

› The diversity of horticulture in Japan – Japanese gardens

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History and style of Japanese gardens

In Japan, natural landscape gardens first appeared during the Nara period, about 1,300 years ago. However, some scholars argue that the original form of Japanese gardens dates back to the Jomon period (14,000 BC - 10th century BC), based on the fact that chestnut trees were planted at the Sannai Maruyama site in Aomori Prefecture, and stones were set into the ground in circles at the Washinoki site in Hokkaido. During the Kofun period (mid-3rd century - 7th century), civil engineering techniques for creating gardens were developed, such as covering burial mounds with roofing stones and building moats around them.

In the birth of Japanese gardens, it is apparent that the garden culture from both China and Korea had a major influence. In Korea, square ponds were created in gardens from the Baekje period (mid-4th century - mid-7th century), only to appear in Japan during the Asuka period (late 6th century - early 8th century), when square ponds were found at the Ishigami site (Nara) and at the remains of gardens at the Shimanosho site (Nara).

Heijo-kyo, the capital during the Nara period, is said to have been modelled on Chang'an, the ancient Chinese capital of the Tang dynasty. The vast garden called Shorin-en, located to the north of Heijo-kyo, is planted in the same direction as the Western Inner Garden of Chang'an (Figure 1). A garden pond called Qujiangchi was established in the southeast corner of Chang'an: an artificial pond called Gotoku remains in a similar location in Heijo-kyo. As the two palaces have a very similar layout, it is logical to conclude that the ideas were copied.

These ancient gardens were used as places for entertaining aristocrats and holding banquets. The gardens were of two varieties (Shinden-zukuri style and Pure Land). In the mansions of the aristocrats using the Shinden-zukuri style, a pond was dug in the southern garden area, an island was placed in the pond, a bridge was built over the pond, and water was drawn into the pond through a stream.

As the idea of "Mappo Shiso" (the End-of-the-World Theory) spread during the Heian



Figure 1. East Palace Garden at Nara Palace site, provided by Nara National Institute for Cultural Properties.

period (794-1192), Pure Land gardens were created. A good example of a Pure Land garden is the Byodo-in Garden in Uji, Kyoto. The Amida Hall was placed at the center, with the other buildings connected by corridors. A pond, with an island in the front, and a bridge occur along the same straight line. Pure Land gardens were characterized by their frontality and spatial symmetry. This garden style spread to the gardens of Hiraizumi in Oshu. In particular, the Muryoko-in Garden (Iwate) and the Motsu-ji Garden (Iwate) are considered to be fine examples of Pure Land gardens.

The development of stone arrangements and the birth of dry landscape gardens and tea gardens

From the Kamakura to the Muromachi periods (1333-1573), stone arrangements were developed in temple gardens. The gardens of Jisho-ji, Tenryu-ji and Rokuron-ji (Kyoto) are said to be masterpieces, with their pond banks decorated with dramatic stone arrangements. This first began when Buddhist Zen monks, as part of their training, cre-

ated gardens by erecting stones. The development of stone arrangements gave rise to the style known as "karesansui".

Placing natural stones in a garden is a distinctive feature of Japanese gardens. Western gardens are based on the idea of conquering nature, and so they arrange stones and create flower beds and fountains. Japanese gardens, on the other hand, are based on the idea of harmony with nature. They believe that a waterfall stone arrangement, where water flows from a high place to a low place, is closer to nature than a fountain.

The tea gardens completed by Sen no Rikyu came to be called "Roji". They were decorated with stepping stones, stone basins and lanterns. These were eventually introduced into the gardens of feudal lords and town houses, and have become indispensable elements of modern Japanese gardens.

From the mid-Muromachi period onwards, dry landscape gardens were established mainly in the Zen temples in Kyoto. Well-known examples are the Ryoan-ji garden, with 15 stones set in the southern garden of the abbot's chamber (Figure 2), and the Daitoku-ji Daisen-in garden, which depicts a dry



Figure 2. The Ryoan-ji garden. Source: Honda Kinkichiro, "Illustrated Collection of Famous Gardens of Japan", 1911.

waterfall stone arrangement and dry stream in the style of a landscape painting.

When "Shoin-zukuri" was introduced to homes and temples in the Medieval Ages, "Shakkei" (borrowed scenery), played an important role, emphasizing the view outside the garden. Shoin-zukuri architecture developed a way of framing the garden and viewing it from indoors. Entsu-ji Garden, with Mt. Hiei as its main view, and Jiko-in Garden, which borrowed the view of the Nara Basin and its villages, are both well known. The Shugakuin Imperial Villa Kami-no-ochaya Rinuntei, with its deep eaves and shallow verandas, acts as a frame to include the large cluster of trees and Yokuryu Pond, while also allowing a distant view of Kitayama. It can be said that Shakkei was a world-class technique born in Kyoto, as it was surrounded by

Higashiyama, Mt. Hiei, Arashiyama, Kitayama, and other mountains.

Strolling Garden: transformation into amusement spaces

A dramatic change in garden style emerged in the early modern period (1573-1868) with the birth of the Strolling Garden (Daimyo). A large pond was placed in the center of the site and surrounded by thick forest to isolate it from the outside world. Garden paths were arranged around the pond so that visitors could stroll around the entire area. This garden style can be seen in the gardens of Katsura Imperial Villa and Shugakuin Imperial Villa (Kyoto), known as imperial court gardens, but it can also be seen in many of the gardens established by the feudal lords throughout Japan, such as Korakuen in Okayama, Ken-

rokuen in Kanazawa (Figure 3), and Ritsurin Garden in Takamatsu.

Daimyo gardens are arranged around a pond with attractions such as artificial hills, plum groves, and tea gardens (Figure 4). Visitors enjoy the sequential scenery of the garden as it changes from one view to another while walking along the garden paths, or from floating boats on the pond, and admire the vast sky that spreads above the garden. Many of these gardens were built in the Ninomaru space of castles belonging to feudal lords and can be found today at the famous Nagoya Castle Ninomaru Garden and Ako Castle Ninomaru Garden. A distinctive feature of these feudal gardens was that the entire garden was developed as an amusement space. Many of the gardens had flower viewing areas and teahouses.



Figure 3. Kenrokuen in Kanazawa.



Figure 4. Genkyuen in Hikone.



Figure 7. Iwasaki Hisaya residence garden in Shitaya Kayacho, owned by Awano.

Concluding comments

Japanese gardens are made up of plants, stones, water and soil, and their basic approach is to express the beauty of natural landscapes such as mountains, valleys, coasts, oceans and the countryside. This approach has been passed down continu-

ously from the Asuka and Nara periods to the present day. Japanese gardens are highly regarded for their unique beauty around the world. Our ancestors not only appreciated the beauty of the land, but found multiple ways to express that beauty symbolically, dynamically and dramatically. ●

>About the author



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