concentrates on concrete farming activities and a dynamic Chan view of “the present moment”, which leads the garden owner to understand farming in the garden as a way of meditative practices, and concretize the meditative practices into farming activities of the garden.

Agricultural Chan is accomplished in acts, movements and actions that are precisely related to farming activities. That agricultural Chan is no longer an aloofness, indifference or silent spectatorship towards farming, but a real participation in and influence on the process of plant growth. It can be said that this is a new kind of enlightenment, which acknowledge the importance of the realistic demand in the present moment—that crops are important and the method of agricultural Chan should finally be put into the practices of farming activities.

This pragmatic inclination also embodied in Li Guo’s 李果 descriptions in Record of Drinking in Qingzhishan Hall 青芝山堂飲酒記 of Zhang Zigen’s 張子良 leisurely home life after his repair work on Xiangyi Han Gong’s old garden that: “Returning home, he tended to his small fields and planted millet. During leisure time, he transcribed small collections of Song and Yuan scholars and listened to his two sons read. Occasionally, he played chess with guests. His demeanor was calm and peaceful” (Guo [Li 2008](#), p. 59). What he planted is panicum, which is a kind of sorghum. It can be inferred from this description that farming and writing, teaching children and playing a chess game are not contradictory activities but complementary to each other. The point is that what Zhang Zigen planted is not exotic rare flowers or crops, but ordinary sorghum for food which can also be used for making wine. This might be the reason why Li Guo mentioned his farming activities.

Action, or more precisely, the implementation of agricultural Chan, endowed the garden owner with the inherent advantage of manual laborer’s ability of “aloofness from the outer entanglements” due to farming self-sufficiency. In the first line of Gao Xunzhi’s 高異誌 *Record of farming and fishing* 耕漁軒記 in the Yuan dynasty: “In ancient times, people had fixed residential holdings, but they could not make profits through their house property. This cultivates an economically autonomous tradition that farmers diligently farm the field, the merchants trade and move from time to time, and the workers polish their tools and work. Though it is hard work but dare not retreat because of livelihood. If one withdraw from this self-sufficiency lifestyle, it also means that it is hard to maintain “the aloofness from the outer entanglements and cultivate high moral standards” 獨善其身 (Xunzhi [Gao 2008](#), pp. 176–77). The literati and officials’ “aloofness from the outer entanglements and cultivation of high moral standards” was often accompanied by the social consideration and preparation of “contributions to the wellbeing of all”. This realisation depends too much on society, especially on predetermined social ‘positions’ of class and power. In this sense, farming in the garden changed this predicament so that literati and officials could act like autonomous manual farmers which are more independent and accessible.

Ultimately, the aesthetic of garden farming is a creation of the aesthetic domain. The ‘openness’ agricultural Chan in the process of planting the crops evokes the garden owner to create a vigorous image of the life realm with birds flying in the sky and fish swimming in the ponds. In the design of Chinese garden architecture, the relationship between humans and nature is paramount, with elements such as rocks, water, and plants serving as both functional and symbolic components of the landscape. Like literary paintings and *ni-huaben* (colloquial stories) 擬話本, agricultural Chan provides food for livelihood, but its pragmatic purpose is secondary to the shaping of an ‘open’ domain—a place that nurtures the spirituality and fits the body, where the spirits receive comforts and the body could have sentient feelings. That this world is not a closed loop or a lock, but a multifaceted and vigorous space where everything is intertwined and connected.

This is also the case in Han Yong's 韓雍 farming activities of the Ming dynasty in his book *Notes from Turnip Creek Cottage* 葑溪草堂記 about the basic layout of the thirty-acre garden on the east side of his house. It is recorded that: "There is a square pond in the middle, with a circumference of two hundred paces, and the stream comes from the southeast and injects itself into it" (Yong Han 2008, p. 58). This statement is crucial, as it provides an important clue to the map of the Turnip Creek Cottage, the layout of which is implicitly based on the eight trigrams of King Wen—the southeast is the xun position, and the water from the southeast harnesses the wind, which is precisely a warm current. Han Yong 韓雍 then "ordered Zi Wen to mow and weed" (Yong Han 2008, p. 58), which is the start of his garden farming. We find that Han Yong's 韓雍 farming activities were basically around the water of the pond, and are implemented through the act of farming and planting. Before that, he put "Jia fish" in the pond, built "a hall with three pillars" in the north of the pond, and stacked with a rockery in the south of the pond. Since then, it has been planted with extensive grass and trees. In the north of the pond, there were orchids in front of the hall, old laurels on the left and right side of the pond, and bamboo near the wall. The varieties of bamboo are Gui West spotted bamboo, Gui East purple bamboo, and gold jasper bamboo. There were peaches, plums, apricot and more than 100 miscellaneous trees outside the bamboo area. In the south of the pool, there were hundreds of chrysanthemums. In the southeast of the pool, there were five ancient plum trees, and 300 citrus trees, cherry, loquat, ginkgo, pomegranate, Xuan pear, walnut and Haimen persimmon. There was a small pond in the southwest of the garden with red lotus in it, and 200 mulberry trees, jujube, acacia, catalpa, elm, and willow surrounding. The rest of the empty space of the garden was vegetables in rows. Therefore, Han Yong's so-called "Turnip Creek Cottage" was actually based on the water coming from the southeast and a result of planting no less than six hundred trees in the main body of the pond.

Why plant such a large and diverse range of trees? Han Yong's own explanation is that "the nature of things is changing from time to time, thus it can satisfy the daily demand of the family through four seasons of a year. When it is snowing and rainy days, or when the moon and winds are clear and fresh, it is also a pleasant time to invite friends and guests to walk and play around for entertainment, which can help people forget the worries and pressures in the mundane world. In this case, it is inappropriate to plant bizarre and precious flowers and trees which are easy to be stolen by people who are greedy" (Yong Han 2008, p. 58). Han Yong's criterion is clear: he refuses to plant bizarre and precious trees because planting itself is not to satisfy his own curiosity or greed. That planting is merely an authentic act of planting whose original meaning is to experience time through plants. What is the nature of time? What we know for the moment, is the fact that 'the nature of things is different and changing from time to time'—time is embodied through the nature of natural things, especially plants, which are more crucial than defining time itself. In other words, what Han Yong seeks to bring to light is a natural world permeated by time in the form of planting. This world as an integration of time and space must be an aesthetic world.

In fact, under the influence of agricultural Chan, trees were indispensable in gardens. In Wang Shizhen's 王世貞 *Record of Uncle's Jing'an Gong's Mountain Garden* 先伯父靜庵公山園記, there is a sentence that reads, "The magnificence of the mountains cannot be counted, largely due to the design that the rocks are clever in qutai 取態 (taking the form), the fruit trees are clever in bikui 避虧 (filling the blank), the flowers and grass are clever in chenlai 承暎 (embellishment), and the pavilions are clever in jusheng 據勝 (occupying the best view spot)" (Shizhen Wang 2008, p. 251). The rocks and pavilions are easy to understand, and the question rises to the plants. Why is it necessary for trees to "bikui 避虧"? The fruit trees are the supplement of 'blank space'. What does it mean by "chenlai 承暎"? It means that the flowers and grass are subjected to an unintended sideways glance, not a frontal glance and they are good at being the supporting role. The flowers and trees are not the 'main scene', they are a coordinating complementary, but it is this secondary, marginal,

‘non-mainstream’ imagery that gives the beauty of the mountain its layers, its profusion and variation.

Thus, nature in the farming activities of the garden is a realm of aesthetic which one permeates his life in the texture of nature, becoming part of it, achieving the encounters with nature. Agricultural Chan connects “being” and “non-being” which fosters the meaning of nature image from an individual’s confined subjective knowledge and encapsulates the integration of the whole of nature as a life value. As a result, the owner of Jiangnan garden enhances the domestic concept of “spiritual traveling with things 物與神遊” which highlights the fluidity as well as the disillusionment of nature imagery. Through the interactions and dialogues between man and nature, a vigorous and dynamic realm of heaven and earth is shaped.

4. Conclusions

Chan Buddhism is a quintessential example in Chinese Buddhist history, which originated from the practices of mind and body, but moved from silent illumination and static contemplation to agricultural Chan. It combines the characteristics of Chinese farming culture, which includes taking care of one’s body and mind through concrete farming activities. Agricultural Chan was originally a life practice that the monks “learn” from the lay people, but in the end, it “flows back” and “fit” into the monastic life of the monks. It can be seen that “everyday practices” is the priority matters, and that so-called ‘beauty’ comes mainly from ‘life’. The literati and scholars imitated the monks who practised meditative practices through farming in their gardens which helps to liberate themselves from the inner fatigue of paperwork. They embrace nature and gain its rewards in return. As a special form and process, “farming in garden” undoubtedly enriched the beauty of the garden to a more multifaceted level, and also practised the beauty of agricultural Chan, making them more complementary to each other.

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