



CHAPTER I

THE PLEASURES OF GARDENS

One fine spring day (the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month of 1701), Keishōin 桂昌院 (1627–1705), the mother of fifth Tokugawa shogun Tsunayoshi 綱吉 (1646–1709), set out on a tour of some of Edo's temples and shrines. After making her way through Dōkanyama 道灌山, Ōji Inari 王子稻荷 shrine, Enshōji 円勝寺 temple, Yanaka Kannōji 谷中感応寺 temple, and Nippori 日暮里, she concluded the outing with a visit to Rikugien 六義園 garden, then being built by Tsunayoshi's grand chamberlain (*soba yōnin* 側用人) Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu 柳沢吉保 (1659–1714). At that time of year (May by the solar calendar), the trees would have been verdant with new foliage and the azaleas in full bloom—a lovely season to enjoy a leisurely garden stroll.

Records state that Keishōin “suddenly decided” to stop at the garden on her return to Edo castle. But the *Matsukage nikki* 松蔭日記 diary by Yoshiyasu's consort Ōgimachi Machiko 正親町町子 (1675?–1724)—the primary source on which our account is chiefly based—indicates that in fact her hosts had been given private notice of her intentions in the previous year:

[Word came that] the lady of San no maru 三の丸 [Keishōin] would be visiting an Inari shrine in a place called Ōji. . . . On her return, since it is on the way, she has a plan to stop by the rustic hillside village [Rikugien] in Komagome 駒込. So preparations [for her visit] are being hastened. That date is to be the twenty-fifth . . .¹

On the appointed day, the people of the Yanagisawa household were busy with preparations from early in the morning. The hall of the pavilion that had been readied to welcome Keishōin was furnished with impressive folding screens and picture scrolls depicting auspicious motifs of pine and bamboo. The grass and undergrowth were neatly trimmed, and the entire garden was freshly sprinkled with water. Yoshiyasu's wife, consorts, children, and ladies-in-waiting were all on hand to welcome their honored guest.

Keishōin arrived “late in the Hour of the Sheep,” or about two or three in the afternoon. She brought a large retinue, including household retainers and ladies-in-waiting as well as her favored priest, physician, and other members of her personal circle.

Keishōin was first led into the reception hall, where gifts were exchanged. While not as gravely formal as similar ceremonies conducted on the shogun's visits, the number of gifts and the rituals of their exchange were still quite extensive. Then Keishōin entered the garden, signaling an end to straitlaced ceremony and the start of more pleasurable amusements.

1 *Matsukage nikki*, Section 10 “Kara-ginu,” p. 152.

The Yanagisawas' aim in entertaining Keishōin and her retinue was not to be showy or extravagant, but to allow them a taste of the lives of ordinary folk by re-creating the simple everyday atmosphere of a country town. Toward this end, as *Matsukage nikki* reveals, the structures in the garden had “rope blinds (*nawa-sudare* 縄簾) and bamboo blinds (*take-sudare* 竹簾), fixtures that were rustic-looking and rough, not refined and formal, and that made sounds whenever people went in and out,”² adding further to the relaxed ambience. Keishōin seems to have been intrigued first by the thatched roof of a cottage modeled on a country farmhouse. The Yanagisawas must have been quite satisfied, not to mention relieved and delighted, that their contrivances had charmed her exactly as they had hoped.



Figure 1-1. Rikugien. Photograph: Shirahata Yōzaburō, 1994.



Figure 1-2. Detail from *Rikugien zenzu* 六義園全図 (Painting of Rikugien). 1889. Courtesy of the National Diet Library.

2 *Matsukage nikki*, Section 10 “Kara-ginu,” pp. 153–54.

Keishōin was served fruit, or possibly sweets or sake and snacks, inside the cottage. According to *Matsukage nikki*, a cluster of other structures were set up like a marketplace. One stall offered beautiful papier-mâché dolls and other toys for children. Another nearby “sold” notions for the ladies like powder and rouge. Fans, amusing illustrated books, and fruit were on display. A flower shop offered a most intriguing variety of blooms. There were also shops selling sake and other goods.³

The toy shop catered to the small children in Keishōin’s retinue. The women, resplendent in their finest holiday attire, chattered gaily with one another as they wandered through the stalls in threes and fours, perusing the different wares.

Meanwhile, “caught by surprise at the unaccustomed sight [of Keishōin and her retinue], the humble country folk of the place stared wide-eyed in amazement, gaping as if they were watching a festival.”⁴ Naturally, however, those playing the parts of the country folk were people in the employ of the Yanagisawa household and others chosen beforehand who had been instructed in how to react. Being a diary, *Matsukage nikki* tends to be subjective, and we would do well to remember that the record may have been exaggerated, even fictionalized to a certain extent, although this does not completely detract from its value as a historical source.

After the women had completed their rounds of the shops, Keishōin returned to the reception hall, this time for a banquet. Everyone high and low was given plenty of sake, and all were pleasantly inebriated. Although Keishōin was loath to leave, she “finally” (*yōyō* やうやう) set out on her return journey, in the words of *Matsukage nikki*, after her attendants persuaded her that she still had a long way back to Edo castle and needed to get there by nightfall.⁵

While the description of the guest unwillingly tearing herself away from the garden must no doubt partly reflect Machiko’s desire to compliment her own household, probably Keishōin did greatly enjoy this special event and sincerely regretted having to leave. The items in the stalls were all presented as souvenirs to the members of the retinue.

Although the visit lasted only a few hours, the preparation, expense, and attention to detail it required were staggering. Tsunayoshi’s eldest daughter, Princess Tsuru 鶴, and adopted daughter Princess Yae 八重 visited Rikugien in 1702, at which time another splendid welcome was prepared. These and other visits testify to the close relationship between Yoshiyasu and the shogun as well as the shogun’s extraordinary trust in his grand chamberlain. As the Edo period (1603–1868) progressed, the gardens of the daimyo lords grew into increasingly more sophisticated arenas of socialization, providing venues for entertainment and feasting of which visits by the shogun and his family represented the height.

3 *Matsukage nikki*, Section 10 “Kara-ginu,” p. 154.

4 *Matsukage nikki*, Section 10 “Kara-ginu,” p. 156.

5 *Matsukage nikki*, Section 10 “Kara-ginu,” p. 156.

Fireworks and Fountains: Garden Entertainment in the West

A French contemporary of Tsunayoshi was Louis XIV (1638–1715), the “Sun King.” The magnificent 1664 fête in the gardens of his palace at Versailles, a state-sponsored affair lasting for eight days from 7 to 14 May, is considered the greatest such event in the history of Western gardens. The amusements of the first three days were presented under the title of “Les Plaisirs de l’Île Enchantée.” A cavalry parade opened the festivities, followed by a stage play with ballets and a sumptuous banquet overflowing with wine and food. The second day featured a play performed on a temporary garden stage, and the highlight on the third day was a play at the Fountain of Apollo in the center of the garden. The splendid fireworks launched at the climax to the play illuminated the entire palace, and as darkness settled over the grounds the three days centering on theatricals came dramatically to an end.⁶ Everyone, including Louis XIV and his queen, participated as actors in the spectacle, effacing distinctions between host and guest, cast and audience; a parallel might be drawn to modern-day events at theme parks like Disneyland, in which visitors feel as if they themselves are participants.

While Versailles and other gardens of the baroque period were at their most magnificent during large-scale festivities, they also functioned more regularly as settings for smaller gatherings and social interaction among members of the court. Similarly, daimyo gardens often hosted social interaction among daimyo during their stints of service in the capital or between daimyo and their retainers, aside from the more official function of receiving visits from the shogun or his family members and favorites.

In Europe, such social functions were by no means limited to baroque gardens, but had already been a feature of gardens of the preceding Renaissance era. Garden fountains might be contrived to surprise guests with water that would suddenly spout forth as they watched (Figure 1-3). The garden of Villa Lante, which Cardinal Gianfrancesco Gambara began to construct in the 1560s, is equipped with a large stone table carved with a central trough that could be filled with water to chill bottles of wine.

Going back even further in history, an illustration from the thirteenth-century medieval allegory *Roman de la Rose* depicts a group of men and women conversing and making music in a flowering garden with a lawn and central fountain (Figure 1-4). The fifteenth-century German panel painting *Garden of Paradise*, attributed to the Master of the Upper Rhine, shows people conversing, eating and drinking, playing music, and so forth (Figure 1-5). Such images give evidence of an early understanding of gardens as settings for social interaction.

Thus in both Japan and the West, gardens were from early on not objects of mere visual appreciation but places where people could gather to spend lively, truly pleasurable moments with one another.

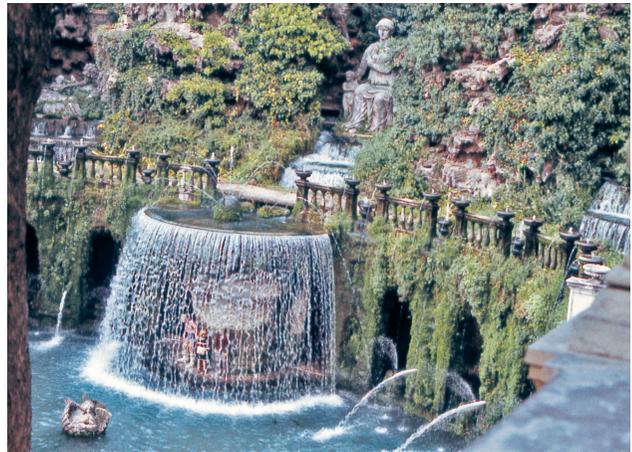


Figure 1-3. Water surprise, Fountain of the Owl at Villa d’Este in Tivoli, Italy. Photograph: Shirahata Yōzaburō, 1977.

⁶ Shirahata 1998, p. 11.



Figure 1-4. Illustration of garden from *Roman de la Rose*, ca. 1490–1500. Collection of the British Library.



Figure 1-5. *Garden of Paradise*, attr. Master of the Upper Rhine, ca. 1410. Collection of the Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Toward a New Appraisal of Gardens

Gardens are not created simply to be looked at. Meant for rejoicing in the fragrance of flowers, listening to the sounds of wind in the trees or rippling over the waters of a pond, opening the heart to the soothing melodies of birdsong, and relishing in the taste of fruit plucked and eaten on the spot—they are places for all five senses of sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste. Historically, gardens were often significant venues of society and entertainment, where friends—sometimes very high-ranking—could gather to drink, eat, play, and laugh together.

Yet at some point, gardens came to be included among the purely visual arts as the subject of a narrow appreciation afforded only by “viewing.” For example, many consider Zen dry landscape (*karesansui* 枯山水) gardens, with their abstract and idealized depictions of nature, to be the epitome of all Japanese garden styles. Dry landscape gardens are frequently compared to ink paintings, which are created by a similar principle of abstraction, with craggy peaks and ravines that are recognizable in what at first seem only blotches of ink or random strokes of the brush. Yet such an evaluation is a consequence of modern trends in art theory premised on the notion of gardens as a purely visual form of art. In part, it betrays the influence of Western abstract art, which was introduced to Japan shortly before World War II and was particularly popular for a time after the war. In dry landscape gardens, Japanese devotees of modern abstract art found the answer to their longing to discover forms of abstract art in indigenous tradition. *Karesansui* gardens were lionized and advertised as an abstract art that had existed in Japan long before its Western counterpart, and thus their fame spread, partly because they catered so well to the images of “oriental mystique” sought by the West.

In truth, dry landscape gardens are only one, rather unusual part of Japanese garden tradition. The gardens of the aristocratic *shinden-zukuri* 寝殿造 residences of the Heian period (794–1185) contained sections designed in the dry landscape style, but they also had ponds equipped for pleasure boating. Daimyo gardens of the Edo period (1603–1868) were likewise constructed in a comprehensive style that harmoniously blended all facets of Japanese garden tradition, including ponds, streams, and waterfalls as well as dry landscapes. The character of dry landscape gardens is limited by comparison, and the acclaim they have received owes largely to the postwar period of enthusiasm for modernist architecture and its spartan rejection of all things decorative.

Once a garden is seen as an abstract form of art, it becomes tempting to evaluate it solely on visual terms at the expense of functional considerations. Those who observe only the visual shapes and forms, and then become convinced that they thereby understand everything, greatly underestimate the richness a garden—of any cultural tradition—truly has to offer.

Shinden-zukuri gardens were an indispensable adjunct of life in Heian-period aristocratic circles, in which ceremony and entertainment were often indivisible. Their style was devised to complement the architectural style of the time, with its pavilion-like structures connected by roofed outdoor corridors. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the dry landscape garden flourished in temples to enhance their capacity to provide places for quiet meditative thought. Edo-period stroll-style gardens were developed mainly by daimyo to entertain the shogun, other daimyo, or retainers. The introduction of lawns in the gardens of Meiji-era (1868–1912) statesmen and financiers reflected their need

for spaces to hold the outdoor parties that were an integral part of their newly westernized lifestyle.

Genuine understanding and appreciation of gardens requires much more than simply affixing familiar labels of style, such as “dry landscape” and “stroll,” or, based on the dates of their first construction, slotting them into chronological categories taken largely from political history, such as Heian, Kamakura, Muromachi, Momoyama, or Edo. To fully understand the garden as an art appealing to all five senses, we should consider how gardens were used—what people actually *did* in them.

This point is particularly important with regard to the landscape gardens of the Edo period, a select number of which have been preserved over the centuries and are open for public enjoyment today. They deserve fuller appreciation than has been afforded in the voluminous literature in Japanese previously accumulated on this subject.

Use and Appearance

Two key words in garden design are “use” and “appearance.” “Use” is value determined by practical considerations, and “appearance” is value deriving from a garden’s scenery and other artistic qualities. Both are indispensable aspects of a garden, the overall character of which depends on the proportionate weight given to one or the other.

Roji kikigaki 露地聴書, an Edo-period tea-garden book that compiles the experience of tea masters active up to the early Edo period, covers basic principles of the tea ceremony and tea-garden design. The following passage is often quoted in discussions of use and appearance:

With stepping stones Rikyū gave six parts consideration to ease of passage (*watari* わた^り) and four parts to appearance (*keiki* 景気), while Oribe gave four parts attention to ease of passage and six parts to appearance.⁷

“Ease of passage” concerns the utility of the stones in walking through the garden. “Appearance” refers to matters of artistry, such as the stones’ shape, layout, and the atmosphere they evoke. In short, the passage claims that Sen no Rikyū 千利休 (1522–1591) placed greater weight on how efficiently the stones guided the visitor along the path than on how they looked, while his disciple Furuta Oribe 古田織部 (1544–1615) preferred beauty over utility. More generally, the passage encapsulates the two tea masters’ differing philosophies about the design and appraisal of gardens. It illustrates two basic stances of garden appreciation, the first prioritizing artistic (visual) considerations and the second, practical ones.

How we perceive a garden has great bearing on how we evaluate it. For example, the garden of the Katsura detached palace 桂離宮 is often idealized as the ultimate expression of a distinctively Japanese aesthetic that is unparalleled anywhere in the world. In terms of practicality versus beauty, it is usually considered to be weighted toward beauty. In fact, it was designed with the closest attention to practical and utilitarian considerations.

⁷ The date and publication of the *Roji kikigaki* are not known. This passage originally appeared in *Sekishū sanbyaku kajō* 石州三百ヶ條 (Three Hundred Precepts for the Sekishū Tea School), vol. 2, written in the late seventeenth century. In supplement (hoi 補遺) to *Sadō koten zenshū* 茶道古典全集, vol. 11, Tankōsha, 1962, p. 236; Shirahata 1998, p. 134.

The estate now called Katsura detached palace was acquired by Prince Hachijō no miya Toshihito 八条宮智仁 (1579–1629) in 1615. (The property was so named only after it came under the management of the Imperial Household Ministry in 1883.) The prince immediately began a garden at his new villa, and the following summer in the sixth month, he celebrated the completion of the first tea room. On this day he and close acquaintances from the court attended a tea ceremony in the building—effectively an inauguration party. The prince’s diary records the presence of *renga* 連歌 associates and dancers;⁸ far from being a quiet and ceremonious event, the gathering was one for enjoying food, composing *renga* linked verse, and watching dancers perform inside the tea house or perhaps in the garden. In its early days, Katsura detached palace was the setting of gaiety and fun such as one would hardly imagine from the stiff image it carries today as an elegant garden modeled on Heian-period standards of beauty.

Like Katsura, Shūgakuin detached palace 修学院離宮, the villa built in the mid-seventeenth century for Retired Emperor Go-Mizuno’o 後水尾 (1596–1680), was frequently the setting of pleasurable occasions. The *Kakumeiki* 隔菴記 diary (1635–1668) by the Kinkakuji 金閣寺 temple priest Hōrin Jōshō 鳳林承章 (1593–1668) records entertainments at Shūgakuin on the fourteenth day of the fourth month of Manji 万治 2 (1659), shortly after the site’s completion.⁹ On the fifth day of the ninth month of Meiwa 明和 3 (1766), Prince Katsura no miya Yakahito 桂宮家仁, Prince Arisugawa no miya Yorihito 有栖川宮職仁, Prince Kajii no miya 梶井宮, and Princess Osa no miya 於佐宮 held a moon-viewing banquet at Takagamine Sansō 鷹峰山莊 mountain retreat near Shūgakuin. Prince Yakahito even went to take a preliminary look at the place on the day before, bringing along his own lunch and tea. Hours before the banquet on the next day, he sent sake, side dishes, and soups as well as sets of bowls, plates, cups, hangings, and carpets from his residence, located within the grounds of what is now the Kyoto imperial palace.

Scholar of architecture Nishi Kazuo 西和夫 argues that the most significant aspect of the early-Edo-period residences and villas of retired emperors and court aristocrats was the way they were used, in itself an intangible art.¹⁰ His perspective of incorporating use as well as appearance in evaluating art is one that has been too long neglected with respect to garden appreciation.

Likewise, as the account of Keishōin’s Rikugien visit (see pp. 1-3) amply demonstrates, Edo-period daimyo gardens were designed to serve the purposes of entertainment and social interaction. They moreover sometimes included facilities for outdoor recreational activities of the kind that would be classified as “sports” today. The “tidewater garden” at Hama detached palace 浜離宮, a shogunate retreat before the Meiji era, had a saltwater pond designed to ebb and flow with the tide (see Chapter 4). Its location enabled a range of activities that would not have been easily available inland, and thus it was frequently host to occasions of horseback riding, fishing, and duck hunting. Fishing was especially popular in the late Edo period, being a non-strenuous “sport” in which even aristocratic ladies could easily take part. Accounts during the time of eleventh shogun Tokugawa Ienari 徳川家斉 (1773–1841)

8 *Toshihito shin’nō gonenreki* 智仁親王御年曆 (27 June 1616). Shirahata 1997, pp. 40, 42; Shirahata 1998, p. 135.

9 *Kakumeiki*, vol. 4, p. 501.

10 Nishi 1988, p. 132.

record a day of fishing enjoyed in the garden by the shogun's wife and other ladies of the women's quarters of Edo castle.¹¹

In later times, the emergence of modern parks and athletic fields caused recreation and physical exercise to shift to those sites, accentuating the tendency to look upon gardens as purely visual works of art. Today, people quite often forget that a label such as “stroll style” captures only one small portion of a garden's full range of functions.

Of course, the relationship between use and appearance should properly be cooperative and complementary, not conflicting or competitive. Given that gardens have since modern times tended to be overly focused on the visual, it would seem more fruitful from now on to reground thinking about garden aesthetics on a thorough consideration of their uses as well.

Concepts of Beauty and the Garden

Indeed, from ancient times gardens in Japan served more as arenas of everyday life than as scenes to be admired from afar. The word that is currently used in Japanese to mean “garden,” *teien* 庭園, is historically quite new, having entered the vocabulary only in the Meiji era; many people even during that time seem to have persisted in employing the more familiar Edo-period term *rinsen* 林泉 (literally, “trees and ponds”). Although considered virtually synonymous today, originally the two ideographs composing *teien* (庭 *tei*, also read *niwa*, and 園 *en*, also read *sono*) had separate meanings. *Niwa* signified an open space for performing agricultural tasks or religious rituals and perhaps can be translated as “yard” or “court.” *Sono* was close in meaning to the English word “orchard” and indicated an area, usually enclosed, for growing plants. Utility spaces for work and ritual, and orchards to cultivate plants for human convenience: these were the two most fundamental conceptions of Japanese gardens.

In Japan's earliest extant poetry anthology, *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 (a collection of approximately 4,500 poems from the early fifth to mid-eighth centuries), four words signify gardens: *niwa*, *sono*, *shima* しま, and occasionally *yado* やど. *Niwa* indicates a place of work in the first of the two examples cited below, and of ritual in the second:

庭に立つ麻手刈り干し布さらす東女を忘れたまうな

Niwa ni tatsu / asate karihoshi / nuno sarasu / azuma omina o / wasuretamō na

As I spend each day cutting and drying hemp in the garden (*niwa*) and rinsing the cloth, do not forget me, the woman living to the east. (poem no. 521)

庭中の阿須波の神に木紫さし吾はいいはむ帰り来までに

Niwa naka no / Asuha no kami ni / koshiba sashi / are wa iwawamu / kaeriku made ni

Demarcating a sacred space for the Asuha god in my garden, I will keep myself purified until your safe return. (no. 4350)

11 Shirahata 1997, p. 202.

The next poem seems at first glance to run counter to the described usage of *niwa*, as it refers to a garden (*niwa*) with a *tachibana* 橘 tree (a citrus fruit believed to assure longevity). However, it is one or at most a few trees, not a full-scale orchard.

橘を屋前に植ゑ生し立ちて居て後に悔ゆとも駿あらめやも

Tachibana o / niwa ni ue ōshi / tachite ite / nochi ni kuyu tomo / shirushi arameyamo

I've planted and grown a *tachibana* tree in the garden (*niwa*), and am now feeling anxious and restless. However I may regret, it cannot be helped. (no. 410)

An example of *sono* appears in the following well-known verse by Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持 (718–785):

春の苑紅にほふ桃の花下照る道に出で立つ乙女

Haru no sono / kurenai niou / momo no hana / shitaderu michi ni / idetatsu otome

In a spring garden (*sono*) under the rosy glow of peach blossoms stands a fair maiden. (no. 4139)

Shima denoted a garden fashioned through human design, as seen in the following poem:

妹として二人作りし吾山齋は木高く繁くなりけるかも

Imo to shite / futari tsukurishi / waga shima wa / kodakaku shigeku / narinikeru kamo

In the garden (*shima*) that I planted with my beloved, the trees now grow dense and tall. (no. 452)

As another example, the prefatory statement to “The old banks of the erstwhile pond have, with the passage of time, become overgrown with waterside weeds” (no. 378, 昔者の旧き堤は年深み池の渚に水草生ひにけり *Inishie no / furuki tsutsumi wa / toshi fukami / ike no nagisa ni / mikusa oinikeri*) credits the poem to Yamabe no Akahito 山部赤人 (?–736?) upon visiting the garden (*shima*) of the late grand minister of state Fujiwara no Fuhito 藤原不比等 (659–720).

In the next poem, a *yado* is planted with *kara'ai* 韓藍 flowers, thought to be the modern-day cockscomb:

わが屋戸に韓藍蒔き生し枯れぬれど懲りずて亦も蒔かむとぞ思ふ

Waga yado ni / kara'ai maki ōshi / karenuredo / korizute mata mo / makamu tozo omou

Although the cockscomb I planted and grew in my garden (*yado*) soon withered, I must not have learned my lesson, for I desire to plant it once again. (no. 384)

Yado gradually narrowed in meaning to denote only the architectural structures in a residence. Likewise, *shima* eventually came to specify islands in ponds (a characteristic feature of gardens) or the sea, although it occasionally could refer to gardens even in later times. In *Tales of Ise* 伊勢物語, Fujiwara no Tokitsura 藤原常行 (836–875) presents Prince Saneyasu 人康 (831–872), a son of Emperor Ninmyō

仁明 (810–850), with a “handsome” stone for his Yamashina 山科 retreat, saying, “Since the prince likes gardens (*shima*), I shall give it [the stone] to him.”¹² The use of *shima* here to mean “garden” references an anecdote from *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicle of Japan; the oldest official history of Japan, completed in 720) in which Soga no Umako 蘇我馬子 (551?–626) creates a garden pond with a central island, prompting others to dub him the “garden chief minister” (*shima no ōmi* 島の大臣).¹³

Of the four words, only *niwa* and *sono* survived in their original meaning of “garden.” The two long remained distinct, as typified by the following example:

わが園の李の花か庭に落るはだれのいまだ残りたるかも

Waga sono no / sumomo no hana ka / niwa ni chiru / hadare no imada / nokoritaru kamo

Is it the plum in my orchard (*sono*) that scatters petals in my courtyard (*niwa*) like flakes of lingering snow? (no. 4140)

The Western Garden Aesthetic. *Garden* (English), *Garten* (German), *jardin* (French), and *giardino* (Italian) all originate in the old root *gard* (also *gart*, *garth*), denoting an enclosure. In the Western conception, therefore, gardens were fundamentally places of shelter and comfort enclosed for protection against human and animal invaders. The English words *yard* and *court*, which can also mean “garden,” likewise indicated a space bounded by fences or structures; *court*, in particular, came to denote a place for royalty to conduct matters of state.

Most Western gardens, in addition to being enclosed, were laid out on more-or-less level ground. In that sense, they were akin to the flat, yard-like *niwa* of the *Man'yōshū* poems. Renaissance gardens in countries north of the Alps spread flat in front of the main residence. They featured hedges arranged into patterns with colorful gravel or beds of flowers laid among them (Figures 1-6, 1-7). Subsequent baroque gardens, sometimes also called rococo gardens, were characterized by sculptures and hedges placed along a straight visual axis, as well as by fountains, mazes, and a wealth of other decorative elements exhibiting a highly developed sense of play. Italian Renaissance gardens might seem like the exception, since they, for example the earlier-mentioned garden of Villa Lante, were built on inclined terrain. But they did not use the slopes as they were, instead shaping them into flat terraces that were each then decorated with hedges, potted plants, flowers, and fountains made to work by the disparity in elevation. They were, in effect, accumulations of planes cut into the slope.

The tendency in Western gardens to favor plane surfaces can be attributed to their basic nature as enclosed spaces (i.e., yards, courts). In sum, formal garden making in the West developed out of efforts to evoke beauty in enclosed, level plots of ground through the imposition of a rational order. Introducing variation and interest to a plane surface inevitably entails some sort of segmentation, and

12 “When the emperor was preparing to visit the Third Ward, someone gave my father a handsome rock from the Beach of Chisato 千里 in Kii 紀伊 Province, but it arrived too late for the occasion and was deposited in a watercourse facing one of the ladies’ apartments. Since the prince likes gardens, I shall give it to him.’ He sent some of his escorts and attendants to fetch the rock, and presently they returned bearing it. It was an even finer specimen than he had heard.” (*Ise monogatari*, Episode 78, in *Takekoto monogatari/Ise monogatari*. This translation is taken from McCullough 1968, p. 122.

13 *Nihon shoki*, vol. 22, thirty-fourth year of the reign of Empress Suiko 推古.



Figure 1-6. Het Loo Royal Palace Garden, Apeldoorn, The Netherlands. Photograph: Shirahata Yōzaburō, 1989.



Figure 1-7. Het Loo. Photograph: Shirahata Yōzaburō, 1989.

so garden designers unsurprisingly came to rely on the rules of symmetry and geometry as they sought to devise new and more creative partitioning methods. Thus, prior to the emergence of the landscape style in eighteenth-century England, all Western gardens were of the formal style.

The Japanese Garden Aesthetic. Japanese gardens, by contrast, have never been formal or geometric. Instead they follow what we might call a naturalistic landscape style (although this description brings up the tricky questions of what one means by “natural” or “landscape”). In his book *Landscape Gardening in Japan* (1893), the English architect Josiah Conder (1852–1920) writes that Japanese gardens are “a more or less conventional imitation of favourite types of growth observed in nature”¹⁴—a succinct and insightful observation of the nature of Japanese garden design.

From the aristocratic gardens of the Heian period to the stroll-style gardens favored by Edo-period daimyo, Japanese gardens were primarily nonformal, nongeometric representations that extracted and re-created certain distinctive features found in nature, such as ponds, waterfalls, streams, or hills. The idealization of nature was particularly evident in the dry landscape and rock gardens of the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. *Bonseki* 盆石 (tray gardens)—which are considered to represent a mountain, a landscape, or indeed the whole universe in a single rock—constitute perhaps the ultimate in abstraction of naturally found motifs. Dry landscape and rock gardens are in effect *bonseki* translated to the scale of a garden.

The Japanese concern with imitating nature was reflected in the vocabulary people throughout the ages employed to describe their gardens. As already discussed, in *Man'yōshū* the space we now refer to by the single term “garden” was denoted by four different words: *niwa*, *sono*, *shima*, and *yado*. *Niwa*, *tsubo* 壺 (courtyard), *senzai* 前栽 (plantings), *senseki* 泉石 (literally, “pond and rocks”), and *suiseki* 水石 (literally, “water and rocks”) describe gardens in sources from the late twelfth to early fourteenth centuries, and gardens of the time had been primarily combinations of flat ceremonial spaces, courtyards, plantings, ponds, and stones arranged either singly or in groups. A fifteenth-century diary calls Zen’ami 善阿弥 (1386?–1482?), the artist patronized by eighth Ashikaga shogun Yoshimasa 足利義政 (1436–1490), “a master of the garden (*senseki*)”; an entry in the same diary documenting the shogun’s visit to Inryōken 蔭涼軒, a subtemple of Shōkokuji 相国寺 in Kyoto, calls its garden a *sensui* 泉水 (literally, “pond and water”).¹⁵ Words such as *senseki* and *sensui*, then, not only indicated ponds, waterfalls, stone arrangements, and other features of a garden, but could refer through extension to the garden itself.

An interesting glimpse into garden vocabulary of the early seventeenth century is provided by the Japanese-Portuguese dictionary compiled by a Christian missionary to Japan.¹⁶ The work contains three garden-related entries: “niua,” “sono,” and “xenzai.” “Niua” and “xenzai” are glossed “pateo” (courtyard gardens common to Portuguese and Spanish houses with potted flowers, fountains, and

14 Introduction of Conder 1964 (1893).

15 *Inryōken nichiroku*, vol. 1.

16 *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam com a declaracao em Portugues*. Society of Jesus-Japan Province, 1603. Collection of Bodleian Library, Oxford.

water basins) and noted to also refer to spaces with flowerbeds. “Sono” is defined as “iardim” and “horta,” both equivalent to the English word “garden.” No mention is made of dry landscape gardens, although they surely existed by the time the dictionary was compiled; *sensui* and *senseki* likewise do not appear.

The Edo period is notable for the use of the word *rinsen* (literally, “trees and pond”) to refer to gardens, as seen for example in *Miyako rinsen meishō zue* 都林泉名勝図会 (Illustrations of Famous Gardens and Sights in Kyoto), the title of a popular guidebook published in 1799. Although the spread of this Chinese-sounding compound had partly to do with the importance attached to knowledge of Chinese writings and poetry among the samurai class, it also reflects the central place claimed by trees and water (i.e., pools and ponds) in the gardens of the time.

Alternating Trends. Tanaka Seidai’s *Nihon no teien* 日本の庭園 argues that Japanese gardens, while consistently built in a naturalistic landscape style, reflect two different attitudes toward nature depending on their times of construction. He analyzes Japanese garden history as an alternation of two major trends, the first the pursuit of the natural and the second the attempt to remake it.¹⁷

According to Tanaka, the *shinden-zukuri* gardens of the eleventh century onward belonged to an age when gardens *followed* nature, whereas newer gardens inspired by Zen Buddhism and its view of nature—an example of which is the late-fourteenth-century Saihōji 西芳寺 temple garden—arose out of efforts to *remake* it. Gardens returned to following nature during the mid-fifteenth century (in political and cultural history, the Higashiyama 東山 era), and continued in that tradition until about the middle of the sixteenth century. The tendency to remake nature returned in the Momoyama to early Edo periods, reverting again to following nature around the middle of the seventeenth century.

The value of Tanaka’s approach is that it does not fall into the trap of privileging modern outlooks on gardens. By considering how garden designers throughout history sought to interpret and re-create nature, Tanaka succeeds in incorporating the standpoint of those who were directly involved in their creation. A history of garden *making* (i.e., gardens and their creators in the context of their times) and not of garden *appreciation* (modern-day visual evaluation of the finished results), his analysis offers refreshing insights solidly grounded in an understanding of the workings of garden design.

To Tanaka’s framework, I propose that we further add the perspective of the user. By doing so, we can divide the history into periods in which gardens were actively entered and used versus those in which they were mostly viewed from outside. The former stance may be described as one of *entertainment*, the latter of *appreciation*.

Nara-period (710–794) gardens appear to have been relatively more focused on appreciation,¹⁸ whereas the *shinden-zukuri* gardens of the Heian to Kamakura (1185–1333) periods were mainly devoted to entertainment combining feasting and ritual. Appreciation was again ascendant in

¹⁷ Tanaka 1967, pp. 11–12.

¹⁸ Garden paths were not well developed, so people did not often stroll about in them. Accounts of banquets do not give details of what was involved. Excavated gardens show buildings very close to them, so it is thought that they were enjoyed from the vantage point of an adjacent building.

Muromachi-period (1336–1573) dry landscape gardens (Figure 1-8), while the stroll-style gardens of the Edo period were venues of shogunal visits and other gatherings offering pleasure and hospitality. Thereafter, from the beginning of the Meiji era up to the present day, the notion that gardens are a form of visual art intended for appreciation has firmly held sway.



Figure 1-8. Dry landscape garden, Tōkaian, Myōshinji temple 妙心寺東海庵, Kyoto. Source: *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, vol. 13 (Gakushū Kenkyūsha, 1979).

Thus in terms of function, too, Japanese gardens have historically switched between two trends. Of course, greater emphasis on entertainment or appreciation did not necessarily preclude the other, but only meant that one was relatively more predominant. Of the two, I consider the function of entertainment to be the basic motive force linking gardens throughout Japanese history. Although I included Nara-period gardens in the appreciation-oriented category above, they were the settings of *kyokusui no en* 曲水の宴, or “meandering-stream banquets,” so their uses for entertainment were also significant. The viewing-centered gardens of the Meiji and Taishō (1912–1926) eras, likewise, continued to function as venues of social interaction. Gardens were gentle and generous spaces to be used, and that use, chiefly, was entertainment. They were not, although I repeat myself, mere objects of art to be viewed from afar.

“Beauty” as it is sought in the form of a garden is different from that pursued through either architecture or art. The fields may be closely related, but it seems to me that gardens have a distinct aesthetic and philosophy of use and appreciation. What is sought from a garden is something that cannot be satisfied by painting, sculpture, architecture, or anything else.

Restoring Richness of Perspective

Gardens are not merely works of art that happen to be fashioned from natural elements. If anything, they represent a living, breathing, comprehensive kind of art that gives pleasure not only to the eyes, but to a wide variety of aspects in people’s daily lives. If we are to truly understand and appreciate gardens, we must first leave behind the habit of primarily visual appreciation to which we have grown so firmly accustomed in modern times. The pleasures offered by gardens are many. Two of the greatest available to us today are acquaintance with a garden’s history and appreciation of the actual site. One involves consulting plans, illustrations, and written sources to learn about a garden’s origins and changes made to it over time; the other, visiting and appreciating the qualities of the garden itself.

If we could moreover have the chance to actually *use* a garden, then we would be privileged to an even richer experience. One can hardly imagine a better way of becoming acquainted with a garden than to spend a few hours wrapped in its long history and beautiful landscape while enjoying good food and drink among pleasant company. That is the kind of experience through which we should truly come to know a garden. At the very least, the fact that gardens were originally created with such pleasures in mind should not be forgotten.

Simply admiring gardens from afar will do nothing to reveal either their true beauty or spirit. With every garden we encounter, we should remind ourselves that it was created to give pleasure to human beings via all five of their senses. In this way, we will be able to appreciate anew even gardens that today can only be seen but not touched.

The stroll-style daimyo gardens of the Edo period are excellent examples. They were venues alike for performance and fine arts such as tea ceremony, noh, kyōgen, linked-verse writing, and haiku as well as sports such as duck hunting, horseback riding, archery, and fishing. Daimyo gardens served the samurai class as settings of social occasions often carrying great political import. For one, they bridged important social links between the samurai class and the Kyoto aristocracy, as indicated by

the functional similarities between daimyo and aristocratic villa gardens including those at the Katsura and Shūgakuin detached palaces.

If we can get rid of preconceived notions and see daimyo gardens in a new light, it should be possible to determine their proper place within garden history and, in turn, open up new perspectives on the gardens of the Edo period. Not only that, we should be able to reach broader and heretofore neglected criteria for garden evaluation. That is what I propose to accomplish in the following pages. To highlight that new perspective, I begin with a comparative survey of the history of gardens in Japan and the West.