

# Research outside Japan on Japanese Landscape Gardening and Flowering Cherries

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In the sixteenth century the landscape art of Japan attracted the attention of the intellectual world of Europe, where wealthy upper layers of society enjoyed gardens in various forms. The reports of Jesuit missionaries about Japan mention naturalism as a remarkable aspect of landscape design. In the ensuing seventeenth century, reports came in through the Dutch East India Company that showed a continued interest in scenery in the Japanese landscape garden resembling wild nature; as a vision it became framed in an antithesis with the formalism of renaissance and early baroque landscape art in Europe.

My most recent research at Nichibunken touched upon these ideas; two papers have been published. In the course of the eighteenth century, Western interest in the Far East shifted more and more to China. Japan's doors had been closed by its government, and information about the country was sparse and filtered by economic interests. At the same time China became ever more known as a great country with an excellent state organization based on Confucianism. With the interest of Europe's power elite in China, the image of the Japanese landscape garden became absorbed into, or overwhelmed by, the Chinese garden. The *Jardin Anglo-Chinois* and *Chinoiserie* became leading concepts in orientalist landscape design of the eighteenth century.

With the opening of Japan in the mid-nineteenth century the Japanese landscape once more came to the attention of the West. Travelogues describe the dream-like and romantic world of early Meiji Japan. The incredible level of horticultural artistry achieved in the late Edo period was still present and amazed foreign visitors. This translated into a Western vision of the Japanese landscape garden as being full of flowers, an image encouraged by the export policies of companies like Yokohama Ueki nurseries. Pictures show beautifully dressed, dream-like young Japanese women standing among the flowers or under the cherry blossoms; in fact many Westerners, women included, traveled to Japan to paint this world in water colors and describe it in a romantic kind of realism. Within Japan, Meiji writers came to define the "Japanese garden" 日本庭園 as a pattern based on classification; it followed the lines of *tsukiyama* and *hiraniwa* divisions found in later Edo period garden books.

In the West these ideas were followed and several more scientific efforts to understand the Japanese garden came about, most famously Conder's *Landscape Gardening in Japan* (1893). Gardens considered worthy of showing the foreign visitor were chosen and

a canonical set of famous gardens was established, featuring Ryōan-ji and Kinkaku-ji in Kyoto, and Kairakuen in Mito, and so on. In the 1930s, the “Japanese garden” had developed as a particularity of Japan’s culture to the extent that it became one of the explicit themes of Japan’s cultural policies. From 1935 onwards, government-sponsored books appeared, most prominently one in English by Tamura Tsuyoshi that was translated into several other Western languages, sponsored by the Society for International Cultural Relations, or Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai (KBS). Also supported by the KBS, Newsom’s study *Japanese Garden Construction* came out in 1939. It was intended as a manual for constructing one’s own Japanese garden. However, it did not escape the standard ideas of the Edo period, and gave an even more detailed report on the typical, patterned division into sets of supposed *tsukiyama* and *hiraniwa*-styles, but also added details on composition, materials, and construction techniques.

The Pacific War changed the vision of the Japanese garden into something that was meant for eternal and universal peace: the Zen garden. For several decades, woolly stories and picture books—gorgeous, it must be admitted—were the only thing that came out. No serious, scientific publication on Japanese garden research appeared outside Japan. Authors copied each other’s words without much thought or search into truth or credibility of opinions; unfortunately it shaped the world’s mainstream understanding of the supposed spiritual or symbolical qualities of the Japanese garden. Later, from the 1970s, a few more serious publications, based on more reliable and Japanese primary sources came about:

- \* Schaarschmidt-Richter, *Der japanische Garten – ein Kunstwerk* (1979) was published in German, with translations in English and French as well. Basically it reports on documentary research, translated from the studies of Shigemori Mirei.
- \* The Hamburg University Ph.D. thesis of Hennig, *Der Karesansui-Garten als Ausdruck der Kultur der Muromachi-Zeit* (1982) relies on Shigemori Mirei too.
- \* In 1986 David Slawson gained a Ph.D. at Indiana University on *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens*, which includes a translation with comments on the Muromachi period manual *Sansui narabi ni yakeizu*.
- \* In 1988 my Wageningen University Ph.D. thesis *Themes, Scenes, and Taste in the History of Japanese Garden Art* came out in the Leiden University series *Japonica Neerlandica*, published by J.C. Gieben. After it sold out, I was able to rewrite it in an expanded version as *Themes in the History of Japanese Garden Art*, which was published by the University of Hawai’i Press in 2002; it is also sold out. The book is a cultural history of the Japanese garden from the Heian

period to the Edo period. My work attracted attention mostly because of my critique of the Zen garden, something followed by other, secondary Western writers in the 1990s, as noted by Elizabeth Ten Grotenhuis in her review in the *Journal of Japanese Studies* (2003). This Zen critique was not taken up in Japanese until 17 years later, by Yamada Shōji in 2005. This illustrates how Japanese researchers lag behind due to their unfamiliarity with publications in English.

- \* Goto Seiko from Rutgers University published *The Japanese Garden: Gateway to the Human Spirit* in 2003.
- \* My third book *Japanese Gardens and Landscapes: 1650–1950* is now in production with the University of Pennsylvania. It reframes Japanese garden research to fit into the international discourses of garden history, environmental sciences, and nature philosophy. It includes the history as described above. It is safe to assume that it would benefit Japanese research to have it translated into Japanese.

It is deplorable and frustrating that respectable Western researchers of Japanese culture continue to quote from such secondary but best-selling sources as Kuck (1968), Nitschke (1993), or Keane (1996) rather than from the above scholarly studies. The situation concerning Japanese cherries is even more fragmented. Ingram's *Ornamental Cherries* came out in 1948. It is basically a good gardener's guide and has some remarks on cultural history. In the U.S., Jefferson and Wain published a taxonomical research in 1984: *The Nomenclature of Cultivated Japanese Flowering Cherries*.

I was able to make quick progress with my research on Japanese flowering cherries during my first stay at Nichibunken in 1990–91, and I finished it largely during my term at Kyoto University of Art and Design. My *Japanese Flowering Cherries* finally appeared in 1999 and has been the English standard outside Japan on cultural history and taxonomy of Japanese cherries since then. In 2007 my paper "Cultural Values and Political Change: Cherry Gardening in Ancient Japan" was published in a volume put out by Harvard University Press, and it goes more deeply into the aesthetics and biology of Japanese flowering cherries. Translating both of these works into Japanese would be a good idea, as I received the Japanese Institute of Landscape Architecture Research Prize for this work, and respectable cherry researchers in this field who have read my work in the original (Ōba, Katsuki, Iketani) seem positive about it.

In spite of the large number of researchers and massive amount of publications on Japanese gardens inside Japan, there is, as far as I know, no research institute outside the country open to the study of Japanese gardens. Speaking from my own experience,

my research and publications were not supported by any institution outside Japan, apart from incidental honorariums for lectures, papers, or a small, occasional research project. Universities in Holland are not interested in Japanese gardens; priorities of research at Seoul National University, where I am attached today, are also elsewhere.

Strikingly, inside Japan it seems there is no real interest in research results from outside Japan either. English research papers published outside Japan are not taken up in the CiNii database. It is not possible to get a *kakenhi* (Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research) number registration with an affiliation outside Japan. It seems a disadvantage for Japan and its researchers to turn its back to the outside world, and it does not encourage researchers from outside to work on Japanese (landscape) culture either. My strong motivation has always been the high standards of landscape research and practice inside Japan, which is simply fascinating. It seems that much could and should be improved upon in promoting Japanese landscape research outside Japan, as its landscape culture is not only at the world's highest standards, but also extremely relevant in the face of climate and environmental crises that are threatening humanity now.

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