

IV. Nature Appreciation Thoughts in Japanese Tradition

When we consider about the core difference between the primary conception of aesthetics in the East and the West, it can be found that the concept of aesthetics in Eastern traditions are intimately related with their 'nature appreciation thought' whereas that of Western traditions mostly emphasized on the fine art or philosophical analyzing of creative art.

Especially, the nature appreciation spirit of Japanese tradition is mostly reflected in their culture such as painting, poem, music, architecture, and so forth. One of the important reasons is associated with their religious beliefs such as Shinto, the indigenous religion, and Buddhism, the exotic religion.

Shinto is considered to be at the origin of Japanese culture. It emphasizes on the wholeness of nature and firmly accepts that moral virtue is interconnected with the awareness of nature. Thus, Japanese ordinarily celebrates the landscape and it sets the tone for Japanese aesthetics.

On the other hand, most Japanese aesthetic ideals are influenced by Buddhism to a great extent. According to Buddhist thought, all things are considered as either evolving from or dissolving into 'nothingness'. This "nothingness" does not mean 'empty space'. It is rather a space of potentiality. For Instance, There are no permanent waves of the sea. There are only a wave arising from it and returning to it. No point can be

represented as completeness of a wave, even at its peak. It means that nature is a dynamic whole that is to be admired and appreciated. Hence, the concept of 'impermanence', everlasting process of nature, is also the important one in considering Japanese arts and aesthetics. This appreciation of nature has been deep-seated in the philosophical foundation of Japanese aesthetics, arts, and other cultural elements.

For example, the aesthetic awareness of four seasons such as *Haru* (Spring), *Natsu* (Summer), *Aki* (Autumn), and *Fuyu* (Winter) are found in Japanese culture not only as aesthetic objects but also as a part of their everyday life. Especially, the two festivals of Spring and Winter such as *Hanami* (The flower-viewing) and *Momijigari* (Viewing autumn tinted leaves) are most favourite seasonal events of which reflects their nature appreciation spirit as the aesthetic concept of 'impermanence'. Obviously, the practice of indigenous Shintō and Buddhist philosophical concepts are syncretized in these intangible cultural heritages of Japan.

The Japanese spirit of the appreciation of nature can be found the several facets of Japanese culture such as '*Nihon Teien*' (日本庭園), '*Cha no Yu*' (茶の湯), '*Haiku*' (俳句), '*Bonsai*' (盆栽), '*sansuiga*' (山水画), '*ikebana*' (生け花) and so forth. In this research, '*Nihon Teien*', '*Cha no Yu*', '*Haiku*', and '*Bonsai*' are selected as illustrative examples of discussing main theme of the research.

(i) Japanese Gardens or 'Nihon Teien' (日本庭園)

'Nihon Teien' is traditional Japanese garden that create miniature idealized landscapes, often in a highly abstract and stylized way. It is general to landscape the garden which enables you to appreciate all four seasons in Japan by harnessing a centered pond, undulating land, garden rock and vegetation. It was traditionally made in temples, famous large compounds, but nowadays it is also made in Japanese modern big house of wealthy persons, company workplaces and hotels.

Japanese gardens are unique in their techniques of design and control. Using plants, rocks, wood and water in unique ways, Japan has gradually defined its own method of landscaping and is renowned around the world for it. What is unique about the Japanese gardens are the control of nature and miniaturization of landscapes.

Nevertheless, it can be undeniable fact that the Japanese gardens have their roots in the influences of the Chinese gardens²⁵ since ancient times. But it has been gradually transformed by the Japanese garden designers and they began to develop their own aesthetics, based on Japanese materials and Japanese culture under the influence of indigenous Shintō practice and Buddhist thoughts. By the Edo period, the Japanese garden had its

²⁵Garrett Eckbo & Derek Plint Clifford. (last updated: 11-11-2011). "Garden and landscape design". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://global.britannica.com/art/garden-and-landscape-design>

own distinct appearance with the great impact of Zen Buddhist thoughts.

In actual fact, the idea of these unique eastern style gardens began during the Asuka period (飛鳥時代 Asuka jidai, 538–710). Japanese merchants witnessed the gardens that were being built in China, and brought many of the Chinese gardening techniques and styles back to Japan.

Legendary Impact of Chinese Thoughts

Japanese gardens were also strongly influenced by the Chinese philosophy of Daoism and Amida Buddhism, imported from China in or around 552 AD. As the mythical root, Daoist legends spoke of five mountainous islands inhabited by the Eight Immortals, who lived in perfect harmony with nature. Each Immortal flew from his mountain home on the back of a crane. The islands themselves were located on the back of an enormous sea turtle. In Japan, the five islands of the Chinese legend became one island, called Horai-zen, or Mount Horai. Replicas of this legendary mountain, the symbol of a perfect world, are a common feature of Japanese gardens, as are rocks representing turtles and cranes²⁶.

Japanese gardening developed as an art and aesthetic object during the Heian Period (平安時代). With the flourishing of Buddhism, Buddhist Temples would do much of the gardening, designing scenes from mythology

²⁶<http://www.slideshare.net/ShreyaSingh19/japanese-gardens-for-ppt/1>

or recreating places of religious significance in their own yards. The art later moved to the gardens of land-owners and eventually public parks.

Traditionally, there are two purposes of creating Japanese garden such as for recreation of Emperors and nobles and for religious practice of Buddhist monks. The former were designed for recreation and aesthetic pleasure, while the latter of Buddhist temples were designed for contemplation and meditation.

Shintō Practice and Japanese Gardens

Japanese gardens have their roots in the Japanese religion of Shintō, with its story of the creation of eight perfect islands, and of the *shinchi*, the lakes of the gods. Prehistoric Shintō shrines to the *kami*, the gods and spirits, are found on beaches and in forests all over the island. Prehistoric shrines often took the form of unusual rocks or trees marked with cords of rice fiber (*shimenawa*) and surrounded with white stones or pebbles, a symbol of purity.

Thus, one of the earliest garden forms in Japan was sacred places in the midst of nature, which humans marked by pebbles. Predating the introduction of Chinese culture from the mainland, this early garden form can be recognized at some ancient Shinto shrines, for example at the Ise Shrines, whose buildings are surrounded by wide pebbled areas²⁷.(see illustration-1)

²⁷“Types of Garden”. http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2099_types.html

