

# An Immortal Garden: Cultural Legacy of “Fine Bamboo Garden”

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**Abstract:** “Fine Bamboo Garden” (Guyi yuan) of Nanxiang Town today is one of the “five famous classical gardens of Shanghai”, and is called “an immortal garden”, because it has withstood frequent and distinct changes of its cultural connotation. To be specific, at the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty, Min Shiji and Zhu Sansong first built it, because of their plenty financial strength and good crafts, it was ingenious yet deep, a good private garden of a functionary. During the late Ming period, it belonged to literate Li Yizhi, so with more natural taste, and became to a typical poetic style garden. At the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, Ye Jin rebuilt and enlarged it, made it a famous splendid and delicate garden. From the end of the Qianlong period to the late Qing Dynasty and the Minguo Period, it was attached to the local temple, then a gathering place for local business people, then an outing sight for Shanghai people, while it was closely connected with the social and historical transformation of Nanxiang, but its lettered taste was weakened and changed into a public garden. Since the liberation till now, it has been restored and enlarged many times by the government, its poetic charm has lost to a certain extent, but the beautiful landscape and clear cultural style has made it a public garden of the people.

**Keywords:** Fine Bamboo Garden, Historical Changes, Cultural Landscape, Care and Precision

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## 1. Introduction

“Fine Bamboo Garden” (Guyi yuan) at Shanghai Nanxiang is one of “five famous classical gardens of Shanghai” and is called “an immortal garden”. Its cultural landscape has owned clear character through historical changes, on which this thesis tries to make an explanation.

## 2. Private Garden of an Official: Min Shiji and Zhu Sansong Period

### 2.1. Min Shiji

“Fine Bamboo Garden” was built at the Wanli Period (1573-1619) of the Ming Dynasty, by Min Shiji, who lived during the Jiajing and the Wanli Periods, successively held posts of *Shuzheng* of Guanglu Liangyun Office, *Tongpan* of Henan Prefecture, acting *Zhixian* of Song County and *Zhizhou* of Ruzhou.

Private gardens in the regions south of the Yangtze River

developed during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. At that time Nanxiang was “a place merchants met, rich with people and products, preceding all towns nearby”. [1] It was at the Sancha riverside, around by rivulets, quiet and beautiful with scenery, having more than twenty or thirty gardens, [2] thus had the reputation of “small Nanxiang surpassed Suzhou City”. Among these “Wingceltis Garden” (Tan yuan) was an example. Its owner was Li Liufang, a famous literary man at the end of the Ming Dynasty, one of “four gentlemen of Jiading” together with Tang Shisheng, Lou Jian, and Cheng Jiasui. His character was “free”, he “loved natural beauty of mountains and rivers”, and was good at poetry, calligraphy and painting. [3] So “Wingceltis Garden” was distinguished undoubtedly. According to “Preface on Xizhou Compositions in Collaboration” (Xizhou hepu xu) by Li Yizhi, there were “Water Hut (Pao an), Vine Valley (Luo he), No Sword Room (Jiantui zhai), Discreet Recreation Room (Shenyu shi), Little Drunk Pavilion (Cizui ge), Wind Pavilion (Liuliu ting), Spring Rain Corridor (Chunyu lang), Mountain Rain Building

(Shanyu lou) and Treasured Wine Hall (Baozun tang)" in the garden, where literary gatherings were also famous. But it was in disrepair at the end of the Ming. Moreover there were Ji Garden (Jishi yuan), Nest Garden (Caoji yuan), Pleasure Garden (Yi yuan), Fine Trees Garden (Jiashu yuan) and Tung Garden (Tong yuan), which all disappeared now.

So the building of "Fine Bamboo Garden" at that time followed the suit of the time. It was pleasure of "holding the big Xumi Mountain in a small mustard seed", and amusement of leisurely artistic wandering. According to historic records Min Shiji had no literary talents; also the garden was built with his official salary. Indeed it was said he had planted two dragons like Chinese scholar trees before "Open Ease Hall" (Yiye tang) in order to show off, which was the standard of a royal palace, so Min was officially reported, then he dug up one for fear. It seemed that Min Shiji cared much for the garden. It was located among the Cha River at the southeast of Nanxiang Town, which was not out of the way but a little far away from the downtown area, surrounded by nice scenery of temples and fields. It was said about its scale that "it was a ten mu garden with five mu residence".

## 2.2. Zhu Sansong

Min Shiji asked Zhu Sansong to lay trees and stones of the garden. Zhu was born to a well-known bamboo craftsmen family in the late Ming and the early Qing Dynasties, who himself was even famed for craft that his works were loved by the Emperor Jiaqing. He was a master-hand in arranging gardens that a good many private gardens at Nanxiang and Jiading then profited from his direction. He once exhausted his thoughts when building the garden. One example was "Five Old Men Mount" (Wulao feng) beside "Open Ease Hall" (Yiye tang). It was said the rocks were converted by five immortals. They were the dragon, the crane, the deer, the goose and the kite. Because they loved quietness, exquisiteness and leisure of the garden, they liked to descend there at mid-autumn nights, playing *qin* and composing music, talking about chess and discussing swordsmanship. The garden just became their study and hall. The idea quite rich of inspiration made the garden full of celestial color. Because of Zhu Sansong's level the garden could ascend to excellent art.

## 2.3. Garden Name

The word "yiyi" means slender and graceful look of bamboo. It's from "The Qi River Bend" (Qiyu) of "Wei Ballads" in *Book of Songs*: "I am looking at the Qi River bend, that green bamboo is slender and graceful; and there is a noble man who is like beautiful jade that is carved and polished carefully..."

Bamboo is regarded as a noble plant with elegant charm, also a noble man is distinct with special care in every element from moral quality to outward appearance, thus has the meaning of "yi".

However, we can't find in historical records about the literati then as Zhu Yunming (1460-1527), Dong Qichang (1555-1636), Qian Qianyi (1582-1664) and even Li Liufang

(1575-1629) related with the garden.

## 3. Elegant Private Garden: Li Yizhi Period

Li Yizhi, Li Liufang's nephew, bought the garden at about the end of the Wanli Period. According to historical records, "(Li Yizhi) was quite smart as a child; he could take in several lines at a glance; he read books as his career; and distinguished people from all quarters who went to him; so even his uncle Li Liufang respected him as a rival. He went to the capital seven times for imperial examinations but failed; then he was disappointed and let alone himself; also he was rich with ancient and modern knowledge, and wrote so many works to fill a whole room." [4]

In Tong Jun's *Gardens Records of Regions South of the Yangtze River* (Jiangnan yuanlin zhi), "The garden then belonged to Li Changheng (Li Liufang), quickly passed to Changheng's nephew Zizhong (Li Yizhi), and 'Fine Bamboo Garden' began to be famous." [5] Now Huang Shang's "Visiting 'Fine Bamboo Garden' on a Spring Day" (Chunyou guiyuan) also mentioned that the garden once belonged to Li Liufang. This doesn't agree with local historical records. [6]

Li Yizhi once wrote a poem "Completing Building Little 'Fine Bamboo Garden'":

*I am naturally a life's guest, might as well take the dwelling as home. I bought the small garden, and cut down bamboo to repair the slanting fence. Swallows freely seek new nests, and the pond rests by shallow sands. The loveliest are many green trees that don't hide the moonlight.* ("Gardens" of Nanxiang Town Records at Jiaqing Period)

From the poem we can see that Li Yizhi had reconstructed the garden. At that time it was not large, and had quite natural tinge that was just different from the former folk craftsmanship of Zhu Sansong, and the later a little ornate style by Ye Jin's development. Li Yizhi made a true garden of a literary man.

Li Yizhi also had a poem "Fine Bamboo Garden":

*While my careerism rather wanes, I am secluded quietly. I plant vegetables as duty, and watch bamboo casually. I resort to water to build three ways to the best friends, and pick clouds to patch a wood. Houses appear and paths wind, while the mounts can be ascended. The bridge parts early moon shadow, and on the far hill firs line beside the brook. The empty hall invites laurel fragrance, and the high pavilion hides tung shade. Water clock from Buddha's temples sounds clear, while Buddha's patter is gentle. I am idle the moment like trees and stones, and most amused with fish and birds. I bring shoes for climbing the hill alone, but who can play qin instrument when visitors come? I just paint desultorily like Wu Daozi, and write poems like Qu Yuan in the drifting along life. I sit till the spring river is full, and love the far green in summer. Here at the literature and wine gathering, let's pour the wine made by my family together.* ("Gardens" of Nanxiang Town Records at the Jiaqing Period)

This "Fine Bamboo Garden" is simple and wild, just like

what Tao Yuanming portrayed in his idyll. For example, words like “watch bamboo casually” and “pick clouds” seem pursuing Tao’s artistic conception of “seeing the south mountain leisurely”. At the same time scenic refinement and sinuosity are represented, like sentences “the bridge parts early moon shadow” and “paths wind” said. The emotional appeal wasn’t ornate, but profound. It looks as if some main landscape parts like temples around the garden, “Flying Kites and Jumping Fishes Veranda” (Yuanfei yuyue xuan), “Open Ease Hall” (Yiye tang), bamboo, laurels, and firs, had been there all along from the beginning. Moreover, there were surely lively gatherings, seen from the poem’s last sentence.

According to local records, “between the Shen and the You Period (1645), (Li Yizhi’s) three sons were killed in the country armed rebellion. At that time Yizhi was visiting Jinling. When he returned he already lost his family.”[7] This accident happened at the place now called “South Pavilion” (Nan ting). Li Yizhi became an orphan when he was three years old, when the whole family was destructed, of which the situation and feeling can rather be imagined. His sentiment to “Fine Bamboo Garden” was complicate, yet the deepest. In his “Preface on Xizhou Compositions in collaboration”, “In the former times When Wang Youjun (Wang Xizhi) was drinking and intoning, he heaved a sign about Peng zu’s longevity and ordinary people’s short life. It seemed he couldn’t be unaffected by life and death. I look at this garden map, suddenly ignore that long life could be longed for, and secretly add my poems at the end of the six gentlemen’s. This is not because I surely enough like the fame more than fear the death, but the temporary feeling of sadness and happiness can’t be judged by reason.” Consequently “Fine Bamboo Garden” was engraved with Li Yizhi’s individual mark. That is part of the interest of the talented literati between the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty.

“Fine Bamboo Garden” got Min Shiji’s finances and Zhu Sansong’s art at the beginning, again got Li Yizhi’s interest, so ascended to the famous gardens substantially. Qian Daxin (1728-1804) of the Qing Dynasty in “Brief Notes on Small Orchid Garden” wrote: “I think there are many famous gardens beside the Cha River, and ‘Wingceltis Garden’ of Sir Changheng is the best, his nephew Sir Zizhong also constructed ‘Fine Bamboo Garden’.” Tong Jun wrote in *Gardens Records of Regions South of the Yangtze River*: “Nanxiang...till the end of the Ming Dynasty, had had ‘Fine Bamboo Garden’ of the Min, ‘Wingceltis Garden’ of the Li and ‘Three Old Men Garden’ (Sanlao yuan) of the Li, which were called ‘Three Famous Gardens’.” [8]

Between the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qing, “Fine Bamboo Garden” was successively possessed by the Lu and the Li.

*Jiading County Records* at the Qianlong period started a popular mistaken writing of the garden name: “Yi” Character was added with “water” component. [9] But *Nanxiang Town Records* at the Jiaqing period, *Jiading County Records* at the Guangxu period [10] both used the standard “Yi” without “water” component. The “Yi” character with the component adds the suggestion of water, so is directly. But if seen from

appearance, the one without “water” component seems abstruse, while the other is more beautiful and immediately arouses people’s association of ideas of water wave like brocade figure and wavelet dimple, so answers ordinary people’s interest.

## 4. Famous Resident Garden: Ye Jin Period

### 4.1. Ye Jin

In the winter of the 11<sup>th</sup> year of the Qianlong Period of the Qing Dynasty (1746), Ye Jin bought “Fine Bamboo Garden”, in the spring of the next year he rebuilt it in a large scale, and in the autumn of the 13<sup>th</sup> year of the Qianlong Period it was completed and renamed. According to Ye Weiming’s *Extensive Seal Engravers Biography* at modern times, Ye Jin was good at engraving seals, had Chenghuai tang seal as proof. Local records wrote: “Ye Da, styling himself Yunqu, was a *zhizhou* candidate. He and his younger brother Jin styling himself Weitang, were immigrants from the Dongting East Mountain of Wu County to the Cha River area. Jin gained “Fine Bamboo Garden” of Li Zizhong (Li Yizhi), and Da behind the garden cultivated flowers and trees, mixed with springs and stones, and occasionally invited poets to drink and intone there. When the community had public affairs, Da brothers donated money to help, never declined as strangers, so local officials all presented tablets to award them.” [11]

Ye Da’s garden was named “Small Orchid Garden” (Langai xiaozhu), on which Qian Daxin had notes.

Ye Da and Ye Jin brothers were quite likely to be rich businessmen who travelled to Nanxiang and lived. They were fond of literature, so that admired Li Yizhi’s fame and bought “Fine Bamboo Garden”, at the same time showed zeal for refined literary gatherings. And that from the name “Small Orchid Garden”, together with Shen Yuanlu’s “Notes on ‘Fine Bamboo Garden’” and Qian Daxin’s “Brief Notes on ‘Small Orchid Garden’”, we may deduce that the brothers also had comparative letters, but not simply mingled with men of letters and posed as culture lovers. From local records the two were also moral men.

Ye Jin extended the garden, of course recomposed former landscape and artistic ideal. However, mostly he tried hard to resume Li Yizhi’s “Fine Bamboo Garden”. Zhang Kuifang wrote in “*Fu* of ‘Fine Bamboo Garden’” (“Gardens” of *Nanxiang Town Records* at the Jiaqing Period): “(Ye Jin) longed for the old mark and restored the garden, piled stones and winded the wall...He exhausted his strength and extended on past basis. He wasn’t just going to own it, but to develop its fineness. He kept former tablets and collected new paintings and poetry.” Many parts including the rockery were constructed newly, especially “Little Cloud Labyrinth” (Xiaoyun dou). Ye Jin’s pile this time has been preserved up to now. However, his admiration to Li Yizhi was shown completely.

After Ye Jin’s reconstruction, Li Yizhi’s slightly wild small garden became a great work skilled in somewhat ornate style.

#### 4.2. Cultural Landscape in Ye Jin's Garden

Ye Jin's garden was of noble quality, at the same time with some easy and wild flavor. The landscape arrangement showed ingenuity. Although totally it was both spacious and profound, the landscape details were rather secluded and winding; therefore the characteristic of "profound" was even more distinct. According to Shen Yuanlu's notes, some important landscape then was as following:

"Open Ease Hall" at the northwest of the garden, was "high and reaching all directions" and "established a garden's situation", meaning retiring to the countryside leisurely and enjoying simple and wild life.

The mound at the southeast of the garden occupied the most wonderful situation. To ascend it and overlook, to the north, the east and the west were vast mansions of temples at the Cha riverside, to the south was ten thousand *qing* even farmland.

"Flying Kites and Jumping Fishes Veranda", of which the shape was very nice, formed a realm where works of God were flourishing, moreover suited with principles.

"Limpid Pavilion" (Yunqing ting), was about at the center of garden water that contained beauty with the most clarity.

"Moon Painting Corridor" (Huiyue lang), According to Shen Yuanlu's notes, "when the moon appears the walls are like pictures."

About plant arrangement, bamboo was the principal, which established main character of noble virtue. Others were plum, lotus, pine, cypress, laurel and chrysanthemum, which other than beauty of vision and scent, were all analogies of noble virtue. And those like lotus, peach and willow were frequently seen in the countryside of the regions south of the Yangtze River.

### 5. Period of Town God Temple Garden, Business Association Location and Outing Place for Shanghai City

In the 53<sup>rd</sup> year of the Qianlong Period (1789), because the garden was in the neighborhood of the town god temple, it was bought with collected donations by local people, turned into a town god temple garden. However, it was changed from a literary resident garden into a public one and lost some old cultural meaning.

"Fine Bamboo Garden" by Yao Chengxu wrote:

*It was once like Xie Family's distinguished courtyard and Wang Mojie's mountain villa with quiet water and bamboo. The charm lasts as trees and mountains, and the past family was elegant in calligraphy and painting. This garden is worthy of a record like those Luoyang's famous ones after the disaster, while autumn wind and falling leaves are sad. The rest god temple was respected by neighborhood, and one needn't grieve over magnificent houses turning into wild mountains.*

(Collection of the Visiting to Old Landscapes in Wu Place by Yao Chengxu [12])

"Fine Bamboo Garden", with its special experience, especially connection with Li Yizhi's family, and elegant and

quiet landscape, had already become a famous spot cherished by later literati. The lucky point is it became the town god temple garden thus avoided the decline.

Afterwards the garden had endured repeated wars and calamities and been damaged seriously. Meantime it had received repeated repairs. In the 7<sup>th</sup> year of the Tongzhi Period (1868), "Harvest Happiness Pavilion" (Fengle ting) was added to commemorate the three masters as Tanyuan, Zizhong and Zishi (Zhang Hongpan, was a notable of Nanxiang and a good friend of Li Liufang and Li Yizhi.), which is lost now. Further more during the Guangxu Period some business gathering places were added, after that the wine shop, tea shop, pastry shop and photo shop were opened in the garden, while "temple garden" was only a name. At that time there were already names of "Mandarin Ducks Hall" (Yuanyang ting) and "Leisure Boat" (Buji zhou), where people wrote poems, drew pictures and tasted Nanxiang small steamed meat filled bun. Now the stone tables and stools near the south gate maybe were put at that time. It's not specific when "Open Ease Hall" was called "Nanmu Hall", also "All Sides Hall", which is a mark of the hall changing from a gathering place for men of letters to one for public people. In 1934 "Lacking Corner Pavilion" was newly built as a symbol of resistance against Japanese aggression.

In the 34<sup>th</sup> year of the Guangxu Period (1908) the railway between Shanghai and Nanjing was built which passed through Nanxiang and had a station, also Nanxiang's development made it crowned as "Small Shanghai". Convenient traffic made "Fine Bamboo Garden" an outing and literary gathering place for Shanghai city.

According to Tong Jun's *Garden Records of the Regions South of the Yangtze River*, not long before 1937, "What were mentioned in Shen's notes like 'about ten secluded rooms', 'Limpid Pavilion' and 'Fragrance Corridor'...yet can't be traced in the garden now." On the 16<sup>th</sup> attached map of the book, some new scenes appeared instead of old ones. The new scenes names basically suited both refined and popular taste, which had some celestial color for once being the temple garden, but were a little lack of new ideas and entire harmony.

During this period the garden had been more connected with the social history of Nanxiang, so local virtuous people took care of it even at war times.

### 6. People's Park Period

After the liberation, although "Fine Bamboo Garden" couldn't avoid "culture revolution", the government has reconstructed and enlarged it many times. It has really changed into "a beautiful park" with new looks. Now the garden has an area of 146 *mu*, which is about ten times more than the former one. There are six parts in the garden, which are: "Open Ease Hall", "Geese Playing Pond" (Xi'e chi), "Pine and Cranes Garden" (Songhe yuan), "Green Bamboo Garden" (Qingqing yuan), "Mandarin Ducks Lake" (Yuanyang hu) and "Nanxiang Wall" (Nanxiang bi). Now both the cultural meaning and the landscape arrangement are much clearer and brighter than the past. Moreover, it is closely

connected with the local social history and becomes a symbol of Nanxiang.

Little of the past scenes were remained with their original names. Most of them have been newly built and some have surely changed position to suit with the entire arrangement of reconstruction. For example, "Light Bamboo Pavilion" (Fuyun ge) is already made from cement instead of bamboo and the garden water is separated from the outside. The lost or revised scenic names undoubtedly miss some refined delight and cultural connotation.

The former "Cranes Mark Stone" (Heji shi) in Nanxiang Temple is moved into the garden, and "White Cranes Pavilion" (Baihe ting) is built besides it. It is about an ancient tale in the name of Nanxiang Town. According to *Nanxiang Town Records*, "During the Tianjian (502-519) Period of the Liang Dynasty, local people got a stone of one *zhang* long when dug into the earth, and two cranes often met on it. So Monk Deqi built a temple at that place. After a long time, the cranes flew away and never returned, the monk saw a poem on the stone. During the Kaicheng Period of the Tang Dynasty, Monk Xingqi stayed here, again two cranes came and were reluctant to leave. Then the cranes flew south." The Nanxiang Wall picture was based on the story. Furthermore, two Buddhist pillars of the Tang Dynasty and All Peace Tower of the Song Dynasty former in Nanxiang Temple are also moved into the garden. "Cranes Mark Stone" and Buddhist pillars were originally in the "eight scenes of Nanxiang Temple", now they have become important parts of the garden's cultural interest. Thus "Fine Bamboo Garden" owns the position of symbolizing the town and the color of ancient Buddhist tale.

"Pine and Cranes Garden" and scenes of "Old Cranes Veranda", "Longevity Tablet", "Tortoise Hill" and "Tortoise Lake" are closer to popular wishes for happiness and longevity. "Slight Music Pavilion" was also built based on a nice tale. It is said in the past when ascending the pavilion and watching "Five Old Men Mount", one could faintly hear music of *qin*.

The newly built "Green bamboo Garden" is a special bamboo garden, which is emphasized on good and large varieties pleasing both the eye and the mind without much deep meaning. Also in other places of the garden are planted more plants suitable for modern view, including old famous peonies, Chinese wisterias, met sequoias, grand magnolias, bajiao trees, white magnolias, crape myrtles and Chinese elms, but the implied meaning in plants is weakened.

## 7. Conclusion

No matter how many changes have taken place, the garden has always been under great care and with precision. Ye Jin's "Fine Bamboo Garden" was praised as "a complete beauty of ponds, pavilions and plants". (Ye Weiming *Extensive Seal Engravers Biography* at modern times) Today in the garden the building still reflects this character without exception. One can find a scene at every step and every position when wandering in the garden. For example, Tea Veranda seems

nice from any angle. In the pavilions and verandas and along the winding corridors, there are many little windows, out any of which is a delicate picture. Moreover, "Leisure Boat" is exquisite and "Little Cloud Labyrinth" is ingenious. However, sometimes one feels a need of a bit rest from appreciation, and precision can't avoid shortages. Carvings and paintings on the pavilion and corridor walls are full. Colorful stones on the paths are of much various materials and designs. Generally care and precision are in the culture psychology of Shanghai people, which are typically embodied in building "Fine Bamboo Garden".

The poems of *Four Seasons Pictures of Fine Bamboo Garden* to the tune *Diaoji ren yue yuan* completely show the scenery in the garden today:

*When east wind blows again the garden is green freshly. The plum blossoms are white and the peach blossoms are red. The crabapple flowers are watery, the orchids are just fully fragrant and the swallows come back happily. The ducks enjoy the spring pond, the butterflies dance along the sweet brook and the bees play under the blossoms. The birds sing, the grass is green, the willows are weeping and the tung trees are new.*

*When sweet wind blows much the garden is green passionately, one can enjoy the new lotus blossoms in the pond. The dragonflies play on the water, the cicadae cry in the trees and the frogs sing folk songs. The young swallows fly, the willow leaves whirl and the long bamboo is luxuriant. The scholar trees are like canopies, the bajiao leaves are like fans and the visitors walk back and forth like shuttles.*

*When autumn wind rises the garden is green again, one can see the grass in the pavilion. The spring blossoms begin to fade, the chrysanthemums blossom and the thin willows slant by the wind. The pine trees are high and the bamboo is long, the plum flowers are rare and the cypresses are lofty, and the grass is fragrant and the flowers flourish. The bridges and pavilions fall shadows on the pond, pleasure-boats go slightly and rhinoceros' fragrance is conveyed.*

*When north wind stirs the garden's remaining green, one can just enjoy that the snow is like plum blossoms. Jade dragons dance, white flowers cover the trees and a silver sea is misted. The spring plums wait for blossom, the wintersweets have bloomed, and the geranium leaves grow luxuriantly. The bamboo, the pine and the cypress trees are the only green in graceful postures. ("Garden Literature" of *Shanghai Gardens Records*)*

By the unknown author "Fine Bamboo Garden" today has changed completely from a deep, wind and quiet place to a bright and lively one. From spring to winter the nature shows vitality in its content, with the flowers and trees, and the insects and birds all beautiful and visitors enjoying the scenery. Indeed, now busy cities are far and far away from nature, while in the nearest suburb of Shanghai there is such a place both close to nature and full of culture interest. Facing the immortal garden, the place people happily play in, all gains and losses seem disappear to limitless gratification. [13]

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