



NICHIBUNKEN MONOGRAPH SERIES NO. 19

Daimyo Gardens

Shirahata Yōzaburō

Translated by Imoto Chikako and Lynne E. Riggs

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International Research Center for Japanese Studies
Kyoto

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Imoto Chikako and **Lynne E. Riggs** are professional translators of mainly nonfiction, working through the Center for Intercultural Communication (www.cichonyaku.com).

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PREFACE

In 1997, when I wrote the afterword to my Japanese book, *Daimyō teien: Edo no kyōen*, upon which this preface is based, there was no book in Japanese, nor in English as far as I know, on the subject of the gardens of the great daimyo estates. Even today, quite a number of these gardens are part of the heritage that keeps people who live in or visit Japan connected to the past and to nature. Although nearly twenty years have passed since then and despite the ten years it took to complete this translation, I think I can take pride that this is still the first substantial history of the genre.

What motivated me to write about daimyo gardens was my sense that histories of Japanese gardens are far too Kyoto-centric, leading to the impression that the history of Japanese gardens is synonymous with the history of Kyoto gardens, and that everything beyond them does not really matter. Why, I couldn't help wondering, did gardens outside Kyoto get such a cold shoulder? Of course, when we think that Japanese garden culture (*teien bunka*) has flourished in the city of Kyoto for more than a thousand years, and that it represents one of Japan's distinguished cultural traditions, it is not surprising that people would conclude that they could understand Japanese gardens if they but studied them in Kyoto. And, of course, the weight of Kyoto's gardens in garden history is formidable.

When we consider the more than 260 years of the early modern phase of Japan's history and the great metropolitan culture that developed in Edo (present-day Tokyo) as the political center of the country, however, we cannot dismiss Edo as not having any significance in garden history. Indeed, I believe that the reader of this book will soon understand that the history of Japanese gardens cannot be discussed without due appreciation of its great gardens.

"Daimyo gardens" refers broadly to the gardens that were built by daimyo, the lords of more than 200 domains through which the Tokugawa shogunate (established in 1603) governed the country. As far as style is concerned, however, I limit my use of the term not just to the fact that they were built and maintained by daimyo, but that they were equipped for the function of stroll gardens and were large enough to accommodate quite sumptuous garden parties. Significantly, there appear to have been as many as a thousand such large-scale gardens during the Edo period. In the history of gardens anywhere there is probably no other such large group of gardens of the same type, and yet I found that very little research had been done about them and what books were available tended to treat them only superficially.

The reason for this gap can perhaps be attributed to modern views of gardens, which are generally skewed in favor of the visual perspective. That perspective was what led to the treatment of gardens as something to be mainly appreciated visually, as if putting them in picture frames. It has seemed to me that most histories of gardens and theories of their aesthetic and significance are distorted by this bias toward the visual aspects of appreciation. Gardens are not just forms of plastic arts created using the materials of nature. They may be seen as works of creative art, but they are not an art meant simply to satisfy the eyes; they are a more living, multifaceted art meant to be entered and enjoyed physically,

with all the senses. The history of gardens is worth examining not just in terms of cultural history but in the context of the history of politics, thought, and society as well. When we reflect how daimyo gardens were closely linked to the society of the warrior class (*buke*) and that of the nobility (*kuge*), and how their design and uses incorporated all the performing arts and artistic culture of the time in which they were built, we can see that the quality of gardens as a totality of artistic and social experience was really at its most remarkable in the daimyo gardens of the Edo period.

We can see this artistic totality in daimyo gardens most clearly in their uses for social interchange. To diminish that totality by limiting the experience of gardens solely to the visual dimension is to unfairly trivialize their value. So in this book I attempted a comparison with the styles and functions of the baroque gardens of the West. The result is but a tentative effort in an inquiry that I always hoped to expand. There are some studies that compare the differences between gardens of East and West in terms of form, but there seems to be little study of the disparities of the two as far as function is concerned. My analysis in this respect may be a bit adventuresome, but I hope the reader will understand this as part of my attempt to approach gardens in their totality. Daimyo gardens cannot be understood in their entirety without seeing how they functioned as the outdoor appurtenances of the lives of people of the warrior class, daimyo families in particular.

The typical daimyo residence was surrounded by a high fence, and in the Edo period, it was not easy to gain access to such an inside realm. Then, with the opening in 1868 of the Meiji era, when we might have been able to see what lay inside these fences, a massive modernization program went into motion in Japan. In almost no time the vast majority of those numerous gardens vanished. And thus the daimyo gardens that once were such a vibrant part of Japan's urban culture have been buried in history.

What I have tried to do is to study the daimyo gardens, including those that have disappeared, and use them to shed light on the important aspects of Edo garden culture (both in Edo itself and in the Edo period) and open a window on the culture and society of the warrior class of those times. In doing so I am not completely satisfied that I have lived up to the potential of my sources. A great number of wonderful maps, diagrams, and pictures of the daimyo gardens have been preserved in different parts of the country, a small number of which are introduced in this book. A wealth of pictorial resources about daimyo gardens, including bird's-eye view maps, detailed diagrams of the features included on their grounds, as well as beautiful color paintings of their scenery, has been preserved, which, together with the gardens themselves, represent a tremendously valuable cultural heritage.

Also to be better exploited in the study of Edo period gardens are the results of archaeological research, which has extended its reach from ancient and medieval times all the way to the premodern period. By combining the results of historical documents with the findings of archaeology as well as diagrams and written accounts, we are well equipped for a very lively re-envisioning of the society of Edo times. It is my hope that this book, the scope of which had necessarily to be limited, might serve as the springboard for fulfilling the potential of such resources. At the very least I hope that it will create some ripples in the rather overly Kyoto-centric study of Japanese gardens, prompting renewed efforts to understand this subject in its entirety.

Even in the compilation of what I hope will be a further stepping stone in the study of the history of Japanese gardens, I have relied upon the assistance of many going back to the editors of the two original books upon which this one is based. After my work was selected for translation by the Nichibun Publications Committee, I decided to integrate the two books and focus the content of the English edition more closely on daimyo gardens of the Edo period, and prepared an original manuscript for translation. That manuscript was ably translated by Imoto Chikako and edited by Lynne E. Riggs; together they undertook to give the manuscript a clearer chronological sequence and eliminate repetition, resulting in a tighter overall narrative. I am deeply indebted to them for their loyalty to the potential of this book. The original plan for the English edition also included incorporation of numerous photographs, old maps, and other illustrative materials. Preparation of this aspect of the book turned out to be a real challenge, since most of the photographs I had taken of gardens date back before the spread of digital camera technology. I am thus eternally indebted to my colleague Professor Patricia Fister at Nichibun and editor Shiraishi Eri for their patient work of collecting and organizing the image data, completing the captions and credit-lines, and obtaining adequate digital images. Although I retired from Nichibun before it could be published, through this monograph I hope to share with English readers something of the research and expertise to which I have devoted my career.

Shirahata Yōzaburō
April 2016

